

**SEIZING THE SELF:  
SURMOUNTING THE OBSESSIVE DEVICE OF THE SELF**

Shilpa Venkatachalam

Saul Bellow wrote Dangling Man whilst serving in the Merchant Marine. Like so many of Bellow's other characters Joseph, the protagonist in the novel, is a philosopher-theorist who has in the past studied and worked on Diderot and other philosophers of the Enlightenment.<sup>1</sup> He even quotes Spinoza intermittently. Hence it would be no surprise at all to study this novel in conjunction with philosophical thought, and, further, to find through such a study, similarities between the fiction and philosophical enquiry. In conducting such a study there is always the danger of using the work of fiction in order to demonstrate entire philosophical systems. To undertake a study of Bellow's work with the ultimate aim of trying to put a label on it, be that existentialist, nihilist or absurdist would be a gross reduction of not only the work itself but of Bellow's aesthetic philosophy. My approach in the present study of Bellow's Dangling Man is to bring to light certain Heideggerean phenomenological instances but without attributing a consistent and deliberate conceptual system within which the novella may be understood.

Previous criticism on Bellow has concentrated on various aspects such as the question of freedom (Aharoni 47-52), the notion of hero and anti-hero (Kaler 16-23; Brans 435-47), the quest for values in a modern age (Ikeda 29-36). Some critics have looked at Dangling Man as a wartime novel (Schwartz 3-4; Reichman 28-42). Others have attempted a comparative approach, contrasting Dangling Man to Sartre's Nausea and Camus's The Stranger (Lehan 1959: 181-202; Clayton 1968). No detailed study has been undertaken of the possible and several links between Bellow's Dangling Man and phenomenology. Phenomenology studies the basis of a first-person experience of consciousness and hence studies first-person methods of accessing knowledge about consciousness, experience of ourselves and of the world, and our mental states. Dangling Man is a novel in which the protagonist Joseph tries to understand himself and the experience of the world, around him through the first-person perspective. This paper is a study of the ways in which Heideggerean and Husserlian phenomenology and Dangling Man complement one another. Because Dangling Man is a first-person account of events or non- events and because it is written using the style of a journal it provides an exploration of issues of consciousness, being, and the search for the self.

In his mammoth work Being and Time, Heidegger undertakes an analytic of *Dasein*. Heidegger uses the term *Dasein* to mean the being of persons. It literally means 'Being

---

<sup>1</sup> It is now well-established that Saul Bellow did read a substantial amount of philosophy. Among several thinkers he read widely on were Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, and George Steiner. He also makes mention of German phenomenology and Edmund Husserl in his Library of Congress address (1963). Most of the characters in his books read philosophy too: Herzog, for instance, rejects G. W. F. Hegel's philosophy; Ravelstein is devoted to philosophy and is a character inspired by Bellow's philosopher friend Allan Bloom; Dr Tamkin from Seize the Day (1956) reads among other things the best of philosophy and often talks on absurdist philosophy and nihilism. I have drawn attention to the fact that many of Bellow's protagonists are philosophers themselves because it is of significance to the argument in this essay. In an ironic way, this very fact serves as a means by which Bellow carefully articulates on the confluences and divergences of philosophy and imaginative literary fiction.

There.’ Heidegger uses the word with a view toward establishing a specific meaning. The entity for which enquiring about what it means ‘to be’ is itself an issue is the entity that Heidegger terms *Dasein*. It is by existing that man or *Dasein* understands what it means, ‘to be.’ There is a concurrence between existence and essence. The essence of the being of man or the being of *Dasein* lies in existence. There is no pre-given meaning to the being of man. Man understands what it means ‘to be’ in the very act of existence or in being. The understanding that *Dasein* does is the very mode of being of *Dasein*. Existence and essence are merged. Hence there is no pre-given substance to *Dasein*. For Heidegger, the search for the self is prompted by the fact that *Dasein*’s Being is concealed. This concealment manifests itself in the condition of ‘falling.’ ‘Fallenness’ refers to a mode of being in which *Dasein* exists among other *Daseins* as well as entities other than *Dasein*’s in such a way that the true meaning of existence and being gets concealed. This happens because the individual is absorbed in living and in the world around him/her. *Dasein* is happy with outer appearances because it provides a less troublesome alternative to discovering the true meaning of Being. In ‘falling,’ *Dasein* conceals its own Being. The concealment of Being is manifested by *Dasein* in the manner in which *Dasein* conceptualizes itself: in terms of the world.<sup>2</sup> Because of this condition, *Dasein* must discover and reveal the truth of its own Being. Husserl’s now famous dictum, which was later to become the slogan of phenomenology was ‘back to the things themselves.’ This dictum is a call to allow things to show themselves. It is a call to resist understanding things according to traditional assumptions or a pre-given meaning. Husserl who is considered the father of phenomenology believed that one could put aside one’s assumptions and prejudices (bracket them) and ‘come to things’ without any of these. However, according to Heidegger, Husserl’s mistake was to assume that it was possible to ‘come to things’ without any pre-given understanding. Instead, Heidegger argued that one is always first and foremost aware of the pre-given meaning and that this pre-giveness is fundamental in order to unearth the truth that lies beyond and beneath it. For Heidegger truth is not a correspondence between the object as it appears and the object as it really is. Rather, what is meant by truth is that the world is masked and covered over by taken-for-granted meanings. When *Dasein* ceases to understand itself as an interpreter of the world and of itself, truth gets masked over by already given answers whose validities are never questioned. This condition of always being amidst things such that *Dasein* and the world are always revealed according to the relatedness between *Dasein* and things in the world, Heidegger terms ‘being-with.’ Thus disclosedness and inauthenticity become essential and in fact primary conditions in order for truth to reveal itself. The ambiance that pervades the narrative of Dangling Man is also highly suggestive of a covering-over that resists all attempts at penetration. Mists, darkness, clouds and snow obstruct the sun and thus literally and metaphorically cloud the sight. Smoke from chimneys, the height of trees, tall buildings, electric signs that suffuse the surrounding atmosphere in blinding neon lights, are all hindrances to clear vision. The newspapers are saturated with words that seem merely

---

<sup>2</sup> In an interview with Agni, Saul Bellow speaks about the world and the self. His remarks bring to mind Heidegger’s proposition that the objects and phenomena in the world are understood in terms of how we relate to them. Heidegger uses the well-known example of the hammer and says that the hammer-thing cannot be understood in abstraction, but in fact, in our relatedness to it as a hammer. In a similar sense, Bellow says, “One of the distractions is thought, thought itself. Even good thought, even what we call *advanced* thought is a distraction because it takes us away from our phenomenal surroundings. And a novel can’t live when it’s divorced from these phenomenal surroundings. It can be divorced from anything else” (Birkerts 1997).

to gloss over the more fundamental truth.

As a project, hermeneutics sought to discover the hidden that lay beneath that which appears visible. Historically, hermeneutics goes back to the Greek *hermeneuein*, meaning to interpret, and is a science concerned with situations in which we are confronted with meanings that are not immediately obvious but that need to be interpreted through effort. Hermeneutics soon came to be involved with the exegesis of Biblical texts. In philosophy, it has come to be associated with thinkers such as Heidegger, Gadamer and Husserl and is associated with the process of interpretation and the uncovering of hidden meanings. For Heidegger, hermeneutics is ontology and involves the process of interpreting which he sees as an indispensable feature of existence. Whereas in Biblical exegesis an idea of a transcendent meaning is integrated into the interpretation itself, Heideggerean hermeneutic phenomenology offers a de-transcendental and historicized approach where the subject is always already historicized and factic and exists within the particulars of time and place. There is no 'beyond' in Heidegger. He rejects the conscious-centred being of Husserl. For Heidegger, *Dasein* by being-in-the-world is always outside the immanence of consciousness. Phenomenology is interpretive rather than descriptive and thus becomes hermeneutic phenomenology.

Where Husserl suggested the strategy of 'bracketing' (1964, 1969) in phenomenological analysis, which posited that all knowledge of lived experience must be suspended in order to discover the essence of an object, Heidegger went further and to an extent rejected the Husserlian technique of 'bracketing.' Heidegger focused instead on *Dasein* as a Being-in-the-world and this mode of being was an essential mode of being for *Dasein*. *Dasein* cannot be understood without the world in which *Dasein* exists. Within this framework, Heidegger proposed that to understand *Dasein*, it was necessarily impossible to 'bracket' our assumptions about the world in which we exist. Heidegger argued that knowledge about the world cannot be suspended, as Husserl suggested. Instead, one might become aware of the assumptions within which the world is understood and understand and interpret them for what they are. This is what is referred to as 'truth' in Heideggerean hermeneutics.

Where Husserlian phenomenology is more descriptive in its analysis, Heideggerean phenomenology tends to be more interpretative and, as some might argue, more pragmatic in its approach. In fact, Heidegger himself wrote in Being and Time, that the Greek term *pragmata* described appropriately the Being of *Dasein*. *Dasein*, explains Heidegger, shows itself by comporting itself in this or that particular way, by letting things in the world affect *Dasein* rather than by understanding them as mere objects. However, for the most part, *Dasein* remains hidden. That which shows itself conceals that which remains hidden in *Dasein*, and to discover this hidden is the task of Heideggerean phenomenology. Hence Heidegger undertakes to interpret *Dasein's* being and existence in the world. But beyond this, he undertakes to bring to light what makes the experience of the everyday possible. We thus arrive at analyzing the structure of the meaning of Being so as to understand what makes our phenomenal everyday experience possible. By existing and interpreting experience we necessarily interpret *Dasein's* Being.

Deciphering the meaning of the self is exactly what Joseph does through his long wait. The notion of a 'message concealed within the appearances' is present throughout the phenomenological tradition. In Dangling Man, the motif of a facade that conceals the true nature of things is a constant and steady one. The first entry by Joseph in his journal is a remark on how in the present day one is compelled to "strangle" individual feeling and emotion

in order to portray a tough exterior. Already, in the first pages of the novella then, there is the hint of covering over something in order to display a false exterior. Joseph's sense of the self and of his identity is masked over with labels, yet he does not know who he really is. His relationship with his wife Iva satisfies the definition of a marriage, yet beneath that definition lies the hidden truth of their relationship. His job is a convenient veil in order to escape the responsibility that comes along with freedom. The responsibility lies in making choices because we are free but in also accepting the consequences of those choices. Further freedom is thrust upon him. He tries desperately to find what lurks beneath the mass of humanity that for most part seems a mere "reflection of the things they lived among" (15).

Joseph, in *Dangling Man*, might well be understood within such a framework. The real world that exists in the narrative is a shared world of meaning and relationships. He writes in one of his entries about his society and his world and the people in it, "We were figures in the same plot, eternally fixed together" (15). On the other hand, civilization teaches that each of us is an inestimable prize" (86). It is evident, whether he likes it or not that he is part of a common world and he even explicitly refers to it as "my generation, my society, my world" (15). Man is a being-in-this-world. Yet, this does not imply that the individual is determined by the world or by his environment. Being-in-the-world always means being-with-others in *Dangling Man*. Truth, for Heidegger, is achieved only by actively being-in-the-world, not by severing oneself from the world and merely perceiving or experiencing an object in a vacuum that would then immediately call for an observing subject and the experienced object. Rather, objects in the world are each related to the other and form a network that is then understood to be the world. According to Heidegger, objects are never understood in isolation from the world of which they are a part.

The relation between subject and object in phenomenology is better comprehended by understanding the difference between descriptive phenomenology and interpretative phenomenology. Describing phenomena is generally associated with Husserlian phenomenology because of its emphasis on reflection, evidence and description. Interpretation, on the other hand, is allied to Heideggerean hermeneutic phenomenology. Descriptive phenomenology focuses on the structure of experience: what makes experience possible? Through such an understanding, descriptive phenomenology seeks to arrive at the essence of experienced phenomena and at the essence of the intentional act. For instance, in perceiving a chair that stands in front of me, descriptive phenomenology might seek to understand how the chair is experienced through the intentional act of perception. What does a particular intentional act reveal about the Being of the chair? In this sense, Heidegger would argue, there is still the silhouette of a subject-object divide separating the one who experiences from that which is the object of the intentional act. Heidegger posited that the interpretative technique of hermeneutic phenomenology erases such a subject-object divide and proposes instead that both the perceiver and the perceived constitute each other and are dependent on every individual's pre-understanding of the world and the historicity of the individual.

It is between these two modes of thinking that Joseph is caught. This can be explained with recourse to a certain episode that occurs a few lines before the last entry in the journal. Joseph has been informed that he is soon to join the army. Prompted by his days spent waiting all alone in a room, Joseph is reminiscing about past years and writes:

The room delusively dwindled and became a tiny square, swiftly drawn back, myself and all the objects in it growing smaller. This was not a mere visual trick. I understood it to be a revelation of the ephemeral agreements by

which we live and pace ourselves. . . . I rose rather unsteadily from the rocker feeling that there was an element of treason to common sense in the very objects of common sense. Or that there was no trusting them save through wide agreement. . . . To be pushed upon oneself entirely put the very facts of simple existence in doubt. (139)

Several things are going on in this passage. Joseph visits his old childhood room in his father's house. We find him reflecting on his experience of the room as a young boy as he sits in the same room several years later, a grown man now when the recollection is taking place. This interpretive-descriptive analysis of his experience of the room makes him think of the specific intentional content of his experience in the present. It is through memory that he experiences the room that he is already present in. Pure description of the room as experienced by him in the present is added to experience of it through remembrance. The past is merged with the present. The same object is intended in radically different ways. That which was first seen is now experienced in thought through memory. The episode begins with a separation between the experiencing subject (Joseph) and that which is experienced (the room). But as Joseph begins to reminisce, he also begins to analyse. He understands that remembering it from the perspective of a young boy alters the experience of objects in the room and the room itself. But as the recollection proceeds Joseph becomes increasingly aware of the co-mingling of the experiencing subject (himself as a boy and himself as an adult in the present) and that which is experienced (the room of his childhood) such that each affects the other, each is intertwined with the other.

Objects can be experienced through different intentional acts and different intentional acts alter the way in which an object is given to experience. The intended object of consciousness, in this particular case the room that Joseph reminisces about, is never given in its entirety. It is always experienced from a particular and limited perspective. And because it is always given in one of the many possible ways, the truth about the Being of the room will always transcend any experience of it. The concept of 'Horizon' in phenomenology may serve to clarify this. 'Horizon' refers to the limits within which *Dasein* is able to understand and experience the world. The perceiving subject while apprehending an object of intention is already placed within the context of certain possible apprehensions. Thus the object of perception is always understood within a context and relates to the subject's activity. In this case, the room is apprehended in and through the intentional act of memory and is hence understood from within the context of such a remembering. This does not imply that all of the many perspectives through which an object can be intended are necessarily false but that the object itself always transcends itself and the way in which it is experienced. Some might argue that because the object is experienced by different subjects in different ways phenomenology has the risk of slipping into solipsism. However, just because an object is given to consciousness in different ways and according to different mental acts does not mean that the object is purely dependent on the perceiver or that all meaning is derived through the mental act. For if that were the case then it would be impossible to experience an object as being the same object over time because the experience of the object itself would differ with each intentional act. Nor would it be possible for other individuals to talk about and experience the same object. Temporality and intersubjectivity become the means through which phenomenology is rescued from solipsistic thinking.

For Heidegger, however, there is no question at all about the experiencing subject and the perceived object because there is no distinction between a subject and an object. Both are

interlocked and mutually influence and shape one and the other. Further, *Dasein's* experience of the world and of its own Being, is determined by several factors such as historicity (the space and time that *Dasein* finds itself in), the mood in which *Dasein* always finds itself in, and on our practical dealings with the world and objects in it. Therefore, Heidegger argues, the nature of 'truth' is such that it constantly conceals and discloses itself.<sup>3</sup> When one particular interpretation makes itself apparent, all other interpretations are necessarily closed off. The intention of both Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerian hermeneutics is a rigorous argument against the Cartesian notion of the thinking/acting/experiencing subject as the source of all knowledge.

In Dangling Man, the notion of an isolate locked up by himself in order that he might discover the truth is seriously put to the test. There is no implication in the text which suggests that the world and the objects in it have a self-contained truth to them. Neither is the novella entirely an attack on subjectivity. Rather, the text hints at the notion that even to attempt to separate oneself from the world that the individual is inextricably embedded in is not merely futile, but destructive to the self. The room that Joseph contemplates is fixed within the factors of time and space. The thought that perhaps very many years ago it did not even exist crosses his mind. Whether or not the room existed many years ago is something he will never be able to know. The realization forces Joseph to confront the contingency of all knowledge. The contingency derives from the fact that the individual is always rooted within the specifics of space and time. One of the issues that phenomenology concerns itself with is the conditions underlying the possibility of transcending the constraints of space and time in order to arrive at an atemporal knowledge of the essence of things. To believe that knowledge held solely by the individual is universal and constant is a mere delusion of the mind. It foretells the threat of solipsism. Perhaps, then, the answer lies in the mediation between the individual and other people. Communication is possible only because Joseph shares the world with other individuals. Truth must be discovered in the phenomenal world of everyday experience. Isolation and annihilation are but the same sides of a coin. For, as Joseph writes, "to be pushed upon oneself entirely puts the very facts of simple existence in doubt" (120). The sovereignty of the self becomes a curse for Joseph. However sovereignty of the self must clearly be distinguished from autonomous individuality. Sovereignty implies that if each individual were to rely solely on his or her own peculiar 'truth' or 'perspective' then it would all end in a kind of stark meaninglessness or absurd universe. Meaningfulness is hence found in the mediation between inter-subjectivity and individuality. We might ask if there really is a mediation between intersubjectivity and the isolate in Dangling Man. Where in fact does such a mediation lie? Perhaps the alternative to the existence of the isolate lies in throwing ourselves away. It might be argued that Joseph gives himself up entirely to 'the world.' Perhaps that is the reason why he writes:

We struggle perpetually to free ourselves. Or to put it somewhat differently, while we seem so intently and even desperately to be holding on to ourselves, we would far rather give ourselves away. We do not know how. So, at times, we throw ourselves away. When what we really want is to stop living so exclusively and vainly for our own sake, impure and unknowing, turning

---

<sup>3</sup> In his speech, during the Nobel Prize ceremony (1976), Bellow himself touches upon the way in which consciousness and the self constantly reveals and conceals itself. He remarked: "The essence of our real condition, the complexity, the confusion, the pain of it, is shown to us in glimpses, in what Proust and Tolstoy thought of as 'true impressions.' This essence reveals and then conceals itself. When it goes away it leaves us again in doubt. But we never seem to lose our connection with the depths from which these glimpses come."

inward and self-fastened. (112)

There is a significant difference between Joseph's conception of 'giv[ing] ourselves away' and 'throw[ing] ourselves away.' This difference suggests parallels with Heidegger's concepts of the 'thrownness' and the categories of authentic and inauthentic modes of existence, all three of which must be understood in relation to the others, rather than as individual concepts. If we read the passage above carefully, there is an antecedent moment that is left unarticulated. The passage starts "We struggle perpetually to free ourselves." This suggests that there is 'something' that holds every individual captive. It is from this 'something' that every individual struggles hard to sever himself. A few pages earlier, Joseph writes about the lack of choice thrust upon the individual who finds himself, whether he likes it or not, in a specific time and a particular place in history. According to Heidegger, *Dasein* is literally 'thrown' into existence. This implies that *Dasein* has had no say or control of the time, place, historical era, no choice as to whether or not *Dasein* wanted to exist within the historical conditions that *Dasein* finds itself rooted in. Instead *Dasein* finds itself within the particulars of all these without prior preparation, knowledge or alternative. Joseph says about himself, "whether I liked it or not, they were my generation, my society, my world. . . . The worlds we sought were never those we saw; the worlds we bargained for were never the worlds we got" (15). The sense of being flung into the world without control over the situation is immediately made apparent. Throughout the journal, this idea is brilliantly brought out by countering freedom with freedom. Joseph finds himself a free man: he is currently unemployed, yet paradoxically is waiting to be drafted into the army. Joseph is hence free but his freedom is accompanied by the act of waiting to be drafted into the army. His freedom from employment is counteracted by the restraint imposed on him by waiting to be drafted into the army. The consequent situation is one filled with potential freedom. Joseph is free to spend his time whilst waiting as he pleases. However, there is a contradictory type of freedom that runs against this potential freedom. In that, freedom is forced upon the individual in two ways: firstly there is the notion that freedom is burdening. It has no form and no meaning and this consequently becomes the very meaning of the self. Joseph explains, "We are afraid to govern ourselves. Of course. It is so hard. We soon want to give up our freedom. It is not even real freedom, because it is not accompanied by comprehension" (122). Secondly, freedom is curtailed by the factors of space and time within which the individual ego finds himself or herself. Pure formless freedom is counteracted against by a truncated freedom. Joseph struggles to free himself from the limitations imposed upon him. He does this by freeing himself from the shackles of his job, from the suffocation of society and from the sham that surrounds him in everyday life. In freeing himself from all of this he is confronted with a shapeless freedom and is forced to mould it into a form or face the risk of confronting an indefinable self. The ontical struggle arises from the conflict between freedom as a potential 'to be' and a formless freedom. The conflict gives rise to the question of what it means to 'be Joseph' but also resists all attempts to provide an answer to it.

The idea of potential freedom versus a truncated freedom can be found in Heidegger's explication of *Dasein* as a 'thrown being.' In the following section, there are two different ways in which the word 'thrown' is used. The first one implies the Heideggerean notion of being thrown into the world within a particular time and space in such a way that *Dasein* has no control over or say in the matter. I posit that the second manner in which one might 'throw oneself away' and which Joseph perhaps alludes to in his journal implies a surrender

to Heidegger's 'they-self' and to readily available explanations of the world and of being.<sup>4</sup> For Heidegger, what is of significance is not that *Dasein* is simply 'thrown' into the world but instead the way in which *Dasein* chooses to attend to this 'thrownness.' The freedom that is inherent in *Dasein's* own disclosure is contained within its 'thrownness.' *Dasein* can choose how to relate to 'thrownness' and in this choice *Dasein* reveals itself either authentically or inauthentically. Thus, there is the indication of a formless freedom which *Dasein* must take hold of by making choices and by disclosing itself but this is possible only because *Dasein* exists in 'thrownness' and thus within the parameters of specific social, cultural, personal and historical factors. *Dasein* is 'thrown' into the world in which other things and other *Daseins* exist. *Dasein* is confronted with two choices: authenticity and inauthenticity. It can relate to the condition of being 'thrown' in such a way that 'thrownness' allows *Dasein* to reveal its own Being by understanding its own possibilities and to disclose itself through mood. Alternatively, *Dasein* may take the other path and rely on the 'they-self' to provide pre-established definitions of the self and the world. In the condition of inauthenticity, *Dasein* falls away from itself.

An expression of the notion of the 'they-self' is possibly what Joseph alludes to, when he writes in his journal: "We throw ourselves away." Here 'throwing ourselves away' implies surrendering oneself to ready made answers about being and about the world. It is worth noting that in the same entry in which Joseph writes about 'throwing ourselves away' he also uses words such as "impure," "unknowing," and "inward" to qualify the throwing of oneself. His entry draws direct attention to the idea of being shackled. I am not suggesting that Joseph is Heideggerian in his outlook, but that the notions of inauthentic existence and the 'they-self,' of Heidegger's *Dasein* as a 'thrown' project and Joseph's own outlook correspond to a great degree. The manner in which the concepts of the 'they-self,' and the notions of the authentic and inauthentic are expressed in the fictional text as part of the ontical struggle that Joseph finds himself thrown into. This is partly why the concepts are not developed in a theoretical manner in the fictional text. Within the ontical struggle that Joseph is immersed in, the notion of 'throwing ourselves away' is of significance because it is this self that can provide a refuge from the question of what it means 'to be.' Joseph refuses to seek comfort in that refuge and the refusal intensifies his struggle to discover the meaning of who or what he 'is.'

In his study of Bellow's fiction, John Jacob Clayton undertakes a comparative study of Dangling Man with Sartre's Nausea. In it, he too draws a distinction between 'giving oneself away' and 'throwing oneself away.' Amongst various other things, Clayton's study seeks to argue that both Sartre and Bellow attack the idea of the self and ego and both deal with a type of death of the self but in radically different ways. Clayton suggests that Joseph partly 'throws himself away' but also partly longs for the loss of selfhood and hence 'gives himself away.' The study also draws on certain existentialist themes that run through the narrative of Dangling Man but is careful to draw out the divergences between existentialist thought through Sartre's Nausea (1938) and Bellow's Dangling Man. This article, whilst addressing similar concerns, seeks to elucidate instances of phenomenological thought with a view to attending to the question of

---

<sup>4</sup> For the most part, *Dasein* is absorbed in the 'they' or in the crowd. The 'they-self' is the result of such absorption. It is the inauthentic mode of being and refers to the self that is influenced by the crowd rather than discovering authentically what it means 'to be.' The 'they' provides *Dasein* with ready made answers regarding the world and what it means 'to be' thus preventing *Dasein* from authentically discovering the same.

whether in fact imaginative literary fiction is better suited to an ontical or ontological study of Being.

I should now like to draw attention to the significance of the theorist-persona in Dangling Man because, like many of Bellow's other characters, Joseph too is an amateur theorist. As a theorist, he fails all attempts to define who he is. The search for the self assumes a literal stance in the first few pages of the novella. Here, it becomes a struggle to define the self. Joseph is waiting to be drafted into the army because 'who he is' remains unknown. He is of Canadian descent and a British subject. Due to the confusion that results from his unknown identity he is classified as an 'alien.' His classification as a 1A in the army must undergo revision after notification that he is married. He is required to undergo two blood tests. And whilst this search to discover who he is goes on, he has nothing better to do than to 'dangle.' He must quite literally simply wait until he is given further notification of 'who he really is.' In his search for himself, Joseph sometimes speaks of himself in the third person. The earliest episode of Joseph talking about himself in the third person occurs in the first few opening entries of his journal. But there is a significant point that must not be overlooked in his third person encounter with himself. Joseph speaks of an older self, a self of the past, and it is when he talks about the Joseph of the past, that he refers to himself in the third person. The self as subject tries to understand the self as object. But the question to be asked here is whether in fact the subject and the object are the same? He says:

For legal purposes, I am that older self, and if a question of my identity were to arise I could do nothing but point to my attributes of yesterday. I have not tried to bring myself up to date, either from indifference or from fear. (16)

The notion of the self is problematised because of the lack of trace between the past and present. There is no means by which Joseph can assuredly state that the Joseph of yesterday is the same as the Joseph of the present. And by 'same,' I do not mean to imply that the attributes remain unchanged but that, despite alterations and differences, there might be a fixed and identifiable atemporal core or essence that might remain unchanged. The lack of continuity between the Joseph of the past years and the Joseph in the present is an instance of metaphoric death. It becomes necessary within the novella because it questions the consistency of the self and shatters the belief in an unchanging essence of the self. But more importantly, it brings to light the difference between the notions of a constructed identity and the self. In Dangling Man the self is pure experimentation. Joseph struggles to find the means by which he might locate himself. The finding and searching results in experimentation: he tries out different approaches. What or who is the self? This is the question that remains unanswered but not without the burning desire to find the answer to it: "We are all drawn toward the same craters of the spirit — to know what we are and what we are for, to know our purpose, to seek grace" (112). Dangling Man is an exhaustive exploration of the ontical because in it Joseph ontologises. He is seeking the answer to the question of 'Being.' The ontical is made manifest through the act of writing in the journal *intime*.

Joseph tries to define himself according to his physical appearance, he tries to attribute character traits that might provide him with a fixed and stable identity, he attempts to understand the self as sporadic and indefinable, he constructs alternative selves which might be understood as him, he sometimes refers to himself in the third person in an effort to grasp some substantial sense of the self. Sometimes he is the subject searching for himself. The subject and object are one in this case. At other times he is the subject searching for the object. The object in this case is a constructed self. He is at times attracted by the idea of the

possibility of finding the self within the world whilst at other times he is attracted by the idea of discovering the self as a mind existing alone within a room. He finally turns to the army: "Perhaps the war could teach me, by violence, what I had been unable to learn during those months in the room. Perhaps I could sound creation through other means. Perhaps" (139). The repetition of the word "perhaps" is clearly suggestive of uncertainty. That uncertainty comes from the fact that other attempts have ended in failure and the expectation that perhaps this attempt might well too.

It is precisely the self as experimentation that Heidegger talks about in his treatise, Being and Time. Heidegger states:

We do not *know* what 'Being' means. But even if we ask, "What is 'Being'?" we keep within an understanding of the 'is,' though we are unable to fix conceptually what that 'is' signifies. . . . However much this understanding of Being (an understanding which is already available to us) may fluctuate and grow dim, and border on mere acquaintance with a word, its very indefiniteness is itself a positive phenomenon which needs to be clarified.  
(25)

I will elaborate on why the 'indefiniteness' is to be understood as a positive phenomenon. The inability to lay down a fixed definition of what the Being of *Dasein* means points to 'possibility.' 'Possibility' itself is a Heideggerean notion. It means that, for *Dasein*, there exist possibilities or ways of being. In being, *Dasein* is continually revealing and concealing itself. To confine it to some concrete system of interpretation is reductive and erroneous, according to Heidegger. However he is quick to add that, because of the lack of any fixed ground upon which the Being of *Dasein* can be understood does not imply that *Dasein* is nothing. Heidegger argues that *Dasein* should not be understood as an entity with a pre-given essence or as something that has properties. All attempts to define what *Dasein* is will necessarily escape us. But because it is impossible to ground *Dasein* as a fixed concept does not automatically imply that *Dasein* is nothing. *Dasein* is pure possibility. To understand *Dasein* means to uncover what it means to be. And this can be done only in the everyday world which is where *Dasein* exists. To be able to seize its own possibilities, *Dasein* must first and foremost be engaged in the urge to enquire into what it means to be *Dasein*. *Dasein* is always what it can be. In this sense *Dasein* must understand itself as a potential to be. "[P]ossibility signifies what is *not yet* actual and what is *not at any time* necessary. It characterizes the *merely possible*" (Heidegger 183). However it must be remembered that when Heidegger explicates the notion of possibility and potentiality, he does not suggest that it is infinite in terms of limits. *Dasein* always finds itself with certain conditions that restrict the horizon of possibilities.

From a Heideggerean perspective, Joseph is not to be understood as nothingness but as existing toward his own potentiality-for-Being. Because there is no fundamental essence prior to existence for *Dasein*, there is a certain freedom as concerns the Being of *Dasein*. This freedom is the freedom for *Dasein* to be itself. *Dasein* must continually unveil itself and this is possible in the several modes of being that *Dasein* finds itself in. To exist in such a way is to live authentically. The converse of such an authenticity is what Heidegger refers to as the inauthentic. To ignore the primordial freedom of being and to construct an artificial and manufactured self in order not merely to escape the burden of freedom and of having to discover the self but also to rid oneself of the sense of anxiety and alienation that one is confronted with when faced with the overwhelming question of what it means 'to be,' is to live inauthentically according to Heidegger.

The Heideggerean account of the self and Bellow's own views on the self intersect in significant ways. Bellow has repeatedly argued that the failure to define oneself according to any stable system does not imply that the self is nothing. Clearly this is also Joseph's view in the *Dangling Man*. Joseph believes, like Heidegger, that the search for the self is an ongoing process of concealment and disclosure. To both Heidegger and Joseph, it would seem something of a betrayal to submit to a fixed notion of what the self is. And hence, Bellow's 'dangling man' is forever condemned to a quest that has no logical end. Joseph is undoubtedly tortured by his suffering, but on the other hand, to submit to a coherent system seems not merely unacceptable but even impossible to him. It is not that he loves his suffering: rather the suffering is the consequence of resisting a reductive meaning of the self to a mere construct.

For *Dasein*, authenticity and inauthenticity are two modes of possibilities of being. *Dasein* is literally thrown into the world without the preliminary choice of whether or not it wished to be in the world. *Dasein* is for most part lost in the they-self. Because it is fallen into the they-self in which *Dasein* exists in its average everydayness, *Dasein* has lost itself. Being absorbed by the everyday world and having lost itself in the they-self is tranquilizing for *Dasein* because being in this mode frees *Dasein* from its authentic freedom to discover what kind of a Being, *Dasein* really is. All answers are provided for by the they-self. "The 'they,' which supplies the answer to the 'who' of everyday *Dasein*, is the 'nobody' to whom every *Dasein* has already surrendered itself in being-among-one-another" (165–166). In a certain sense such absorption in the world allows for *Dasein* to exist and function within the world amongst other people and to be part of the world. However, because everything is already assigned with a pre-given familiarity and understanding, *Dasein*, by being immersed in the they-self, is led to the deceptive view that "one is leading and sustaining a full and genuine 'life'" (222). However, *Dasein* is soon faced with anxiety, and with the sense of not-knowing itself without conformity to the they-self.

One might understand Joseph's viewpoint within such a Heideggerean context. Joseph, it can be argued, vacillates between two opposing modes of being. Certainly, there are instances of losing oneself in the mass of men in *Dangling Man* but there is also, along with this, a handing over of oneself in the world which is not an absorption into the 'they.' This handing over is best manifested by Joseph's own recruitment into the army. On the one hand, the army provides Joseph with a regimental form by which he can define himself. Yet, at the same time there is the suggestion that the army will help him discover who he really is, away from the world of common concerns. The army, in *Dangling Man* becomes an alternative to the everyday world and offers him the opportunity to be a 'good citizen.' However, both these instances of losing oneself result in a loss of the self because individual choice is put into serious question. On the other hand, there is an increasingly burdening freedom in the days that he spends within the confines of his room. Within the confines of his room he is unable to use his freedom and unable to make choices because who he really is always escapes him. As a result, this too will result in a loss of selfhood. For Joseph, the self is not a product of the environment; neither can it be grasped in acts of intense self-reflection. He will experiment with different means to unveil the meaning of what it means 'to be' without the realization that it is in experimentation that the answer to his question lies.

Being-in-the world can in certain instances lead to a sort of metaphoric death of the self. It is a death because the self is won over by the 'they-self' and finds such an absorption into the

world 'tranquilizing.' But this is one form of a metaphoric death of the self and is radically different in nature to another form which results from a deliverance of the self:

Great pressure is brought to bear to make us undervalue ourselves. On the other hand, civilization teaches that each of us is an inestimable prize. There are, then, these two preparations: one for life and the other for death. . . . We are schooled in quietness and, if one of us takes his measure occasionally, he does so coolly, as if he were examining his fingernails, not his soul, frowning at the imperfections he finds as one would at a chip or a bit of dirt. Because, of course, we are called upon to accept the imposition of all kinds of wrongs, to wait in ranks under a hot sun, to run up a clattering beach, to be sentries, scouts or workingmen, to be those in the train when it is blown up, or those at the gates when they are locked, to be of no significance, to die. The result is that we learn to be unfeeling toward ourselves and incurious. Who can be the earnest huntsman of himself when he knows he is in turn a quarry? Or nothing so distinctive as quarry, but one of a shoal, driven toward the weirs. But I must know what I myself am. (86)

Joseph takes to writing in his journal to find an answer to a formidable question, "Is there a self"? There is also a sense of superiority in Joseph's attitude. The need to find and define the self is so sharp that there is a detectable tone of repugnance in Joseph's voice at the various forces that smother any possibility of discovering a unique coherent self. The insignificance of being simply one among a million other men, the futility of finding oneself in a world that stifles all attempts at uniqueness, reverberates in the above passage. Impersonality is literally imposed upon the self, who is merely one amongst the many others who "wait in ranks under a hot sun" or who "run up on a clattering beach" (86). Further, death makes a mockery out of individual selfhood by threatening to annihilate him. A loss of selfhood, either way, follows one like a shadow that will not fade away. Joseph is of the opinion that even those engaged in the search for the self are deceived easily and are, for most part, satisfied by illusory answers as if one were "examining his fingernails, not his soul" (86). The individual gets lost in the mass and becomes just another in the immense crowd. Individual selfhood is asphyxiated by the 'they.' And as Joseph himself remarks, often this is reason enough to make one "unfeeling" and "incurious" toward oneself. Yet, Joseph himself is driven by the urge to discern "what I myself am."

The Heideggerean notion of Being as infinite possibility and its inauthentic counter-part find expression in Dangling Man in the idea of the ideal construction. An ideal construct is a false universal, and one through which the individual defines and interprets himself or herself and the universe. It is restrictive, allowing for just one way of interpreting, and is inauthentic because it is a construct for mere convenience. In a conversation with his alternative ego, Joseph explains:

An ideal construction, an obsessive device. There have been innumerable varieties: for study, for wisdom, bravery, war, the benefits of cruelty, for art; the God-man of the ancient cultures, the Humanistic full man, the courtly lover, the knight, the ecclesiastic, the despot, the ascetic, the millionaire, the manager. I could name hundreds of these ideal constructions, each with its assertions and symbols, each finding — in conduct, in God, in art, in money — its particular answer and each proclaiming: "This is the only possible way to meet chaos". (102)

As Joseph says, the ideal construction becomes a refuge against chaos. Chaos is to be understood as that which is indefinable, as that which transcends captivity or in the

Heideggerian sense as 'infinite possibility.' To Joseph, many of the other more minor characters who appear in his journals seem to be living inauthentically, in other words according to contrived definitions. They do so because the alternative found in the genuine freedom of unpredictability is much too overwhelming for them. And so they choose to define themselves according to a construct within which they may fit, rather than the opposing alternative of a resistance to any such definition. And so Jimmy Burns, for instance, might see himself as a communist party member, and Joseph, as a "contemptible petty-bourgeois renegade" (23), or Steidler who "under the influence of an ideal construction" (102) swears by an idea of dramatic and would "willingly let go everything in his life that is not dramatic" (102). Joseph tells us that Steidler is "willing to pursue his ideal until his eyes burst forth from his head and his feet from his shoes" (102). The notion of the ideal construction, the inauthentic existence and the universalizing tendency that comes with it, are all intricately woven by Bellow. The ideal constructor uses his construction as the only way of seeing and hence everything becomes subsumed by this or that particular way of seeing.

What is to be said then of Joseph's persistence with the question that informs the narrative of Dangling Man? Why is it that no 'ideal construction' can satisfy Joseph? Perhaps, Heidegger can provide an answer. In Being and Time, Heidegger writes that anxiety forces *Dasein* to discover what *Dasein* is anxious of. *Dasein* is forced out of the immersion of the they-self and comes into direct confrontation with the question of 'what *Dasein* is,' when severed from the they-self. This brings *Dasein* into an authentic mode of being. Because this anxiety is not specifically directed at anything all, the 'they' is unable to resolve it. *Dasein* realizes that the 'they' cannot provide it with any truth as to what kind of a Being *Dasein* really is. Perhaps *Dasein* must look at itself in order to discover the truth about itself. But this pushes *Dasein* into choosing for itself and brings it into a realm of freedom where all decision must be made by *Dasein* and not by the 'they.' This causes as much anxiety as the realization that the 'they' cannot provide *Dasein* with the truth about Being. The use of the journal form in Dangling Man is suggestive of a desire to construct and that is precisely what Joseph is attempting to do. He is immersed in constructing a notion of what it means to be himself and the form of a diarist writing about himself becomes synonymous with the theorist who is involved in generating systems of understanding. Joseph's failure as a philosopher-theorist is of primary significance.<sup>5</sup> The significance of Joseph's failure as a theorist can be placed in the context of Bellow's own views when talking about Freud. Joseph voices a similar abhorrence to the notion of the 'ideal construction.' But it is distrust of any 'ideal construction' that results in Joseph's unending quest for the self. Joseph's failure to find a system is echoed in other ways as well. Firstly, there is the fact that he has abandoned his biographical study of Diderot and other philosophers of the Enlightenment. We learn also that he had been a member of the Marxist party but has given up this alliance. He struggles throughout to achieve some definition of himself through constructions, and he even goes so far as to create an alternative personality with whom he can talk concretely about himself. There is no system by which he can define himself entirely. Joseph is able to characterise himself not as a Marxist, nor as an existentialist, nor as a philosopher. All

---

<sup>5</sup> The importance of the construction of a persona who theorizes and fails miserably at it is reflected in Saul Bellow's own remarks in his Nobel lecture (1976). Here, he stresses the importance of the failure of systems of thought for the human being. He said: "We must hunt for that under the wreckage of many systems. The failure of those systems may bring a blessed and necessary release from formulations, from an over-defined and misleading consciousness."

attempts to fix himself within a definite system end in disillusionment. The form of a journal only serves to highlight all of this. The diary form works against the construction of a definable self. Most often used to record and document impressions, reactions, convictions and details of events and of oneself, one might imagine that it offers the potential to know and solidify the sense of the self. It provides the self with a sense of continuity by tracing and linking the self of the past, present and the future. It is otherwise with Joseph. The entries in his diary only heighten the fragmentary and conflictual forces within the self. It amplifies the evanescence and the immense lack of fixity that is the self. The use of the diary form works towards and generates specific ideas. The protagonist, in this case Joseph, literally observes and records himself. The subjective 'I' is also simultaneously the observed 'other.' He is at once both subject and object. Joseph the subject of *Dangling Man* becomes the very object of his search. He is essentially writing himself. It is hence the most conducive form of writing for a recluse or, to phrase it in a different way, for the ruminations of a thinking mind. But in all this, the diary or the journal *intime*, is in many ways the most fitting form to augment the treatment of time, the diary form serving to stretch or enhance the experience of time. The irony of the text is that it chronicles the time period from when the protagonist Joseph quits his job in a Travel Bureau through his sixteen month long wait until he is drafted into the army for military travel of his own. On the one hand, while it traces the movement of time from the day he gives up his job until the day when he receives the letter from the army, the form of the diary through its entries also paradoxically undercuts the sense of passing time by highlighting its static quality. He writes, "I can't answer for Iva but for me it is certainly true that days have lost their distinctiveness" (57).

It is not merely to fill time that Joseph records entry in his diary but the diary itself becomes one possibility among others through which Joseph might find himself. The form and content of the journal *intime*, it is supposed, might well correspond to locating the form and content of the self. The motif of waiting and of the static texture of time that resounds throughout the novella is simultaneously undercut by the sense of the ceaseless flow of time. This magnifies the notion of 'becoming' and of the hard fact that the self is always unfolding, sometimes revealing itself as this and at other instances concealing itself. Joseph's search for himself is not a mere groping about in the dark. There is a faint understanding of the self that has been concealed. Hence, the search is directed to recover that which is concealed. Bellow explains in an interview:

In almost everything I write there appears a primordial person. He is not made by his education, nor by cultural or historical circumstances. He precedes culture and history. . . . [T]here is something invariable, ultimately unteachable, native to the soul. A variety of powers arrive whose aim is to alter, to educate, to condition us. If a man gives himself over to total alteration I consider him to have lost his soul. If he resists these powers, forces of his own can come into play. (Roudané 276)

Joseph's entire journal, and the very fact that he writes in it about himself, is testimony to discovering the 'primordial person'. In parts, the journal is descriptive, at other points it becomes more penetrating in terms of interpretation of the implication of those descriptions toward the question 'who am I?' The entire novel echoes with the idea that even though there is a vague impression of the self, that very impression itself remains to be found and unveiled. There are instances of the physical being, the historical being, the social being: Joseph as a citizen, Joseph as a husband, Joseph as an ex-member of a party, Joseph as an isolate. Yet, there is lurking behind all these various Joseph's 'a Joseph' that transcends all of this. "Who is Joseph"? Despite the very many ways in which he can define himself he is

unable to answer the basic question of who he is. This brings us to an episode he records in his diary. Joseph arrives at a bank to cash a check. Twice he is rejected, once because he lacks identification and the second time because the vice-president is unable to say for sure that there is a correspondence between the identity on his card and the Joseph who stands before him. Surely, this points to the central question that informs the entire narrative. It is the question of 'who he is.' "We are all drawn toward the same craters of the spirit — to know what we are and what we are for, to know our purpose, to seek grace" (112).

Joseph sets himself the task of searching for this self that overarches these various modes of being. All this comes through with lucidity in a conversation Joseph has with his alter-ego or what he also refers to as the Spirit of Alternatives or *Tu as Raison Aussi*. Prompted by the inevitability of death, the conversation concerns the overwhelming question of the meaning of 'what it means to be oneself.' Joseph is afraid to "make my own way toward clarity" (122). He must decide if he is to be molded by forces or if he must discover the more primordial and transcendental meaning of the self that is something beyond a mere sum total of these forces. He is weighed down by the freedom that is the self, in all of its infinite possibilities and discouraged by the incomprehension that such a freedom carries with it. This incomprehension of knowing once and for all, what or who the self is entices one to "run out, choose a master, roll over on our backs and ask for the leash" (122). Joseph is not without the realization that Being transcends all these inauthentic enticements. There is something beyond mere definitions provided by the social and the physical descriptions of the self, there is something more to the self than that which becomes apparent through our acts and beliefs. Prompted by this awareness, Joseph falls prey to an outburst against an ex-comrade, Jimmy Burns, in a restaurant. The episode begins with Joseph waiting for a friend by the name of Myron Adler to discuss the prospective of finding a job. Whilst waiting for Myron Adler to arrive, Joseph recognizes Burns, a friend he had once known whilst he still belonged and subscribed to a political party. Joseph proceeds to make his acquaintance with Burns but is met with indifference when Burns pretends not to have recognized him. What follows is a diatribe by Joseph. In the course of his invective, it becomes apparent that Joseph's attack stems from the frustration of a sense of non-existence derived from the fact that Burns refuses to recognize him. This, argues Joseph, is a direct result of rejecting a party ideology according to which one may choose to define oneself. The fact that he does not belong to the party anymore puts his very identity into question for Jimmy Burns. His tirade is directed against Jimmy Burns but it is also as much, if not more, a launch against the notion of defining the self according to a set of principles that one subscribes to. He says, "When a man obeys an order like that he's helping to abolish freedom and begin tyranny" (21). The freedom that Joseph refers to is the freedom to think, but also the freedom to be an authentic self, which lies beyond the confinements of any definition. But is not Jimmy Burns' espousal of the party similar in many ways to Joseph's commitment to the army? Do they not serve the same ends? Several pages after the Burns episode, Joseph writes in his journal: "If I were a little less obstinate, I would confess failure and say that I do not know what to do with my freedom" (110). Then in his very last entry before he is to join the army he does indeed confess, "I am no longer to be held accountable for myself; I am grateful for that. I am in other hands, relieved of self-determination, freedom canceled" (140). Both Burns and Joseph ultimately choose the same thing: the inflexibility of being caught within a system, the converse of a freedom that is the self. But, perhaps, like dissociating himself from the party that he once belonged to, the army too might become in time only experimentation for Joseph. Like his many abandoned projects, the army too may well be abandoned by Joseph in the future. That is

why the question of the self persists, sometimes revealing itself and at other moments becoming fainter than ever.

Heidegger begins his exposition on Being in his Being and Time by focusing on the importance of the manner in which the question of Being is raised. He explains that the formulation of a question is of fundamental importance to any inquiry since it directs that which is to be answered. Further on, he writes that, as concerns Being, there is already a fuzzy understanding of Being which explains why human beings behave and act in the varied ways we do. There is then already an implicit understanding of what the limitations and possibilities of *Dasein* are, of how we exist within the world and amidst others in the world. However this needs to be clarified because, over time, *Dasein* becomes susceptible to an inauthentic existence which conceals the possibilities and limitations that *Dasein* truly is. For this 'vague fact' to achieve clarity, Being must become transparent and this can happen only if the inquirer is the seeker himself, according to Heidegger. *Dasein* is the name given to the kind of Being who enquires about his own Being. One of the primordial modes of the Being of *Dasein* is found in this mode of enquiring 'what it means to be.' One of the ways in which *Dasein* discloses itself, according to Heidegger, is through moods. *Dasein* is never to be understood as being severed from mood. Mood is a fundamental *existentiale* (173). Moods are not to be understood as mere psychical states. *Dasein* is always disclosed according to the mood in which *Dasein* finds itself. What is of significance is that moods are not merely ontically disclosive but ontologically disclosive as well. That is why Heidegger's explication on moods is not merely about the psychical state of mind that *Dasein* finds itself in. Moods reveal Being-in-the-world as a whole.<sup>6</sup> Heidegger writes: "*The mood has already disclosed, in every case, Being-in-the-world as a whole and makes its possible first of all to direct oneself toward something*" (176). What Heidegger means by this is that moods limit *Dasein's* attention by making the whole of existence appear within a particular perspective. The world, being-with-others and *Dasein* are all revealed according to one of the many other possible modes of being. Once again the world, objects in the world and others in it transcends the particular and specific mood which informs the directedness. *Dasein* always has some mood or the other. Heidegger's emphasis on moods undercuts any theoretical understanding and performs the task of destroying an abstract understanding of the world that the tradition of western philosophy has usually resorted to. For Heidegger, instead, we are always already in some relation to the world. Any cognitive understanding comes after. *Dasein* finds itself 'thrown' in the world and as a 'thrown project,' *Dasein* already has an understanding of the world. Moods disclose *Dasein* in its specific 'thrownness.'

In Dangling Man, one of the many ways in which Joseph's Being unfolds itself is brought about by the treatment of Joseph's relation to his surrounding physical environment. I am not by any means suggesting that a direct correspondence lies between Heidegger's exposition on moods and *Dasein*, on the one hand and the world of Dangling Man, on the other. What is being claimed however is that there is a rather clear indication of the way in which environment,

---

<sup>6</sup> Within this framework, it is interesting to note Opdahl's comments on Bellow's protagonist. He states, "Because Bellow's point of view is almost always that of his protagonist, the society he describes may be a reflection — and projection — of his hero's consciousness. His portrayal of it is often an exploration of the character who sees it" (10). Whilst Opdahl's observations may seem similar to my own approach, they strike at a more subjective interpretation. Opdahl's argument can be understood within the Cartesian framework. The argument that I posit is in direct opposition to the Cartesian view and, hence, comes into conflict with Opdahl's viewpoint.

Being and self-disclosure occur in the novella in an interestingly analogous manner to Heidegger's phenomenological explanation of Being-in-the-world. The reason I draw a parallel between this aspect of Dangling Man and Heidegger's theory on moods is because in both there is the notion that the way in which the world appears cannot be separated from the mood in which *Dasein* find itself in. In Dangling Man, the physical environment is amplified by the burdensome hostility of Joseph's world. 'Fog' makes it cumbersome for him (Joseph) to find his way, high winds threaten to throw him off his path as he walks along the roads, the onerous life that Joseph leads is reflected in the "street lamp bent over the curb like a woman who cannot turn homeward" (68). The darkness and estrangement that has lodged itself in Joseph pervades the entire universe and as Joseph writes in his journal "the cold is part of the general malignancy" (107). However, having said that, it is important to clarify that such an understanding does not imply that the world is a mere projection of the perceiving individual mind.

Through Dangling Man, there is a sort of dialectic between man and world such that both impinge upon one another. It can be argued that, because the novella uses the first-person narrative voice, the environment becomes a direct reflection of Joseph's consciousness or inner world. However, the present study is precisely against such a dualistic understanding, in which the distance between subject and object are widened, so much so, that the world becomes dependent upon, and a reflection of the subject's mind. It is impossible to say which one is a reflection of the other. Each magnifies the other so that Joseph's consciousness becomes not a reflection but an extension of the physical environment. But this is equally true of the physical world as well which can be understood to be an extension of Joseph's mind. In this sense, both are enmeshed with one another. Heidegger would argue that moods or the state-of-mind discloses *Dasein* in such a way that it reveals the way in which the world matters to *Dasein*. In Dangling Man, it is precisely such a disclosure that is illustrated: what is disclosed is the way in which the world matters to Joseph, and through this disclosure Joseph reveals himself to us.

Joseph's struggle is an ontic-existential struggle. The ontological issue of the fundamental structures of Being are present as questions, as hesitations and as doubts. In the introductory chapter of his book, Opdahl contends that Bellow's vision is primarily a movement from the historical to the metaphysical in that he is concerned more with "the larger universal issue" (6). Whilst I agree with Opdahl's analysis, it is my contention that the movement in Dangling Man is not one from historical to universal. Rather the metaphysical and ontological question is at the centre of the work. The historical becomes one of the many possible ways of providing an answer to the question of selfhood. It is an experiment, like the many other ones, that Joseph juggles with. Joseph's struggle is an ontic-existential struggle. The ontological issue of the fundamental structures of Being are present as questions, as hesitations and as doubts. "In all principal ways, the human spirit must have been the same" (15), says the old Joseph. But what exactly is that essence of Being, is primarily the driving question that consumes Joseph. And it is precisely this questioning that makes Joseph's struggle an ontical one. This is because the ontical specificity lies in the fact that throughout the narrative Joseph is *ontologising*. This article has attempted to understand the manner in which the ontical unfolds in the attempt to *ontologise*. Joseph repeatedly and consistently fails at finding an answer to 'who he is.' The reason for this failure can perhaps be understood by turning to Heidegger.

Heidegger, in his analysis, explains that the experience of Being is determined by finitude or

temporality. He argues that the issue of finitude has been forgotten both by the individual and by the history of philosophy. Finitude or our being-toward-death determines disclosure or the way in which essence is revealed in existence. This forgetfulness of finitude, both by the individual and by metaphysics, leads to nihilism. Heidegger uses nihilism in a very specific manner. For Heidegger, western philosophy and metaphysics has forgotten the question of Being. This is because the Being of beings for Heidegger is always showing itself, bursting forth from concealment into unconcealment, continuously and ceaselessly. But metaphysics has always tried to find an answer to the question of the Being of beings according to a calculated and value-assigning manner. This could be through science, modern technology, God, etc. In finding an answer to the question of Being, there has been a betrayal of the very question itself. For Being is that which is the source of mystery: a mystery that can never be grasped as a whole. This is because the problem of existence is such that it is always unfolding. Thus to reduce the question of Being to an answer or to the manipulation of the human mind, is to divorce it from existence.

The authority of reason is seriously put to the test by Joseph. Initially, Joseph refuses to submit to the failure of rational thought. By and by, he discovers that his failure at building coherent theories to explain Being and the self are in many ways a reaction to the inflexibility of abstract thought. Instead, Joseph discovers that no system can provide a satisfactory answer to the question of the self because it lies beyond man's capacity for reason. In one of his many conversations with his alter-ego, he says "The human might is too small to pit against the unsolvables. Our nature, mind's nature is weak, and only the heart can be relied on" (98). Thus, the nihilism that is constantly at bay in Dangling Man can be explained at least in part, to be the consequence of man's faith in reason and intellect. Yet at the same time, alienation is not the answer for Joseph. Instead, he devotes himself to the search for the meaning of Being and to the quest for meaning, hoping and desperately believing in its possibility. Joseph's choice of joining the army is not to be seen as a surrender of the imagination. There are several instances in the journal where he does seem to be giving into the seduction of reason. At one point, he writes, "Out of my own strength it was necessary for me to return to the verdict for reason, in its partial inadequacy, and against the advantages of its surrender" (68). It might even appear that he insists on the rationality that has so often failed him and his ultimate choice of joining the army is a surrender to reason itself. The induction into the army pronounces death not only in a literal and biological sense but in a metaphoric one as well. Reason, form, systems: all are modes of a 'death of the self.' They each seek to stifle the uncontainable vastness of the self. Yet, Joseph's choice cannot and should not be understood as a mere failure. He is not defeated. Death here is to be understood metaphorically as well. The death of the self brings with it simultaneously the promise of a re-birth and that is why Joseph's quest does not end with his enrollment into the army. Rather, it can be viewed as a new beginning. It is significant that his chronicles start during the month of December and his last entry is made in the month of April. The association with December, wintry and foggy, dark and barren, is starkly opposed to April, a time of re-birth and renewal of life. Perhaps then, it is a metaphoric death that awaits Joseph.

Heidegger's analyses of temporality and finitude brings into focus *Dasein* as a Being-toward-death. Death is the ultimate possibility for *Dasein* and as the ultimate possibility it is understood as a possibility that ends all other possibilities. *Dasein* must understand itself as a Being that is always disclosed in anticipation, or as a Being always already ahead-of-itself. This understanding arrives with the awareness of *Dasein's* finitude. *Dasein* is 'thrown' into

possibilities and hence is always and already 'thrown' into its own death which is the final possibility that brings all other possibilities to a grinding halt. But because being 'thrown' into possibilities is the condition from which *Dasein* might engage in purposeful action and might disclose itself through such action, temporality becomes the meaning of Being. *Dasein* is hence always becoming its own death. In this recognition, lie both, the fact of one's own mortal becoming and the fact of one's own mortality. Heidegger is also quick to add that death does not simply belong to *Dasein* in a way that it belongs to every other *Dasein*. Death individualizes *Dasein*.

Does Joseph in Dangling Man take a hold of his mortality in an authentic way? It is very evident that Joseph is haunted by finitude and mortality. Joseph is constantly plagued by a sense of anxiety over death. Clayton argues that Bellow's characters are weighed down by a sense of guilt which stems from the belief that they are undeserving of life. Death becomes a sort of retribution or punishment for the characters. My own analysis in this article does not follow this trajectory of thought. I relate Joseph's anxiety over death to issues of an authentic versus an inauthentic manner of understanding human finitude. More importantly, my argument will illustrate how this anxiety over death that Joseph is constantly engulfed by has to do with the undefined self. Joseph is surrounded by images and events of either death itself or of images that in some way symbolize death. His landlady has been ill for the past three months and as Joseph says is not "expected to live long" (8). In one incident he recalls a picture of his grandfather which was taken shortly before his death, at another time in the narrative, when he is on his way to meet Iva on the occasion of their sixth anniversary he becomes witness to a man sprawled on the street who might have been dead. He dreams about death and dying and is even re-visited by the vision of the dead man lying sprawled on the road. These events and memories are not merely incidental and do not occur merely in passing through the pages of the journal. Rather, their re-telling, their recounting and their descriptions are suffused with a tone of unease and fear, of the anticipation of his own inevitable death and with trepidation. More importantly, it is through these episodes that Joseph's own view on mortality finds expression. For Joseph, death implies cessation of all choice and, in this sense, his own views on death are obviously similar to Heidegger's analysis. Where for Heidegger, death is the ultimate possibility that cancels all other possibilities, for Joseph death is "the abolition of choice" (107). What does it mean to say that he takes hold of his mortality authentically? When Joseph talks about death, he personifies it as a hunter and a murderer seeking and awaiting for the moment when he might attack. It is true that, in like fashion to Heidegger, he understands that once *Dasein* 'is,' it is always already dying. From the day we exist "we know we are sought and expect to be found. . . . Who does not know him, the one who takes your measure in the street or on the stairs" (88). Further, death to Joseph means inexistence and the end of all choice. Not only does it mean that the individual no longer exists but that the individual self is no longer able to comport itself and take hold of a choice. But what of the words 'choice' and 'possibility,' that are used by Joseph and Heidegger respectively? Do they entail a similar meaning? Whether they mean essentially the same thing cannot be said. What can be said with some amount of certainty, however, is that there is a point of convergence of meaning in the ways that they are used. Joseph does write about the annihilation of choice that death brings with it. And it can be understood in a Heideggerean sense. 'Choice' means alternatives just like possibility does in Heidegger's analysis. He does also talk about the individualizing of the self that death brings with it. This happens, according to Joseph, because death shatters the separate autonomous self. For it is whilst thinking of death that Joseph writes "I am forced to pass judgments on myself and to ask questions I would far rather not ask: 'What is this for?' and 'What am I for?'" (89). The question 'what am I for' can provide the answer to the question

'what am I?' And it is this particular question – 'what am I for?' – which is the root of his many experiments: the answer lies in discovering the purpose and consequently the meaning of Being. He must first find a self to preserve and maintain which death in time can destroy. The anxiety over death that Joseph is confronted by stems from the lack of such a self. The dissociation from external social factors weighs heavily on the quest to discover the essence of the self. In his study titled Saul Bellow (1982), Robert R. Dutton argues that Joseph's final submission to the military accounts for the fact that it is impossible to exist by oneself in a world of which we are a part. It is from this world, argues Dutton, that any 'self-meaning' and 'social meaning' is achieved. Against such a trend of thought, another critic, Opdahl, argues that "Joseph's search for an autonomous self is a rejection of the assumption belonging to both the thirties and French Existentialism – that man is defined exclusively in external or historical terms" (31). Opdahl contends that Dangling Man, like many other of Bellow's other stories, are constructed around the relationship that they share with the social realism that was a product of the thirties. Further, he argues that Joseph's final defeat is not a consequence of his turning inward but because he is not able to do so as "he is nevertheless a part of his time" (31). Whilst Opdahl touches upon Joseph's failed attempt to locate an essential self, he attributes the failure to the fact that Joseph exists in a particular social milieu: that of the thirties. In shifting the centre of concentration from the historical setting to the ontological, my own argument stresses the search not so much for the 'autonomous self' as opposed to the 'essential self.' The 'autonomous self' implies an independent and unique self and is related more to the notion of identity. The 'essential self,' on the other hand, is related to that which lies beyond such an identity to a notion of a fundamental self which would prevail should identity disappear. This is a sort of romantic notion of a unchanging core of the self that unlike identity is not susceptible to change and so is always 'present' and 'stable.'

Saul Bellow would shirk away from being labeled a philosopher and draws a distinction between philosophy and fiction. In an interview he says, "I prefer to get my philosophy from philosophers. This is not to say that I am opposed to ideas in fiction" (Enck 156). His fiction and essays are a profound expression and examination of ontological, moral, intellectual, social and psychological questions. The failure to provide an answer is not a narrative flaw: rather it is the protagonist's resistance of submitting to a reductive framework within which the self may be understood. Thus, to state emphatically at the end of my analysis that Bellow's work is Heideggerean or phenomenological would betray the very ideology upon which that work rests. The argument in this article concludes without an authoritative theory about the precise conceptual framework into which Dangling Man should be inserted. Joseph, the man who dangles, transcends this effort.

### Works Consulted

- Aharoni, A. "The Search for Freedom in Dangling Man." Saul Bellow Journal 3.1 (1983): 47-52.
- Abbott, H. P. "Saul Bellow and the 'Lost Cause' of Character." Novel: a Forum on Fiction 13 (1980): 264-283.
- Bellow, Saul. "Where Do We Go From Here: the Future of Fiction." Michigan Quarterly Review 1 (1962): 27-33. Rpt. in To the Young Writer. Ed. A. L. Bader. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1965. 136-146.
- . Nobel Lecture. 1976. Nobelprize.Org. Web. October 2004.
- . "Dangling Man." Novels: 1944-1953. New York: Library of America, 2003. Pp.
- . "A World Too Much with Us." Critical Inquiry 2 (1975): 1-9.
- Birkerts, S. "A Conversation with Saul Bellow." Agni: Interviews / Exchanges 46 (1997). Web.
- Brans, J. "The Dialectic of Hero and Anti-Hero in Rameau's Nephew and Dangling Man." Studies in the Novel 16.4 (1984): 435-47.
- Clayton, John Jacob. Saul Bellow: in Defense of Man. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1968.
- Dutton, Robert R. Saul Bellow. Boston: Twayne, 1982.
- Enck, J. J. "Saul Bellow: an Interview." Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature 6 (1965): 156-160.
- Heidegger, Martin. Being and Time. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1962.
- Husserl, Edmund. The Idea of Phenomenology. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964.
- . Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy. New York: Harper, Torchbooks, 1965.
- . Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology. Trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson. 5th Ed. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969.
- Ikeda, C. "Hard-Boiledness in Saul Bellow's Dangling Man." Kyushu American Literature 26 (1985): 29-36.
- Kaler, A. K. "Use of the Journal / Diary Form in the Development of the Odyssean Myth in Dangling Man." Saul Bellow Journal 5.1 (1986): 16-23.
- Lehan, .
- Opdahl, K. M. The Novels of Saul Bellow: an Introduction. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1967. Print.
- Reichman, R. "The Medical Model and the Wartime Reading of Dangling Man; Or, What Can Joseph Recover?" Saul Bellow Journal 14.2 (1996): 28-42.
- Roudane, M. C. "An Interview with Saul Bellow." Contemporary Literature 25 (1984): 265-280. Print.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. Nausea. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965. Print.
- Schwartz, D. "A Man in his Time." Review of Dangling Man. Partisan Review 11.3 (1944): 348-50. Rpt. in Critical Essays on Saul Bellow. Ed. Stanley Trachtenberg. Critical Essays on American Literature. Boston: Hall, 1979. 3-4.