

Contributions To Phenomenology 74

Hans Pedersen
Megan Altman *Editors*

Horizons of Authenticity in Phenomenology, Existentialism, and Moral Psychology

Essays in Honor of Charles Guignon

 Springer

Horizons of Authenticity in Phenomenology, Existentialism, and Moral Psychology

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Hans Pedersen • Megan Altman

Editors

Horizons of Authenticity in Phenomenology, Existentialism, and Moral Psychology

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Hans Pedersen and Megan Altman

This volume centers on the exploration of the ways in which the canonical texts and thinkers of the phenomenological and existential tradition can be utilized to address contemporary, concrete philosophical issues. Within the discipline of philosophy, there are, on the one hand, many thinkers who see philosophy as a process of abstraction in the pure search for theoretical knowledge, without thinking it necessary to explain how philosophy is practically situated. On the other hand, there are a growing number of philosophers who feel that philosophy can and should strive to illuminate and engage with pressing social, moral, and political issues. In the more general sphere of public debate, there are many who question the value of the continued existence of the discipline of philosophy. Especially in the light of serious financial difficulties faced by many colleges and universities, there is a grave demand to justify the practice of philosophy by showing it can have a serious impact on other areas of academic study or some other sort of practical importance. In this book, the authors illustrate the ways in which existential and phenomenological thought can be used to address current, and often pressing, practical issues. Overall, the essays illustrate how ideas rooted in phenomenological and existential interpretations of human existence are open to contemporary ways of engaging with the enduring question of the meaning of human existence.

The work of Charles Guignon has done quite a bit to show that the existential and phenomenological philosophical traditions have a great deal to contribute to such efforts to demonstrate why philosophy continues to be of great practical import.

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Whereas the recent surge in the influence of Applied Ethics has been due to the ability of philosophers to provide specialized analysis of difficult and pressing ethical issues (e.g. stem-cell research, corporate responsibility, balancing economic growth with protection of the environment, etc.), Guignon's work has focused on the no less difficult and pressing philosophical questions about human existence. What does it mean to be/have a self? Is there a more authentic way to live life? If so, what would an authentic life look like? How should I, as an individual, understand my relationship to the society in which I find myself? How should we understand and respond to the fact of human mortality? Are we indeed in an age of nihilism, as many philosophers and writers have claimed, or is there a way to find value and meaning in the world? In his work, Guignon has used the canonical texts and thinkers of the phenomenological and existential traditions (particularly the works of Martin Heidegger) to address questions like these in a way that combines high-quality academic scholarship with a real sense that interested, intelligent non-philosophers can and should be able to engage fruitfully with these philosophical questions. Guignon's approach to phenomenological and existential philosophy is one that emphasizes clarity and avoidance of technical jargon and his belief that this philosophical tradition can and should make a practical impact on our lives.

The overarching and unifying theme of Guignon's multifaceted work is the investigation of what it means to be authentic. Spanning the gamut of philosophical, religious, literary, aesthetic, and psychological approaches to authenticity, Guignon has developed an original and groundbreaking path to understanding what is involved in owning up to who and what we are. In a recent reflection on his own path of development, Guignon (2012) paid homage to the central role of Heidegger's magnum opus *Being and Time* (1962). During the course of his undergraduate studies at the University of Pittsburgh, Guignon was awoken from his dogmatic slumber when the English translation of *Being and Time* appeared in 1962. He recalls:

Having the text itself to work with set me on a course of thought and questioning that completely overturned my narrow sense of what education was all about. For, where my classes and studies up until then seemed to be a matter of mastering the currently accepted views about things in the area I was studying, the main thrust of Heidegger's thought involved identifying the underlying assumptions taken as self-evident in whatever field one was studying, and 'de-structuring' those assumptions to see whether they were as solid as was supposed. With the Heideggerian challenge to the question-worthiness of any inquiry, many basic assumptions were put in question. (2012)

Seen in light of this Heideggerian challenge, Guignon's work on authenticity attempts to deconstruct the assumptions made about the self and agency found in much of mainstream contemporary philosophy, the human sciences, and everyday discourse.

For example, in 1983, Guignon established himself as a first-rate Heidegger scholar with his publication of *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge*. Using Heidegger to undermine the Cartesian framework that still serves as the basis for much contemporary epistemology, Guignon challenges the assumption-laden foundations of our Western ways of thinking about subjectivity and agency. In challenging the epistemological foundations of subjective individualism, he provides

a detailed and insightful interpretation of Heidegger's conception of subjectivity and agency to show the contrast with the Cartesian understanding of these things. Guignon also lays the foundation for his move towards focusing on more practical issues as he takes over the Heideggerian challenge and begins to make it his own.

As his career developed, Guignon published numerous articles dealing with authenticity and related themes like agency, freedom, and subjectivity, culminating in his longest and most sustained work on the notion of authenticity, *On Being Authentic* (2004). In *On Being Authentic*, Guignon sets out to trace the development of and the problems with the pop-culture conception of authenticity. According to this conception of authenticity, each of us has certain innate traits or desires that are truly indicative of who we are as individuals. Being authentic is a matter of discovering those inner traits and desires and making sure we are true to them in the face of societal pressures to do otherwise. Guignon questions whether it is possible or healthy to maintain this emphasis on finding innate character traits that are definitively one's own at the expense of meaningful engagement with the community in which one finds oneself. In contrast to the popular notion of authenticity, Guignon lays out an alternative conception of authenticity that aims to better incorporate the ineradicably social aspects of our selves. This book brings together various aspects of Guignon's scholarship in which he critically examines the shortcomings of common conceptions of selfhood and works to provide an enriched understanding of what is involved in leading an authentic life in the contemporary world.

In addition to his exploration of human agency, Guignon's work explores authenticity through other avenues such as science and technology. For example, in *Re-envisioning Psychology: Moral Dimensions of Theory and Practice* (1999), Guignon collaborates with psychologists Frank Richardson and Blaine Fowers, both of whom are contributors to this volume, to "examine the cracks in the foundations of academic and professional psychology" (1). Guignon and his colleagues illustrate the various ways in which the theories and practices of modern therapy are colored by conflicting and often tenuous views of human behavior. In this joint intellectual effort, the authors attempt to show how insights concerning the constitutive aspects of human action and authenticity gleaned from the phenomenological and existential traditions can inform psychotherapy and psychological research.

In the spirit of several key existential thinkers (Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus immediately come to mind), Guignon has often taken up the question of how we should respond to the fact of human mortality and what it means to authentically face up to this fact. Focusing on Heidegger's thought in particular, Guignon has attempted to work out how the connection between death and authentic existence. There is an intuitive plausibility to the idea that a clear-sighted awareness of one's mortality can lead one to "live life to fullest," to make more of one's life than someone who remains in denial of this fact, and yet, it is difficult to clearly say what exactly is meant here. Much of Guignon's thought on human finitude and authenticity can be understood as a reflection on what he refers to as the Heideggerian notion of "ontological teleology": human existence is an event or happening that is always already underway in moving toward some culminating

point, some final *telos* or end. In his earlier work, Guignon (2004) postulated that death, defined as the end of one's own life-story, provides a sense of narrative unity to one's life. In his more recent work, Guignon (2011) has become critical of this narrative approach to death, arguing that the fact that we are going to die at some future point does not assure us that our lives have any kind of unity or wholeness. Instead, in a shift that speaks to Guignon's prioritization of a fidelity to the phenomena being analyzed over the protection of his established "turf," he has focused on the idea that death (at least in Heidegger's sense of the term) is not the completion of one's life-story, but rather the completion of the movement towards authentic existence.

The essays included in this volume address the key themes and questions raised in Guignon's work, and as such, are intended to honor and extend his thought and approach to philosophy. All of the essays included are written by scholars who are at least partly influenced by the phenomenological and existential traditions. The contributors comprise a mix of established, well-known scholars and younger, emerging scholars made up of Guignon's students, colleagues, and collaborators to show the ways in which this general approach to the phenomenological and existential tradition is still vibrant and is being passed from one generation to the next.

Outline of the Main Sections

Part I: Authenticity and Subjectivity

This section includes essays that deal with the questions surrounding what it means to be an agent/self and what it means to be an authentic self or person. The first contribution from Lawrence Hatab builds upon Guignon's commitment to critically examining the presuppositions and shortcomings of the modern conception of subjectivity. Hatab's essay focuses on the "concept of the subject as a fundamental problem in the history of philosophy since the modern period." After tracing the historical development of the modern conception of subjectivity, Hatab argues, using Heidegger's conception of selfhood as developed in *Being and Time*, that subjectivity is a "deficient concept for rendering human existence and selfhood."

The next three essays in this section all deal with authenticity and share a commitment to developing accounts of authenticity that are broader than the common, individualistic accounts of the concept, such as that criticized by Guignon in *On Being Authentic*. Steven Burgess and Casey Rentmeester begin their essay by reviewing Guignon's account of Heidegger's critique of Cartesian subjectivity and show how this critique leads to the conception of authenticity found in Heidegger's early thought, according to which authentic selfhood involves being open and responsive to other people and to one's socio-historical context. Burgess and Rentmeester then proceed to develop this account of authenticity and push it even further in the direction of openness to one's world by incorporating the concept of dwelling, which Heidegger develops in his later thought.

In a similar vein, Jeff Malpas begins with the notion of authenticity that Guignon develops based on Heidegger's early thought. Malpas especially focuses his attention on what can be added to authenticity by Heidegger's conception of *Gelassenheit*, which Malpas translates as 'releasement'. Through an analysis of Wordsworth's poem, *Michael*, Malpas makes the case that *Gelassenheit*, and thus authenticity, involves a deep connection to one's geographical place, again stressing, as Burgess and Rentmeester do, the insufficiency of the more closed-off, individualistic conception of authenticity.

Kevin Aho also attempts to develop a less individualistic conception of authenticity by examining Heidegger's interest in the works of Dostoevsky. Aho focuses on several key themes for Dostoevsky: belonging to a people, being rooted in one's homeland, and giving oneself over to religious faith. Like Malpas, Aho makes the case that *Gelassenheit* is an essential part of (or perhaps alternative to) authenticity. Aho goes in a somewhat different direction than Malpas by suggesting that Heidegger's conception of *Gelassenheit* can be understood in connection with the key Dostoevskyan themes mentioned above—*Gelassenheit*, and hence authenticity, involves giving oneself over to one's people, one's homeland, and ultimately to the way in which Being presents itself to us.

In the final essay of this section, Michael Zimmerman analyzes Phillip K. Dick's novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and uses it as a platform to consider how best to think of authenticity. Zimmerman finds several competing conceptions of authenticity at work in Dick's novel: authenticity as being true to one's identity, authenticity as being a genuine human, and authenticity as complying with a higher duty. While Zimmerman argues that Dick's novel does not lead to any definitive conclusion about the best way of understanding authenticity, the novel, especially in the thoughts and actions of the protagonist, Deckard, makes the case that authenticity cannot be understood as complying with a higher duty.

Part II: Phenomenological Reflection on the Sciences and Technology

The essays in this section consider the ways in which the resources provided by phenomenology can provide a helpful perspective from which to analyze how the sciences understand human existence and the ways in which technology frames our experience and understanding of the world. The first essay by Benjamin Crowe sets the tone for this section by making the case that an exclusively naturalistic worldview precludes the possibility of finding human existence meaningful. Crowe begins by considering Husserl's critique of naturalism and then turns to Husserl's reflections on Fichte to develop an alternative, phenomenological framework, in which human existence can be seen as meaningful.

Eric S. Nelson continues this general consideration of the relationship between phenomenology and the sciences by exploring Heidegger's early *Auseinandersetzung* with the thought of Wilhelm Dilthey. While Heidegger clearly was greatly

influenced by Dilthey's focus on the historical situatedness of human existence, Heidegger disapproves of Dilthey's uncritical reliance on information from the sciences. For Heidegger, the social (and natural) sciences remain at the level of ontic inquiry, merely investigating the readily manifest properties of various groups of entities, and do not and cannot adequately pose the question of what it means to be anything at all. Accordingly, Heidegger argues that Dilthey's thought is not properly ontological. Nelson suggests that Heidegger might have been a bit hasty in his criticism of Dilthey on these grounds and that there might something gained by considering some of Heidegger's contemporaries, who, influenced by Dilthey, attempted to establish a reciprocally informative relationship between phenomenology and the sciences.

In the next two essays, Frank Richardson (in collaboration with Robert Bishop) and Blaine Fowers discuss the ways in which phenomenological and existential philosophy have raised questions about research practices and conceptions of knowledge in the human sciences. In Fowers's essay, he makes the case that psychological research that does not take into account the larger context of meaning in which the subjects are acting is inadequate. He demonstrates this through the thorough analysis and critique of a psychological study on honest and dishonest behavior. In the second essay, Richardson and Bishop explain how research in the humanities and social sciences has often seemed to be trapped in an epistemic dilemma between a purely objective view of the results of such research and a purely relativistic one. Richardson and Bishop, using the work of philosopher and theologian, Colin Gunton, make the case that an epistemic framework based on the hermeneutic approach to philosophy can provide a useful intermediate position between these extremes of objectivism and relativism.

Frank Schalow's contribution explores our understanding of addiction. Schalow seeks to undermine the prevalent behaviorist model of addiction. He does this by using Heidegger's analysis of human existence and everyday agency to develop an account of addiction that is an alternative to the behaviorist model and a better fit with our phenomenological experience.

Richard Polt's essay develops a Heideggerian critique of "cyberbeing." Polt uses the work of the mid-twentieth century mathematician, Norbert Wiener, who coined the term, 'cybernetics,' to flesh out what is meant by cyberbeing—understanding beings solely in terms of information. Polt then proceeds to critique this understanding of beings using Heidegger's account of inauthenticity in *Being and Time* and Heidegger's later concept of enframing.

Part III: Phenomenological Considerations of Death and Ethics

The third part of this volume contains essays that focus on the existential and phenomenological interpretations of human finitude, all of which are at least partially

inspired by Heidegger's influential (and still mystifying) account of how best to understand human mortality. In the spirit of Guignon's emphasis on providing clear interpretations of difficult questions and avoidance of technical jargon, Adam Buben unpacks Heidegger's account of death in *Being and Time*. By situating Heidegger's phenomenological description of death within the "history of the philosophy of death," Buben illustrates a more nuanced and concrete interpretation of the death chapter in *Being and Time*. Buben's essay not only offers an original exegesis of this chapter, it also appeals to the recent developments in Guignon's understanding of Heidegger's treatment of death. In contrast to the narrative view of death, which has its roots in the Christian notion of total world-collapse or, to use a more common expression, dying to the world, Buben argues that the primary purpose of Heidegger's discussion of death is to "liberate and open Dasein up to the possibility of taking complete ownership of itself as the Being that is essentially open to possibilities."

In a similar fashion, Megan Altman's essay picks up on the nuances of Guignon's argument against the idea that what gives narrative unity to a life is that kind of being-toward-death where death is understood as the individuating feature of human existence. Specifically, Altman argues against a Derridian reading of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* that claims that ethical existence is a disguised attempt to evade death thereby abnegating individual responsibility. By expanding on Guignon's scholarship, Altman problematizes this watered down version of ethical individuation and tries to show how the existential view of death opens up a broader understanding of responsible agency.

In the next two essays of this section, the authors focus on the embodiment of mortality within the concrete reality of human life. Iain Thomson examines "the basic coordinates of the dispute between Heidegger and Levinas over 'death' and its phenomenological and ontological significance." Whereas Levinas argues that the existential significance of death is defined in relation to the other, Heidegger claims that being-toward-death involves taking a stand in relationship to one's own finitude. In tackling the long-standing Heidegger-Levinas controversy, Thomson's essay focuses on an essential point of correspondence in the intellectual context of Heidegger's and Levinas' struggles to make sense of human finitude. By taking into account that both thinkers are responding to the devastating and contentious political climate of post-war Europe, Thomson presents Levinas' view of death as a genuine departure from and reconstruction of Heidegger's thought.

This section ends with Mariana Ortega's reflections on what Guignon refers to as the "existential meaning" of our ways of dying and being with others. Her essay works within the existentialist and aesthetic traditions in order to understand Marlene Dumas's provocative idea that art and philosophy are ways of "learning how to die." Ortega provides an original account of the ways in which Dumas's canvases prompt an embodied sense of anxiety and being-toward-death that is "connected to our ownmost possibility or the possibility of becoming responsible for our own choices."

Part IV: Questions of Agency and Sociality

The included essays attempt to show that the phenomenological and existential traditions can be used to address the question of human agency and to explore the ways in which phenomenological thought can be used to provide a basis for understanding and critiquing social existence. In the first essay of this section, Derk Pereboom considers the phenomenology of human agency and which position in the free will debate has the best phenomenological support. Pereboom first makes the case that the phenomenology of agency supports agent-causal, as opposed to event-causal, accounts of action. While it might seem that this implies that the phenomenology of agency would best support a libertarian position on free will, since supporters of agent-causal views of action have tended to also support libertarianism, Pereboom goes on to argue that the phenomenological aspects of agency that align with agent-causal accounts of action could just as easily support deterministic agent-causal views as libertarian agent-causal views.

Hans Pedersen's essay uses Kierkegaard's thought to explain the problem of ironic agency and to work out a potential solution to the problem by showing how Kierkegaard's conception of faith can be re-purposed and applied to this issue. Ironic agency, for Kierkegaard, is characterized by an opposition between an agent's external actions and her internal attitude towards those actions. Pedersen argues, with Kierkegaard, that the ironist is driven by the motivation to make herself into a well-defined, discrete individual, but that a thoroughgoing ironic stance is self-defeating, since irony undermines the sort of commitment required to be a self or agent in the strong sense of the term.

In their contributions, William Koch and Daniel Dahlstrom seek to challenge the common belief that Heidegger's thought has little to contribute to the understanding and critique of social existence and propose ways in which Heidegger's thought can be fruitfully applied to this end. Koch makes the case that there can be a meaningful sense of social critique that can be developed out of Heidegger's thought. Heidegger's phenomenology focuses on revealing the hidden conceptual assumptions in our various ways of understanding the world, and Koch argues that this gives a way of critiquing social and political structures in light of their own undisclosed assumptions without having to posit some ahistorical, universal normative standard to serve as the basis of social and political critique.

Dahlstrom begins his paper by acknowledging that Heidegger's early thought often lends itself to an individualistic, solipsistic conception of human existence, especially in his account of authenticity. This tendency has then often been countered by a swing to the opposite extreme and the support of what Dahlstrom calls "populist authenticity" that overly prioritizes the social aspects of authenticity. Dahlstrom argues that both of these extremes are equally unsatisfactory and attempts to develop an account of authenticity that "necessarily is at once individual and social."

Mark Wrathall's paper ties together questions of human agency and social existence by suggesting that Heidegger's notion of authenticity is best understood as an ethical ideal broadly construed. Wrathall accepts the existentialist, transcendentalist,

and historicist approaches, but he does not think that these views can capture or take seriously the normative domain of authenticity. Drawing on *Being and Time*'s Aristotelian influences and the "Letter on Humanism"'s conception of "originary ethics," Wrathall's essay aims to show that authenticity is an "extra-moral ideal" of agency. In other words, authenticity is an ideal that is made manifest in and contributes to various spheres of human existence such as the moral and social, but as an ethical demand it is not gathered from these dimensions of the life-world. Rather, it comes from the individual herself. Wrathall argues convincingly for a thick descriptive interpretation of authenticity: the individual is responsible for the normative force of conventional, common sense norms. This Aristotelian-inspired extra-moral ideal of normative agency requires integrity and self-constancy along with the self-formation of a resolute and steady character.

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Part I
Authenticity and Subjectivity

Chapter 2

Can We Drop the Subject? Heidegger, Selfhood, and the History of a Modern Word

Lawrence J. Hatab

Selfhood and Subjectivity

A major element of *Being and Time* is Heidegger's critique of modern philosophy's division of self and world into subject and object, where objectivity denotes "facts" independent of the self and the rational subject denotes the mind's reflective distance from ordinary involvements and practices, a distance that frames the methods and ordering principles allowing the constitution of objective facts. In other words, modern objectivity and subjectivity are both shaped by a disengagement from the ways in which the human self first and foremost finds itself in the lived world. Heidegger's phenomenology aims to establish the priority of this "first" world, which therefore cannot be understood objectively or subjectively in the modern sense: "subject and object do not coincide with Dasein and world" (Heidegger SZ, 60).¹

Dasein's "selfhood" is not originally an interior consciousness over against an objective world, but a unitary structure of being-in-the-world. The self is not a "what" but a *way* of being (Heidegger SZ, 117). Dasein in its everyday existence is for the most part immersed in non-reflective practices, involvements, and relationships; Dasein is "thrown" into its world, rather than being a self-originating conscious entity. Dasein is "in" its world in the manner of inhabitation, of being at home amidst (*bei*) its environment, which Heidegger designates as

¹I am using standard pagination of the German text indicated marginally in translations and in GA 2.

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“dwelling” (SZ, 54). Dasein’s being is the *meaning* of its world, its *mattering* to Dasein’s factual activities and concerns.² What matters to Dasein in its world are the range and import of its possibilities, its tasks and projects that shape present concerns with futural purpose. So Dasein’s “self” is not a discrete entity but a temporal movement toward a future informed by an inherited (thrown) past; nor is Dasein simply a “mind,” but rather an engaged agent in a practical environment; nor is Dasein simply an individual self, since being-with other Daseins is an essential feature of the lived environment.³

The organizing concept for Dasein’s selfhood as being-in-the-world is care (*Sorge*), which in its own way captures both senses of the ontological difference mentioned earlier. In German, *Sorge* carries a twofold meaning of caring-about and anxious worry. Care, for Heidegger, is a *single* phenomenon with this twofold structure (SZ, 199), which gathers both Dasein’s concerned being-in-the-world and the primal mood of anxiety that discloses the radical finitude of being-toward-death, the exposure of Dasein to meaninglessness at the heart of existence. Accordingly, Dasein’s being is a temporal project of meaning that is also saturated with the lapse of meaning. This is why Dasein’s selfhood cannot be rendered as a being, a thing, an object, or any condition of presence because its existence is a temporal movement bounded by, and infused with, absence. If Dasein’s finite being-in-the-world is characterized as an *ungrounded, engaged temporality*, we can spotlight Heidegger’s critique of modern philosophy, which can be tagged with two basic concealments of finitude: (1) its ontology of constant presence and an epistemological principle of certitude, which conceal an abyssal temporality and the contingencies of life; and (2) its bifurcation of self and world into a detached subject and external objects, which conceals existential engagedness.

At this point I want to focus on the second form of concealment by exploring the question of selfhood and subjectivity, and I do so with the help of an important book by François Raffoul, *Heidegger and the Subject*. In this study, Raffoul argues that selfhood is essential to Heidegger’s thought, both early and late. Even in the supposed “turn” (*Kehre*) from Dasein to being, the *meaning* of being for human selves remains central. This is cogent because selfhood, for Heidegger, never

²That the world matters to Dasein is all that is meant by the notions of “mineness” and “for the sake of itself,” which therefore do not connote anything egoistic, but simply a challenge to the priority of impersonal (third person) models of being (Heidegger SZ, 41–43).

³The subject-object split in modern thought is well indicated in the problem of skepticism, particularly in terms of radical doubt about the existence of the external world. In section 43 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger takes up the problem of skepticism, particularly in terms of the presumed division of self and world into subject and object, an internal conscious mind and things external to the mind. He critiques skepticism, not on its own terms, not by showing how the existence of the external world *can* be proven, but by dismissing radical skepticism *as* a problem that needs to be solved. Since Dasein is not originally an internal consciousness over against an external world, but rather *is* being-in-the-world, then involvement with its world-environment is constitutive of Dasein’s being. The very notion that subjective consciousness must pursue a demonstration that its environment exists shows that reflection has disengaged from a prior mode of being that makes it possible to pose such a question in the first place (see Heidegger SZ, 202, 205).

referred to some discrete entity or self-thing, but rather to an intrinsic relatedness to the meaning of being (and so not simply a self-relation). Raffoul rightly understands that a proper account of Heidegger's early phenomenology and the ubiquity of selfhood in the question of being must follow Heidegger's deconstruction of the modern subject-object binary. Yet Raffoul also shows how the early Heidegger displayed an ambivalence regarding the status of subjectivity, as opposed to his later departure from subject-language. In this way Raffoul opens up the possibility of rethinking subjectivity, a task that has occupied a number of contemporary thinkers, often in matters pertaining to ethics and politics, especially when the supposed loss of the subject is thought to obviate human agency and undermine arguments against oppression (Raffoul 1998, Chap. 5).⁴ We can add, of course, "existentialist" writers such as Kierkegaard and Sartre who have advanced non-foundationalist models of subjectivity that proclaim the openness of human selfhood.

The ambiguity of the subjectivity question is shown in Raffoul's careful portrayal of Heidegger's "destruction" of the subject as a deconstructing/appropriating of the concealed *being* of the modern subject (Raffoul 1998, 139). It is this *being-of-the-subject* that interrupts the tradition and prepares a "nonsubjective" understanding of subjectivity or selfhood, something entirely different from the tradition (Raffoul 1998, 211, 147–48). Raffoul's nuanced and provocative treatment of Heidegger's engagement with Kant (see especially BP, 125–42/GA 24, 177–99) suggests that the early Heidegger was not utterly abandoning subjectivity but trying "to open up *another* sense of subjectivity" (Raffoul 1998, 122). As Raffoul reminds us, Heidegger on occasion (in *Being and Time*, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, and *History of the Concept of Time*) indicated that the ontology of Dasein was meant to explicate the tacit meaning of the subject, and that the "subjective" turn in modern thought was an inescapable starting-point for philosophy (Raffoul 1998, 5–6, 155, 180). In *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, Dasein is specifically described as a subject, or more precisely, "the *subjectivity* of the subject" (Heidegger MFL, 165/GA 26, 211).

In addressing this question, I want to mention something important in the early Heidegger that is not often recognized or appreciated. Heidegger did not think that fundamental ontology was a strict departure from, or replacement for, the Western philosophical tradition. The meaning of being as he saw it was simply concealed within, and even implicit in, that tradition (see Heidegger SZ, 22–23). The early Heidegger, therefore, wanted his philosophical concepts to be launched from a radical reappropriation of the history of philosophy. Heidegger was not averse to seeing in standard philosophical concepts the kind of phenomenological meaning he was working to uncover. Here we should mention the crucial importance of "formal indication" in Heidegger's early work. Philosophical concepts, for Heidegger, are not necessary, fixed structures that "ground" thinking. They are formal concepts that can only be drawn from a phenomenology of factual existence, and that can then only function as indications, or "pointers" toward their activation in

⁴For discussions of the so-called "return of the subject," see Stern 2000; Palti 2004; and Deeds Ermarth 2001. See also *Why We Are Not Nietzscheans* (Ferry and Renault 1997).

factical life. Philosophical concepts, then, are not substantive designations but self-exceeding indications of concrete, finite being-in-the-world. The problem in philosophy has been that formal concepts have become reified and detemporalized into ascertainable objects of thought in and of themselves, thus eclipsing their indicative function (see Heidegger FCM, 292-94/GA 29/30, 422–27). Even though traditional philosophical constructions are an obstacle to the phenomenology of Dasein and so must not be presumed or employed uncritically, Heidegger in *Being and Time* does talk of the possibility of ascertaining the “unreified being of the subject, the soul, the consciousness, the spirit, the person,” all of which “refer to definite phenomenal domains that can be given form” (SZ, 46)—as formal indications.⁵ Here we find clues to the ambiguity of Heidegger’s relation to tradition, particularly with respect to subjectivity.

One of the meanings of the *Kehre*, however, can be understood as a departure from the early complicit engagement with traditional philosophical concepts, particularly the subject. In the *Nietzsche* lectures, Heidegger concedes that the danger of phenomenology getting ensnared by subjectivity was due to the limits of the early hermeneutical situation (N IV, 140-42/GA 6.2, 172–74). This situation was also alluded to in “Letter on Humanism,” where Heidegger says that in order for his early work to gain traction in the existing philosophical milieu, it needed to be expressed “within the horizon of that philosophy and its current use of terms” (LH, 259/GA 9, 357). With the *Kehre* it was not so much the project of *Being and Time* that was in question, but its *language* (Heidegger LH, 231/GA 9, 327). Heidegger also complained that *readers* remained stuck in the customary meaning of concepts deployed in *Being and Time*, rather than rethinking them in the light of fundamental ontology (LH, 259/GA 9, 357). Here is my take on this: Readers got stuck in the formal nature of concepts at the expense of their indicative function. This problem was especially acute with subjectivity, a notion that Heidegger now directly claims *Being and Time* was trying to *abandon* (LH, 231/GA 9, 327). So the early ambiguity about the subject becomes resolved in the later Heidegger when he specifically targets subjectivity as inadequate to the thinking of being.

Considering Heidegger’s early engagement with the philosophical tradition, my own view is that a kind of complicity with standard philosophical concepts is not always problematic. Many philosophical terms can function effectively if clarified by existential phenomenology and if given a formal indicative character. Yet I also believe that Heidegger’s later turn away from the subject was justified, to the point where I think his early work never should have been complicit with subjectivity at all. Recalling the previous list of traditional concepts designating selfhood that Heidegger suggested could display a positive phenomenological meaning, I think

⁵In *Being and Time*, when discussing selfhood in terms of the “I,” Heidegger clearly distinguishes between (1) a *merely* formal, reflective awareness of the “I” and (2) phenomenological attention to the function of the *word* “I,” which is to be “understood only in the sense of a non-binding *formal indication*”—especially as this leads in the direction of Dasein’s selfhood understood as a *who* rather than a *what* (SZ, 115–16).

that soul, consciousness, spirit, and person can have potential in this regard, particularly in view of a host of pre-theoretical uses of these terms, as distinct from their technical uses in philosophy. Yet I want to argue that the same cannot be said for the subject. I will make this case by considering the history of the word “subject” in philosophy, which should also provide a fruitful avenue for understanding how foundational models of selfhood critiqued by Heidegger took shape in Western thought.

The History of the Subject

The subject as the “I think” (*cogito*) in modern philosophy is a transubstantiation of the Medieval *subjectum*, which (as Heidegger was always at pains to point out) was the Latin descendent of the Greek *hupokeimenon*, which was understood as the substantive bearer or base of properties and attributions.⁶ In *What is a Thing?* (a 1935–1936 lecture course), Heidegger discusses the origins of the modern subject-object distinction in terms of Descartes’ task of positing a self-grounding fundament for the mathematical character of modern science, wherein the radical divorce of mathematical physics from all Ancient, Medieval, and customary beliefs demanded a grounding in a disengaged thinking sphere. In this way the *a priori* methodology and abstract mechanical principles of the New Science could be secured and liberated from all external dependencies and contingencies (see Heidegger WIT, 98–106/GA 41, 98–106). Heidegger mentions Galileo as an example of such a methodological *a priori* (WIT, 90ff/GA 41, 90ff). In the *Discourses*, Galileo recounted how the discovery of universal principles of motion required that he conceive of a body on a horizontal plane free of any obstacles, a conception that no experience will give him (“I conceive in my mind . . .”).⁷ Heidegger claims that with such developments, the erstwhile meanings of *subjectum* and *objectum* became transformed in a remarkable way. The *cogito* became identified as a special, privileged *subjectum*, construed as the underlying *hupokeimenon* or substantial basis of mathematical thinking. Originally a “subject” indicated any referential base, more in line with Aristotelian *ousia*, which was Latinized as “substance,” or that which stands under or behind or within particular features of an entity.⁸ Before Descartes,

⁶It should be noted that in the same *SZ* passage where Heidegger mentions the possibility of an unreified concept of the subject, he also points out that any reified concept is drawn from *subjectum* and *hupokeimenon*.

⁷For an account of how dematerialized thought experiments and imagination figured in the science of mechanics, see Bertoloni Meli 2010.

⁸In Aristotle there is an important distinction between *hupokeimenon* and *ousia*, with the former usually pertaining to predication and the latter to being. Yet this distinction was not a separation along the lines of the modern subject-object split. Being, for Aristotle, is a “fused” concept where the existential and predication functions of the “is” are two sides of the same coin. See Van Brennekom 1986.

subjectum showed no exclusive identification with the thinking mind. But now the *cogito* as *subjectum* became something unique in line with the modern mathematical project: a *self*-grounding *subjectum* that freely grounds the thinking of nature as a set of “objects,” namely the “disenchanted” entities of modern science denuded of all relations to human interests on behalf of a mechanistic/causal world view.⁹

In the light of modern science, “nature” was transformed into a set of material objects properly ascertained only through empirical observation and quantitative measurement. The reach of this model has been such that in some circles philosophy itself is conceived as a kind of “naturalism,” which is shorthand for scientific naturalism, wherein philosophical topics are best explained by, or at least must be consistent with, findings in natural science. Analytic philosophers often complain that continental philosophy is bereft of precision and commitment to scientific reason. Continental philosophers often complain that analytic philosophy takes for granted terms or criteria that are not timeless but rather historically emergent and that thus at least are worthy of questioning. Nature is a good example.¹⁰ One might think that our sense of physical nature is nicely collected in the Greek word *phusis*, usually translated as nature; but this word had a much more complex meaning for the Greeks (as emphasized repeatedly by Heidegger). *Phusis* is derived from the verb *phuō*, meaning to grow, to bring forth, to give birth.¹¹ With Aristotle we get a philosophical articulation of *phusis* as nature, but here too we have to be careful. Aristotle does not equate *phusis* with physical matter; *phusis* is manifest more in form than in matter (*Physics*, 193b5ff). And a prime instance of *phusis*, for Aristotle, is *psuchē*, life, including the human soul (*On the Soul*, 412a20ff). *Phusis* is not contrasted with the “supernatural.” It is simply identified with movement and change (Aristotle *Physics*, 200b12) and is specified as self-manifesting movement, as contrasted with *technē*, artifice, or movement caused by an external agent in human production (*Physics*, 192b10ff). Aristotle even gives *phusis* a comprehensive ontological significance, going so far as to connect it with being itself (*Metaphysics*, 1003a26-32). To repeat, Aristotelian *phusis* is not strictly material because it includes a teleological principle of form, where all natural beings are essentially purposeful in the process of actualizing potentialities that are intrinsic to their being.

⁹With respect to the mathematical, Heidegger insists that number is not its source, but a consequence of the original meaning of the Greek *mathēsis*, or presuppositions required for learning (Heidegger WIT, 70ff/GA 41, 69ff). Descartes bears this out in Rule IV of *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (PWD I, 15–20). There *mathesis universalis* is not universal mathematics but a general universal method of grounding thought by deduction from the intellect’s natural capacity for measuring order (as set out in the *Meditations*). Descartes knew of the Greek sense of *mathēsis* as a process of learning (connected with Platonic recollection). And he took mathematics per se to be simply the purest instance of *mathesis universalis*. See Van Pitte 1991.

¹⁰For Heidegger, what is “natural” is always historical (WIT, 39/GA 41, 38).

¹¹In Homer, *phuō* usually refers to plant life, with a specific meaning of bringing forth shoots, and earth is commonly called *phusizoos*, that which gives forth life (*Odyssey*, 11.301).

In general, the modern concept of nature developed out of two guiding criteria in modern science that, despite their apparent divergence into empirical and conceptual standards, were reciprocally related in scientific work: experimental verification and mathematical formalization. Both Descartes and Kant, among others, insisted that a science of nature was grounded in mathematics.¹² Modern science was a self-conscious repudiation of Aristotelian “physics,” in part because central Aristotelian concepts of purpose and potentiality eluded precise formalization and verification. As Newton put it, “the moderns, rejecting substantial forms and occult qualities, have endeavored to subject the phenomena of nature to the laws of mathematics” (Newton 1960, xvii).¹³ And Descartes described his *Meditations* as the foundation of his physics, which deals a mortal blow to Aristotelian physics (Descartes 1981, 94). Consequently, in modern science, “nature” is no longer understood in an Aristotelian manner as the field of self-manifesting phenomena that guide inquiry according to their evident formations, but as re-formed phenomena according to *a priori* constructs and principles that are *not* evident in immediate experience. In *Meditations* V, Descartes claims that corporeal things in nature exist, but their true existence cannot be ascertained as a match with our sensory grasp (as in Aristotle), because sense experience can be confused. Things in nature exist only in the manner of clear and distinct ideas, which are ultimately grounded in pure mathematics, which is the ground of mechanical physics, and which, for Descartes, is ultimately guaranteed by knowledge of God (*Meditations* V, PWD II, 48–49).¹⁴ It can be argued that God, for Descartes, is not only a warrant for physics but also the source of the non-teleological conception of mechanics. For Descartes, God’s perfection is radical freedom, especially with respect to creation as a result of sheer divine will, as not bound by any prior conceptions, including goodness and purpose (Dutton 1996). Divine “indifference” with respect to the quality of nature underwrites the

¹²Descartes PWD I, 19–20; Kant 1985, 6. Descartes’ thought was not restricted to deductive principles to the exclusion of experience. For Descartes, although the laws of nature are deduced necessarily from God’s immutability, their truth is *confirmed* by experiment. See Nadler 1990.

¹³For Galileo, philosophy is written in the “great book” that is the universe. But this book cannot be understood unless one learns its language and letters—mathematics—“without which it is humanly impossible to understand a single word of it.” Without mathematics, one wanders around in a “dark labyrinth” (Galileo 1957, 237–38).

¹⁴It may be that the *Meditations* is not primarily about the separability of mind and body, but simply the radical distinctness of thought and extension. See Rozemond 1995. Thought and extension are principal attributes of mental and physical substance, and substance is the base of its “modes,” indeed is the “subject” of its modes (Descartes PWD I, 198). Individual bodies are modes of the principal attribute of extension. A substance has only one principal attribute, defining its essence and bearing its modes. So *res extensa* should not be called “body” but the core defining element of individual bodies. In other words, body can be *nothing other than* extension. This scheme allows the treatment of *all* bodies as subject to the singular analysis of mathematical relations, thus supplanting the Aristotelian view of qualitative differences among bodies, and justifying the reductive mechanism of the new physics of nature.

legitimacy of the “purposeless” axioms of mechanical physics.¹⁵ Moreover, since nature has no intrinsic ends of its own, the door is open to the modern technological spirit of reducing nature to human ends. Descartes himself claimed that the chief benefit of the new mechanical model of nature is the power of control it grants to those who understand the secrets of nature’s workings. Human beings can then become “the lords and masters of nature” (*Discourse VI*, PWD I, 142–43).

We should note that one of the meanings of “natural” is that which is “native” to experience, what we are born into, which is indicated in the sphere of common sense that Descartes had to withdraw from and even fight off in his method of radical doubt. Modern science exhibits a similar kind of contested disposition toward natural experience and understanding (which are sometimes called, disparagingly, “folk knowledge”). Indeed, the posture of experimental science toward nature is far from a cooperative relationship (which marked Aristotle’s account of scientific knowledge). Francis Bacon is disarmingly honest on this matter. The experimental method investigates “nature under constraint and vexed; that is to say, when by art and the hand of man she is forced out of her natural state, and squeezed and molded” (Bacon 1905, 27). The point is that modern scientific naturalism emerged as a *struggle* with erstwhile conceptions of nature and lived experience. Kant as well claimed that scientific reason “has insight only into what it itself produces according to its own plan,” and that, armed with necessary laws, it must “compel nature to answer reason’s own questions” (CPR, Bxiii). We can conclude that the construal of nature as a scientific and technological “object” is itself far from an objective discovery. For such a scheme to emerge, the rational “subject” has to withdraw from natural experience to reconstitute the *being* of nature by way of mathematics.¹⁶

The mathematized being of nature allows for the contemporary sense of “objectivity,” in the manner of *independence* from interests, values, and purposes. Yet the *selectivity* evident in this transformation of nature is another angle on the history of subjectivity and objectivity. Such selectivity can be seen in the shift that occurred in the meaning of *objectum*. In *What is a Thing?* Heidegger notes that *objectum* originally referred to something present in the mind rather than something existing

¹⁵Along these lines, the turn to the *cogito* in Descartes is not simply a matter of inward reflection but a radical withdrawal from both outside experiences *and* internal thoughts that are the effects of past experiences and influences. Such is the mark of *indifference* (Descartes PWD II, 41) to all possible occurrences in the world and in the mind, which is what underwrites the method of radical doubt. See Dodd 2004.

¹⁶The transformative character of this modern scheme is shown in its reversal of Aristotle’s analysis of mathematics. In *Metaphysics* 13, Aristotle claims that mathematical form is indeed disclosive of being, but only in the manner of secondary *ousia*, not the primary *ousia* of particular phenomena in nature. Mathematical form is *derived* from primary *ousia* through the operation of *aphaeresis*, or “abstraction,” which means to pull away or take away from (Aristotle *Metaphysics*, 1061a30ff)—a term that Aristotle uses exclusively for mathematics, and that exemplifies his critique of Platonic Forms, which are falsely assumed to be conditions of primary *ousia*. Analogously, modern physics would count as a comparable distortion of nature by giving primacy to mathematical form. See Heidegger’s analysis of Aristotle in this regard in *PS* section 15, an analysis that serves as an early precedent for his later critique of modern science.

in reality (an imagination would be an example). *Objectum* was the Scholastic translation of the Greek *antikeimenon*, meaning “set over against,” which Aristotle used not to designate an “object” but opposition. In philosophy *objectum* basically referred to an intentional object or representation, something thrown before or presented to the mind, as distinct from the independent reality of a thing. When Berkeley claimed that “to be is to be perceived,” he was equating *esse* and *objectum*. As he said with respect to natural phenomena, “their real and objective natures are therefore the same” (Berkeley 1744, para. 292).¹⁷

What is unusual in all of this, Heidegger remarks, is that the modern senses of subjectivity and objectivity represent a reversal of the original meanings of *subjectum* and *objectum*. *Subjectum* in the old sense indicated something we would call “objective,” and *objectum* something we would call “subjective.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* bears out Heidegger’s point in recognizing “an exchange of sense” between subjectivity and objectivity in the course of time (see under “objective”). Objectivity originally meant something only in the mind while subjectivity meant real existence outside the mind. A 1647 passage cited in the *OED* (under “objective”) calls personal confession the objective foundation of Christian faith, while Christ is called the subjective foundation.¹⁸ The implication of Heidegger’s analysis of this meaning reversal is, I think, as follows: When the *cogito* became the self-grounding *subjectum*, its substantive reconstruction of nature as a mathematical system out of its own thinking sphere privileged the mind’s self-positing capacity (more in line with the original meaning of *objectum*); and from this privileging of the new *subjectum*’s positing power there eventually arose the modern sense of “objectivity,” namely real things existing independent of the mind as discerned by scientific reason. In other words, after Descartes the *cogito* as the primal “subject” now can deploy its own mental “objects” (ideas, laws, etc.) to refashion nature by way of a new sense of being that is stripped of non-measurable qualities such as values and purposes—what we now call “objective being” (see Heidegger WIT 103, 106/GA 41, 103–04, 106–07; also N IV/GA 6.2, Chap. 15, and LEL, 116ff/GA 38, 140ff). Regarding the existence of material things, Descartes says: “I now know that they are capable of existing in so far as they are the subject-matter (*objectum*) of pure mathematics, since I perceive them purely and distinctly” (PWD II, 50).

We must be clear that Heidegger’s account is in no way a dismissal of the modern project but an attempt to clarify its deepest conditions of thought.

This reversal of the meanings of the words *subjectum* and *objectum* is no mere affair of usage; it is a radical change of *Dasein*, i.e., the illumination (*Lichtung*) of the being of what is on the basis of the predominance of the *mathematical*. (Heidegger WIT, 106/GA 41, 106)

¹⁷For a general analysis, see Ayers 1998.

¹⁸William Hamilton, who edited the collected works of Thomas Reid (first edition in 1846), provided extensive notes to Reid’s texts, and one note gives a detailed account of the reversal of meaning between *subjectum* and *objectum*. In Scholastic philosophy, he says, “a material thing, say a horse, *qua* existing was said to have *subjective* being out[side] of the mind; *qua* conceived or known, it was said to have *objective* being in the mind” (Reid 2005, 806–09).

It could even be said that the terminological shifts were necessary for the radical reshaping of nature in modern science. Heidegger's critique would target the subsequent exclusive role played by such thinking in the general question of the meaning of being. In other words, the positive disclosive power of modern science prompted an inappropriate extension to all manner of philosophical topics.

When Was the Subject Born?

With respect to the historical developments in question, Heidegger's analysis of Descartes and modern thought is in a technical sense a premature compression of a transitional process that took a long time to unfold. To my knowledge, Descartes did not use the term *subjectum* in reference to the *cogito*. There is, however, an interesting moment in Hobbes' objection to the *Meditations* (objection 2 in the third set of objections: Descartes PWD II, 122–24). He suggests that Descartes is applying the substantive sense of the subject (i.e., *subjectum*) to the thinking mind—hence a thinking thing (*res cogitans*) becomes “the subject of the mind, reason, or understanding.” But for Hobbes a substantive subject is corporeal (following one of the common meanings of “subject”), so he asks how a mind can be a subject. In effect Hobbes is accusing Descartes of arbitrarily connecting a subject with a nonmaterial entity. Descartes replies that indeed a subject is a substance, but not on that account necessarily material (citing non-corporeal senses of “subject”). This is a hint of things to come, but not yet a technical employment of modern subjectivity. The same is true for objectivity, given Descartes' distinction between formal reality (more in line with the original substantive sense of *subjectum*) and objective reality (more like the modern sense of subjectivity). In *Meditations* III, formal reality refers to a thing's actual existence as distinct from the objective reality of the mind's representation.¹⁹

Aside from Descartes, I am not aware that Spinoza uses “subject” in the modern sense, and like Descartes, he distinguishes between formal and objective essence. Locke does describe external “objects” as the source of the mind's ideas, as does Hume, but as far as I know, neither Locke, Berkeley, nor Hume uses the term “subject” in reference to the mind, but rather to the old sense of *hupokeimenon*. For Hume, “subject” even refers to “external objects” (Hume 2000, I.4.3). In Kant, of course, the modern configuration of subject and object is clinched and indeed perfected with respect to Heidegger's diagnosis. Inheriting the Cartesian *cogito*, Kant proclaims: “The *I think* must be *capable* of accompanying all my

¹⁹Formal reality can apply to the mind, however, in the sense of an idea's actual presence in the mind, as distinct from the objective reality of an idea, namely what the mind grasps when it sees distinctions, particularly in definitions and clear and distinct ideas—where “clear” means being *present* and accessible to an attentive mind, and “distinct” means being clear plus being sharply marked off from other ideas so as to contain only what is clear (Descartes PWD I, 206–07).

representations” (CPR, B131), and it is the ground of any knowledge of “objects” (B203). For Kant, to be an object is to be constituted by the *a priori* structures of the “thinking subject,” and therefore objects do not exist “in themselves” (the *noumenon* is not an “object”) (CPR, A191/B236). An “object of experience” must be governed by necessary rules, otherwise we are left with *merely* subjective apprehension, merely a play of representations and thus not an “object” for knowledge (Kant CPR, A194-95/B239-40). For Kant the modern sense of objectivity is secured because of the inter-subjective validity and necessity of the mind’s categories. According to Kant, subjective knowledge is transcendently more certain than objective knowledge (since *a priori* categories guarantee scientific knowledge); but empirically, subjective knowledge (in individual minds) is less certain than objective knowledge. Thus Kant denotes a distinction that posed an enduring problem in modern philosophy: the difference between transcendental subjectivity as the ground of knowledge and individual subjectivity as a possible site of cognitive deficiency (non-objective belief based solely in an individual mind).²⁰

Here I note two questions regarding the complex history of modern subjectivity and objectivity, questions I am not able to answer with any confidence. First, when was the “subject” first used as a technical reference to the *cogito*, to the “I think”? Was it someone before Kant?²¹ Second, how did the individual, psychological sense of “subjective” tend to eclipse the more foundational, cognitive sense of the subject

²⁰Although the phrase “thinking subject” occurs frequently in *CPR*, Kant also deploys earlier connotations of the subject as the substantive base of properties or the reference of predication (i.e., *subjectum* understood ontologically or logically). So Kant actually works with three senses of the subject: cognitive, ontological, and logical. It should be noted that Kant critiques theories that move from the “I think” to a substantive self (see CPR, A348-51). The error of rational psychology is taking the cognitive unity of consciousness as “an intuition of the [thinking] subject as an object” and illicitly applying the category of substance to this supposed object (Kant CPR, B421). For Kant here the thinking subject is a precondition for thinking objects, not itself an object of thinking. Indeed, the transcendental cognitive subject is a “logical subject,” not a “real subject” (Kant CPR, A350)—note all three senses of the subject used here. Despite such manifold uses, Kant’s emphasis on the thinking subject seems to have cemented this denotation for philosophy afterward.

²¹William Hamilton, cited earlier, surmised that the reversal of meanings between *subjectum* and *objectum* began around the mid-Seventeenth Century, in German writers such as Calovius, Leibniz, Wolff, and Knutsen. In Christian Wolff, subject is connected with substance, since the latter is called the subject of constant and variable intrinsic determinations (*Gesammelte Werke*, III, 15, #683). Leibniz, in *Theodicy* I.59, says something that could be relevant: “soul and body compose one and the same *suppôt*, or what is called a person.” *Suppôt* comes from the Latin *suppositum*, closely linked to *substantia* and *subjectum*. Leibniz provides a clear case of the human subject by joining *subjectum* and *persona* in an ethical/juridical sense: “The *subjectum* of a moral quality is a *persona* or a thing (*res*). A person is a rational substance, and is natural or civil” (*Nova Methodus* II.15). See Zarka 1999 (the Leibniz passage is cited on p. 263). Locke defines personhood in a manner comparable to the Cartesian *cogito*: A person is an identity, given by “consciousness, which is inseparable from thinking, and as it seemed to me essential to it: It being impossible for anyone to perceive, without perceiving, that he does perceive” (1975, II.XXVII.9).

that we find in Kant and Hegel?²² Indeed with Kierkegaard (a significant influence on Heidegger's thinking in *Being and Time*) we come to the valorization of non-objective, personal subjectivity in its proper existential sphere (the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious)—which accordingly rejects Kant's attempt to ground the value realm in intersubjective universals. So we see a long and winding road from *subjectum* as substance, to the subject as ground of knowledge, to subjectivity as individual, personal selfhood; and all of this intertwined with a concurrent movement from *objectum* as mind-dependent, to objects as constituted by the subject, to objectivity as reality independent of minds and selves. Now we have the familiar distinction between subjective belief (as mind-dependent) and objective truth (as mind-independent).

The terms subject and object, subjective and objective are today used in a host of different ways that cannot be reduced to any common genus—largely because of the variegated history of these terms. With the “subject” we note the following meanings: (1) the subject as the ground of cognition, the rational mind, which can be taken as universal and identical across individual minds (e.g., in Descartes and Kant); (2) the subject as the individual self or person; (3) the subjective as non-objective, as the immediate content of individual consciousness, and then as (4) the *merely* subjective, as corrigible content contrasted with objective truth; (5) the grammatical subject of a sentence; (6) a disciplinary subject of study; (7) the subject of investigation; (8) political subjects, e.g., a monarch's subjects; and (9) passive subjection in a general sense, as in being subject(ed) to ridicule. With the “object” we have: (1) an object as counter-posed to a knowing subject; (2) an object as a material thing in the world; (3) an object of thought, which can therefore be immaterial; (4) the object of investigation (thus identical to # 7 above); (5) an objective as a goal, as in a planning objective; and (6) objective truth, as true independent of subjective beliefs, desires, or interests.

Should We Drop the Subject?

The confusing historical and semantic thicket just described is one reason why I think we should drop the subject. There are so many different meanings attaching to the subject and subjectivity that a termination of usage in the matters at hand can clean up the conceptual landscape. One could argue for the use of subjectivity as a defensible label for the phenomenology of selfhood at issue in this investigation, especially since subjectivity and selfhood have come to be joined so much in

²²When Hegel declares in the *Phenomenology* that being is subject as well as substance (1977, 17), he was inheriting (and conjoining) a distinction that originally was more a synonymy. Heidegger's counter-position is that the being of Dasein is “neither substance nor subject” (SZ, 303).

common usage, often in rich ways. I concede that subjectivity in the “existentialist” sense (especially in Kierkegaard) might suffice for the kind of existential selfhood that I am arguing is intrinsic to the being question, but I have two reasons for resisting this, at least from a philosophical standpoint: (1) Subjectivity came to mean personal selfhood *only* out of the modern transubstantiation of subject and object, and the subsequent differentiation between scientific objectivity and “merely” subjective psychological states. Thus subjectivity *never* harbored an authentic phenomenological base outside of this “impersonal” philosophical framework. (2) Personal subjectivity has itself come to represent a kind of individual *subjectum*—as a *ground*—which continues to plague philosophy, especially in epistemology and moral and political philosophy.

The perennial problem of subjectivism—where truth is reduced to individual beliefs, with no warrant beyond the subject’s self-assertion—is a vestige of the grounding character of the subject in the history of modern philosophy. For Heidegger, truth is the “unconcealment” of being, something disclosed *to* Dasein (see SZ, §44), and it cannot be reduced to subjectivity, either individually or collectively. Here we find one element of Heidegger’s critique of “humanism.” Human existence is not the author of being and truth because it is essentially open to, and thrown by, being (Heidegger LH, 244-45/GA 9, 171–73). Heidegger specifically mentions the modern concern over subjectivism: Since subjectivity has come to represent only the isolated, individual self—and thus has nothing to do with “objects”—then anything pertaining to the subject must be “mere semblance” if subjectivism is to be overcome (LEL, 116/GA 38, 140). But his own phenomenology avoids this problem entirely by not assuming the human being to be an “isolated I” (Heidegger LEL, 124/GA 38, 149).

In ethical and political spheres, any baseline subjectivism or individualism will always haunt the “claim” of social projects. Moreover, if individualism is assumed and manifested in ways of life, there can result the reactive formation of oppressive or consuming systems that overwhelm individual selves. Heidegger undercuts ethical subjectivism when he claims that norms are a “dispensation” to humans as a “belonging” to being, a “dwelling” in being, such that norms are “something we can hold on to,” rather than something “merely fabricated by human reason” (LH, 262/GA 9, 361).

I have outlined a number of reasons why the subject is problematic in philosophy, mainly because of its grounding-character, whether in the rational or personal subject—in that the rational subject is divorced from the instabilities of lived experience and temporality, and the individual, personal subject is divorced from its enviroing world and other selves. The thrown finitude of Dasein’s being-in-the-world provides a viable alternative to subjectivity, particularly in light of Heidegger’s notion of authenticity, to which I now turn.

Authenticity and Selfhood

In *Being and Time*, Dasein's world-disclosive environment is at first characterized as fallen and inauthentic, terms which are easily misconstrued if Heidegger's text is not read carefully.²³ Fallenness and inauthenticity do not indicate any deficient condition of Dasein that must be transformed or superseded, but simply the original, everyday immersion in world concerns, which Heidegger calls a primordial and essential condition of Dasein's being (SZ, 129, 179). Some of the analysis in *Being and Time* carries the influence of Kierkegaard's critique of bourgeois conformity, and it gives the impression that authenticity would mean the liberation of the unique individual from common social patterns, which Heidegger terms *das Man*, "the Anyone." But we are told that authenticity is not a departure from *das Man* but its modification, and that *das Man* is a "primordial phenomenon" belonging to Dasein's "positive constitution" (Heidegger SZ, 129). We can make sense of this if we interpret *das Man* in a less pejorative manner as socialization, as the necessarily common ways in which human beings are initially enculturated into social practices, cognitive patterns, and cultural norms. *Das Man* is called the "common world," Dasein's *first world out of which* it can make its own way (Heidegger HCT, 246/GA 20, 339). Authenticity, then, would refer to the *tension* between socialization and individuation, and not a break with the social world as such.

Authenticity is not a denial of inauthentic fallenness, but its modification (Heidegger SZ, 130). What kind of modification? Inauthentic Dasein is not "itself" (Heidegger SZ, 176). But what is Dasein's authentic "self"? Here Heidegger is working with the familiar philosophical notion of a dimension that is more "true" to the self's being than other dimensions. Yet Dasein's authentic self is not an "entity" or any kind of positive content, but rather the awareness that Dasein's being is permeated by a negative dimension that is sheer "possibility" and finally its utter "impossibility" in death (Heidegger SZ, 250–51). In other words, inauthenticity involves a concealment of Dasein's radical finitude by way of a fallen absorption in the realm of beings and a confinement to common, familiar modes of understanding. Authenticity indicates an appropriation of what *exceeds* beings and the self's familiarity, security, and control. Dasein's thrownness "means *never* to have power over one's ownmost being from the ground up" (Heidegger SZ, 284). Authenticity therefore points to an *ungrounded* selfhood that is "neither substance nor subject"; it also points to the radical finitude of being, which for Dasein involves an awareness of the pervasive possibility of loss and privation, and an engagement with the intrinsic incompleteness of existence (Heidegger SZ, 303).

²³I have always benefited from Charles Guignon's careful and nuanced work on authenticity. See Guignon 1983, 1984, 2000. Guignon emphasizes two elements of authenticity not much explored in my text: (1) how history is part of Dasein's thrown selfhood; and (2) how authenticity is not simply an "existential" matter but also essential for the *philosophical* work demanded by existential phenomenology.

The finitude of being is clearly indicated in the twofold unity of care. The meaning of being is intrinsically related to an absence of meaning. The “repulsion” of anxiety is the “thrust” of Dasein’s everyday immersion in beings. Dasein’s fallenness now gets clarified as *fleeing* from the primal force of anxiety (Heidegger SZ, 189). Yet fallenness is not a deficiency that anxiety is meant to diagnose, but rather a positive, disclosive condition of meaning that now can be *understood* as a movement structured by absence. In other words, we care about the world *because* we are radically finite. All instances of caring-about, caring-for, and being-careful are what they are by virtue being linked with a looming negativity. The care structure, therefore, is a “double movement” of meaning in the midst of “unmeaning.” In this way, being-toward-death is constitutive of the “meaning of life.” It is well understood that a brush with death can sharply open up the value of life in ways quite different from ordinary compartments. As Heidegger puts it in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*: “just as every loss first really allows us to recognize and understand the value of something we possessed before, so too it is precisely death that illuminates the essence of life” (FCM, 266/GA 29/30, 387). The “nothing” in anxiety and death, then, generates the “throw” that opens up a world of meaning; it is not an empty nothingness but a *power* that “constantly thrusts us back into being,” that lets beings be *as* beings (FCM, 299/GA 29/30, 433). What is ingenious about Heidegger’s analysis is that an absence of meaning is not the opposite of meaning but a possibility that is intrinsic to the very unfolding of meaning.

In the context of this analysis, authenticity can be understood in two registers: (1) In anxiety Dasein understands its authentic “self” not as some particular being but as the finite throw of care and being-toward-death. If inauthenticity can be characterized as a fleeing towards beings as a *refuge* from anxiety, authentic care amounts to understanding Dasein’s comportment towards beings *as* finite, as possibility rather than full actuality. As Heidegger puts it, authentic care is being-toward-death, in which Dasein “exists finitely” (SZ, 330). (2) In a more specific sense, authenticity can allow individual Daseins to discover their own particular and richer modes of care because the inauthentic commonalities and leveling power of *das Man* have been disrupted by anxiety, which opens room for new possibilities of discovery. In general terms, authenticity is a “modification” of inauthenticity in that the disruption of meaning permits a more sharpened, careful attention to meanings that can be carelessly weakened by familiarity and comfort. So being-toward-death can bring fresh meaning *to* life out of the stale conditions of everydayness.

Dasein’s finitude also entails the limits of human agency, in that it is *thrown* into its world, “always already” shaped by its social environment and an historical inheritance not of its own making. Dasein’s thrownness is thus counter-posed to intimations of sovereignty and mastery in the modern conception of a self-grounding, autonomous subject. Yet Dasein’s thrownness cannot be reified into any kind of social or historical determinism, because its world too is finite in being unstable and changeable. Dasein’s “historicality” (Heidegger SZ, §74) refers not simply to its past but also to its open future (which is why history is a set of *changes* in the first place). Dasein’s world is always susceptible to disruptions and alterations, and this is where the “individuated” elements of authenticity come into play.

I have suggested that authenticity represents a *tension* between individuation and socialization; it is also a tension between Dasein and its heritage (Heidegger SZ, 383). I have argued in another work that authentic individuation can be understood as the fourfold possibility of *owning*, *unmasking*, *innovating*, and *interrogating* one's culture and heritage (Hatab 2000, 174). I culled various remarks in *Being and Time* to organize this set of possibilities: (1) One can freely appropriate as one's "own" (*eigen*)²⁴ a tradition that has been handed down, but no longer simply *as* handed down (Heidegger SZ, 383). (2) One can unmask the disguises, superficialities, and other concealments that block a richer and deeper understanding of cultural phenomena (Heidegger SZ, 129, 391). (3) One can discover or initiate new possibilities that are normally impeded by inauthentic immersion in the commonplace (Heidegger SZ, 194–95). (4) One can challenge normalization and its tendency to suppress "new inquiry" and "disputation" (Heidegger SZ, 169).

The individuating elements of authenticity do not bring a severance from the cultural world because Dasein always remains "situated." But authenticity is also a situated *openness* in not being reducible to any closed form of actuality—an openness that is the precondition for any change or innovation in Dasein's world. Authenticity is a complicated circulation of factors that cannot be adequately described by any one factor or set of factors. Authentic selfhood is a situated openness that is neither autonomous nor determined, neither isolated nor communal, neither separated from, nor fused with, its environment, neither exempt from, nor bound by, tradition, neither conformist nor eccentric, and in general neither a fixed substance nor sheer becoming. In sum, because of Heidegger's account of finitude and the complex structure of Dasein's being-in-the-world, the substantive contours and implications of subjectivity make it a deficient concept for rendering human existence and selfhood.

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²⁴Note the German word translated as authenticity: *Eigentlichkeit*.

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Chapter 3

Knowing Thyself in a Contemporary Context: A Fresh Look at Heideggerian Authenticity

Steven Burgess and Casey Rentmeester

Etched in the forecourt at the holiest place in the ancient Greek world, the oracle at Delphi, is the phrase γνῶθι σεαυτόν: “know thyself.” As Charles Guignon notes, for the Greeks, the meaning of this phrase was straightforward: “To know yourself . . . is to know above all what your *place* is in the scheme of things—what you are and what you should be as that has been laid out in advance by the cosmic order” (2004, 13). Keeping this in mind, we may say that at the dawn of Western civilization in ancient Greece, the task of living out one’s life was usually quite clear: one should understand the order of things as determined by the cosmos and then live out one’s function within that cosmic order. Today, we still hold on to the idea that we should know ourselves and be true to ourselves; however, with the onset of modern science wherein the world is now seen as a *universe* as opposed to a cosmos, that is, “as a vast, homogeneous aggregate of material objects in contingent causal interactions” as opposed to a web of meaningful connections, the task of understanding one’s purpose and determining the meaning of one’s life is not so clear (Guignon 2004, 30). Hence, people living today have existential crises about the meaning of life and nihilistic worries that there may not be such meaning. One of Martin Heidegger’s goals in his philosophic writings was to overcome nihilism and initiate a way in which to understand human existence in a meaningful fashion. Believing that “the human is devastated in his essence, which now means for us, abandoned by being,” Heidegger attempted to revive the human understanding of

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being and thereby restore what it means to be human (CPC, 138/GA 77, 214). In doing so, he had to conceptualize an understanding of human being that went against the prevailing understanding of his (and our) day, which is that of the modern self. In this essay, we shall look at Heidegger's critique of the modern worldview in general and the modern self in particular and attempt to understand what the meaning of human existence looks like for Heidegger. Heidegger's early notion of authenticity [*Eigentlichkeit*] and his later notion of dwelling [*wohnen*] will be juxtaposed in our attempt to offer a coherent interpretation of what it means to be fully human in the Heideggerian framework. We argue that this understanding provides a contemporary version of what it means to "know thyself" today.

Heidegger's Critique of Modernity

In the last years of his life, Heidegger stated that the basic driving force of his magnum opus, *Being and Time*, is a shifting [*Ortsverlegung*] in philosophy from the realm of self-enclosed consciousness to *Da-sein* (FS, 72/GA 15, 123). In speaking to this shift that occurs in *Being and Time*, Guignon notes that Heidegger saw modern philosophy's obsession with epistemology as "a short-lived aberration in the history of philosophy which must be diagnosed and overcome" (Guignon 1983, 13). For the purposes of this paper, we can point to two primary elements of modernity that Heidegger explicitly criticizes in his attempt to shift the focus of philosophy away from epistemology: (1) the essential division between the inner self and the external world; and (2) the understanding of society as a collection of discrete individuals that come together to form a social group.

While the understanding of the self in the early Greek period was one of a placeholder in the greater scheme of things, in the medieval period, wherein Christianity swept across the Western world, the self was understood primarily as a creature of God. Guignon sums this up as follows: "We are made *toward* God, that is, our proper orientation in life is to be God-directed, and so we are only properly and fully human when we are bound to God as we are always meant to be" (Guignon 2004, 15). Hence, we find Saint Augustine of Hippo in his *Confessions* striving to attain the right relation to God in his quest to live the proper life. Since the essential aspect of the self was understood in terms of one's relation to God, the philosophy of this era was dominated by this religious perspective.

In the modern period initiated by Descartes, a new understanding of the self emerges. Heidegger states that with Descartes, "the very essence of man itself changes, in that man becomes subject" (QCT, 128/GA 5, 88). Our word "subject" derives from the Greek word ὑποκείμενον (*hypokeimenon*). Though we tend to translate ὑποκείμενον as "that which underlies,"¹ Heidegger argues that the literal translation of ὑποκείμενον is "that which lies-before" (BP, 108/GA 24, 152) and

¹Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott note that ὑποκείμενον comes from ὑπόκειμαι, which means "to lie under or beneath" (2003, 843).

he states that the Greeks understood ὑποκείμενον as “everything that endures of itself and thus lies present” (EP, 28/GA 6.2, 431). This understanding of what it means to be a subject continues into the medieval period, meaning that anything that endures of itself is considered a subject from the ancient Greeks on through the medieval period. Heidegger notes that “everyone who is acquainted with the Middle Ages sees that Descartes is ‘dependent’ upon medieval scholasticism and employs its terminology” (BT, 46/SZ, 25).² While Descartes is admittedly ensconced in the medieval tradition, he also initiates the modern period by changing the meaning of various terms. One of these changes has to do with what it means to be a subject. Descartes allocates the status of subjecthood only to the human being, thereby giving the human being unprecedented importance in the history of Western thought.

For Descartes, there are only two types of substances in the world: mind and matter. While matter is extended in space, mind is not, making the two types of substances fundamentally different. Descartes’ rather extreme form of substance dualism has been one of the most widely criticized doctrines in the history of philosophy. Contemporary scholars often stage an attack on Descartes’ fundamental division between mental substance and material substance as a springboard for their own views, thinking that this proves they have overcome the skeptical problems associated with the dualistic hobgoblin of modern philosophy. Heidegger thinks that this facile rejection of Descartes conceals a more fundamental *Cartesian* tendency to understand the self as opposed to the world. Now consider the less facile rejection, Kant’s “Copernican revolution” in thought: rather than beginning with a conception of our epistemic situation as a mind attempting to know external objects that are essentially foreign to it, we instead see objects as at least partially constituted by our own cognitive faculties. Without even broaching the more questionable appearance/thing-in-itself distinction, the assumption is still made that there is a fundamental gap between the knowing subject and represented objects. Thus we notice that the rejection of the more radical and obvious strands of dualism is accompanied by a general neglect of the persisting Cartesianism, rooted in a subject/object view of knowledge.³

A major part of Heidegger’s overall project is to investigate human being without starting with a set of ontological commitments pertaining to the nature of the human self. In any investigation, we always start with some hermeneutic background, and in order to have access to human being (*Dasein*), we must already have some understanding of it. The key to Heidegger’s phenomenological method is to avoid imposing substantive philosophical convictions on the objects of inquiry, and instead to let them show up on their own terms. In chapter II of the first division of *Being and Time*, Heidegger makes it clear that he does not presuppose the traditional epistemological divide between subject and world. As he often does, Heidegger

²Those interested in the relation between Descartes and medieval philosophy should consult Roger Ariew’s *Descartes among the Scholastics* (2011).

³For a more thorough discussion of this topic, see Guignon 1983, Chap. 1.

builds up what is typically understood to be the apparent starting point for a philosophical problem (in this case knowledge) only to turn around and offer more powerful reasons for its rejection. Hence the following back and forth:

What is more obvious than that a ‘subject’ is related to an ‘Object’ and *vice versa*? This ‘subject-Object-relationship’ must be presupposed. But while this presupposition is unimpeachable in its facticity, this makes it indeed a baleful one, if its ontological necessity and especially its ontological meaning are to be left in the dark. (BT, 86/SZ, 59)

The obviousness with which the tradition passes down the subject-object view of knowledge masks the ontological opacity of this relation. Most accounts begin with the inner, subjective realm and try to understand how it is that the knower transcends this sphere to grasp things external to it.⁴ Two major problems result from this. For one, the inner subject is never clarified with respect to its ontological nature. Second, the gulf between inner and outer gives rise to all of the unresolvable skeptical problems that have encumbered epistemologists since Descartes.

Heidegger thinks that these issues never surface once we realize that “*knowing is a kind of being which belongs to being-in-the-world*” (BT, 88/SZ, 61).⁵ Being-in-the-world is part of Dasein’s essential constitution and as such is the grounding for any type of knowledge relation. It must be emphasized that this is not simply a new way of reconstructing the traditional epistemic relation, since “subject and Object do not coincide with Dasein and the world”; rather, Dasein is always already immersed in the world (BT, 87/SZ, 60). Out of this fundamental immersion, we can view ourselves in subject/object type relations, perhaps as a result of a breakdown in our everyday dealings with things, but this is a modification of our more primordial being-in-the-world, and by no means our primary way of knowing. If Dasein is already amidst the world, rather than separated from it by a deep ontological rift, then the problems of skepticism mentioned above never get off the ground. Likewise, the ontological opacity of the inner subject is replaced with the phenomenologically accessible Dasein as constituted by being-in-the-world. Indeed, much of Division I of *Being and Time* involves the investigation of the latter in order to clarify its ontological nature. Eventually, Heidegger comes upon a conception of the self that is more in line with the conception that could be found in ancient Greece. Dasein is not a Cartesian subject, but rather is thrown into a world filled with meaning. Guignon states, “For [Heidegger], the so-called ‘inner’ *just is* what becomes manifest in giving shape to one’s identity through one’s worldly expressions, and the individual *just is* the configuration of possibilities that have

⁴As Heidegger states, “Now the more unequivocally one maintains that knowing is proximally and really ‘inside’ [. . .], the less one presupposes when one believes that one is making headway in the question of the essence of knowledge and in the clarification of the relationship between subject and Object. For only then can the problem arise of how this knowing subject comes out of its inner ‘sphere’ into one which is ‘other and external’, of how knowing can have any object at all, and of how one must think of the object itself so that eventually the subject knows it without needing to venture a leap into another sphere” (BT, 87/SZ, 60).

⁵Macquarrie and Robinson capitalize their translation of “*Sein*” and its derivatives (e.g. “*in-der-Welt-sein*”); we render all such instances with the lower-case.

been taken over from the public world and given form in taking a stand in the world” (2008, 286). In other words, Dasein is being-in-the-world, a world that is already imbued with significance.

Despite Heidegger’s critique of the Cartesian subject and his attempt to reinstate an understanding of self that is more in line with the conception of the self that prevailed in ancient Greece, the Cartesian understanding of what it means to be a self persists. Charles Taylor states, “For us the subject is a self in a way he or she couldn’t be for the ancients” (1989, 176). Instead of being a placeholder in the grand scheme of things or a soul striving to live out God’s will, the self is understood fundamentally as an individual who is self-made and self-defined. Taylor calls this self the “buffered self.” As a buffered self, “my ultimate purposes are those which arise within me, the crucial meanings of things are those defined in my responses to them” (Taylor 2007, 38).

One of the results of this understanding of the self as a self-enclosed unit is that it does not have a necessary relation to entities outside of it, including external objects and, most importantly for our purposes, other human beings. The only way humans can come together to form communities in this conception is if they get together with others and work out some contract (whether implicit or explicit) as to how society should function. This might explain why we begin to see social contract theorists like Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau during the modern period. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that this conception of human beings as discrete individuals with no necessary connection to externalities is simply flawed. Rather, for Heidegger, human beings are always already in the world amongst others. The two guarantees that a person has—as Dasein, i.e., as “being there”—are being-in-the-world and being-with others. Heidegger states, “a bare subject without a world never ‘is’ proximally, nor is it ever given. And so in the end an isolated ‘I’ without Others is just as far from being proximally given” (BT, 152/SZ, 116).⁶ Instead of conceiving of human beings as self-enclosed discrete individuals that must strive to build relationships with others, Heidegger argues that human beings are essentially constituted relationally: “being with Others belongs to the being of Dasein” (BT, 160/SZ, 123). Aristotle once said that human beings are by nature social animals (cf. Aristotle 1985, Book I, Chap. 2), and Heidegger agrees that an essential aspect of the human constitution is social in nature. In fact, Heidegger argues that anyone’s particular world as is manifest in one’s self-consciousness *presupposes* a shared, communal world. He states:

In order to give a more accurate portrayal of the phenomenal structure of the world as it shows itself in everyday preoccupation, it must be noted that what matters in this preoccupation with the world is not so much anyone’s own particular world, but that right in our natural preoccupation with the world we are moving in a *common* totality of surroundings. (HCT, 188/GA 20, 255)

⁶We should point out that the word “Others” has a technical meaning for Heidegger. “Others” does not mean everyone but myself; rather, “they are . . . those from whom, for the most part, one does *not* distinguish oneself—those among whom one is too” (BT, 154/SZ, 118). In other words, there is no fundamental separation between Others and myself for Heidegger.

In other words, Heidegger inverts the ontological priority of the subject and communal world: there can be no private, self-enclosed consciousness without a communal world. If we were to accurately portray the nature of human beings, we would be better off comparing them to a group of bees or ants than construing them as rugged individuals.

Heideggerian Authenticity

If we take this Heideggerian understanding of the self seriously, we come upon a very different concept of personhood than what is found in the modern or Cartesian context. As Hubert Dreyfus notes, “Dasein is nothing like what philosophers have thought of as a ‘subject’” (1991, 99). Instead of seeing the self as fundamentally a discrete individual who contingently interacts with the outside world and happens to develop a social nature, Heidegger views the self as always already engaged with entities and essentially social in nature. In other words, the self is essentially a relational being and should be understood in terms of its relations to others and the world. This relational understanding of the self is essential in attempting to understand what authenticity means for Heidegger. Before we delve too deeply into this concept, perhaps we should first point out that the German word *Eigentlichkeit*, which is commonly translated as “authenticity,” does not exactly match up with the English concept of authenticity. Guignon states, “Certainly no native German speaker would think of translating this word as ‘authenticity’—they have their own word for this: *Authentizität*” (2011, 88). In order to understand what Heidegger means by *Eigentlichkeit*, we should look at the stem of this word, *eigen*, which means “own” and “proper” (Guignon 2011, 88). An “authentic” person in this regard is one who *owns* up to his or her *proper* existence.

Some recent commentators on Heidegger’s notion of authenticity have emphasized the subjectivist aspects of Division II of *Being and Time*. For instance, Steven Crowell holds that Division II is an “account of subjectivity as inwardness, conscience as first-person self-awareness” (2005, 129). There are several texts that speak in favor of such a view: “Anxiety individualizes Dasein and thus discloses it as ‘*solus ipse*’” (BT, 233/SZ, 188); “The non-relational character of death, as understood in anticipation, individualizes Dasein down to itself” (BT, 308/SZ, 263). The problem is that in these cases a close reading of the context reveals that these statements are not to be understood as referring to anything like an inward ego-subject. Heidegger clarifies that “this existential ‘solipsism’ is so far from the displacement of putting an isolated subject-Thing into the innocuous emptiness of a worldless occurring”; rather, it “bring[s] Dasein face to face with its world as world, and thus bring it face to face with itself as being-in-the-World” (BT, 233/SZ, 188). This last thought will serve to guide how we are to make sense of “individual Dasein.”

Even an interpreter such as Taylor Carman, who rejects this subjectivist line of thinking, nevertheless views *Being and Time* in terms of first-, second-, and third-person perspectives, where “Authentic modes of existence [. . .] are those in which

Dasein stands in a directly first-person relation to itself” (2005, 285). This may not be problematic in its own right, but it is misleading, since it tends to make Heidegger’s position sound too close to the tradition he is critiquing. We should recall Nietzsche’s claim that language leads us to believe in substantial individuals (“doers”) behind our actions (1967, 484). Likewise, if we take Heidegger’s thought to be investigating human being from different grammatical perspectives, this seems to indicate that Heidegger’s shift from Division I to Division II involves a withdrawal into the subject (the first-person) that has existed as the substrate that underlies all experience. Heidegger makes use of novel terminology in order to express his disavowal of presuppositions concealed in the structures of traditional language. Thus to understand his project as spinning out a phenomenological analysis of the first-person, the “I” in reference to itself, is to already take on the kind of ontological assumptions Heidegger took great pains to overcome.⁷

If we are to understand authenticity in terms of *ownedness*, we must get clear on what exactly it is that Dasein is *owning*. Division I offers a phenomenological interpretation of the basic structures of Dasein in its everydayness. The results of this investigation are captured in the three-part structure of care. First, we are *thrown* in our background of shared meanings; second, we are *projecting* forward by carrying out goal-directed activity; and finally, we are *fallen* amidst the public ways of understanding. For the most part, we are simply absorbed in our everydayness as fallen thrown projection without *owning* anything in particular: “Losing itself in the publicness and the idle talk of the ‘they’ [*das Man*], [Dasein] *fails to hear* its own self in listening to the they-self [*das Man-selbst*]. If Dasein is to be able to get brought back from this lostness of failing to hear itself, and if this is to be done through itself, then it must first be able to find itself [. . .]” (BT, 315-16/SZ, 271). It is in what Heidegger calls the “call of conscience” that Dasein is disclosed to *itself*.

Immediately Heidegger tries to head off misinterpretations of what this “self” is that gets called in conscience:

But it does not get called to that Self which can become for itself an ‘object’ on which to pass judgment, nor to that Self which inertly dissects its ‘inner life’ with fussy curiosity, nor to that Self which one has in mind when one gazes ‘analytically’ at psychical conditions and

⁷In section 64 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger makes continual reference to the “I” and appears to be carrying out an analysis of the first-person (BT, 364-70/SZ, 316–323). We must not take too much from this for the following reasons. For one, most of the discussion involves an interpretation of Kant, and Heidegger is making use of Kant’s terminology. Indeed, this is indicated by his repeated use of scare quotes when referencing the “I.” Some of Heidegger’s closing remarks also make it clear that the question of the “I” will not be central to his inquiry, but is in fact posterior and dependent upon a more primordial understanding of the self: “As something that keeps silent, authentic *being-one’s-Self* is just the sort of thing that does not keep on saying ‘I’; but in its reticence it ‘is’ that thrown entity as which it can authentically be. The Self which the reticence of resolute existence unveils is the primordial phenomenal basis for the question as to the being of the ‘I’. [. . .] In the prevalent way of saying ‘I’, it is constantly suggested that what we have in advance is a Self-Thing, persistently present-at-hand; the ontological question of the being of the Self must turn away from any such suggestion” (BT, 369-70/SZ, 322–323). For these reasons, there is scarcely another mention of the “I” in the rest of *Being and Time*.

what lies behind them. The appeal to the Self in the they-self [*Man-selbst*] does not force it inwards upon itself, so that it can close itself off from the 'external world'. The call passes over everything like this and disperses it, so as to appeal solely to that Self which, notwithstanding, is in no other way than being-in-the-world. (BT, 318/SZ, 273)

If Heidegger does not refer to the self as an inner, mental realm set against the world, then what is the self like that is authentically disclosed? Heidegger gives us a composite definition that can guide our discussion: "This distinctive and authentic disclosedness, which is attested in Dasein itself by its conscience—*this reticent self-projection upon one's ownmost being-guilty, in which one is ready for anxiety*—we call 'resoluteness'" (BT, 343/SZ, 296–297). This complex definition deserves careful attention.

The first thing to note is that the entire phenomenon of resoluteness is accessed by way of *disclosedness*, a term that has an important technical meaning for Heidegger. Disclosedness is an essential feature of Dasein's fundamental structure: An investigation into a set of uncovered entities is what Heidegger calls an 'ontic' pursuit, meaning one that deals with entities of a particular ontological kind. However, for an entity to be uncovered, it must show up in a certain way because of what kind of being it is, and what kind of being it is can only be understood through the totality of its ontological relations of meaning. One can think of this totality as a background or framework of intelligibility that enables us to make sense of particular entities within the whole. Heidegger calls this horizon through which things have meaning a 'world.' Disclosedness, then, does not reveal particular entities themselves, but the character or manner of being that a set of entities within a world takes on. Investigations into ways of being are termed 'ontological' and they underlie any ontic pursuit. In this case, the existential characteristics of Dasein itself are authentically disclosed in the call of conscience.

Heidegger explains this call as being *reticent* [*verschwiegen*]. It cannot be articulated in the language of *das Man*, the public forms of expression, since we lose sight of our most fundamental ways of being in our lostness in the everyday.⁸ Resoluteness is a *self-projection* insofar as we are being made aware of ourselves as structured by care. We are always projecting out of the thrownness of our facticity, but in the call of conscience we take hold of the fact of our "ownmost *potentiality-for-being*," that is, that we have meaningful ways of pushing forward into the future that cannot be determined with an appeal to *das Man*. We generally neglect to face up to this fact fully while immersed in our normal day-to-day behavior.⁹ This phenomenon of "fleeing" from our own being-in-the-world manifests itself in *anxiety*. Thus being "ready for anxiety" involves owning up to the ways we project ourselves, not as this or that possibility that anyone can take on, but as those for which we are ultimately responsible.

⁸"Dasein is falling into the 'they' (in being-already-amidst the world of its concern), and it is summoned out of this falling by the appeal" (BT, 322/SZ, 277, translation modified).

⁹"Dasein's absorption in the 'they' and its absorption in the 'world' of its concern, make manifest something like a *fleeing* of Dasein in the face of itself – of itself as an authentic potentiality-for-being-its-Self" (BT, 229/SZ, 184).

Heidegger refers to this aspect of Dasein as “being-guilty.” This literal translation of “*Schuldigsein*” does not quite capture Heidegger’s meaning, as *schuldig* can refer to being responsible or indebted, in addition to its moral and legal connotations. Heidegger offers one of his characteristically mysterious definitions of the term as “*being-the-basis of a nullity [Nichtigkeit]*” (BT, 329/SZ, 283). He explains that we are always thrown into our facticity, but that this thrownness is not something of our own doing: “Thus ‘being-a-basis’ means *never* to have power over one’s ownmost being from the ground up. This ‘*not*’ belongs to the existential meaning of ‘thrownness’” (BT, 330/SZ, 284). In spite of the fact that we are not ultimately the reason for our thrownness, we nevertheless take up the possibilities as our own in our projections. Being-guilty, therefore, involves a certain *lack* in our being, since we recognize ourselves as responsible for the possibilities from which we project, even though this ground of factual possibilities is not the direct result of any explicit choice we have made.

Now that we have clarified the structural components of resoluteness, we are prepared to explain precisely what it discloses:

Resoluteness, as *authentic being-one’s-Self*, does not detach Dasein from its world, nor does it isolate it so that it becomes a free-floating “I”. And how should it, when resoluteness as authentic disclosedness is *authentically* nothing else than *being-in-the-world*? Resoluteness brings the Self right into its current concerned being-amidst what is ready-to-hand, and pushes it into solicitous being with Others. (BT, 344/SZ, 298)

In contrast with its typical unowned absorption in its world, Dasein reveals its ownmost nature to itself in a resolution—that it is a being for whom being is an issue manifested by its futural projection out of a background of meaning. A resolution does not amount to “taking up possibilities which have been proposed and recommended, and seizing hold of them”; rather, “*The resolution is precisely the disclosive projection and determination of what is factually possible at the time*” (BT, 345/SZ, 298). From this we can see that authenticity for the early Heidegger does not involve anything like a stripping away of the inessential layers of the empirical self in order to reveal a pure subject. Nor does it consist in a Sartrean rejection of social norms so that the individual might stake out a radically new way of being. On the contrary, it is a genuine recognition that we are temporally structured beings, who draw from sources of meaning that are essentially social and historical. In such a recognition we own up to the fact that this rich reservoir of meaning is what enables the possibility of any selfhood whatsoever.

Dwelling as the Later Version of Authenticity

In his later thought, Heidegger moves away from talking about authenticity in terms of *Eigentlichkeit* and begins to speak of the essence of human being in terms of dwelling. He states, “The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth, is . . . dwelling” (BW, 349/GA 7, 149). In other words, the essential way in which humans exist lies in dwelling. Even in his

early years, Heidegger made a connection between human being-in and dwelling. In *Being and Time*, for instance, he states, “being-in . . . is a state of Dasein’s being . . . ‘In’ is derived from ‘*innan*’—‘to reside’, ‘*habitare*’, ‘to dwell’” (BT, 80/SZ, 54). Heidegger does not elucidate this connection at this point, but dwelling becomes increasingly important in his later work, and Heidegger continues to think of the essence of humans as being-in-the-world. In his 1951 essay, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” Heidegger states, “To say that mortals *are* is to say that *in dwelling* they persist through spaces by virtue of their stay among things and places” (BW, 359/GA 7, 159). Heidegger goes on to explain what he means by spaces, explicitly disassociating his notion of space from the geometrical notion of coordinates. Rather than thinking of spaces in terms of spatial coordinates, Heidegger understands spaces in terms of the go-betweens among things and places, which are full of meaning.

One example that Heidegger provides of the meaningfulness of places comes in his discussion of the Greek temple in “The Origin of the Work of Art.” Here, he states,

It is the temple-work that first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being. The all-governing expanse of this open relational context is the world of this historical people. (BW, 167/GA 5, 27–28)

Here, it seems as though Heidegger is defining the world as he defines worldhood in *Being and Time*, i.e., as the “referential totality which constitutes significance” (BT, 160/SZ, 123). In other words, the world is what constitutes the meaningful relations of a culture. As Hubert Dreyfus aptly points out, in setting up a world, a work of art functions as a cultural paradigm.¹⁰ He states, “A cultural paradigm collects the scattered practices of a group, unifies them into coherent possibilities for action, and holds them up to the people who can then act and relate to each other in terms of that exemplar. Works of art, when performing this function . . . actually produce a shared understanding” (1993, 298). In order to understand this, let us look at how the Greek temple functions as a cultural paradigm in the Greek world.

In setting up a world, the Greek temple reveals what is important within Greek culture and thereby gives direction to the Greek people. It is within this framework that the Greeks can interpret what happens as disastrous or blissful, victorious or disgraceful, etc. In fact, in setting up the Greek world and thereby revealing what is important for a culture, the temple-work gathers the lived space in which the Greeks first find themselves *as* Greeks. By revealing what is important within the culture, the temple-work offers a shared understanding for the Greeks in which they can unify together and thereby consider themselves a united culture. The Greeks who lived amongst such places that were implicitly charged with so much significance were able to dwell in that they understood their place in the greater order.

¹⁰The notion of a paradigm is invoked by Thomas Kuhn (1970). The notion of a cultural paradigm comes from Clifford Geertz (1973).

Heidegger aims to bring back an understanding of human existence wherein humans dwell among places and things of significance. In “The Thing,” Heidegger emphasizes that places gather the various meanings that are relevant in a particular cultural context. With the onset of modernity and the scientific understanding of reality, Heidegger thinks that we lose touch of the notion of places and things that hold significance. We come to understand everything in terms of extended objects in space and time with no meaning other than the meaning that we as subjects assign to things. However, Heidegger thinks that a more primordial relation between *Dasein* and places or things is possible if we can simply learn to dwell. Dwelling consists in understanding the ways in which all entities are intertwined and imbued with meaning. Heidegger uses the notion of the fourfold [*Geviert*] to stress the relational nature of any given entity. The example he uses is a jug pouring wine as a gift to the gods. He states, “The gift of the outpouring dwells in the simple singlefoldness of the four. The gift of the outpouring is a gift because it stays earth and sky, divinities and mortals” (PLT, 171/GA 7, 175). When he speaks of ‘singlefoldness of the four,’ Heidegger is speaking of the fourfold, which consists of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals, all coming together in a moment of gathering. Michael Zimmerman offers an excellent description of this moment of gathering that happens when the jug pours the wine:

We use the jug to pour liquids. In this pouring, the jug gathers together: (1) the earth, from which spring the grapes for the wine in the jug; (2) the sky, from out of which comes the sunlight needed for the grapes to grow; (3) the gods, to whom a libation of wine is offered; and (4) the mortals, whose thirst is quenched by the wine. (1981, 235)

The simple moment of pouring a glass of wine reflects a great deal of other things. The wine is dependent upon the earth for the grapes and the water of which it is made. It is dependent upon the sky for favorable weather and sunlight to allow for a good harvest of the grapes. Mortals are also involved in this moment of gathering because farmers are necessary to take care of the grapes, turn the grapes into wine, create the jug in which to store the wine, and bottle the wine into the jug. The divinities also come into play in this specific context because they allow the grapes to be and also are offered a libation. Therefore, all four of these elements come together in the simple moment of the pouring of wine. As Heidegger states, “Earth and sky, divinities and mortals—being at one with one another of their own accord—belong together by way of the simpleness of the united fourfold” (PLT, 177/GA 7, 180). In this moment of gathering, the beings fuse together (‘being at one with one another’) and yet each being can be said to be unique (‘of their own accord’).

Commentators on Heidegger’s notion of the fourfold often struggle to determine just what Heidegger meant by the fourfold and how it is related to dwelling. As Julian Young notes, “Baffled by Heidegger’s poetic brevity, commentators have consigned [the fourfold] to the silence of the too-hard basket” (2006, 373). While we agree that the almost mystical nature of some of Heidegger’s later writings makes it difficult to provide any substantial commentary on the concept, it is still clear that Heidegger is trying to point out the relational nature of the things and places that permeate our lives. If we can learn to reflect upon all that goes into a simple pouring

of a jug of wine, Heidegger thinks we can begin to appreciate the nearly infinitely complex relations that make up our worlds. One who has learned to dwell is one who celebrates such relations.

While Heidegger's later notion of dwelling certainly has a different flavor than his notion of authenticity in his early work, there is still a basic structural similarity between the two concepts that holds. Just as the authentic person is one who owns his or her existence in *Being and Time* by taking a stand on his existence and accepting one's nature in resoluteness, the person who learns to dwell takes on an appropriate relationship with the places and things that surround oneself. Both authentic Dasein and the dwelling mortal gain a new understanding of what it means to be human, and this understanding not only opens up new perspectives of the human condition and the relations between entities, but also provides an understanding of what it means to "know thyself" in a contemporary context.

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Chapter 4

From Extremity to Releasement: Place, Authenticity, and the Self

Jeff Malpas

... / Not in Utopia, – subterranean fields, – / Or some secreted
island, Heaven knows where! / But in the very world, which is
the world / Of all of us, – the place where, in the end, / We find
our happiness, or not at all!,

—William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Bk XI.

Oprah Winfrey does not figure in many works of philosophy. But along with “Dr. Phil,” she is an important starting point for Charles Guignon’s definitive investigation of authenticity in his *On Being Authentic*. That work begins with a popular conception of authenticity—one to be found on TV shows such as Winfrey’s as well as in magazines and self-help books—that is tied to notions of self-discovery and self-empowerment. On this conception, which is not restricted to the realm of pop psychology alone, authentic people, those who are ‘true to themselves’ as the phrase has it, are also those who “take control of their own lives through self-inspection, self-surveillance and self-assertion” (Guignon 2004, 166). Guignon ends the book, however, with an emphasis on a very different notion, that of *releasement* (a translation of the German term *Gelassenheit*),¹ understood in terms of “a heightened sensitivity to what is called for by the entire situation . . . [it is] a kind of situational awareness of what should be done” (167).²

¹The term is famously used by Heidegger (in GA 16), but is originally found in the mystical tradition best exemplified by the great fourteenth-century figure, Meister Eckhart.

²The notion is already introduced (as “*self-loss* or *releasement*”) in the first chapter of Guignon’s discussion in which it is set against authenticity characterised as “*enownment*” (Guignon 2004, 5–7).

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To some extent, Guignon's use of the notion of releasement, initially presented as a contrastive notion to that of authenticity,³ seems to figure as part of the rethought and "expanded" conception of authenticity that is the culmination of Guignon's account (2004, 5–6). The concept of releasement itself, however, is left by Guignon as a relatively undeveloped concept. It is illustrated by reference to Hans-Georg Gadamer's notion of conversational engagement in which interlocutors give themselves over to the subject matter that jointly concerns them, and Guignon also explicitly invokes Martin Heidegger's use of the term (undoubtedly Guignon's primary source here), but there is little in the way of additional elaboration of the concept. Nevertheless, Guignon's characterization of releasement as "a kind of situational awareness" not only stands in opposition to the narrow idea of authenticity as inwardly focused on the individual, autonomous self of which Guignon is critical, but also brings into view the notion of *situation*, and so too, the idea of being "in *place*"—for what is it to be situated but to be placed (*situ*, in the original Latin, meaning 'site' or 'place')? Indeed, the idea of situation, and so of place, is already implicated in the Gadamerian understanding of conversation on which Guignon draws, even though this is not something noted by Guignon himself (situation, and with it, place, is a key concept for hermeneutics generally).⁴ Place, and releasement as tied to place, is where my discussion will find its end, but it is also where it will properly begin. Let me turn, then, to that beginning, and to the place that will be its focus, Grasmere Vale in the English Lake District, and the poem in which that place appears, William Wordsworth's *Michael*.

The concluding poem in volume two of the *Lyrical Ballads*, where it figures as one of the "Poems on the Naming of Places," *Michael* is a tale of misplaced trust, betrayed love, lost hope, and grief. Quite apart from its significance in other respects—and it is one of Wordsworth's best-known works—the poem articulates a strong sense of the interconnection of human life with the place in which that life is lived. The shepherd, Michael, after whom the poem is named, and whose story it tells, is a man bound to his own stretch of country—the landscape of Grasmere Vale in Westmoreland. Of the fields and hills that belong to that landscape, Wordsworth writes, in the original version of the poem in *Lyrical Ballads*, that they were to Michael, "his living Blood, even more/Than his own Blood – what could they less?" (Wordsworth 1800, 203). The very relationship between Michael and his son Luke, which stands at the heart of the poem and is the source of Michael's grief, takes on material expression in the "straggl[ing] heap of unhewn stones" (Wordsworth 1800, 200) that mark the place to which the poem belongs. Wordsworth's poem is notable for its position within Wordsworth's own literary *oeuvre* and as a key text

³Later the contrast becomes less clear-cut, with Guignon arguing that "the opposition between . . . enownment and releasement is an oversimplification" (Guignon 2004, 164).

⁴See Malpas 2010, 261–280; and also Malpas, unpublished.

in the thinking of place—especially in Seamus Heaney’s elaboration of the idea of a “sense of place” (Heaney 1984).⁵ Yet the poem also has significance for the thinking of authenticity.

Wordsworth’s *Michael* has a central role in Lionel Trilling’s *Sincerity and Authenticity*. The latter is a work on which almost every philosophical examination of authenticity draws, including Guignon’s. Trilling’s focus on *Michael* has, perhaps not surprisingly, little to do with the poem’s topographical orientation or significance. Instead, the figure of Michael appears in Trilling’s discussion at just that point at which Trilling moves from the concept of sincerity to focus squarely on the idea of authenticity as such. Trilling writes:

Michael says nothing; he expresses nothing. It is not the case with him as it is with Hamlet that he has ‘that within which passeth show.’ There is no within and without: he and his grief are one. We may not, then, speak of sincerity. But our sense of Michael’s being, of – so to speak – his being-in-grief, comes to us as a surprise, as if it were exceptional in its actuality, and valuable. And we are impelled to use some word which denotes the nature of this being and which accounts for the high value we put upon it. The word we employ for this purpose is ‘authenticity.’ (1971, 93)

As Trilling presents matters, the concern with authenticity arises in the context of what he refers to as an “ontological concern . . . [a] preoccupation with the sentiment of being” (92). It is primarily a matter of a certain mode of the self in which the self is entirely encompassed by the passion, feeling, or commitment that belongs to it. In Michael’s case, this “being authentic” takes the form, extreme though it may seem, of his own being as a “being-in-grief.” Trilling’s focus is thus on authenticity as an *exceptional* mode of being of the self—singular and extreme—in which the self is completely and utterly given over to that which it is and as which it also appears. It is this that Trilling finds exemplified in an especially clear form in Wordsworth’s *Michael*.

Contrasting the sense of authenticity that appears in Wordsworth with that in Rousseau, Trilling writes that “our sense of what authenticity means involves a degree of rough concreteness or of extremity which Rousseau, with his abiding commitment to an ideal of patrician civility, does not give us but which Wordsworth does. Michael is as actual, as hard, as dense, weighty, perdurable as any stone he lifts up or lets lie” (94). Here authenticity seems to mean an actuality of being that may be so extreme as even to offend against our normal sensibilities. As a result, Trilling concludes that authenticity is “a polemical concept, fulfilling its nature by dealing aggressively with received and habitual opinion” (94). But even more than this, and for contemporary readers of *Michael* this may seem surprising, the authenticity that Trilling takes to be present in Wordsworth’s poem, and that is given concrete form in the figure of the old and grieving shepherd, is so extreme as to carry a potential violence within it—a violence that is given explicit and paradigmatic expression,

⁵I have also referred to the poem in my own work—sometimes in conjunction with Heaney’s comments (see Malpas 1999, 2). See also Bate 1991.

according to Trilling, in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (a work that stands along with the poem *Michael* as one of the key texts in Trilling's account).

It is this violence that appears, in relation to authenticity, in terms of the aggressive, and in Trilling's terms "polemical," assertion of the individual self and its autonomy against the existing social order and its settled conventionalities, even, should it come to it, against the very order of nature and of the world. What drives it is the demand for a reality, an actuality, a truth, that goes beyond the ordinary truths of everyday life and appearance—and if this demand should be such as to result in the destruction of that which is less than real in this sense, or that stands in the way of such real, authentic being, then so be it. It is thus that Trilling reminds us of the Greek origins from which "authentic" and "authenticity" derive: "*Authenteo*: to have full power over; also, to commit a murder. *Authentes*: not only a master and a doer, but also a perpetrator, a murderer, even a self-murderer, a suicide" (Trilling 1971, 131). Here Conrad's Kurtz, who is indeed master, doer, perpetrator, murderer (perhaps even, in a sense, a self-murderer, certainly a self-destroyer) appears as the authentic hero (the hero *in extremis*) facing up to the reality of his own self and those around him—a reality that also turns out to be a horror. It is a long way from Westmoreland to the Congo, and yet it would seem, if we follow Trilling's account, that the gap between Kurtz and the old shepherd Michael, unlikely companions though they may be, is not so great. Although differing in manner of expression and mode of realization, both, it would seem, are joined by the ideal of authenticity, and by the extremity of being and of the self that the commitment to authenticity apparently brings with it.

Guignon tells us that his aim in *On Being Authentic* is "not to sing the praises of authenticity, but to put in question some of the unstated assumptions that surround it and prop it up" (2004, ix). One might suppose that one of those "unstated assumptions" is the idea that there is an *exceptionality* and *extremity* of being that can be found in the individual self, and that such exceptionality and extremity is something valuable. To some extent this is indeed something that Guignon contests, but only inasmuch as the ideal of authenticity, as expressed specifically through an emphasis on the self, seems capable of legitimating the cruel and violent impulses of our inner lives just as much as it does those tendencies that are decent and kind. Rather than focusing on the exceptionality or extremity that might seem to go with authenticity, Guignon is more concerned with the understanding of the self that apparently underpins some forms of authenticity—including those that seem to licence individual excess, but also those that might appear, on the face of it, to be more responsible and reflective—forms of authenticity that are really founded in an emphasis on the individual self as autonomous and independent, and as capable of standing apart from its social and interpersonal context (Guignon 2004, 104–106).

Guignon devotes considerable attention to a critical examination of the way in which the ideal of authenticity has developed and the ideas with which it seems to be associated. A significant part of Guignon's account, however, most notably

the final chapter “Authenticity in Context,” is indeed given over to a rethinking or retrieval of authenticity in terms of the social context in which the self is located and defined. Authenticity becomes, on this account, “essentially a social virtue” (161). In this, Guignon draws heavily on Charles Taylor (Taylor 1991), who argues in similar fashion, as well as Bernard Williams (2002, 172–205). What Guignon offers is thus not a complete rejection of the idea of authenticity—an idea about which he says “there is obviously something clearly right” (2004, ix)⁶—but rather a rejection of a certain conception of authenticity, and an argument in favour of an expanded version of what authenticity might mean: “What is problematic, as I see it, is not the goal of being authentic, but the predominance of any one perspective on the rich and dense weave of undertakings and responsibilities that make up our lives” (167). Against this background, the way Guignon would seem to intend the idea of releasement is as a mode of giving oneself over to a world of shared involvement with others—a mode, literally, of *self-release* in contrast to the more usual emphasis in authenticity on *self-possession* and independent self-realization.

Like Trilling, Guignon also draws on Wordsworth as an important reference point in charting the development of the modern idea of authenticity. Unlike Trilling, however, but implicitly in keeping with his own approach to authenticity, Guignon looks not to the early poems, not to *Michael* or any of the “Poems on the Naming of Places,” but rather cites the later works, and especially the *Prelude* (a work begun in 1798, but worked on continuously by Wordsworth throughout his life, and published just after Wordsworth’s death in 1850).⁷ Adopting elements from the reading of Wordsworth advanced by Geoffrey Hartmann (a reading that itself seems, as Jonathan Bate points out, to derive from the work of Paul de Man),⁸ Guignon treats Wordsworth as holding to a set of views that Guignon takes as characteristic of Romanticism, namely: that there is a need “to recover a sense of oneness and wholeness that appears to have been lost with the rise of modernity”; that this can only be done through “a total immersion in one’s own deepest and most intense feelings”; and that “the self is the highest and most all-encompassing of all that is found in reality” (Guignon 2004, 51).

The ideas at issue here are seen by Guignon to underpin the focus on the self that is also a characteristic feature of authenticity, and that sees the retrieval of

⁶Taylor also asserts, as a key premise of his account in *The Ethics of Authenticity* that “authenticity is a valid ideal” (1991, 23).

⁷*The Prelude* (named as such by Wordsworth’s wife, Mary) was intended as the introduction to Wordsworth’s great unfinished work, *The Recluse*.

⁸A reading originally developed in essay form (Hartmann 1962, 214–224), and later forming a central part of a more extended treatment (Hartmann 1964). Guignon himself refers (2004, Chap. 4, n. 12) to one of Hartmann’s later discussions (Hartmann 1979). Jonathan Bate points to the connection to De Man (specifically, De Man 1984—see Bate 1991, 7–8). Hartman’s reading, in conjunction with that of Harold Bloom, is one that aimed, as Bate puts it, “to bring philosophy, and in particular that philosophical tradition which ran from Kantian idealism to Husserlian phenomenology, to the centre of Romantic studies” (1991, 7).

reality as a matter of the retrieval of the self, understood as requiring a turn inward, and in Guignon's account, a turn away from the world, or, at least, towards an internalisation of the world:

Romanticism, far from providing an alternative to scientific objectification, simply turns reality over to the sciences once and for all and rests content with creating its own reality in imagination. Romanticism's final story is that we can let science have reality, because we have another reality – a special reality that is in here, within the self. Given this view of things, however, the self is not just the centre of the universe. It *is* the universe. For the sort of Romanticism found in *The Prelude*, there is simply no place for anything outside the self. (Guignon 2004, 65)

As a picture of Romanticism, or, indeed, of the German Idealist tradition with which it is connected, this account is perhaps a little too simple. Not only does Romanticism contain various strands within it, not all of which are consistent with the account Guignon offers here, but one can as much argue that Romanticism proposes a rethought understanding of the self that, in contemporary parlance, is itself *externalised*, as one can view it as tending towards an internalized conception of the world. In relation to the story of the development of authenticity, and especially as it relates to Wordsworth's role within that story, this picture also raises some questions, particularly when set against Trilling's account. In Trilling's discussion of authenticity, the focus is not at all on *The Prelude*, but rather on that earlier poem set in Grasmere Vale (the second volume of *Lyrical Ballads* in which *Michael* appeared was published in 1800). Moreover, even though this is something ignored by Trilling himself, that earlier poem is most definitely *not* a work that sets the self off *against* nature or the world, but does exactly the opposite—*Michael* is, as we have seen, a poem that has its origins in a sense of the deep interconnection between place and self, and between place and the human.⁹

One might argue that if there is a problem here, then, it is a problem for Trilling rather than Guignon. The view of the self that Guignon finds in Wordsworth is something Guignon acknowledges is discovered by Wordsworth “slowly in the course of his life's journey” (2004, 63). One might say, then, that Trilling is misled in taking *Michael* as the exemplary work for the discussion of authenticity, whereas Guignon rightly focuses on the later poetry because it is there, on some readings at least, that Wordsworth comes fully to articulate the romantic prioritisation of the self—something that is not present in the earlier work. Undoubtedly, there are issues surrounding Trilling's approach to *Michael*. Yet so far as its place in Trilling's discussion of authenticity is concerned, to say that Trilling uses the wrong poem would be to miss the point of Trilling's analysis. What Trilling takes *Michael* to exhibit is precisely that exceptionality and extremity of being that Trilling sees as at the heart of the ideal of authenticity and that reaches its full literary realisation in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

⁹In Heaney's words, the Westmoreland landscape that appears here is “both humanised and humanizing” (1984, 145).

There can be no doubt that the ideal of authenticity does develop in tandem with the modern preoccupation with the individual self. But if we follow Trilling's account, then the real problem with authenticity is not merely the focus on the individual self, but rather the tendency towards the exceptional and the extreme—a tendency that is expressed in terms of the desire for a reality that, to rework Trilling's words, will be “as actual, as hard, as dense, weighty, perdurable as . . . stone.” Understood in relation to the self, authenticity thus names something *metaphysical*—an exceptional or superlative quality of being. It names a mode of the being of the self in which the self appears as more true, more real, more actual—more *being*—than anything that might lie outside of it. Often such exceptionality will take the form of an extremity, if not an *excess*, of feeling, of willing, of acting—even of *power*. If this is not the sense of authenticity that is the primary focus for Guignon, it is that which seems to take centre stage in Trilling. Indeed, one might argue that it is what founds the contrast Trilling draws between authenticity and *sincerity*. Thus Trilling writes of “authenticity” that it suggests “a more strenuous moral experience than ‘sincerity’ does, a more exigent conception of the self and of what being true to it consists in, a wider reference to the universe and man's place in it, and a less acceptant and genial view of the social circumstances of life” (1971, 11). Sincerity belongs with the idea of a settled and civilised life, authenticity, on this view, with the possibility of its overthrow and even destruction.

One might object, however, that this idea of authenticity as given over to exceptionality and extremity is itself too extreme. Authenticity, it may be argued, can be associated with exceptionality, but that need not always be so, nor need any such association be taken as indicating anything essential about authenticity as such. Authenticity can be understood in much more moderate terms, and such an understanding, it might be argued, is also more adequate to the real character of authenticity. This, is of course, the position Guignon adopts—at least in the retrieved conception of authenticity he offers towards the end of his account—even though the explicit focus for Guignon is not the rejection of exceptionality or extremity as such (in fact, it is not something to which he gives much attention),¹⁰ but rather the rejection of the focus on the individual self. Thus although Guignon is himself quite clear that his position diverges from Trilling's, this is because “Trilling's way of contrasting sincerity and authenticity makes authenticity look like a purely personal matter” (2004, 156–157), and not because Guignon directly contests Trilling's focus on the exceptional character of the authentic. Guignon offers a very different account of authenticity, one that renders authenticity as a more positive and *more moderate* notion than it is in Trilling. Moreover, Guignon also argues that the idea of authenticity that one might take to be the focus for much of Trilling's analysis—which Guignon takes to be characterised by an emphasis on the individual self, but which seems better understood in terms of the focus on exceptionality—is itself incoherent. It is so, claims Guignon, just in virtue of the fact

¹⁰Although Guignon does say that what is crucial about authenticity “is not just the intensity or fervor of the expression it carries with it” (2004, 158).

that it supposedly gives an incomplete picture of authenticity through leaving out its essentially social character (157–163). This seems no reason, however, for rejecting the idea found in Trilling as inadequate to the notion of authenticity, and holding that authenticity must therefore be understood differently, unless one is already committed to viewing authenticity as indeed a valuable and coherent notion from the first. Yet that is precisely what is in question, and certainly can be taken to be part of what is contested in Trilling's account.

In support of his own analysis, Guignon asks us to imagine individuals who are genuinely and deeply committed to ideals that are empty, trivial or lacking in worth. Guignon's claim is that, no matter the fervour or intensity of their commitment, we would not regard these individuals as living authentic lives (158). Authenticity is thus supposed to carry a content that goes beyond just the requirement of self-possession—to be authentic is not only to live a life that is *one's own* but also to live a life that is *worthwhile*, and that satisfies a criterion of worth that is socially as well as personally oriented. Whether one finds this argument convincing will depend on whether one agrees with the readings of the examples that Guignon offers—and whether or not one does so will almost certainly depend on whether or not one takes authenticity to involve the sort of exceptionality and extremity identified by Trilling. In fact, part of the problem with Guignon's developed account is that it seems already to rule out as instances of authenticity just those forms of authenticity, of the sort identified by Trilling, that seem paradigmatically associated with the concept, and that also seem to epitomise what is most problematic about it.

Guignon's rethinking of authenticity as a "social virtue" thus immediately transforms authenticity from a dangerous and extreme ideal to a moderate, civil, and benign one. At the same time, the issue of exceptionality and extremity itself appears to be effectively overstepped—indeed, although it is not omitted from Guignon's account, it might be viewed as simply subsumed under the problematic focus on the individual. The question is: which of the accounts of authenticity that we find here is correct? Is it the account of authenticity as given over to exceptionality and extremity that is evident in Trilling or the moderate conception that seems to underlie Guignon's account to reach its full realization at the end of *On Being Authentic*? In fact, there is one sense in which both accounts are correct, and what makes this possible is an oscillation or equivocation that operates within the idea of authenticity itself—an oscillation that allows authenticity to shift between the moderate and the extreme, between the benign and the dangerous. The very fact of this oscillation or equivocation can also be seen, however, as lending support to Trilling's more negative construal of authenticity and its dangerous character.

On the face of it, it may seem that the concept of authenticity is not only familiar and widespread, but also relatively clear and well-understood. The most common characterisation of the notion, in a moral or ethical sense, is that which is given in the injunction from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, spoken by Polonius to Laertes, "to thine own self be true" (a characterization reflected in my own use of a similar phrase

near the very start of this discussion).¹¹ In fact, Trilling treats the line from *Hamlet* in terms of sincerity rather than authenticity, although he nevertheless sees it as standing within the history of the development of the latter notion. Both sincerity and authenticity can indeed be said to involve a basic notion of *truthfulness*,¹² and of truthfulness *to self*, but it is not the identical notion in both cases (although this fact is often overlooked), and the difference does not lie merely in the idea of sincerity as social and authenticity as personal.

Trilling points out that the origins of the modern sense of authenticity as a moral notion lie “in the museum, where persons expert in such matters test whether objects of art are what they appear to be or are claimed to be” (1971, 93). One can see how a notion of truthfulness is indeed at work here, and also how it operates in many ordinary uses of the notion of the “authentic,” as, for instance, when we say of a meal that it was “authentically” Italian, of a hand woven carpet that it is an “authentic” Persian rug, or of a painting purported to be by Rembrandt that it is an “authentic” work by the Dutch master. Significantly, however, the particular sense of truthfulness at issue here is one very much tied to the idea of a *determining origin* or *authority* that gives that whose authenticity is in question its character as authentic.¹³ Thus the authenticity of meal, the carpet, or the painting is typically ascertained by going back to something that determines the character of each in just that respect that is at issue. In the museum case cited by Trilling this process of going back to some original and authoritative determination is clearly evident in his reference, in the passage quoted above, to the idea of the expert who can “test whether objects of art are what they appear to be or are claimed to be.” The process of “authentication” that Trilling invokes here is one in which the aim is indeed to establish a link back to a specific determining origin whether in a historical period, a geographical location, or an individual artist, craftsman, or workshop. Not just a matter of truthfulness to self alone, authenticity is that particular form of truthfulness to self that looks to a connection back to a determining origin or authority. Moreover, it is this that underpins any distinction between sincerity and authenticity in terms of a social or personal orientation. As should also be clear, it is the connection back to a determining authority or origin that grounds Trilling’s association between authenticity and exceptionality. In the case of Wordsworth’s *Michael*, and following Trilling’s account of the poem, that determining origin or ground is the self-evident character of Michael’s grief as belonging to his very being.

If we take authenticity just in terms of some general notion of truthfulness to self, then not only will we find it difficult to distinguish authenticity from sincerity, but

¹¹ *Hamlet*, Act 1 Scene 3.

¹² Hence the appearance of the discussion of authenticity in Williams’ *Truth and Truthfulness* (2002).

¹³ Thus the *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for authentic includes the following: “a. OF. *authentique* (13th c.), ad Latin *authentic-us*, a. Gr. *ἀὐθεντικός* ‘of first-hand authority, original,’ f. *ἀὐθεντία* ‘original authority,’ and *ἀὐθέντης* ‘one who does a thing himself, a principal, a master, an autocrat,’” (Coleridge et al. 1971, 569).

we will also find it hard to dispel the ambiguity that allows that notion of truthfulness to self to slide over into the stronger notion of a grounding in some determining origin—in some exceptional or superlative mode of the self or of existence. This is part of what makes discussion of authenticity so awkward: on the one hand, authenticity calls up a set of notions, especially that of truthfulness, that seem to be part of our normal moral discourse and as such can be seen to belong with notions of moderation and civility; on the other hand, the character of authenticity as connected with the idea of a determining authority, and the exceptionality that goes with it, tends us towards an extremity that is sometimes anti-social, but also violent and dangerous. The result is indeed an oscillation within the very concept of authenticity, and because one of the poles of that oscillation is that of exceptionality and extremity, so the oscillation is itself a dangerous one.¹⁴

The danger here is made all the greater in virtue of the fact that, when intended in relation to the self, the very constraints that normally obtain in other ordinary uses of authenticity no longer apply. The self is itself a contested concept and the domain that belongs to it has no clear or definable boundaries—unlike, for instance, the domains of regional cuisine, handicraft production, or art collecting (or, one might add, the social practices that provide the usual setting for truthfulness in the sense associated with sincerity). This is another aspect of the ambiguity or instability that seems to be part of the problem that authenticity presents. Indeed, it is an instability that one might argue is already present in Shakespeare's use of the idea of "truthfulness to self" in *Hamlet*. What is at issue here may well belong, in its literary and historical content, more to sincerity than to authenticity, but part of what Shakespeare seems to be doing is playing with, and perhaps even casting doubt upon, the very idea of "truthfulness to self" on which both sincerity and authenticity seem to draw.

As is often pointed out, the line in *Hamlet* that expresses this idea of truthfulness to self is put in the mouth of a character who himself exhibits little in the way of the commitment he impresses on his son—Polonius is presented as something of a scheming, pompous, self-interested windbag. But Polonius' exhortation to Laertes to be true to himself also carries with it a deep ambiguity that does not derive only from the lack of truthfulness evident in Polonius' own character. Part of the focus of Shakespeare's play is Hamlet's own uncertain sense of self, his own uncertainty about what is true in the world around him as well as in his own soul. In a context in which the self is thereby put into question, what is to be made of the injunction to be

¹⁴It is worth noting that Williams also acknowledges a danger that attaches to authenticity, writing that "The search for an authentic life is always questionable, and it is not a secret that it can lead to ethical and social disaster" (2002, 205). Williams, however, diagnoses the danger differently from the way it is done here, and I would argue one reason for this is that he tends, as does Guignon as well as many other authors, not to give sufficient recognition either to the way in which authenticity tends to go beyond mere truthfulness or to the instability that this implies. In this respect, it is perhaps also worth noting that Williams' account focuses on Rousseau, who, as we have already seen, is viewed by Trilling as exemplifying a rather more moderated version of authenticity than is to be found, as Trilling would have it, in Wordsworth's *Michael*.

true to one self—especially when that injunction is put by a schemer and a fool? The ambiguity surrounding Polonius' advice to Laertes becomes all the greater when we realise that Laertes is himself the one who, at the end of the play, is so consumed by grief, animosity, and the desire for revenge that he is opened to the manipulative wiles of Claudius, precipitating the final duel that brings the whole sequence of events to its bloody and extreme conclusion. Put in the context of the concern with authenticity, *Hamlet* may be seen as indicating a new uncertainty about the self that puts into question the very ideal of truthfulness to self, but that can also be seen to carry something of a foreshadowing of the horror and extremity that is to come.

Shakespeare aside, one may well ask what the self can be anyway such that one can indeed be true to it? How does authenticity operate here—what are the criteria to which one would look to determine whether a self is authentic *as a self*? This question is not answered by interrogating authenticity understood merely in some general sense of truthfulness, even of truthfulness to self. That sense of authenticity actually carries little determinate content beyond the idea of a distinction between the truthful and the false, the real and fake—and it no more tells us what is to count as authentic than the related concept of truth as applied to sentences provides us with a list of truths or a rule for identifying the true as opposed to the false. Indeed, it is significant that, as we saw in the discussion above, when Guignon argues for a more substantive account of authenticity that is consistent with what we might think of as a more properly consistent moral outlook, he does so in a way that seems already to depend on treating authenticity as associated with what is morally worthwhile and valuable (the darker account of authenticity offered by Trilling is thus a misunderstanding of authenticity rather than a diagnosis of something problematic that lies within it). There are not the resources within the notion of authenticity to delimit its application to the self, but neither can one look to an account of the self to fill out the notion of the authentic. Such an account will tell us about the self, but it will shed little light on *authenticity* as such (at best it will fill out the context in which the idea of the authentic might be applied). Thus the sort of account that Guignon advances, and that is adumbrated in Taylor, in favour of a rehabilitated concept of authenticity that looks beyond the personal, is really based in an argument for an expanded concept of the self which is then used to reinterpret authenticity in accordance with that expanded conception. The only way in which an analysis of the self can illuminate authenticity is if it is already assumed that authenticity provides a legitimate way of thinking about the self, but that assumption itself requires legitimation. Only when we look to some stronger sense of what authenticity may be, a sense that goes beyond notions of mere truthfulness, can we begin to see a sense in which authenticity might stand in a stronger relation to a substantive conception of the self—except that any such stronger sense of authenticity is likely to be filled out in terms of just that exceptionality and extremity of being that remains largely in the background of Guignon's account, but which is so central to Trilling's.

It is surely no accident that Guignon's account does indeed end, not with authenticity, but rather with *releasement*. Moreover, Guignon himself suggests that he intends the notion of releasement as a counter to "the dangerous one-sidedness built into the concentration on authenticity in certain areas of the self-help movement" (2004, 167). Releasement also stands in stark contrast to the exceptionality and extremity that is evident in Trilling's account of authenticity. Guignon's characterisation of releasement, as I noted at the very beginning of my discussion, treats releasement in terms of "a heightened sensitivity to what is called for by the entire situation . . . [it is] a kind of situational awareness of what should be done" (167). This does not mean, of course, that releasement involves a turn away from the self—the very idea of situation presupposes a 'body,' or, we might say, a 'subject,' that is situated, and to be aware of the situation in its entirety is to be aware of both that which is situated as well as that within which it is situated. The point is well-illustrated with a well-known example used in relation to the understanding of spatiality: to grasp one's spatial situation one must be able to relate the parts of space to the parts of one's own body.¹⁵ Analogously, in order to grasp one's situation one must be able to relate aspects of that wherein one is situated to aspects of oneself. If releasement is indeed a form of *self-release* it is so not in the sense that it involves a complete abandonment of the self, but rather inasmuch as it means a releasing of the self *into the situation*, and so also a releasing *of the situation* in the direction of the self.

Guignon's own explication of releasement draws on Gadamer's model of conversation in which we are indeed given over *to the conversation* and so allow the conversation *to take us along within it*, as well as on Heidegger's explicit use of releasement as an alternative way of relating to modern technology. Releasement in this context is specifically a matter of 'letting be' (something clearer in the German *Gelassenheit* than in the English 'releasement'),¹⁶ and so of taking an attitude to technology, and to the world, that refuses the attempt at control or mastery. Moreover, Heidegger's own account of technology is one that sees technology, not as something wielded by human beings, but rather as an all-encompassing ordering of things that extends even to the human. On this basis, releasement in the Heideggerian context, must mean a refusal also of those forms of dominating control or mastery that are directed at the self—forms of control or mastery that one might argue are paradigmatically at work in many contemporary versions of the ideal of authenticity.¹⁷ It means recognition of the self as characterised not by its

¹⁵See especially the elaboration of this point by Immanuel Kant (see Kant [1768] 1992).

¹⁶The notion also connects with Heidegger's earlier use of the idea of 'letting be,' as captured in the German *seinlassen* (e.g. in Heidegger GA 9).

¹⁷Although Heidegger's discussion of releasement is most explicit in relation to the question of technology and the response to it, one can argue that it is actually a mood or attitude that permeates much of his later thinking – and in this respect one might say that there is a shift in Heidegger from a way of thinking in which something like the ideal of authenticity predominates, and with it, a sense of exceptionality and extremity, to a focus instead on releasement, and so a refusal of such exceptionality – a refusal of extremity. One might then say that Heidegger's thinking itself

exceptionality or extremity—and certainly not in the sense of mastery, resoluteness, or strength—but by its openness to the world, by its dependence on the world, by its vulnerability to the world.

Releasement must involve a freeing up of one's attitude towards the self no less than a freeing up of one's relation towards the world. In this respect, releasement can be understood as more than just a mood or attitude, but as rather based in a different understanding of the very nature of the self and of the self in its relation to the world. Guignon makes no direct connection between the idea of releasement and the 'dialogical' conception of the self that he also explores, and that plays an important role in the argument he advances for authenticity as a "social virtue." Yet such a dialogical account of the self, which can itself be seen to connect with ideas in Gadamer and in Heidegger, involves a different *ontology* of the self, one that treats the self as essentially relational and dynamic, and that also, although there is not the space properly to argue for the point here, as embedded in and shaped *by its situation*, by *its being in place*.

It is at this point that we are returned once more to the figure of the shepherd Michael, and to that 'straggling heap of unhewn stones' in Grasmere Vale. Trilling takes *Michael*, as we have seen, to be a poem that provides a picture of authenticity as exceptionality and extremity. There can be no doubt that it does just that. Yet, as we have also seen, it does something more as well. When Trilling tells us that, for Michael, "there is no within and without," he echoes Wordsworth's own description of the way the seeming externality of the Westmoreland landscape has become internalised in Michael—it is his "living Blood"—even as his grief is given material embodiment in the heaped stones before us. Although it exemplifies a mode of authenticity, as well as telling a story of individual grief and loss, *Michael* is primarily a poem about *place*—as is made clear by Wordsworth himself when he writes of the tale of Michael:

It was the first,
The earliest of those tales that spake to me
Of Shepherds, dwellers in the vallies, men
Whom I already lov'd, not verily
For their own sakes, but for the fields and hills
Where was their occupation and abode. (1800, 200)

The tale of Michael is a tale etched into a landscape. It is the story *both* of an individual man and of a certain place in Westmoreland—the one being inseparable from the other. Moreover, as a landscape bears the marks of human stories—stories that belong to that landscape, even though the landscape also goes beyond those stories—so every landscape always bears the marks of what is lost, of what is past,

describes a move from extremity to releasement, and that move is also one that is associated directly with the increasingly explicit shift in Heidegger's thinking towards place and topology (see Malpas 2006).

of remembrance and forgetting. Place and loss, and with it sadness, mourning, even grief, are always linked. This is perhaps the real meaning of *nostalgia*, understood, not in terms of the desire for the return of a past time (as is so often assumed), but rather of the experience of place as also, and inevitably, an experience of loss and the pain of loss.¹⁸

Set against the background of the inquiry into authenticity, *Michael* presents a complex set of ideas, since it can be seen as encompassing notions of both extremity and of releasement—or at least of that ‘released’ conception of the self that understands it as standing in an essential relation to its situatedness, to its being in place. One might object, of course, that the situation, the place, that appears in Wordsworth is simply the situation as physical location, and so does not carry the sense of social situatedness that is actually at issue in Guignon’s discussion—whether it might be implied in his idea of releasement or in the dialogical conception of the self that he takes from Williams, Taylor and others. There is a longer argument that could be put here, but in brief, there can be no social situation that is not also physically embedded and embodied, and even the physical landscape carries with it a depth of social significance. The social is itself etched into the materiality of physical situation, into the materiality of place, just as the materiality of place is itself saturated with the structures and significations of the social.¹⁹

The sense of releasement towards place, or interdependence with it, that is evident in Wordsworth’s *Michael* is also not restricted to that poem alone. Although it is true that Wordsworth’s poetry increasingly comes under the influence of ideas from the German idealist tradition that gives particular emphasis to the self, it is also true that Wordsworth retains a clear focus on the connection to nature and landscape as central to his work (something demonstrated, as Jonathan Bate emphasises, by the fact that it is *The Excursion*, a work in which nature and landscape are no less important than in *Michael*, that was considered the ‘summation’ of his work by Wordsworth himself as well as by his nineteenth century readers).²⁰ Yet although Wordsworth does not forsake a commitment to the idea of the intimacy of the relation between self and place, and so to the idea that it is indeed only *in the world* that we can find ourselves, there is nevertheless also a tendency in Wordsworth towards a thinking of authenticity that is itself tied to place.

Trilling identifies the figure of Michael as exemplifying an ideal of authenticity as exceptionality. One might suppose that such authenticity belongs to Michael alone, and yet if we take into account the way Wordsworth’s poem also emphasises the interdependence of Michael with the place in which his life is embedded, then we

¹⁸Nostalgia is thus misunderstood when construed in terms of the pleasant, backward-looking feeling with which it is now all-too-commonly associated, but which is actually a form of “mythophilia” (see Malpas 2012a).

¹⁹The longer argument is one that I have developed in a number of places (see e.g. Malpas 1999), and the position that it supports is one that I have sometimes characterized as a form of “romantic materialism” (see Malpas 2012b).

²⁰See Bate 1991, 8, and Chap. 3.

surely cannot but see the authenticity at issue here as attaching both to Michael *and* the landscape to which he himself belongs. Moreover, there seems no doubt that there is in Wordsworth a clear sense in which authenticity can attach to places, and that part of what is at issue in a poem like Michael is actually the extolling of certain places as sometimes morally more valuable or significant than others. Thus, the pastoral landscape of Grasmere is set in contrast, in the course of two lines toward the end of the poem, to “the dissolute city” in which Luke gives himself “to evil courses” (Wordsworth 1800, 223). Grasmere Vale is a place that Wordsworth loves, and his love for that place does indeed take on an almost metaphysical character, so that the place, and the broader countryside of which it is a part, appears as exceptional—as making possible a mode of being-in-place that is to be found perhaps nowhere else.²¹ In that case, we would have to say that Wordsworth presents a curious mixture that combines a sense of authenticity, and the exceptionality and extremity that goes with it, as well as a sense of releasement, and both of these are tied closely to the Wordsworthian concern with place, and the interdependence of self with place. There is an instability here that reflects the instability that is part of the concept of authenticity itself. It is an instability that seems to lie at the heart of Wordsworth’s thinking, but that may also be part of the very attempt to think place in terms of authenticity.

There is certainly a common tendency for authenticity to be applied to place no less than to the self. Sometimes this is in a fairly mundane sense that is more or less the same as the museum sense identified by Trilling and is most obviously at work in heritage contexts. Yet it is also used in ways that seem to carry a stronger moral connotation—much as seems to be implicit in Wordsworth. In such cases, the idea of authentic place often connotes something almost *utopic*—a realisation of the “enchanted garden,” to use Guignon’s phrase, from which modernity seems otherwise to have debarred us; a place that will ground and secure our existence; a place that will allow us to be what we essentially are. The architect Christian Norberg-Schulz, who was largely responsible for making the Heideggerian concept of “dwelling” well-known in architectural circles, is sometimes read in a way that suggests his commitment to such an idea of authentic place.²² Within environmental thinking, one can argue that there is also a tendency, even stronger than in Norberg-Schulz, to think of certain places, most often wilderness places, as “authentic” and also as exceptional—sometimes so much so that their exceptionality is taken to be such as to warrant the exclusion of humanity from those places (Jackson 1994). There can be no doubt that there is an ethical dimension that properly belongs to the

²¹John Kerrigan writes that “Wordsworth’s entire career was shaped by his need to find a dwelling-place which would not fade” (Kerrigan 1985, 50).

²²See, for instance, Norberg-Schulz 1985. Massimo Cacciari has been one of Norberg-Schulz’s strongest critics (see Cacciari 1980). Cacciari sees Norberg-Schulz as committed to a “nostalgic” attempt (I would argue that it is better characterized as “utopic”) to recapture a pure relation to place that is impossible, and that Cacciari argues Heidegger himself rejects. On the question of what is actually at issue in Heidegger’s use of the term translated by the English “dwelling” (see Malpas *in press*).

thinking of place, and also to the human intervention in place—whether in relation to architecture, the environment, urban planning or elsewhere. Moreover, that ethical dimension may well be seen to be critically determined by the interdependence between place and self, as much as by the interdependence that obtains between self and other (indeed, I would argue that these two sets of dependencies are themselves interdependent).²³ Yet if place is thought through the notion of authenticity, then it is likely to give rise to the same instability as arises when authenticity is deployed as a way of thinking about the self—and to the same exceptionality and extremity. Moreover, just as there is no need to make appeal to authenticity in thinking ethically about the self, neither is there any such need in thinking about place. In every case, as I argued above, the ethical content that is supposedly taken up in the idea of authenticity is actually derived from, and articulated by means of, concepts that are not themselves dependent upon that idea.

Place, along with the self, must be thought through the concept of releasement rather than by means of authenticity. Moreover, the very idea of place should already lead us in that direction. There are no exceptional or superlative places, *at least not in the sense demanded by authenticity*. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, place is never encountered as some determinate, immediately present entity or structure—although we may often imagine places as if they were identical with what is presented on the travel poster or postcard, places always resist any such reduction or encapsulation. Even the place of Wordsworth's *Michael*—Grasmere Vale—is not exhausted by any “romantic” image of rocky hillside and quaint cottage. Places entangle other places, are entangled in those places, and they entangle us within them—places draw us in, allowing a releasing of the self into the place and a releasing of the place into the self (so much so that we may find our own identities inseparably bound up with the places we inhabit). Moreover, although we may come to view some places as more important to us individually than others, this is merely a function, not of any exceptionality that pertains to just those places, but of our own very placidness—which means only that we find ourselves *here* rather than there, in *this place* rather than some other. Our being given over to place—our being released to it—is not a being given over to the exceptional, to the utopic, to the secret, or to the subterranean, but to the ordinary and everyday world that is, as Wordsworth puts it, “the world / Of all of us” ([1850] 1959, 409).

For all that *Michael* also contains within it an expression of the problematic idea of authentic exceptionality, I would argue that even there one can discern this ordinary world and our releasement into it. Releasement is present in Wordsworth's poem not only in *Michael*'s intimate connectedness to the landscape in which he lives, but also in the fact that it is *in grief* that his being is taken up. Although that grief is indeed exceptional and extreme, it is also, as grief, indicative of the dependent and vulnerable character of the self—of the self as incapable of any complete self-sufficiency or self-determination. It is thus, as I noted above, that grief and place—and so now, perhaps, grief and releasement also—can be seen

²³An interdependence I have discussed in more detail elsewhere (see Malpas 1999, 138ff).

as themselves linked. Michael's grief is exceptional, as it is authentic and also extreme, but at the same time it runs counter to some of the key elements in the ideal of authenticity, directing *us* as readers (even though it does not and cannot direct Michael himself), not in towards a separate and enclosed self, but out towards a more encompassing place, towards a more encompassing world.

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Chapter 5

Guignon on Self-Surrender and Homelessness in Dostoevsky and Heidegger

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Charles Guignon's reputation was officially established in 1983 with the publication of his landmark book *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge*. Here, for arguably the first time, Heidegger's obscure, jargon-infused meditations on the *Seinsfrage* were brought into conversation with core themes in mainstream epistemology and philosophy of mind. Combining rich historiography with the conceptual clarity and concrete examples that have become signatures of his work, Guignon helped to legitimize Heidegger scholarship in North America by providing a critical rapprochement between Anglophone and continental traditions. But there was another figure, Fyodor Dostoevsky, who loomed just as large in shaping Guignon's intellectual vision. Beginning with *The Idiot*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *Notes from the Underground* that he read in high school "with a flashlight under the covers late into the night,"¹ and later encountering *The Brothers Karamazov* in graduate seminars with Bert Dreyfus at Berkeley, Dostoevsky would serve as a reliable touchstone for Guignon's thought. And he is one of the few to recognize the significant but often unacknowledged impact that Dostoevsky had on Heidegger's own writing.

It is well known, for instance, that Heidegger kept a portrait of Dostoevsky prominently displayed on his office wall. And Dostoevsky is one of the only non-German figures that he consistently cites as an influence on *Being and Time*. Indeed, after taking over Husserl's chair at Freiburg, Heidegger personally saw to the university library purchasing the complete works of Dostoevsky (Schmid 2011, 37–38).

¹This line comes from a conversation with Charles.

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But his most interesting references come in letters to his wife Elfride. In one, written while serving on the battlefields of Lorraine in 1918, Heidegger asks for two items to give him some comfort, a wedding-day photograph of Elfride, “standing by the sunflower in [her] Worspwede dress,” and a copy of *The Brothers Karamazov* (Heidegger 2008, 48). And, in a revealing note from 1920, he tells Elfride that it was through Dostoevsky that he learned what it meant to have a ‘homeland’ (*Heimat*) and to have one’s ‘roots in the soil’ and goes on to encourage her to read Dostoevsky’s political writings in order to properly understand his critique of modernity (Schmid 2011, 72–73).

Guignon’s work on Dostoevsky and much of his writing on Heidegger addresses the experience of homelessness and how it emerges from the modern configuration of the self (see Guignon 1983, 1984, 1993, 2004, 2006). Using Guignon’s work as a point of reference, this paper draws connections between Dostoevsky and Heidegger regarding how the view of the modern self as an atomistic, rational, and self-determined subject manifests feelings of moral confusion and alienation. The aim is to show how both thinkers point to the importance of recovering the indigenous values of a homeland for a sense of moral guidance.² For Dostoevsky this involves retrieving the practices of the Eastern Church and the Greek notion of *kenosis* (‘self-emptying’) that can release us from selfishness and manipulative pride so that we can treat others in loving and tender ways. And, although his conception of historical recovery is more nuanced and stripped of its religious context, there is an analogous theme found in Heidegger’s later writings on *Gelassenheit* (‘letting-be’). Both of these notions cultivate an attitude of shared humility and moral rootedness that can help heal the wounds of the modern self.

Nihilism and Homelessness

The experience of homelessness in Heidegger and Dostoevsky is informed by the nihilistic mood that was washing over Europe in the mid to late nineteenth-century. Nietzsche famously refers to the predicament in terms of ‘God’s death,’ describing nihilism as the historical moment when “*the highest values devalue themselves*. The aim is lacking; ‘why?’ finds no answer” (1968, 2). Without God, there are no binding values or moral absolutes that we can turn to for guidance and inspiration. We are left in a situation where ‘everything is lawful.’ Among the intelligentsia

²It is important not to whitewash the ideas of ‘homeland’ and ‘recovery’ of indigenous values, especially in light of the anti-Semitism that is linked to both Heidegger and Dostoevsky. This kind of language has long been used to justify cultural racism against Jews as being overly cosmopolitan, materialistic, and rootless. The particular interpretation and critique of modernity I am forwarding, then, requires serious caution, particularly given Heidegger’s largely unapologetic allegiance to the Nazi Party, his infamous “*Blut und Boden*” infused Rectorial Address at Freiburg, and the possible evidence of more explicit anti-Semitic remarks with the release of his “Black Notebooks” (“*Schwarzen Hefte*”) from the 1930s to 1940s.

in Russia, this *fin-de-siècle* nihilism was viewed as a sign of progress, where secular reason, empirical science, and the laws of physics replaced superstition and religious dogma. But for figures like Dostoevsky, these newly imported values created an atmosphere of alienation and confusion for the Russian people. Indeed, all of Dostoevsky's mature (post-Siberian) works can be viewed as attacks on the younger generation of social reformers who were coming of age in the 1860s. He saw them as 'nihilists' for rejecting the traditional values of the Eastern Church and for attempting to re-engineer society on the basis of rational principles like utilitarianism and scientific determinism. By embracing these secular ideals, Dostoevsky saw a historical people being cut away from their indigenous roots, resulting in explosions of crime and mental anguish.

Many of Dostoevsky's major characters are incarnations of this suffering as they confront the ideology of the modern age. Without the authority of the Eastern Church to guide them, they are uprooted and lost, free to construct their own moralities. In *Crime and Punishment*, for example, Raskolnikov overhears a conversation in a bar and uses it to come up with his own theory to justify his murder of Alyona.

Kill her, take her money, dedicate it to serving mankind, to the general welfare. Well—what do you think—isn't this petty little crime effaced by thousands of good deeds? For one life, thousands of lives saved from ruin and collapse. One death and a hundred lives—there's arithmetic or you? (Dostoevsky 1968, 73)

But Raskolnikov's utilitarian calculus collides with the Christian values of self-sacrifice and brotherly love that he was raised with from childhood. He is torn apart by conflicting personalities, described as a man who is at once "magnanimous and kind . . . [but also] inhumanly cold and unfeeling to the point of inhumanity, as though he had two contradictory characters that keep changing places" (Dostoevsky 1968, 215; see Paris 2008, 86–89).

Similarly, when Ivan Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov* learns that his half-brother has committed suicide, he is driven insane by a sense of guilt that clashes with his own rationalistic worldview. "Conscience!" he tries to convince himself, "What is conscience? I make it up for myself. Why am I tormented by it? From the universal habit of mankind for seven thousand years. So let us give it up, and we shall be gods" (Dostoevsky 1957, 592). Dostoevsky describes these feelings of guilt as affective proof of God's presence, a presence that challenges Ivan to let go of his commitment to reason, to either accept the mystery of God or be destroyed by it.

God, in whom Ivan disbelieved, and His truth were gaining mastery over his heart, which still refused to submit. 'He'll either rise up in the light of truth, or . . . he'll perish in hate, revenging on himself and on everyone his having served a cause he does not believe in.' (1957, 594)

Although he is presented as being newly 'Europeanized,' Ivan's guilt as well as his concerns for ultimate questions regarding human suffering and the meaning of life illuminate a repressed longing for the supernatural and the sacred traditions of the Russian people (Paris 2008, 184).

Even *Notes from the Underground*, which is strikingly anti-Dostoevskian in that it contains no spiritual redemption or reference to the importance of God, captures the experience of modern egoism and homelessness that made it impossible for the underground man to act in tender and selfless ways and made him repellant to others. In the final chapter, he ruminates:

I was incapable of love, for, I repeat, with me loving meant tyrannizing and showing my moral superiority. I have never in my life been able to imagine any other sort of love, and have nowadays come to the point that sometimes thinking that love consists in the right—freely given by the beloved object—to tyrannize over her... Even in my underground dreams I did not imagine love except as a struggle. I began it always with hatred and ended it with moral subjugation, and afterwards I never knew what to do with the subjugated object. And what is there to wonder at in that, since I had succeeded in so corrupting myself... (Dostoevsky 2009, 93)

The underground man's view of love as a manipulative struggle for self-assertion is, of course, a tragic distortion of Dostoevsky's own views. And the story would certainly be read differently had it been published with what Dostoevsky called 'the essential idea' of the story. There was a penultimate chapter written that conveyed the importance of love, brotherhood, and "the necessity of faith in Christ," but censors removed the chapter before the book was published (Dostoevsky 1989, 191).

We see, then, that through the anguish of his major characters Dostoevsky is offering a powerful critique of the modern self as a rational, self-determined egoist. For Dostoevsky, such a view represents a kind of cultural depravity or sickness. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Father Zossima, speaking for Dostoevsky, explains:

All mankind in our age is split up into units. Man keeps apart, each in his own groove; each one holds aloof, hides himself and hides what he has, from the rest. He ends by being repelled by others and repelling them... For he is accustomed to rely upon himself alone and to cut himself off from the whole; he has trained himself not to believe in the help of others, in men and in humanity, and only trembles for fear he should lose his money and the privileges he has won for himself. Everywhere in these days men have ceased to understand that the true security is to be found in social solidarity rather than in isolated individual effort. But this terrible individualism must inevitably have an end, and all will suddenly understand how unnaturally they are separated from one another. (1957, 279)

This critique of 'terrible individualism' constitutes a decisive break with the existentialist tradition with which Dostoevsky and Heidegger are often associated. One of the central themes of existentialism is the idea that the primary aim in life is to be authentic, that is, to 'be true' to oneself *as an individual* in the face of meaninglessness and death. But the authentic self for Dostoevsky is not a solitary individual who heroically creates his own values against a nihilistic background. If authenticity has something to do with self-realization, Dostoevsky shows that this can happen only in relation to others and the communal values of a homeland, values that provide an enduring sense of what matters in life. It is, as Guignon writes, "an experience of the harmony of 'togetherness' or 'belongingness' expressed in the Russian word *sobornost*" (1993, xli). On this account, the existentialist view of the self as a voluntaristic subject does not address the modern experience of homelessness; it exacerbates it.

Dostoevsky's critique reflects Guignon's own interpretation of Heidegger. Guignon argues that the primary aim of *Being and Time* is to "combat the 'groundlessness' (*Bodenlosigkeit*) of the contemporary world by uncovering enduring values and meanings within the framework of 'worldliness' and human finitude" (1984, 322). But where Dostoevsky locates these values in the traditions of the Eastern Church, Heidegger's account is largely secularized. It is not a communal belief in God that places moral demands on us, but our 'historicality' (*Geschichtlichkeit*) in general, where this is understood as the horizon of cultural meanings that we have been 'thrown' into, a horizon that lays out certain possibilities for living and allows us to understand and make moral sense of our lives. The problem, for Heidegger, is that we tend to conform to the prevailing social norms and practices of 'the Anyone' (*das Man*), and this, in turn, covers over our 'heritage' (*Erbschaft*), that is, the historical sources from which our current self-understanding emerges. "The Anyone is the bearer and medium of these historical possibilities," writes Guignon, "But the current social world generally conveys this framework of understanding to us in the warped and distorted form of a 'tradition'" (1984, 335–336). This means, to the extent we are absorbed in *das Man*, we are closed off from the older wellsprings of value that can give our lives a sense of shared direction and purpose.

The tendency of modern life to distort and cover over our 'heritage' points to the importance of anxiety in Heidegger's early project because it has the power to shake us out of everydayness and bring us face to face with who we are as finite, historically situated beings. In this sense, anxiety places us before our own temporal constitution as a 'thrown project.' On the one hand, it discloses the fact that I am not an enduring, self-subsisting thing but a '*not yet*,' an unfinished way of being that, until death, is always pressing forward (or 'projecting') into future possibilities. On the other hand, it discloses the fact that I am already 'thrown' into a past, into a socio-cultural situation that opens up meaningful possibilities that I can take over as my life unfolds. This is why Heidegger says, "Dasein 'is' its past in the way of *its own Being*" (BT, 41/SZ, 20). It is this latter point that reveals Heidegger's commitment to the idea of belongingness and his own break with the existentialist tradition. Temporally, my existence does not just stretch forward as a finite 'being-toward-death.' It also stretches backward toward my 'birth,' toward my shared historical beginning. Death, then, is "just one of the ends by which Dasein's totality is closed around" (BT, 425/SZ, 373). The other end is the past.

The fact that I am thrown in this way means that the values and roles I choose are not ones that I alone create as a self-determined subject. They are appropriated from the past that has been laid out before me, and they matter to me because they matter to the historical community that I belong to. In this sense, Heidegger, like Dostoevsky, rejects the modern idea that the world is value-free and that it is up to me, as an individual, to create my own values out of this nihilistic predicament. Although we invariably lose sight of it in the course of everyday life, we are nonetheless already guided by a set of common values and a shared sense of right and wrong that belongs to our historical forbearers. Thus, "far from being 'subjectivistic or individualistic,' the vision of authenticity in *Being and Time* points toward a

communal sense of responsibility for realizing goals implicit at the dawn of Western history” (Guignon 1984, 337). Similarly, when Dostoevsky speaks of the need of Russians to “to return to their ‘native soil’, to the bosom, so to speak, of their mother earth,” he is referring to the indigenous values of the Eastern Church (Dostoevsky 1957, 632). As we will see later, this helps us get clear about what Heidegger means when he speaks of an authentic ‘retrieval’ or ‘repetition’ (*Wiederholung*) of the historical meanings of the past. He is referring to meanings that flow through the history of the West, which is why he says, “to understand history cannot mean anything else than to understand ourselves” (PS, 7/GA 19, 10–11).

We can better comprehend this notion of historical retrieval and how it can undermine the conception of the modern self by looking at the Greek idea of *kenosis* in the Eastern Church and at Heidegger’s interpretation of *Gelassenheit*. Both terms articulate a sense of historical recovery and offer ways to radically rethink the notion of human freedom in the sense of being ‘released’ or ‘freed from’ the willful self altogether.

Kenosis

In the Eastern Church, it could be argued that the view of the modern self is captured in the Russian word *samost* (‘egoism’). In *samost*, I see myself as a willful, self-determined subject, the master of my own nature who is always in conflict with others in an attempt to satisfy my own desires (Lossky 1976, 122). But Dostoevsky shows that a life based on the ceaseless struggle for mastery and self-affirmation is a sucker’s game. It is not an expression of freedom but of bondage and self-destruction. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, he writes:

The world has proclaimed the reign of freedom, especially of late, but what do we see in this freedom? Nothing but slavery and self-destruction! . . . Interpreting freedom as the multiplication and rapid satisfaction of desires, men distort their own natures, for many senseless and foolish desires and habits and ridiculous beliefs are thus fostered . . . [How] can a man shake off his habits, what can become of him if he is in such bondage to the habit of satisfying the innumerable desires he has created for himself? (Dostoevsky 1957, 289)

For Dostoevsky, genuine freedom has nothing to do with the willful satisfaction of needs and desires. As Guignon points out, such a view actually traps us in a self-defeating pattern because “every time we succeed in getting what we want, we have a feeling of emptiness, and that in turn creates a new craving for pleasure. The result is an endless cycle of pleasures followed by feelings of emptiness followed by frenzied attempts to feel pleasure” (Guignon 1993, xi). We are truly free only when we are *freed from* the bondage of our own desires. Thus, when Dostoevsky claims our self-affirmation ‘distorts [our] own nature,’ he is suggesting that the ego is itself the problem. True freedom emerges only when we can release or free ourselves from our own selfish desires. This occurs through an act of ‘self-emptying’ or *kenosis*—a term usually referring to Christ’s act of submission to extreme humiliation and suffering in order to obey God’s will (Guignon 1993, xxxvii). Dostoevsky sees the

kenotic way of life as one that emulates Christ as a historical archetype. Like his heroic character Alyosha Karamazov, it is rooted in a way of being that lets go of the ego in order to adopt an attitude of humility, self-sacrifice, and brotherly love. In this kenotic act, we not only detach ourselves from our own egoistic pursuits, we also radiate the image of Christ and rediscover the earthly flesh that binds us all together.

In recovering *kenosis*, Dostoevsky envisions a day when “a grand and simple-hearted unity might . . . become universal among the Russian people,” reminding us that we are not isolated and self-determined egos but beings bound together in *Imitatio Christi*, where “we are all responsible to all and for all” (1957, 278, 295). But how does this vision of freedom—as self-surrender—map onto Heidegger’s account? The answer is not so clear in *Being and Time*, which still echoes with voluntaristic themes of willful ‘decision’ and ‘resoluteness,’ but in his later reflections on *Gelassenheit*.

Gelassenheit

To the extent his program is focused on the ‘question of Being,’ Heidegger is not overly concerned with moral issues. But, like Dostoevsky, his critique of subjectivism plays a prominent role in his diagnosis of modernity not because it breeds selfishness and fills us with false pride but because it distorts an authentic relationship with Being. By placing the cognizing subject center stage, Heidegger believes Western philosophy has been reduced to metaphysics, a project focused on identifying the most abstract and universal properties—the essence or ‘Beingness’ (*Seiendheit*)—of beings. On this view, the human being, as *animal rationale* or *ego cogito*, becomes the first-ground of philosophy because we alone can isolate and represent the immutable properties of ‘*what is*,’ of beings. Yet, it is by focusing on beings and their respective essences that metaphysics has covered over the ontological difference between ‘Being’ and ‘beings.’ In short, it never engages Being *as such*.

Being, of course, is not to be understood as ‘*a being*’ or the essential properties of a being. It is the inexpressible ‘event’ (*Ereignis*) or ‘happening’ (*Geschehen*) that gives meaning to beings; it is that which lets beings reveal themselves *as* the very beings that they are. And, against the metaphysical view that asserts Being is always grounded and measured in reason, Heidegger makes it clear that it is fundamentally groundless. Being is an abyss, the enigmatic ‘Nothing’ that cannot be explained or captured in rational thinking. He writes:

Insofar as Being essentially comes to be as ground/reason, it has no ground/reason. However this is not because it founds itself, but because every foundation—even and especially self-founded ones—remain inappropriate to Being as ground/reason . . . Being: the *a*-byss. (PR, 111/GA 10, 184)

The proper way to gain access to the truth of Being, then, is not by reasoning about its ‘whatness,’ but through *Gelassenheit*, by ‘letting’ Being address us, letting it emerge and shine forth in the very way that it does. As soon as we try to explain

and impose reasons on the disclosive movement of Being, we fall out of its truth. Humans, on this view, are not the rational masters of Being; we are simple ‘mortals’ who belong to and have been appropriated by ‘the event.’ Here we can begin to see the importance of ‘recovering’ historical possibilities that have been covered over by the metaphysical tradition.

As commentators like John Caputo (1986) and Reiner Schürmann (1973) have made clear, Heidegger’s account of *Gelassenheit* is indebted to the work of the German mystic and theologian Meister Eckhart (1269–1327) who argues that ‘detachment’ (*Abgeschiedenheit*) from worldly things is the only way to become acquainted with God. As long as I remain attached—to ego, possessions, money, or others—I am preoccupied and scattered, always desiring ‘this or that’ thing. For Heidegger, the value of recovering the wisdom of ‘old masters’ like Eckhart is that they can teach us about the importance of ‘letting go’ of these desires and preoccupations, to become, in short, ‘Nothing.’ As Eckhart writes, “[He] who wishes to be this or that, [always] wishes to be something. But detachment on the other hand wishes to be nothing” (1958, 162; cited in Caputo 1986, 14). Detached from the will and from worldly things, the soul can now be receptive to ‘Nothing,’ and this ‘Nothing’ is God.

Heidegger appropriates Eckhart’s theme when he discusses the proper way to dwell in the truth of Being. Being, like Eckhart’s God, is ‘Nothing,’ and the enigmatic ‘Nothing’ can be experienced only when one is released from the *ego cogito* and the willful need to explain, objectify, and give reasons for Being. But Heidegger is not concerned with the language of morality or with arguing against the sinfulness of egoism (Caputo 1986, 174–175). He is concerned, rather, with how ‘willing’ has corrupted our capacity to think in general, where ‘thinking’ (*Denken*) is understood not in terms of calculative explanation but in terms of *being freed* from the need to give reasons and letting the enigmatic play of Being reveal itself on its own terms. In this sense, his critique of subjectivity is directed towards the metaphysical tradition itself, one that continues to regard the cognizing subject as the ground of philosophy because it alone can objectify and master Being. Here, the attitude Heidegger is cultivating is similar to that of the religious mystic. It embodies gratitude, awe, and humility in the face of mystery, and this humility is itself freeing because it releases us from our own prideful and egoistic concerns.

Many of Dostoevsky’s major characters—such as Raskolnikov, Ivan Karamazov, and the underground man—are incarnations of this lack of humility; they are educated, convinced of their own intelligence, and cynical about faith and mystery. And it is their privileging of reason and their reluctance to accept the enigma of God into their lives that torments them. This is why children play such a prominent role in Dostoevsky’s work. It is through their innocence and openness that we can find flashes of Christ-like wisdom because they accept the mystery of things and still possess the capacity for spontaneous acts of tenderness and self-sacrifice. Children have not yet been corrupted by the pride and egoism that plagues the modern self. This is why Dostoevsky claims “the soul [can be] healed by being with children” (1996, 61). And this may also reflect Heidegger’s own nostalgia for the simple ‘folk wisdom’ of the German peasant.

In his short essay, *Why do I Stay in the Provinces*, Heidegger gives an account of why he turned down the call for the prestigious chair of philosophy at Berlin (in 1931 and again in 1933) in order to stay close to his homeland in the southern Black Forest. For Heidegger, city-dwellers in Berlin are ‘floating [and] detached’ from the truth of Being; they are in a state of constant busyness and distraction, immersed in what he calls ‘idle talk’ (*Gerede*). In this state, we are always focused on the ‘newest and latest’ thing; the latest political scandal, technological gadget, or celebrity tryst. The bustle and distractibility of idle talk not only disburdens us from ever having to face the questions of our own existence; it also prevents us from quietly and humbly attending to Being, to the disclosive unfolding of what is near. The unlearned peasant, on the other hand, can sit still in silence and let what is near reveal itself. For Heidegger, this humble disposition maps onto his view of the ‘thinker.’ He writes:

[P]hilosophical work does not take its course like the aloof studies of some eccentric. It belongs right in the midst of the peasants’ work . . . When I sit with the peasants by the fire . . . we mostly say nothing at all. We smoke our pipes in silence. Now and again someone might say that the woodcutting in the forest is finishing up, that a marten broke into the henhouse last night, that one of the cows will probably calf in the morning, that someone’s uncle suffered a stroke, that the weather will soon “turn.” The inner relationship of my own work to the Black Forest and its people comes from a centuries-long and irreplaceable rootedness in the Alemannian-Swabian soil. (1981, 28)

Unlike city-dwellers who are ‘everywhere and nowhere,’ the peasant is rooted to the rhythms and values of a particular homeland, attuned to the “vast nearness of the presence [*Wesen*] of things” (Ibid.). In the quiet solitude of the mountains or the countryside, the peasant understands the value of humility, that he is not the master of Being, but only its shepherd, and the only way to the dwell in its truth is to attend to it and let it be.

But the question of what, exactly, the Black Forest peasant stands for remains unclear in Heidegger. Critics have pointed out that because his notion of *Gelassenheit* has been lifted from its religious context, it is difficult to see its moral relevance. What are the peasants attending to after all but to the abyssal unfolding of Being itself (Caputo 1986, 202, 246–247). For this reason, Heidegger’s conception of letting-go has been criticized for promoting a kind of ‘quietism’ that is empty of any ethical content, a concern that is especially troubling given Heidegger’s affair with Nazism. This is why reading Dostoevsky alongside Heidegger can be helpful. The idea of *kenosis* in the Eastern Church releases us from our own need for mastery and control and allows us to see that we already belong to the enigmatic plenum of Being. But this sense of belongingness places moral demands on us. It illuminates the fact that we are not isolated subjects invariably motivated by self-interest but beings that are mutually dependent on each other and bound together by shared values, values that can provide a sense of moral orientation in our lives. I want to suggest this idea lies at the heart of Guignon’s interpretation of Heidegger and provides a powerful response to the critics who claim his philosophy is morally vacuous.

In fleshing out Heidegger’s account of ‘authentic historicality,’ Guignon shows that our moral perspective is always rooted in the “stories and interpretations passed

down in our historical community” (Guignon 2006, 287). When we see someone acting in an overtly manipulative or selfish way, for instance, we usually respond spontaneously with a sense of outrage because this kind of behavior conflicts with values that emanate from the ‘stories and interpretation’ of our Greek and Judeo-Christian tradition, values we tacitly absorb in our everyday lives. As opposed to inauthentic Dasein who has forgotten its own heritage and simply drifts along in the latest fads and fashions of *das Man*, Guignon suggests authentic Dasein is shaken out of this tranquilized drift and is awakened to deeper possibilities for living, possibilities that flow out of a shared historical source. But, in Heidegger’s later writings, it is not only moods like anxiety that can awaken us to these possibilities; it is also through the meditative practice of *Gelassenheit*, of ‘letting-go’ of the modern need to master and control beings so that we can be open and receptive to older values and ways of living. This allows us to rethink Heidegger’s controversial notions of ‘choosing a hero,’ being ‘loyal to authority,’ and ‘generational struggle’ that come up in the penultimate section of *Being and Time*. Although these ideas may indeed reflect the jargon of Nazism and certainly echo some of themes in his infamous Rectoral Address in 1933, Guignon puts forth the possibility that there may be something far less sinister afoot. His interpretation illustrates how being authentic has little to do with the isolated individual who soberly faces death and creates his or her own values in the absence of God. It is true that authenticity involves a decisive and clear-sighted recognition of one’s own finitude (or ‘being-towards-death’), but it also involves an awareness of our enmeshment in a shared tradition, a tradition that provides us with a value-rich context of archetypal figures, myths, and stories that can help us to understand what a good life is.

Seen in this light, Eckhart’s notion of *Gelassenheit*, like the kenotic stories of Christ, serve as moral paradigms. Flowing out of a common wellspring in the West, both show how we can be freed from the idea of the self as an atomistic and willful subject that is always in conflict with others and be opened up to an awareness of our ‘co-Dasein,’ that is, our mutual dependency and rootedness in the shared values of a historical people. This awareness not only serves as a powerful corrective to the forlornness and egoism that torment characters like Raskolnikov, Ivan Karamazov, and the underground man. It also concretizes Heidegger’s idea of ‘choosing a hero.’ We can certainly choose, as Dostoevsky suggests we do, to model our lives after the image of Christ. But Guignon shows that there are any number of cultural heroes, both secular and religious, whose stories can be ‘retrieved’ and ‘repeated’ to teach us the values of self-sacrifice, humility, and obligation to others, from Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, to Mother Teresa, Helen Keller and Malcolm X (Guignon 2006, 287–288). These stories, taken together, help to constitute a background of meanings that we can draw on to create our own morally cohesive and structured life-story. Guignon’s point is that ‘narrativizing’ or ‘storyizing’ our lives in this way continually brings with it a moral dimension because the resolution of the story usually entails “the achievement of some good, taken as normative of our historical culture” (Guignon 2006, 289). In this sense, the great stories of our tradition radiate conceptions of goodness that invariably clash with the modern values of individualism and selfishness. This is why reading

Notes from the Underground can be such a jarring experience. The underground man is not the embodiment of a hero. His behavior brazenly conflicts with the normative qualities that have been transmitted through our culture as being good or praiseworthy. He is an anti-hero, ‘a sick man’ who has been “uprooted from the soil and has lost contact with the people” (Dostoevsky 2009, 11).

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Chapter 6

Authenticity, Duty, and Empathy in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

Michael E. Zimmerman

[T]he essence of my artistic vision is to try to formulate what constitutes the authentic human being, as contrasted to what I call the “android” (a metaphor) or reflex machine; that is, the creature which resembled a human, is human biologically yet lacks, really, a soul.

—Philip K. Dick (quoted in Rossi 2011, 62)

Therefore, without attachment, perform always the work that has to be done, for man attains to the highest by doing work without attachment.

—Bhagavad Gita, III, 19 (1973)

In 1968, Phillip K. Dick published *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (DADES), the basis for the influential film, *Blade Runner* (1982). Writing in the shadow of global anxiety about a coming nuclear holocaust, Dick draws on still-recent memories of Nazi racism and the then-active, anti-racist Civil Rights movement, in order to create a “future” world in which the technologies used to create an atomic war have also been turned to creating androids.¹ Initially designed as “freedom fighters” on off-world colonies, Nexus 6 androids are now seen as threatening their human masters, in part by calling into question assumptions about who is “authentically” human. Discriminated against because they (allegedly) lack empathy, renegade androids are hunted down and slain (retired) by bounty hunters like Rick Deckard who reinforce the “human” line. In DADES, Dick poses a series of questions about the nature and defining features of “authentic” human existence.

¹Noted literary critic Frederic Jameson writes: “Science Fiction is generally understood as the attempt to imagine unimaginable futures. But its deepest subject may in fact be our own historical present. The future of Dick’s novels renders our present historical by turning it into the past of a fantasized future, as in the most electrifying episodes of his books” (Jameson 2005b, 345).

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More than a rehearsal of past and present issues in science fiction garb, *DADES* also explores issues that may well arise in the future when advanced machines threaten to displace humankind (Kurzweil 2006; Zimmerman 2008).

While Dick has often been read as a postmodern writer, I argue that he should also be read as an existentialist, that is, a modernist deeply concerned about what it means to be human after what Nietzsche called the death of God and in the light of Sartre's existentialism.² As a mid-twentieth century literary modernist, Dick, like Yeats, T.S. Eliot, Joyce and others, was variably influenced by Jungian depth psychology, classical myth, Christian mysticism, and Eastern religions. In this essay, I venture into territory unfamiliar to me: reading a literary work, *DADES*, in the light of Martin Heidegger's understanding of authenticity in *Being and Time* (BT). In so doing, I will open up certain philosophical features of Dick's novel that have not been adequately addressed, and I will also reveal how Dick's fiction may be used to nuance and criticize features of Heidegger's concept of authenticity, especially as Heidegger deployed that concept to justify his support for National Socialism.

Authenticity in *DADES* and BT: A Sketch

DADES takes place on Earth some years after atomic war, World War Terminus (WWT). Most healthy people have left the badly damaged Earth for off-world colonies. Recently, Nexus 6 androids—automata in human form created from biological material—have become indistinguishable from humans, except that androids (allegedly) lack empathy and thus have no soul. Policeman Rick Deckard is tasked with retiring these androids if they flee to Earth from enslavement on off-world colonies.³ His newly developed empathy for androids, however, conflicts with his duty to retire them. *DADES* invites the reader to consider whether a bounty hunter whose job is to kill escaped nearly human slaves can be regarded as authentic.

DADES describes authenticity as having three interrelated modes: (1) being true to one's empathic humanity; (2) being genuine, the real thing; (3) doing one's higher duty, even if it apparently conflicts with one's empathic humanity. By awakening to his empathic humanity, Deckard attains authenticity and thus demonstrates that he is the real thing, a human being. Later, he attains a questionably more profound mode of authenticity when he embraces his duty to retire androids, even though he has empathy for them. While the fit between these three modes and Heidegger's notion of authenticity in BT is not perfect, it is nevertheless instructive. With Nazi Germany and the racist American south implicitly in the background, *DADES* reveals that failure of empathy allows systematic violence to be carried out in the name of authenticity against those regarded as different, other, *not* "real" members of the community.

²For a helpful recent survey of the philosophical aspects of Dick's work, see Critchley 2012.

³Ironically, Deckard must use a technological device, the Voigt-Kampff machine, to discriminate between genuine humans and phony ones, that is, androids.

Before examining DADES in more depth, let us first consider briefly the extent to which the three modes of authenticity in DADES overlap with BT's account of authenticity.

- (1) *Authenticity as being true to one's empathic human identity.* Although BT does not refer to human "identity," BT does indicate that the being of human *Dasein* is care (*Sorge*). Being human means caring about entities, whether they are things or people. Caring about itself, *Dasein* projects a future within which entities *matter* in one way or another. Always already being with others (*Mitsein*), *Dasein* can exhibit positive or deficient modes of caring, including empathy. Yet, apart from this brief mention, empathy does not figure prominently in BT. The meaning (intelligible structure) of *Dasein's* being is the three-fold structure of ecstatic temporality, which must undergo a profound transformation if *Dasein* is to exist authentically. Authentic temporality allows entities to matter to *Dasein* in a new way.

In DADES development of a soul proves to be necessary for empathy, but Heidegger avoids terms like soul, subject, subjectivity, and consciousness, because they are bound up with the theological and metaphysical traditions that he wants to deconstruct. Although the notion of communal being-with does play a prominent role in the second division of BT, critics have long maintained that overall BT lacks an adequate treatment and understanding of intersubjectivity, which is inextricably related to empathy. BT's meager account of these two phenomena provides a clue to why Heidegger made certain political choices. We will return to this issue later.

BT states that human *Dasein* becomes authentic by heeding the call of conscience, which summons *Dasein* to become what he or she already is, namely, finite and historically situated being-in-the-world, the temporal-historical "clearing" in which entities can be, in the sense of manifesting themselves in their intelligibility. The German for authenticity, *Eigentlichkeit*, contains *eigen*, which means "own" as in "my own," and *-lichkeit*, a suffix similar to the English "-ness." *Eigentlichkeit*, then, means "own-ness" or "owned-ness," as in owning myself or perhaps as in owning up to myself and to my finite, situated possibilities. Authentic *Dasein* discloses and responds to what a *particular* situation calls for, as in Aristotle's *phronesis*. If authenticity involves the decision to own my mortal openness, inauthenticity involves fleeing from that openness so as to become absorbed with entities showing up *within* that openness. From such inauthentic everydayness, *Dasein's* usual mode of existence, *Dasein* is summoned by conscience, but often ignores the call.⁴

In DADES conscience calls people to become the empathic beings that they ideally are. Mortality hovers over everything, insofar as individuals are being poisoned by fallout and humankind may be on the way to extinction. To own one's own empathic capacity, then, requires awakening from the moral and existential

⁴BT does not adequately distinguish between fallen everydayness and inauthenticity. Arguably, the latter is an intensified version of the former, provoked perhaps by *Angst* which threatens to reveal that *Dasein* is not a stable thing but rather no-thing, the clearing for the self-manifesting of things.

slumber into which people understandably flee in the dreadful circumstances depicted in DADES.

- (2) *Authenticity as genuineness.* In English, to say that something is authentic can mean that it is genuine, the real thing, not a forgery, as in “That painting is an authentic Rembrandt.” In everyday German, *eigentlich* (authentic) usually means “really” and “actually.” To describe something as “genuine,” Germans usually use terms such as *echt* and *wirklich*.⁵ Authenticity means being real rather than a mere appearance. If we say that a person is being phony, we usually mean that s/he is presenting him/herself in a way that conceals something that may be important, perhaps without even being aware of doing so.

This distinction shows up in BT’s account of falling everydayness. *Dasein* often believes that it is most real when up on the latest fads and gossip. In so doing, however, *Dasein* conceals its true “identity,” understood as finite openness for the self-manifesting (being) of entities. BT famously asserts that *Dasein*’s essence is its existence, that is, *Dasein* is not a pre-defined substance, but rather a possibility that has to be worked out in existing. In fallen everydayness, however, people virtually sleepwalk through life in a benumbed, tranquilized condition, as if they were not mortal and as if there were nothing significant at stake. Under such conditions, which prevail in the postwar California of DADES, empathy is scarce.

- (3) *Authenticity as becoming fully human by complying with higher duty.* In BT, authenticity is more than an individual affair. A people (*Volk*) can exist authentically only insofar as its members own up to the responsibility of creatively renewing its shared heritage, wherein “everything ‘good’ . . . lies” (Heidegger BT, 435/SZ, 383). For Heidegger, authentic communal existence informed by heritage constitutes the higher law that justifies carrying out the hard, even violent duties that must be performed to bring to fruition the hidden possibilities of heritage. Heidegger invests heritage with such overriding importance because the ancient Christian-Platonic table of values, which had assigned to people their appropriate place in the ordered and eternal cosmos, had collapsed.

DADES suggests that the third mode of authenticity involves fulfilling duty required by a higher law, which can trump individual empathy. Heidegger’s deontology differs from Kant’s. The latter claims that duty must be formulated as a

⁵The etymology of the English word “authentic” reveals that it contains both senses of authenticity: to accomplish through one’s own action, and genuine: “mid-14c., ‘authoritative,’ from O.Fr. *authentique* (13c., Mod.Fr. *authentique*) ‘authentic; canonical,’ and directly from M.L. *authenticus*, from Gk. *authentikos* ‘original, genuine, principal,’ from *authentēs* ‘one acting on one’s own authority,’ from *autos* ‘self’ (see *auto-*) + *hentes* ‘doer, being,’ from PIE **sene-* ‘to accomplish, achieve.’ Sense of ‘entitled to acceptance as factual’ is first recorded mid-14c. Traditionally (at least since the 18c.), *authentic* implies that the contents of the thing in question correspond to the facts and are not fictitious; *genuine* implies that the reputed author is the real one; though this distinction is not etymological and is not always now recognized” (Harper 2001).

maxim *universally* applicable to all rational agents, no matter what their particular circumstances. Heidegger's ontological deontology, in contrast, maintains that the capacity for disclosing the being (self-manifesting) of entities is necessary for *encountering* moral duty in the first place. Ontology precedes ethics. Moreover, if in fact human existence is always *historically situated*, searching for universal and timeless norms is misguided. Just as heritage changes from one culture and historical epoch to the next, so do corresponding duties.⁶

Whereas BT claims that renewing heritage provides the basis for such higher law, DADES depicts a world in which human heritage has been virtually eliminated, thereby undermining the possibility of genuine or authentic community. As we shall see, the character of Mercer points to a higher, cosmic duty, though apparently not mandated by God. Such duty demands that Deckard defend the boundary that segregates genuine humans from androids.

Setting the Stage: The “World” of DADES

After WWT, DADES informs us, the flat affect of many depressed, un-empathic people differs little from that of androids. To retain a shred of their humanity, people depend on three technical devices: the Penfield mood organ, the empathy box, and television. (Were Dick writing today, surely he would include the smart phone and social media.) The mood organ alters one's brain-mind so as to generate a wide variety of moods, thus offering a superior alternative to drugs. The second device is television, where, on one of the few remaining channels, talk show host Buster Friendly regales viewers with mindless banter for 23 hours a day. The third device is the empathy box, which lets users “fuse” empathically with the strange religious figure Wilbur Mercer and with everyone else simultaneously using the empathy box. Empathically fusing with Mercer reassures people that they are still human.

Another way of demonstrating one's human identity is to raise animals, something that empathy-lacking androids cannot do successfully. Because animals are very expensive—radioactive fallout has made most species extinct—owning one elevates one's social status. Financially constrained humans like bounty hunter Deckard settle for lifelike artificial animals while yearning for the real thing.⁷ Perhaps the best an android can dream of, as the title DADES suggests, is an electric sheep.

⁶One of Charles Guignon's contributions to Heidegger studies is showing the extent to which a version of Heidegger's communal view of authenticity can be applied to America's heritage, as for example when the U.S. Constitution has been creatively reinterpreted. Another of his contributions has been to note that BT does not successfully resolve the internal tension between a supposedly ahistorical, universal account of human existence, and an historically situated account that reflects the postwar crisis in philosophy, theology, and politics. On the latter issue, see Guignon 2004, 1983.

⁷Having an animal may also compensate for childlessness brought on by the decline in human fertility.

To help people survive on off-world colonies, the government gifts each immigrant with his or her own android. Owning one, so an advertisement announces, “duplicates the halcyon days of the pre-Civil War Southern states . . . For YOUR UNIQUE NEEDS, FOR YOU AND YOU ALONE . . . loyal, trouble-free . . .” (Dick 1996, 17–18). Because androids lack souls and thus have no empathy, retiring illegal androids is neither morally wrong nor a crime, but instead the duty of certain police officers, who earn a bounty for each android they retire.⁸

By emphasizing that only soul-dependent empathy distinguishes human from android, DADES seems intentionally to reference varieties of nineteenth and twentieth century white supremacy, according to which blacks and Jews were *not* genuinely or authentically human, because they lacked “souls.” A black or Jew might try to “pass” as white, but doing so was a criminal act in the Jim Crow South and in Germany under National Socialism. Nazi propagandists went to great lengths to persuade the German *Volk* that grave steps would have to be taken to allow Germany to win the battle against threatening swarms of human “vermin.”

But DADES depicts the status of androids more ambiguously than such analogies/parallels might suggest.⁹ At times, they are shown to be cold, insect-like, incapable of compassion, highly intelligent, and thus a real danger to humankind. Escaped androids use deception mainly to evade bounty hunters, rather than to deceive people “in a cruel way,” but there is one exception, as we will see. At other times, however, androids do seem to care about one other, thereby indicating the presence of at least some empathy.¹⁰

Dramatic Personae: The Three Main Characters of DADES

The issue of empathy shapes the lives of the three main characters, Rick Deckard, John Isidore, and Wilbur Mercer. Growing empathy for androids makes Deckard want to quit his job as an android bounty hunter. Depicted as ensnared in falling everydayness like everyone else, Deckard is shown as mainly concerned about his social status, which is lower than that of his animal-owning neighbor. On learning that he must retire several escaped androids, Deckard thinks of what sort of animal he could buy with all that bounty money that he could earn. Setting out to retire Luba

⁸In some ways the condition of being an escaped android resembles what Giorgio Agamben has called “bare life” (1998).

⁹In two important essays from the 1970s, Dick continues his effort to distinguish the android from the human. See Dick (1972) 1995a and (1976) 1995b.

¹⁰Literary critic Darko Suvin concludes that DADES is one of Dick’s “outright failures . . . with its underlying confusion between androids and wronged lower class as an inhuman menace” (1975, 20) This ambiguity is resolved in *Blade Runner*, the film based on DADES. In a famous scene, Roy Batty (*sic*) leader of the rebel androids, spares Deckard’s life, even though he had retired all of Batty’s friends and his lover. After this display of exceptional compassion, the dying Batty mourns that his extraordinary first-person experiences in space “will be lost, like tears in rain.”

Luft, who is rehearsing *The Magic Flute* with the San Francisco Opera Company, Deckard's "spirits brightened into optimism. And *into hungry, gleeful anticipation*" (Dick 1996, 96; my emphasis).

Unexpectedly, Luft's beautiful voice and clever banter serve as the call of conscience to evoke Deckard's empathy toward her. By remembering his forgotten empathy, he attains a measure of individual authenticity. Shortly before killing her, Deckard even performs an act of compassion toward Luft, to the disdain of his cynical partner. As a foretaste of his coming struggle, Deckard "perceived himself *sub specie aeternitas*, the form-destroyer called forth by what he heard and saw here. *Perhaps the better she functions as a singer, the more I am needed*" (Dick 1996, 99; my emphasis). Yet the conflicted Deckard also mutters that it was "insane" to kill such a talented singer and even wonders whether androids have souls (Dick 1996, 135).

The indiscriminately empathic John Isidore works as an electric pet technician (Dick 1996, 20). Turning off the TV before leaving for work, he is confronted by the all-penetrating silent void. This scene exemplifies BT's account of how *Angst*, the silent disclosure of *Dasein's* nothingness, deprives the world of its meaning.

Silence. It flashed from the woodwork and the walls; it smote him with an awful, total power, as if generated by a vast mill From the useless pole lamp in the living room it oozed out, meshing with the empty and wordless descent of itself from the fly-specked ceiling. [It was] as if it—the silence—meant to supplant all things tangible He had often felt its austere approach before; when it came, it burst in without subtlety, evidently unable to wait

He wondered, then, if the others who had remained on Earth experienced the void this way. Or was it peculiar to his peculiar biological identity, a freak generated by his inept sensory apparatus. (Dick 1996, 20)

Radioactive fallout has so impaired Isidore's intellect that he is officially labeled a "special," although he is often dismissed as a "chicken head." Isidore does use TV and the empathy box to escape the oppressive void, but he has a mutation that allows everything—including malfunctioning electric pets, spiders, and androids—to show up in ways that elicit his empathy. Isidore in short does not need the empathy box to feel empathy. If empathy is the measure of humanity, Isidore would be the most genuine human on Earth.¹¹ As Deckard's empathy grows, however, the reader may wonder which character is, in fact, more fully authentic and thus more fully human—the one who develops his empathy or the one who simply and unconsciously possesses it.

¹¹Isidore recalls Russian Orthodoxy's idea of the holy fool, exemplified by Alyosha, the third brother in Dostoevsky's novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Alyosha's innocent empathy and selfless compassion let him see through pretense, cant, and corruption, even in organized religion, although he suffers as a result. As George E. Otis explains, "Alyosha, the innocent lamb, hinges on his shoulders, the spiritual pain, epistemic nullity, existential confusion, and stoic resistance to spiritual presence, of members of his community" (2009, 43). Isidore is in a sense a fool because intellectual impairment prevents dualistic thinking that can justify mistreatment of Others.

Isidore invites escaped androids Pris, Roy Baty and his wife Irmgard to stay with him.¹² At one point, two of them pluck the legs off a spider, a rare creature. They do so out of curiosity, rather than from a desire to cause pain. Perhaps their brief—4 year—life span constricts their empathic and hence their moral development. For instance, children not yet able to put themselves in the position of the Other will sometimes harm insects and animals out of such curiosity. Isidore, however, is so shocked by the incident that he momentarily falls back into the “tomb world” of death, decay, and depression. He rallies when his new friends report that a bounty hunter is coming. Retaining empathy for his insensitive android friends, Isidore refuses to divulge their location to Deckard. Regarding the bounty hunter, Isidore exhibits less animosity than puzzlement: How could a person *do* such a thing?

Finally, and crucially, there is Wilbur Mercer. In an apparently God-forsaken world, Mercer is a spiritual teacher with whom people fuse emotionally and physically by using the empathy box. He plays a decisive role in reconciling Deckard’s empathy with his duty to slay androids. Like Sisyphus, or like Christ ascending to Golgotha, Mercer climbs to the top of a hill, only to fall back into the “tomb world” before returning to life, only to start climbing once again. Wilbur is occasionally pelted and hurt by stones, which can also wound people using the box.¹³ Empathy generated by fusion with Mercer generates among people a sense of union, but this does not lead them to challenge the possibly sinister postwar socio-political organization (Galvan 1997). Nor would the empathy box allow people to revitalize their specific human heritage, even if it had not been already destroyed by atomic war. Mercerism, then, cannot readily be squared with Heidegger’s aim of promoting authentic community grounded in rejuvenated heritage. Nevertheless, Mercer plays a pivotal role in resolving Deckard’s dilemma: How can he justify killing androids for whom he has developed such empathy?

Deckard’s Dilemma

Reawakened in his humanity by recognizing that androids deserved his empathy, Deckard becomes romantically involved with—and even considers marrying—the android, Rachael Rosen.¹⁴ Earlier in DADES, she is introduced as the niece of Elton Rosen, maker of Nexus 6 androids who is committed to creating ever more advanced models. Invited by Elton to test Rachael, Deckard reveals—after much effort—that she is an android. Later that day, after Rachel flies to Los Angeles to help him retire

¹²The name Pris is apparently an abbreviated version of Priscilla, meaning venerable or ancient. Roy Baty means “crazy king.” (*Blade Runner* plays off on this meaning in depicting Roy Batty (*sic*) as a charismatic and transgressive figure). The meaning of Irmgard is uncertain, though “war goddess” and “universal, complete” are suggested.

¹³That Mercer’s followers can share his wounds indicates that fusion with him can be as powerful as identification with Christ can be for those Christians who develop *stigmata*.

¹⁴In Hebrew, the name Rachael means “sheep.” Dick did not choose this name by chance.

the remaining three androids, she and Deckard make love. Rachael then informs Deckard that she had done so only so he would be dissuaded from retiring her android friends: Pris, Irmgard, and Roy Baty. Outraged that his empathy could allow him to be manipulated, Deckard opts to complete his bloody mission.

Outside the apartment building where the three escaped androids are hiding, Deckard encounters Isidore, who refuses to disclose their location.¹⁵ Inside, a figure suddenly emerges “from the shadows.” Deckard prepares to fire, but the figure purportedly turns out to be Mercer.

‘Am I outside Mercerism now?’ Rick said. ‘As the chickenhead said? Because of what I’m about to do in the next few minutes?’

Mercer said: ‘Mr. Isidore spoke for himself, not for me. What you are doing has to be done. I said that already.’ (Dick 1996, 220)

Earlier that day, Deckard had remarked that at least Mercer “didn’t have to do anything alien to him. He suffers but at least he isn’t required to violate his own identity” (178). Upon entering the empathy box, however, Deckard is confronted by the sorrowful Mercer.

‘I am your friend,’ the old man said. ‘But you must go on as if I did not exist. Can you understand that?’ He spread empty hands.

‘No,’ Rick said. ‘I can’t understand that. I need help.’

‘How can I save you,’ the old man said, ‘if I can’t save myself?’ He smiled. ‘Don’t you see? *There is no salvation?*’

‘Then what’s it for?’ Rick demanded. ‘What are you for?’

‘To show you,’ Wilbur Mercer said, ‘that you aren’t alone. I am here with you and always will be. Go and do your task, even though you know it’s wrong.’

‘Why?’ Rick said. ‘Why should I do it? I’ll quit my job and emigrate.’

The old man said: ‘You will be required to do wrong no matter where you go. It is the basic condition of life, to be required to violate your identity. At some time, every creature which lives must do so. It is the ultimate shadow, the defeat of creation; this is the curse at work, the curse that feeds on life. Everywhere in the universe.’ (Dick 1996, 178–179)

There are certain parallels here to *Bhagavad Gita*. As Arjuna the prince hesitates to lead his side in civil war against family and friends, Krishna—avatar of the god Vishnu—joins the troubled leader and tells him: “[W]ithout attachment, perform always the work that has to be done, for man attains to the highest by doing work without attachment” (*Bhagavad Gita* 1973, Chap. III, verse 19). DADES does not make clear whether Mercer is the avatar of a god, but like Krishna, Mercer does mysteriously show up to persuade Deckard to comply with the duty to slay androids, even though it is wrong to do so in terms of ordinary morality. What matters in life are not the fruits of one’s efforts, which lie out of one’s control, but rather one’s *intention* to fulfill one’s higher duty. Deckard may be violating his own identity as an empathic human by slaying androids, but many soldiers face the same issue when killing enemy combatants. Dehumanizing the enemy is a typical way for soldiers to carry out duties that would revolt them in civilian life. Deckard, however, is

¹⁵The name Isidore means gift of Isis, the Egyptian goddess with special concern for slaves, the unfortunate, etc.

challenged to slay androids that/whom he no longer dismisses as subhuman slaves, but rather as beings deserving his empathy. This is no easy task.

Having retired six androids in 1 day, Deckard knows that he and his wife Iran will “have enough money for once” (DADES, 224).¹⁶ Moments later, however, he thinks: “I’m a scourge, like famine or plague. Where I go the ancient curse follows. As Mercer said, I’m required to do wrong. Everything I’ve done has been wrong from the start” (Dick 1996, 225). Distraught and exhausted, he flies to the desolate Oregon countryside, where he remarks:

For Mercer everything is easy, [Deckard] thought, because Mercer accepts everything. Nothing is alien to him. But what I’ve done, he thought: that’s become alien to me. In fact everything about me has become unnatural. *I’ve become an unnatural self I’ve been defeated in some obscure way.* (Dick 1996, 230; my emphasis)

Why does Deckard feel “unnatural”? Because he has gone against his own conscience and human identity by retiring androids for which/whom he now has empathy? Yet, what could count as “natural” in the post-WWT era with its off-world colonies, specials, electric pets, intelligent androids, empathy boxes, and mood organs? As Deckard climbs a nearby hill, “a vague and almost hallucinatory pall hazed over his mind” (Dick 1996, 230). What follows, then, arises in part from his imagination. Standing on the edge of a cliff he is hit by a rock, which goads him onward. “Rolling upward, he thought, like the stones; I am doing what stones do, without volition. *Without it meaning anything*” (Dick 1996, 231; my emphasis).

Suddenly, Deckard discerns a shadowy figure in front of him: “‘Wilbur Mercer! Is that you?’ My god he realized; it’s my shadow. I have to get out of here, down off this hill” (231). Perhaps Deckard mistakes his own shadow for another person, but instead he may be encountering his dark side, projected outward as a shadowy Mercer. Earlier in DADES, “shadow” refers to negative and defeating phenomena. Upon returning to his hover car, however, Deckard opts for a third possibility: that he has fused with Mercer outside the empathy box and has thus *become* Mercer, immortal and even godlike. Evidently suffering from delusion and ego-inflation, Deckard’s moral qualms about slaying androids can now fall away for good. Indeed, he even expresses relief that there will be more of them to retire. Deckard here affirms himself as the form-destroying android slayer, who nevertheless can still retain his new empathy for androids. He will retire them out of duty, not in order to earn bounty money, although he will accept it. Freedom would seem to involve the affirmation of his cosmic necessity, *sub specie aeternitatis* even though Mercer’s cosmos is indifferent and without meaning. The specific *content* of Deckard’s duty, retiring androids to protect humans, is ultimately less important than the *fact* of embracing *as duty* the causal necessity at work through him. Deckard’s empathy has grown so much that—like Isidore—he even shows compassion even for an electric toad he finds in the Oregon wastelands.

¹⁶The unusual personal name “Iran” is derived from word *Aryan*, from Old Persian. That Iran shows up in the book’s opening scene is a clue that the book will reprise issues of racial superiority acted out by National Socialism.

Implications of the “Resolution” of Deckard’s Dilemma

In view of what has just been said, Mercer seems to be a positive force. Yet, DADES portrays him in ambiguous terms (Hayles 1999, 167–179). On the one hand, he generates empathy on the part of those joining him on his Sisyphean climb up the hill and his fall down. He encourages people to be kind to one another and to avoid killing, except when it comes to The Killers, who must be retired by men like Deckard who are capable of taking on hard duty. Mercer’s hard teaching—“There is no salvation”—is in part derived from his own personal/individual experience of suffering, which evokes empathy from those who fuse with him (Dick 1996, 178–179). Mercer admits to being a drunk, but he refuses to judge either himself or others. Like Isidore, Mercer is an empathic special¹⁷ but endowed with unusual powers.¹⁸ Indeed, some people say that Mercer isn’t even human, but instead “an archetypal entity sent from the stars, superimposed on our culture by a cosmic template” (Dick 1996, 69–70).

On the other hand, the narrator—whose reliability is questionable—describes Mercer in ways that suggest he is a government tool designed to control the human remnant. Consider the empathy boxes in which people fuse with Mercer. Some years after WWT, so we are told, the boxes simply showed up at everyone’s dwelling, presumably at the behest of the same government agency that continues to program and maintain them. As for Mercer’s command that “You shall kill only The Killers,” the narrator remarks:

[I]n Mercerism, as it evolved into a full theology, the concept of The Killers had grown *insidiously*. In Mercerism, an absolute evil plucked at the threadbare cloak of the tottering, ascending old man, but it was never clear who or what this evil presence was. . . . [A] Mercerite was free to locate the nebulous presence of The Killers wherever he saw fit. For Rick Deckard an escaped humanoid robot [android] . . . epitomized The Killers. (Dick 1996, 32; my emphasis)

The “grave effect” of a sinister Mercerism may include justifying Deckard’s duty to retire androids despite his growing resistance to so doing.

Because the reader is uncertain of Mercer’s identity, fraud or cosmic archetype, the significance of Deckard’s embrace of duty is equally difficult to determine. If we assume for argument’s sake that Mercer is more than a willing political instrument, he honors two possible ways of being authentically human. The first way involves recovering one’s empathic humanity. Isidore is perhaps the most empathic human, but Mercer knows that Isidore the special is the exception. Even before WWT, people had little spontaneous empathy. The second way of being authentic is exemplified by Deckard, who heeds Mercer’s summons to see things as they really are in this dark, indifferent, even menacing world. Innocent, unblemished empathy is impossible except for the very few, who are ineffective at sustaining

¹⁷Christopher A. Sims (2009) examines DADES via Heidegger’s concept of modern technology.

¹⁸Mercer’s powers may also be understood in part as manifestations of what C.G. Jung called the collective unconscious.

this bruising world. Sometimes people with awakened empathy must betray their identity, their individual authenticity. In compensation, they experience an elevated mode of existence that is aligned with cosmic necessity.

After encountering the phantom Mercer on the hill, Deckard hears that Mercer may be a fake. Deckard replies: “[M]ercer isn’t a fake . . . *Unless reality is a fake*” (Dick 1996, 234; my emphasis). As noted earlier, the line between genuine and fake, truth and mere appearance, natural and unnatural, is difficult to determine in DADES, as in so much of Dick’s fiction.¹⁹ Hours earlier, Buster Friendly (who himself turns out to be an android!) revealed to his TV audience that Mercer is a bit-part movie actor hired to be filmed trudging up a fabricated hill inside an old movie studio. People off-camera threw fake stones at him. Buster claims that Mercerism is dangerous because its purportedly fuses many people into a single entity “which is manageable by the so-called telepathic voice of ‘Mercer.’” “Mark that. An ambitious politically indeed would-be Hitler could . . .” Here, Buster’s voice breaks off in the text (Dick 1996, 209).

By referencing Hitler, DADES questions the status of Deckard’s resolution to his existential crisis. Earlier described as “insidious,” Mercerism could be—at least in part—a political scheme aimed at reinforcing the human/android division, and at persuading conscience-stricken bounty hunters to obey an allegedly higher duty.²⁰ Dick’s 1968 readers could readily recall that many Nazi leaders claimed that higher duty justified otherwise murderous deeds.²¹ Heinrich Himmler, SS *Reichsführer*, military commander, and a leading member of the Nazi Party always had a copy of the *Bhagavad Gita* at his disposal. He admired *Gita*’s teaching that one should do one’s duty—however terrible—without attachment.²² Adolf Eichmann, tried and

¹⁹In “The Android and the Human,” Dick writes: “But I have never had a high regard for what is generally called ‘reality.’ Reality, to me, is not so much something that you perceive, but something you make. You create it more rapidly than it creates you” (1995a, 205).

²⁰Another celebrated 1960s novel, John le Carré’s *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* ([1963] 2012), chillingly describes how a British Cold War spy was called on to betray not only his individual morality and empathy, but also the democratic values he was supposedly defending.

²¹Partly in response to attempts by Nazi officials to exonerate themselves by appealing to higher duty, the U.N. adopted the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948.

²²Himmler made the following remarks to SS leaders in Posten, Poland in 1943: “I shall speak to you here with all frankness of a very serious subject. We shall now discuss it absolutely openly among ourselves, nevertheless we shall never speak of it in public. I mean the evacuation of the Jews, the extermination of the Jewish race. . . . It is one of those things that is easy to say. ‘The Jewish race is to be exterminated,’ says every Party member. ‘That’s clear, it’s part of our program, elimination of the Jews, extermination, right, we’ll do it.’ And then they all come along, the eighty million good Germans, and each one has his decent Jew. Of course the others are swine, but this one is a first-class Jew. Of all those who talk like this, not one has watched, not one has stood up to it. Most of you know what it means to see a hundred corpses lying together, five hundred, or a thousand. To have gone through this and yet—apart from a few exceptions, examples of human weakness—to have remained decent fellows, this is what has made us hard. This is a glorious page in our history that has never been written and shall never be written Altogether, however, we can say, that we have fulfilled this most difficult duty for the love of our people. And our spirit, our soul, our character has not suffered injury from it” (The History Place 2012; my emphases).

executed in Jerusalem in 1962–1963 for his role in carrying out the Holocaust, insisted that he was only “following orders.”²³ In her controversial book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Hannah Arendt wrote that the seemingly bland bureaucrat Eichmann instantiated the “banality of evil” (Arendt 1964). People do not have to be fanatics to take part in evils like genocide; instead, they need only to accept the legitimacy of their country and its ideal.²⁴

DADES even includes a version of the banality of evil. At first, Isidore imagines a bounty hunter to be like a Nazi storm trooper, or perhaps what a later generation would call a Terminator from the eponymous 1984 film:

[Isidore] had an indistinct, glimpsed darkly impression: of something merciless that carried a printed list and a gun, that moved machine-like through the flat, bureaucratic job of killing. A thing without emotions, or even a face; a thing that if killed got replaced immediately by another resembling it. And so on, until everyone real and alive had been shot. (Dick 1996, 158)

Later, Isidore encounters the real Deckard, about whom the narrator states: “Round face and hairless, smooth features; like a clerk in a bureaucratic office. Methodical but informal. Not demi-god in shape: not at all as Isidore had anticipated him” (Dick 1996, 218). Accounts and photographs of Eichmann show that this description would easily apply to him.

Earlier, we compared Mercer to Krishna, but Mercer’s claim that all creatures must violate their own identity also calls to mind St. Paul’s belief that the human fall has corrupted the whole of Creation. All people are sinners; none can avoid violating his or her original status as an innocent, beloved child of God. As St. Paul said about himself: “That which I hate, I do” (*Romans*, 7:17). No one merits salvation. Out of his inscrutable mercy God grants saving grace to some. From this perspective, whether or not Deckard continues to retire androids is irrelevant to his salvation. No matter what Deckard does, he is utterly sinful, incapable of achieving anything good apart from God. This issue is moot if the events of DADES take place in a Godless world. But, is the world of DADES Godless?

Dick was attracted to Gnosticism, which in the second century CE claimed that original sin is not responsible for evil and suffering in Creation. Instead, the fault

²³The United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was ratified in 1949 partly in response to Nazi claims that their particular circumstances justified genocide. Some acts against people cannot be excused under the guise of “following orders” (United Nations 2013).

²⁴Arendt’s critics insisted that Eichmann was an anti-Semitic fanatic, not merely a bureaucrat following orders. That Heidegger, Arendt’s mentor and former lover, had been a Nazi may have influenced her analysis.

After WWII, the Allies tried leading Nazis as war criminals. Some defendants complained that the proceedings amounted to justice imposed by the victors, but some acknowledged their moral culpability. Walther Funk, minister of economics, stated at his trial in 1946: “I signed the laws for the aryanization of Jewish property. Whether that makes me legally guilty or not, is another matter. But it makes me morally guilty, there is no doubt about that. I should have listened to my wife at the end. She said we’d be better off dropping the whole minister business and moving into a three-bedroom flat” (see Nazi Defendants in the Major War Criminal Trial in Nuremberg, <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/nuremberg/meetthedefendants.html>).

lies with the Biblical God, the incompetent and self deluded deity who made the world. Humans have forgotten their true origin in the God who is wholly other than Creation. His son Jesus Christ brings the *gnosis* that enables some to overcome their forgetting.²⁵ Most people, however, thrash about in hatred, animosity, craving, suspicion, and overriding ignorance, all of which contribute to WWT. The allegedly inferior God may be responsible for the end of the world.

Seen from a Gnostic perspective, Deckard represents man who, forgetting his true identity, betrays himself by killing for money and status. Three curious characters aid in recalling his identity: Luft the android, Isidore the special, and Mercer the alcoholic special. The true God may show up in unlikely guises. Whereas Mercer claims that there is no salvation, Gnostics insist that salvation is possible by reunion with the true God. Mercer's claim that there is no salvation may refer to what the defunct Biblical God once offered, but perhaps Mercer unwittingly points to or stands as evidence for the true, wholly other God. Of course, the God of the Gnostics may not exist either. With nihilism standing at the door, with God truly gone not merely hidden, the question arises: What is the point of Deckard's life? An existentialist might answer: To elect to carry out his duty, even if imposed by an indifferent universe, and even while having empathy for those that he must slay.

Christian theological issues played an important role in the formulation of BT. Heidegger accepted Luther's claim that the fall of man altered humanity's ontological fabric, thus perverting all human capacities, from intellect to will. According to Sean J. McGrath, in "The Facticity of Being God-Forsaken," Heidegger interpreted Luther to mean, that "The being of man as such is itself sin" (quoted in McGrath 2005, 283). With such considerations in mind, Heidegger sharply distinguished theology and philosophy. Theology seeks to articulate scripture's claim that only total surrender to God makes rebirth in God possible. Declining to take that path, philosophy stakes out a claim for its own activity: investigating the being of fallen, thrown, and God-forsaken human *Dasein*. In effect, philosophy is an instance of insurrection against God, but Lutheran theology depicts God as so wholly other that He seems to have abandoned us. From Luther's view of God as *Deus absconditus*, Gnosticism seems but a step away (Gillespie 2009; Lazier 2012).²⁶ It has been

²⁵The Gnostic and Platonic theme of *anamnesis* plays a key role in Dick's quasi-autobiographical novel *VALIS* (Dick 1981). Gnostic themes are present in much of contemporary sci-fi, including *The Matrix* film trilogy.

²⁶Luther's willful and inscrutable God so much resembled the God condemned by Gnosticism that the Reformation may have initiated a Gnostic return in modernity (Blumenberg 1985; O'Regan 2001) Some early modern Christians, faced with the Reformation claim that one is powerless to affect one's salvation, concluded that they should turn their energies toward mastering nature. Moderns call the results of such efforts progress, but Heidegger views the resulting techno-industrial culture as closing down *Dasein's* openness for being. For Heidegger, such ontological damnation would be worse than nuclear war (DT, 55–56). By sharply distinguishing human *Dasein* from other entities, however, Heidegger precluded the possibility of situating humankind within the universe as one of its projects, specifically, the one that allows the universe and its contents to manifest themselves. A version of this path was trod by Hegel and by others who share his developmental understanding of history.

demonstrated that BT contains Gnostic themes (Jonas 1952; Taubes 1954), but discussing their pertinence to the issue at hand would require a separate essay.

Love, empathy, mercy, compassion, and forgiveness are central to the New Testament, but BT leaves such concerns primarily to theology. Taking seriously the implications of Nietzsche's claim that God is dead, BT is concerned with a this-worldly, historical concept of authentic communal existence without reference to an eternal and transcendent deity. Some version of empathy is present when people unite to renew their heritage and to assume the sometimes harsh duties imposed thereby. It is striking, however, that neither in the case of individual authenticity, in which I resolve to exist as the mortal existence into which I have been "thrown," nor in the case of communal authenticity, does BT take seriously the Other and the stranger, toward whom the Biblical traditions call for compassion. This phenomenon makes few if any appearances in BT.

Heidegger recognized that taking the stand and steps needed to renew a people's heritage is fraught with danger, because *Dasein* is finite and inclined toward error. God-forsaken man, however, can do no other. He must take risks amidst trying and murky circumstances. If Luther's assessment that fallen man is completely deprived is right, however, decisions based on inevitably flawed human self-understanding would inevitably lead to calamity.

In 1933, Heidegger concluded that the only thing standing between German *Dasein* and nihilism, embodied in particular by Soviet Marxism's techno-industrial disclosure of entities, was Germany's heritage, which he believed could be renewed only by a National Socialism properly informed by his thought. He adopted Nazism's rhetoric of manly resoluteness and courage, traits deemed necessary to carry out hard duty. In such circumstances, a holy fool, someone with Isidore's universal empathy, would not have been tolerated for long. In supporting Hitler, Heidegger did not address the status of norms advocating a show of concern for the Others, those excluded from sharing in German heritage²⁷ (see Caputo 1993). Authentic communal existence in a God-forsaken world involved duties that trumped such considerations. Indeed, National Socialism called for renunciation of bourgeois subjectivity, empathy, and individualism as unmanly, vacillating, unable to carry out the difficult duties required for greatness.

Conclusion

As we have seen, DADES and BT have similar though not identical views about the first two modes of authenticity laid out in/described in BT. They agree that being authentic and thus being genuine requires that an individual become or own up to his or her humanity. For DADES, being human means having empathy, which requires not merely possessing a soul but developing it, as Deckard tries to do. For BT, being

²⁷At least Heidegger steered away from racial discourse about *Blut und Boden*.

human means to exist as the clearing in which entities can show up, especially in ways that matter to or concern us. People always already exist in a world with others. The possibility of empathy is mentioned, but underdeveloped in BT.

The third mode of authenticity is depicted by both DADES and BT as requiring embrace of higher duty that may conflict with one's individual attitudes and feelings. For Heidegger, such duty follows from a communal decision to revitalize heritage. No such heritage exists in DADES. Making empathy central for human identity, DADES has a spiritual teacher persuade Deckard that he can remain human even while violating his identity. The reader is left to decide the status of Mercer and thus the credibility of his teachings. We do know that Phillip K. Dick despised racism and Nazism, but rather than condemn them outright, he explores in DADES whether those called on to support state-organized oppression can from one perspective appear to be authentic, while from another appear to be agents of evil. In effect, DADES asks whether organized terror is merely the far end of the spectrum of humankind, which is forced to do wrong, whether because of original sin, ignorance of true origin, or necessity imposed by a Godless universe. Yes, Dick might say, condemn Nazis and other violent racists, but recognize our complicity in racism and other -isms that turn some people into unworthy Others against which/whom we can direct contempt, hatred, and violence.

While writing DADES, Dick surely had in mind the moral dilemmas faced by those who fought for the Allies in World War II, both ordinary soldiers as examined in a figure like Deckard, but also scientists responsible for the technology that enabled the killing. Consider J. Robert Oppenheimer and his colleagues, responsible for the atomic bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Working at Los Alamos, Oppenheimer was acutely aware of the personal moral issues involved in helping to invent such a fearsome weapon. Here is his postwar recollection of witnessing the first atomic blast at Alamogordo in spring 1945:

Few people laughed, few people cried, most people were silent. There floated through my mind a line from the *Bhagavad-Gita* in which Krishna is trying to persuade the Prince that he should do his duty: 'I am become Death, the shatterer of worlds.' (Quoted in Pais 2006, 44)

Had the Japanese won the war, would Oppenheimer have been tried as a war criminal and mass murderer? Did racism play a role in deciding to use the bombs against the Japanese? If humans are condemned to do violence against their own identity and against other people, how are we to make moral judgments against all those who have historically wreaked such violence or tolerated it? Is not empathy too weak an impediment to collective violence, especially if the latter is legitimated by an alleged higher duty? Yet, perhaps pacifism, the refusal to engage in violence, is empathy's ultimate answer to those who say one's higher duty is to kill. Here we may think of Martin Luther King, Jr., leader of the non-violent wing of the Civil Rights Movement, who was assassinated in the year DADES was published.

In a world where genocide, racism, and war are still present, and in which intelligent *non-human* beings may well appear in our midst sooner than we think, Dick's cautionary tale retains its pertinence. What does it mean to be an authentic

human being? When are we justified in excluding and even killing Others who are supposedly not genuinely human? To what extent can and should empathy challenge alleged duties that threaten great harm? Must we resign ourselves to the inevitability of evil and violence? Exploring such questions in DADES, Dick does not provide the reader with straightforward answers. Life, especially if we do live in a God-forsaken world, is complicated and painful.

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Part II
Phenomenology Reflection on the Sciences
and Technology

Chapter 7

Phenomenology of Value and the Value of Phenomenology

Benjamin Crowe

Introduction

One of the hallmarks of the tradition of existential phenomenology is the primacy given to the perspective of the personal subject and the careful attention paid to the fundamental questions that arise from this perspective. Rather than accepting a place as servant to the natural sciences, existentialist philosophers have continually urged that the naturalistic viewpoint of these sciences cannot capture the full range of concerns confronting the individual in her personal existence. Charles Guignon, particularly in his studies of Heidegger, has emphasized this point, and has long championed the orientation of the existentialist tradition as a valuable corrective to a strong naturalism that grants exclusive rights to the sciences in deciding philosophical questions. For example, in his important study, *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge*, Guignon writes:

Throughout his writings, Heidegger is concerned to show that the ‘scientific-technological’ mode of activity is severely limited in its possibilities, and that philosophy is consequently neither an ‘underlaborer’ nor a self-contained discipline, but is rather a crucial enterprise that can open a level of understanding that is in principle closed to the sciences. (1983, 183)

This essay has benefited from the comments and criticisms of many people. Here I would especially like to single out participants at the 2013 Southwest Seminar in Continental Philosophy (Texas A & M University), Mario Jorge de Carvalho, as well as his students and colleagues at the Faculdade Ciências Sociais e Humanas (Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal), the editors of this volume, and an anonymous reader.

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Guignon describes how the conception of the methods and tasks of philosophy articulated by Heidegger allows for a deeper appreciation of the fundamental question of personal existence, i.e., the question of the meaningfulness of life. Here, the term ‘meaningfulness’ is employed to capture a notion that includes more than just meaning, or intelligibility, including as well a sense of value, cohesiveness, and fundamental significance. On Guignon’s persuasive reading, when we abandon the assumption that naturalism captures everything that is philosophically important, we become alive to the complexity of how a human being, “in taking over public possibilities, [. . .] relates itself toward its own unique possibility of giving its life a meaning *as a whole*” (1983, 184). In an influential reading of Heidegger, Guignon goes on to assert that the key to a meaningful life in this sense lies in appropriating existential possibilities “in an integrated and coherent way” (1983, 135). Elsewhere, Guignon stresses the limitations of a naturalistic perspective in psychotherapeutic contexts, where many existing theories fail to fully capture the complex texture of meaning involved in such deep personal interactions (2006, 269). Indeed, the modern technological civilization spawned by naturalism is responsible for many of the existential problems faced by men and women in the first place. Guignon’s work reminds us that we can look outside of the dominant naturalism to find a philosophical tradition that responds more deeply to the question of how to live a meaningful life.

My aim in this essay is to build on this important contribution by considering Edmund Husserl’s discussions of the meaningfulness of life. While universally recognized as an important influence on the existentialist tradition in twentieth-century philosophy, Husserl’s own engagement with the question of the meaningfulness of life has received little discussion. This neglect comes despite the fact that Husserl’s criticisms of naturalism influenced generations of thinkers in the existentialist tradition, including Heidegger, whose criticisms of the technological age can be seen as continuous in many ways with Husserl’s earlier concerns.

Largely influenced by a close engagement with the so-called “popular” writings of J.G. Fichte (1762–1814), Husserl articulates a conception of the meaningfulness of life that attempts to balance the unity or coherence of the personality with richness of content. Yet, in his typical manner, Husserl expounds these ideas by employing his trademark phenomenological methodology. Convinced that the naturalistic worldview that had begun to dominate German-speaking philosophy in the late nineteenth century made the possibility of a meaningful life virtually unintelligible, Husserl deploys the technique of the “phenomenological reduction” to focus in on the structures of human agency, paying particular attention to the phenomenon of “motivation,” to the role of meaning in general (*Sinn*) in shaping our practical engagements with the world, and to our capacity to take a position regarding our lives as a whole. The outcome is a typically rich account of what it means to be a person that renders intelligible the possibility of a meaningful life.

Husserl's Fichtean Meditations

There are extensive discussions of ethics, value theory, social theory, philosophy of religion, and related domains scattered across Husserl's vast corpus. One recurring theme in many of these neglected writings is the question of how a meaningful life can be formed. The nature of the source material is such that many of Husserl's reflections on this topic remain inchoate, and even the most developed must still be considered to be incomplete.¹ This state of affairs no doubt explains the fact that Husserl's practical philosophy and value theory remain much less analyzed than other areas of his thought. The situation also requires that a choice be made about the entry point into this fascinating body of fragments. One place to begin considering what Husserl has to say about the meaningfulness of life is with a series of public addresses that he gave to *Reichswehr* veterans on several occasions in 1917 and 1918, entitled "Fichte's Ideal of Humanity" (Hu XXV, 267–293). Husserl's close engagement with Fichte's thought marks something of a new period in his theorizing about practical issues. Previously, his focus had been primarily on (1) defending a robustly realist and cognitivist moral theory in the tradition of Bolzano and Brentano against skepticism, and (2) working out the formal disciplines for practical rationality.² These concerns certainly did not vanish from Husserl's work after 1914, but a new set of themes nevertheless emerges as being central to his project in practical philosophy. In particular, Husserl's opposition to a certain version of naturalism, one that privileges the impersonal, objective perspective of the sciences, remains as a crucial piece of his thinking right through till the end.

Indeed, in "Fichte's Ideal of Humanity," Husserl maintains that the questions posed by the "extremity [*Not*] and death" of World War I (in which several of his most promising students, as well as his own son, were killed) have served to increase a vague sense of dissatisfaction with the then-prevalent naturalism (Hu XXV, 268–269). The quite straightforward idea seems to be that the "exact" sciences (e.g., physics and chemistry), however good they might be at answering certain questions, are unable to address questions about the meaning and value of life, "questions to which no person can be indifferent, because the position one takes on them is decisive for the dignity [*Würde*] of genuine humanity" (Hu XXV, 270). Husserl argues that Fichte, whose radical idealism is the virtual antithesis of *fin-de-siecle* naturalism, is worth giving a hearing to, despite the seeming lack of fit between his basic philosophical approach and the temper of the age (Hu XXV, 270–271). For Husserl, Fichte is above all a thinker who had the intellectual resources to begin to address deep questions whose answers are "definitive of life, and which can and must be decisive for the highest goal-setting of personal life" (Hu XXV, 271).

¹For an overview of these sources, see Ulrich Melle 1991.

²By far the most lengthy treatment of both of these sets of issues is given in lectures three times, in 1908/1909, 1911, and 1914, collected in Hu XXVIII. For a helpful discussion that situates this phase of Husserl's practical philosophy see the editor's introduction to this volume by Ulrich Melle (Hu XXVIII, xiii–xlix).

Husserl's assessment of Fichte's philosophical promise is rooted in Fichte's famous insistence on the "primacy of practical reason." Whatever the precise thesis that Fichte is taken to defend, it is absolutely clear (as it was to Husserl) that the perspective of the personal agent is, in some sense, the basis upon which the entire edifice of his system is constructed. The manner in which Husserl tries to articulate what this perspective involves, quite aside from whether it captures Fichte's primary concerns, is revealing of his own (i.e., Husserl's) conception of the nature of agency. He writes, "Being a subject is *eo ipso* having a history, a development; being a subject is not merely acting, but necessarily also progressing from action to action, from a result of [previous] action, to a present action, to a new result. It belongs to the essence of acting that it is directed toward a goal" (Hu XXV, 275).

In other words, human action is *historical* (that is, it is spread out across time) and *teleological* (that is, it is ordered to ends). What is valuable about Fichte's thought, in Husserl's mind, is that Fichte insists on not subordinating the historical, teleologically-oriented agent to the world of objects and things. Indeed, for Husserl, the conception of agency sketched above has implications for both how we should conceive of a meaningful life and for the sort of philosophical perspective that can be expected to furnish us with a proper analysis of such a life. Husserl is not particularly direct about what these implications are in this text; part of the aim of the present essay is to show just how he develops them elsewhere. However, what he does say here provides some orientation for this reconstruction.

Husserl observes how, on Fichte's view, the series of goals or ends that gives direction to human agency cannot be "unconnected [*zusammenhanglos*]," or else the life that they constitute cannot be said to belong to an "I" in a sufficiently deep sense (Hu XXV, 275). That is to say, a human life does not merely occupy a stretch of time between birth and death, but rather *belongs* to a particular individual in a distinctive way. This feature, in turn, is expressed in the way goals and projects originate with a person as an agent and shape action. Another part of what Husserl is trying to articulate here is that human agency involves a capacity to have some perspective on life as a whole or as an interconnected totality. For a life to belong to an "I," there must be some capacity to survey distinct goals and projects and to grasp how they are linked with one another beyond just their temporal ordering. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger coins several terms to attempt to capture these uniquely human dimensions of agency: (1) *Jemeinigkeit*, which Macquarrie and Robinson render as "mineness," and which captures how life is "mine" at any particular time, and (2) *Geschichtlichkeit*, usually translated "historicality," and which Guignon helpfully glosses as a kind of narrative coherence or integrity (1983, 135). Without arguing for the claim, Husserl thinks that the structure of our agency straightforwardly implies that the most valuable life that a person can lead is one that meets two conditions. First of all, it is maximally unified; in such a life, "[e]ach goal is a *telos*, but all goals most cohere [*zusammenhängen*] in a unity of a *telos* [...]" (Hu XXV, 275). Second, what furnishes this unification must be an end of supreme or unsurpassed value, "[a]nd that can only be the highest moral end [*Zweck*]" (Hu XXV, 275).

On Husserl's view, naturalism cannot gain a real purchase on the historical-teleological structure of agency, and thus cannot articulate the conditions of the most valuable kind of life. This is because, in giving epistemic priority to natural science, naturalism drops teleology as an explanatory principle. Whether or not this is a fair characterization, it is clear that Husserl thinks the failure of naturalism to address the existential questions of humanity brought on by horrific violence is virtually a foregone conclusion. Once again, this is why he finds Fichte's radical idealism intriguing. Indeed, he maintains that the ultimate payoff of the idealist system is that it renders intelligible a life characterized by "concentration" rather than diffusion, which, as shown above, is one of the conditions of a life being valuable (Hu XXV, 280).

The Structure of a Meaningful Life

If anything, the *pathos* found in Husserl's wartime reflections on Fichte only increases throughout the rest of his career. The sense of cultural crisis, rooted in the dominance of naturalism, is most famously articulated in his last major work, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. In a less well-known series of essays written for and published in the Japanese periodical *Kaizo*, Husserl picks up the thread of his wartime address, arguing that the primary shortcoming of naturalism is its failure to address the question of the meaning of life (1923). As he puts it in the first essay, "We have 'exact' natural sciences and through them a much-admired technology [*Technik*] of nature, which gave modern civilization its tremendous superiority, but which also, of course, brought much-lamented ill consequences in its wake" (Hu XXVII, 6). In an unpublished text from 1922/1923, sounding like an existentialist *avante la lettre*, Husserl dramatizes the plight of the individual searching for meaning in the face of the uncannily infinite universe disclosed by modern science (1997, 213–215).

In the same *Kaizo* essay, Husserl argues that what is required is a philosophical stance that does justice to the point of view of agency and its defining quality of "inwardness [*Innerlichkeit*]," i.e., the quality of being "related to an 'I' as to a centering pole of every individual act of consciousness, through which these acts stand in nexuses [*Zusammenhänge*] of 'motivation'" (Hu XXVII, 8). At its core, human agency entails a capacity for "self-reflection [*Selbstbetrachtung*]." In this piece, the most important thing that this capacity entails is the ability to take a stance regarding one's life as a whole. This capacity grounds acts of "self-knowledge, self-evaluation, and practical self-determination (willing oneself [*Selbstwillung*] and giving shape to the self [*Selbstgestaltung*])" (Hu XXVII, 23). That is, the capacity for adopting a sort of synoptic perspective on one's life means that life *as a whole* can be given "shape" or structure in a deliberate way.

As in the address on Fichte, Husserl considers agency to be fundamentally teleological (Hu XXVII, 24–25; 97–100). This means that the structure of self-reflection is, broadly instrumentalist; in representing our lives as a whole to

ourselves, we are looking for some *point* or *end* at which the whole is driving, and to which we can order our more local goals. The simple point is that the capacity for self-reflection entails that we can represent to ourselves what it would be like for our lives as a whole to be satisfying or not (1997, 209; 210–212). Whether or not we grasp the underlying structure of human agency, we can all make sense of questions like “[h]ow can I avoid both self-censure and that of others; how do I become good and, as a good person, give shape to a good, satisfying life?” (Hu XXVII, 212). To then go on to frame an answer to these questions, we must, according to Husserl, posit some end or goal for our lives as a whole which they can succeed or fail to realize (Hu XXVII, 26–27). While we both can and should value many different kinds of things, what is ultimately at issue for us, given the capacity for synoptic self-reflection described above, is what we value “from the innermost center of the personality – ‘with all the soul,’” of something “which inseparably belongs to me as who I am” (Hu XXVII, 28).

For Husserl, any recognizably human life, even a “naïve, natural life,” has this kind of teleological structure. Of course, in the “naïve, natural” case, one is in some sense passive about what the ends are; the goals that shape a life are set by the moment, and there is no genuine sense of “self-continuity [*Selbsterhaltung*],” much less of “self-regulation [*Selbstregelung*]” in any but the most attenuated sense (Hu XXVII, 96). At the other extreme Husserl locates a life characterized by “self-legislation [*Selbstgesetzgebung*],” a life in which the end “is posited *from the inside* out, stretched across an entire life,” thus giving deliberate shape to that life (Hu XXVII, 96–97).

How we move from one extreme to the other is, to use Husserl’s terminology, an issue of “motivation,” i.e. of the connections between personality-constituting acts and between these acts and influences from abroad. Husserl’s account of this move will be explained in more detail below. What is clear at this point is that Husserl conceives of the most valuable life as one which has a unifying *point* or *meaning*. This meaning is grasped in an act of self-reflection, and it is deployed in further acts of self-reflection in governing the course of one’s life. It is also clear that Husserl regards the reigning philosophical naturalism of his day (which to some extent still prevails in our own time) as incapable of providing a satisfactory account of how such a life is possible.

Phenomenology and the Meaningfulness of Life

Both Husserl’s (1) conception of a meaningful life and (2) his dissatisfaction with naturalism are fairly clearly articulated in the more popular essays discussed in the preceding sections. What remains to be seen is the extent to which Husserl thinks that he can construct a more satisfying account of agency and of the genesis of a meaningful life. As has been pointed out regarding his life’s work as a whole, there is a sense in which Husserl’s account of agency and the conditions of a meaningful

life were left incomplete by him.³ Moreover, there is no one text that definitively sets forth all the crucial pieces of this account. In what follows, I draw on *Ideas II*, on texts from Husserl's literary estate on the lifeworld and narratives, and from the previously discussed *Kaizo* article to reconstruct what Husserl has to say by way of a fuller account of the meaningfulness of life.

In *Ideas II*, Husserl makes a distinction between the "natural attitude," which is that of our ordinary lives, and the "naturalistic attitude," which characterizes the practice of the "exact" sciences and which is given epistemic priority by philosophical naturalism. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to fully specify the nature of the latter; indeed, a considerable amount of Husserl's work after World War I is aimed at just such a complete characterization, as well as at clarifying the manner in which this attitude arises from the "natural" one. The culminating piece in this series of reflections is the account of the mathematization of nature and its relationship to the pre-theoretical lifeworld famously offered in *Crisis*. What I want to focus on here is what Husserl has to say in *Ideas II* by way of illuminating the differences between the naturalistic attitude and others. In particular, Husserl describes how the naturalistic attitude is something that has to be worked up to, i.e., it is phenomenologically *derivative*. What essentially characterizes the naturalistic attitude is that it is oriented towards reality considered "objectively," towards "nature" as a sort of value-neutral domain that is not relative to any particular perspective. This orientation is accomplished "by means of a kind of self-forgetfulness of the person I, a certain autonomy – whereby it proceeds illegitimately to absolutize its world, i.e., nature" (Husserl *Ideas II*, 193; translation modified).

Husserl's characterization, as well as his concerns about this tendency towards "absolutizing," are echoed (though of course without Husserl in mind) in Bernard Williams' famous criticisms of moral theories like utilitarianism for adopting the "point of view of the universe." In Williams' words, "The model is that I, as theorist, can occupy, if only temporarily and imperfectly, the point of view of the universe, and see everything from the outside, including myself and whatever moral or other dispositions, affections or projects, I may have; and from that outside view, I can assign to them a value" (1995, 169). But this is a "view from no point of view at all," a view "*sub specie aeternitatis*" which, "for most human purposes . . . is not a good *species* to view it under" (1995, 170; Williams and Smart 1973, 118). Like Williams, Husserl thinks that it is not the "point of view of the universe" or the "naturalistic attitude" from which we actually locate the meaningfulness of our lives; instead, this happens within what Husserl calls the "personalistic attitude," i.e., "the attitude we are always in when we live with one another, shake hands with one another in greeting, or are related to one another in love and aversion, in disposition and action, in discourse and discussion" (*Ideas II*, 192). The personalistic attitude is precisely the point of view of a real live agent, the point of view from which it makes sense to ask about the meaningfulness of life.

³The classic portrait of Husserl's system as incomplete is found in Maurice Natanson (1974). More recently, David W. Smith has downplayed this incompleteness and instead highlighted the systematic unity of Husserl's oeuvre (2007).

For Husserl, the key move to make in rendering a judicious account of these different attitudes is called the “phenomenological reduction.” This is a kind of abstraction, whereby a philosophical inquirer considers consciousness separate from its localization in physical nature (*Ideas II*, 187–188). This “shift of focus” is valuable in that it “makes us in general sensitive toward grasping the attitudes whose rank is equal to that of the natural attitude” (*Ideas II*, 189). The aforementioned personalistic attitude is just such an attitude, one that Husserl thinks is typically occluded by the tendency to give epistemic priority to the naturalistic attitude. What we find in the personalistic attitude is “*not nature in the sense of all the natural sciences*, but is, so to say, something *contrary to nature*” (*Ideas II*, 189). This exaggerated way of stating the results of the phenomenological reduction, and the suggestions of dualism that come with it, are not meant to be taken literally. Indeed, Husserl is clear that it is one and the same “I” that accomplishes the transitions between the different attitudes, and that the objective world of the scientist and the meaning-laden world of the person are in some sense the same world. Husserl’s point is rather that structures and relations can come into view when we engage the phenomenological reduction which are fundamentally different from the structures and relations characteristic of physical nature.

The most important feature of the personalistic attitude revealed by the reduction is intentionality. An intentional relation is fundamentally different from what Husserl calls a “real” or “real-causal” relation (*Ideas II*, 227). After all, an intentional relation can obtain with objects that do not exist, and so which do not exert any causal influence. Once this distinction is established, according to Husserl, we can study intentional relations on their own terms. Instead of causality, these relations are grounded in an intentional analogue that Husserl calls “motivation.” Husserl does not provide a clear definition of this central concept, but his subsequent discussion at least establishes that some distinction is operative here. In his example in §55, it is the experienced properties of an object, not its properly physical ones, that stimulate a person; that is, the “value-qualities” of a thing affect a person and lead to the initiation of goal-directed activity (*Ideas II*, 229).⁴

Husserl does not think that this complex (of world and mind) is somehow closed off to scientific investigation. His point is rather that it is possible to thematize intentionality and motivational structure without adopting the naturalistic attitude, and that doing so allows us to account for agency and moral personality “from the inside,” as it were. “The ‘because-so’ of motivation,” he observes in §56, “has a totally different sense than causality in the sense of nature. No causal research, no

⁴In §56, Husserl gives a different example to indicate the distinction between motivational and causal relations. In making judgments, we are concerned not with the causal connection between premise and conclusion, but rather with what Husserl calls the “motivation of reason” (*Ideas II*, 231). Later on in this same section, he gives yet another example: “I hear that a lion has broken loose, and I know a lion is a bloodthirsty animal, and *therefore* I am afraid to go out in the street. The servant meets his master, and because he acknowledges him as master, he greets him with deference. We make a note for ourselves on a memo pad about tomorrow’s schedule; the consciousness of the schedule in connection with the knowledge of our forgetfulness motivates the making of the note. In all these examples, the ‘motivational because’ appears” (*Ideas II*, 241).

matter how far-reaching, can improve the understanding which is ours when we have understood the motivation of a person" (*Ideas* II, 241).

Once the phenomenological reduction has been achieved, it is possible to see how the various kinds of actions that people engage in (from drawing inferences to navigating a novel social situation) are solicited by and guided toward *meanings*. "A drinking glass, a house, a spoon, a theater, temple, etc. *mean* something. And there is always a difference between seeing something as a thing and seeing it as a useful object, as a theater, temple, etc." (*Ideas* II, 250; emphasis added). Meanings, for Husserl, function as the basic units of intelligibility. They are not physical or spatio-temporal objects; as such, Husserl thinks that they do not fall under the proper thematic domain of the naturalistic attitude. The meanings that Husserl singles out in this discussion are ones that are constituted by certain "subject-correlates" that are also, insofar as they are fundamentally *practical*, at some distance from the naturalistic attitude. This part of Husserl's position might not necessarily fit well with a fuller appreciation of how the sciences that emerge from the naturalistic attitude are themselves practices. Still, the claim that science rests on a fundamentally contemplative stance is one with a venerable history and some inherent plausibility.⁵ Of course, an intelligible life is not yet necessarily a meaningful one, while a meaningful one must be intelligible. Meaningfulness requires more, as Husserl's previously discussed remarks on Fichte and the *Kaizo* essays indicate. Having more or less resolved to ignore the kinds of causal relations studied by the "exact" sciences, a philosopher like Husserl can now see a whole area of investigation, replete with subtle distinctions between different kinds of meanings. Crucially, all of these meanings are disclosed within the personalistic attitude; that is, they are all in some sense tied in to action. Understanding meanings and how they work is, for Husserl, the key to understanding what it is to be an agent.

What the phenomenological reduction allows one to do is to gain a richer, more direct appreciation for the sources of meaning upon which a person draws in forming a valuable or meaningful life for herself. These sources of meaning function as motivations (in the sense outlined above). While Husserl scarcely offers a one-size-fits-all formula for a meaningful life, what he does offer is a richer picture of the way in which such a life is constructed and the sources upon which it draws. The first source of meaning, already introduced previously, is the meaning of *things*. The richness and overall value of a person's life is deeply tied to the richness and value of the objects that populate a person's surroundings. In a text most likely from 1934, Husserl describes this domain as that of the "*surrounding world* [*Umwelt*]," the "'world' which the human being consciously inhabits, constituted as such for him as a human being, the world in which he is in the broadest sense *at home* [*heimisch*], which he shapes or would like to shape for himself as his home . . ." (Hu XXXIX, 154). This meaningful world is populated by objects of use, by artworks, and by symbols (*Ideas* II, 192). It includes even ideal entities, such as

⁵For an excellent discussion of this point (albeit in the context of Heidegger's phenomenology rather than Husserl's), see McManus 2012.

“the ‘world’ of mathematics” (*Ideas* II, 203). From the personalistic point of view, the meanings of things are not somehow additional entities that crowd our ontology, but rather permeate objects and play a key functional role in our commerce with the world (*Ideas* II, 248–249).

For example, in a text from 1925 on the lifeworld, Husserl describes how objects can take on the meaning of being “far” or “near” not in a spatio-temporal sense, but in a practical sense (Hu XXXIX, 145–146). That is, things can be tractable or not, familiar or not, conducive to our purposes or not. At the same time, these “distances” can expand and contract (Hu XXXIX, 154–155). There is the world in which we are at home, the world of “works” and of “things in various stages of being worked up” (Hu XXXIX, 324). At the far edges things take on the meaning of the “unknown,” of the “underground,” the “accidents of fate,” or even the “mythological” (Hu XXXIX, 156).

The second source of meaning, which overlaps with the first, is social. The practical distances that we experience are largely set against the background of an “idea of the normal [*Normalidee*],” a sense of how what I am experiencing now relates to what other people can or cannot experience (Hu XXXIX, 149). In a text from 1935, Husserl discusses how this domain of social meaning is built up in layers, from families, to groups of families gathered in a shared “homeworld,” to a much larger “commerce-world [*Verkehrswelt*]” of civil society (Hu XXXIX, 152).⁶ Furthermore, it is also part of the meaning of this shared world that it has a different “tone [*Stimmung*]” for each person who encounters it (Hu XXXIX, 155). In other words, part of the social meaning that things take on includes our sense of how other people view the world. We are at least tacitly aware of the world as having a variegated “history of freedom and unfreedom, of happiness and misfortune” (Hu XXXIX, 155).

This last observation leads us into the third source of meaning, namely, the interests and goals of individual people. In a 1934 text, Husserl describes how people are not only subjects of a public world, but also subjects of their lives, where “life” refers not to “a momentary life of the present [*Lebensgegenwart*], but rather life in the broadest horizon [. . .] *the life that is ‘granted’ to him or ‘imposed’ upon him in accordance with fate*” (Hu XXXIX, 154–155). As discussed previously, Husserl views being a subject of a life in this sense as something that is teleologically structured. A person is directed toward the “*totality of life* [*Lebensganzheit*]” with a view to “forming it in particular ways” (Hu XXXIX, 156). More concretely, a person “. . . establishes for himself ‘*life-goals*’ and sketches out a ‘method [*Methodik*]’ of active existence, rooted in an overview of life up till that point in its successes and failures, its satisfactions and dissatisfactions, etc.” (Hu XXXIX, 156). That is, being

⁶In texts from the early 1930s, Husserl employs a kind of anthropological thought experiment to reconstruct these layers and their relations to one another, namely, the history of hypothetical nomadic people (Hu XXXIX, 155, 330–331). His remarks occasionally take on political resonance in the context of the time, especially the “blood and soil” rhetoric of the *völkisch* right in the early 1930s. A nomadic people who leaves its original territory might, Husserl notes, be temporarily “homeless,” but they nevertheless comprise a unified “people [*Volk*]” (Hu XXXIX, 155).

a subject of life means employing practical rationality. Again, Husserl conceives of practical rationality in primarily instrumentalist terms. Thus, in a text from November 1933, he observes that a person's life "runs its course in interests, more or less already organized ends and systems of ends" (Hu XXXIX, 164). These range from local and particular ends, to those of a certain profession or social class, to "universal" interests such as science, classical monotheistic religion, and ethics (Hu XXXIX, 165).⁷ In another text, most likely written a year or so before this one, Husserl states his basic picture more directly: "*All experience of being active is interested*, is action in the interest of, toward goals, either in an immediate or mediated way" (Hu XXXIX, 307). The interests that give shape or structure to a life also tend to form clusters; for example, some cluster as "serious" interests, others as the kinds of interests at work in games or leisure (Hu XXXIX, 307–308).

Husserl also maintains that the sort of practical rationality characteristic of being the subject of a life involves a sense of what is practically possible. This includes what one is physically capable of doing, as well as what makes sense to do (as partly dictated by the social "idea of the normal" described above). Importantly, though, one's sense of what is practically possible is not limited to these features. There is also a stronger, more normative sense of practical possibility, which Husserl examines in some detail in *Ideas II*. There, he maintains that the source of this kind of normative constraint on my action flows from an ideal or non-empirical sense of who I really am. Over and above the meanings that things have in our shared world, the meaning of our lives depends upon this sense of the meaning that *I* have for myself.

Husserl sketches out a familiar case: "I could do it"—that is the neutrality modification of the action and the practical possibility derived from it. "Yet I could not do it" [. . .]; this action contradicts the kind of person I am, my way of letting myself be motivated (*Ideas II*, 277). By "neutrality modification," Husserl basically means imagination; thus, the case is one in which I can perfectly well depict to myself my doing something or other, as in a piece of autobiographical fiction. At the same time, I cannot *really* "see" myself doing it. According to Husserl, the constraint that I encounter here does not "*spring inductively from similar experiences of the corresponding action*" (*Ideas II*, 341). For instance, I might imaginatively project myself into a situation in which I face some sort of temptation. If I further envisage myself as resisting the temptation as something evil, I am not merely making an inference based on what I typically do (*Ideas II*, 341). Rather, Husserl suggests, I do this because I have some grasp on an *idea* of who I am (or anyway, of who I *want* to be).

Consider a slightly different example (borrowed from the Dennett-Frankfurt exchange on free will) that, I think, also captures what Husserl is trying to articulate. Supposedly, at the Diet of Worms in 1521, Luther famously told the assembled grandees "*Hier stehe ich, ich kann nicht anders.*" Luther did not mean that he was

⁷Husserl also describes in this text how "understanding" another person requires getting some grip on the more local goals characteristic of that person's social background. He notes how it is not necessarily possible to achieve a complete understanding; his example is of himself (a Moravian-born philosophy professor) trying to understand a traditional Prussian *Junker* (Hu XXXIX, 162–163).

physically incapable of walking out of the assembly hall, or of uttering the words they wanted to hear. Moreover, based on past experience of himself, he can only have concluded that walking away or saying what someone wanted to hear were both entirely within his power. Instead, we might suppose that Luther had some sense of himself that constrained him in this case. That is, he must have had some sense of what his life was all about that put a normative (not a causal) constraint on what seemed like a realistic practical possibility to him.

Returning now to Husserl's discussion in *Ideas* II, one can say that he is trying to articulate a further source of meaning that one encounters in giving shape to a life, over and above the meanings derived from things, from other people's points of view, or from one's more local interests. This source of meaning is the "self" in a deeper sense. Despite the way that this sounds, I do not think that Husserl is positing some mysterious faculty of insight into a hidden "true" self. In fact, Husserl reconstructs this source of meaning on the basis of two fairly evident facts about people, which are set into particular relief by the phenomenological reduction. These are, first, the fact that people have some capacity for surveying their lives as a whole, and second, the fact that our lives involve conflict and disappointment.

This reconstruction is carried out in one of the essays for *Kaizo*. Husserl describes how, as we form and pursue particular goals and interests, we run into a "struggle for existence" that is not simply biological, but rather concerns whether or not our lives as a whole will turn out to be valuable (Hu XXVII, 25). It is quite inevitable that, in exercising our agency in pursuit of our interests, we encounter "painful experiences of negation and doubt" (Hu XXVII, 25–26). For the most part, these put pressure on us to reevaluate what we are about and what we are doing (Hu XXVII, 30–31). Moreover, our capacity to take a position regarding the value of our lives as a whole brings with it a certain level of disquiet, to the extent that it naturally forces upon us questions not only about whether such and such is worth pursuing but also about whether our lives as a whole will turn out to have been worthwhile.

On Husserl's account, these combined pressures lead to the development of an *ideal*, of some wider or more encompassing notion of the self (Hu XXVII, 32). This self-conception is not only designed to survive more local disappointments, but it is also supposed to furnish us with some answer about how our lives on the whole should go. Provided that sufficient reflection is involved here, this ideal can come to form a kind of "mathematical limit," an "ideal of absolute personal perfection" (Hu XXVII, 33). Perhaps more prosaically, we can be said to form an idea of our better self. The worth that our lives as a whole come to possess is to be judged in relation to this idea. Husserl does not fill in the normative content of the "ideal of absolute personal perfection" here. That is not to say, however, that he thinks just *any* ideal would be satisfactory. As far back as his lectures on ethics from 1914, Husserl considers how the relations between different values that form the objects of different acts of will can be viewed as subject to consistency constraints that are roughly similar to the laws of logic. While he does not exhaustively specify these constraints, he does argue that a norm of maximal consistency, of roughly the form "do the best of all goods that are consistently attainable," constitutes a categorical imperative (Hu XXVIII, 126–153; see especially the formulation on p. 137).

In an interesting fragment from 1922 or 1923, Husserl goes on to describe how this source of meaning partly illuminates the importance that certain kinds of stories have for us. Specifically, Husserl thinks that we can account for the power of religious stories (such as the Gospels) when we consider how our sense of the worth of our lives is partly relative to the kind of “mathematical limit” described above. The Gospels, according to Husserl, depict a “domain [*Reich*] of perfect goods,” and foster a sense that “to be able to be this way would be blessedness” (Hu XXVII, 100). In a remark that helps to generalize these observations beyond the immediate context of religious stories, Husserl writes:

I read the Gospels like a novel, like a legend, I empathize [*fühle mich ein*], and I am filled with infinite love for this super-empirical shape, this incarnation of a pure idea, and am filled with blessedness to know that this infinite person is vitally related to me – and to the extent that this power streams forth from this ideal shape [*Idealgestalt*], it already has a reality for me, I believe in this idea, made individual by the legend, and it becomes a force in my life. (Hu XXVII, 100–101)

The power of religious narratives may not be matched perfectly by other sorts of stories, but Husserl’s point generalizes. Literary depiction gives shape to our conception of our better selves, and endows the latter with an attractive force that they might otherwise lack. Indeed, Husserl seems to think that such stories have an essential function to play in the formation of the most valuable sort of life. “What would a human being be,” he asks, “if he could not gaze upon people worthy of reverence, purely good people?” (Hu XXVII, 102). A person can only become the best that she can be “through that transfiguring love that re-composes [*umdichtet*] the beloved into an ideal” (Hu XXVII, 102).

Conclusion

What I hope to have shown in this essay is that, while certainly less familiar and less fully developed than other aspects of his work, Husserl’s reflections on the meaningfulness of life deserve consideration alongside those of his famous existentialist successors. As with many of Husserl’s most suggestive ideas, what he has to say about the meaningfulness of life certainly leaves a number of open questions. For one, does Husserl have anything more to offer by way of argument from the claim that human agency has a certain structure to the further claim that the most meaningful life must also look a certain way? For another, is the kind of consistency that Husserl champions always itself compatible with the most meaningful life? His considerations on the nature and function of narratives, for instance, invite questions about this prompted by famous literary characters whose consistency can become vicious (think of Dostoyevsky’s “Man from Underground”). Finally, what sort of consistency should one strive for in life? While rightly drawing attention to the centrality of practical rationality in shaping a meaningful life, Husserl seems to adopt a somewhat narrow model of practical rationality as purely instrumental, i.e., as structured by means-ends relations. But is it right to think of some of our

highest ends (e.g., virtue) as goals that can be achieved by way of instrumental reasoning?⁸ Wherever these questions might lead, Husserl's phenomenological approach remains a worthwhile path to pursue in the perennial effort to understand not only what it is like to live a human life, but also what it might be like to shape a life that is authentically meaningful.

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⁸For a different way of raising similar questions (about consistency and instrumental rationality), albeit with a different historical reference point, see Millgram 2011.

Chapter 8

Heidegger and Dilthey: Language, History, and Hermeneutics

Eric S. Nelson

Introduction

It is disputable how extensively the hermeneutically and historically oriented “life-philosophy” (*Lebensphilosophie*) of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) influenced Heidegger’s intellectual development in the period between the First World War and the publication of *Being and Time*. There is a strong thesis, proposed by Charles Guignon in his classic work *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge* (1983) and developed by Theodore Kisiel (1993, 313) and Charles Bambach (1995, 232), which maintains that a period of Heidegger’s thought in the early to mid-1920s was influenced by Dilthey’s interpretation of concepts such as hermeneutics, historicity, facticity, finitude, and generation to such an extent that an early draft of *Being and Time* has been described as a ‘Dilthey draft.’¹

A second more minimalistic interpretation suggests that the scope and depth of Dilthey’s impact is overstated. It emphasizes an intellectual formation shaped by other sources: modern German Scholasticism, the transcendental philosophy of his teachers—Heinrich Rickert’s neo-Kantianism and Edmund Husserl’s

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¹Compare Charles R. Bambach 1995, 232.

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phenomenology, and the general existential and life-philosophical intellectual climate of the post-war years found in contemporaries such as Karl Jaspers and Max Scheler.

A third interpretive middle path is indicated by Hans-Georg Gadamer, who stressed the importance of Count Paul Yorck von Wartenburg (1835–1897) in Heidegger’s reception of Dilthey (Gadamer 1994, 23). Yorck was the politically conservative, philosophically speculative, and pietistic Lutheran friend and correspondent of Dilthey from 1877 to 1897. Yorck’s conservative style of thought, which Heidegger was exposed to through the publication in 1923 of the Dilthey-Yorck correspondence, powerfully shaped Heidegger’s reading of Dilthey. Dilthey’s culturally and politically liberal and scientific orientation remained a stumbling block for Heidegger even during his most enthusiastic reception of Dilthey’s work (Gadamer 1994, 23).

Despite the cultural and political differences between Dilthey and Heidegger, Heidegger continued to draw on concepts and strategies from Dilthey’s works in *Being and Time*. The Yorckian character of Heidegger’s interpretation and use of Dilthey is evident in the revealing statement: “the preparatory existential and temporal analytic of Dasein is resolved to cultivate the spirit of Count Yorck in the service of Dilthey’s work” (BT, 383/SZ, 404). This distinction between “spirit” and “work” signals a cultural-political distance from Dilthey even as Heidegger saw the project of *Being and Time* as continuing Dilthey’s research. Dilthey introduced key concepts used by Heidegger and offered rich thick descriptive depictions of multiple dimensions of human existence that Heidegger sought to radicalize. But, as Heidegger maintained in *The Concept of Time* (1924), Dilthey’s work must be re-oriented in light of Yorck’s ontological critique of Dilthey’s philosophy as ultimately ontic, optical or ocularcentric, and positivistic.²

The hermeneutical tradition represented by Yorck, Heidegger, and Gadamer has distrusted Dilthey of suffering from the two sins of modernism: scientific “positivism” and individualistic and aesthetic “romanticism.” On the one hand, Dilthey’s epistemology is deemed scientific in accepting the priority of the empirical, the ontic, and consequently scientific inquiry into the physical, biological, and human worlds; on the other hand, his personalist ethos and Goethean humanism, and his pluralistic life- and worldview philosophy are considered excessively aesthetic, culturally liberal, relativistic, and subjective.³

This essay involves two tasks in response to this negative evaluation of Dilthey that has shaped our current understanding of his philosophical project; first, an interpretation of the issues at stake in Heidegger’s reception of and struggle with Dilthey. These issues touch upon language, historicity, and the nature of hermeneutics. Secondly, by pursuing this task, I hope to question and challenge the “overcoming” of Dilthey’s epistemic and life-philosophical hermeneutics in the “ontological” or “philosophical” hermeneutics of Heidegger.

²See part one of Heidegger 2011/GA 64.

³See Hans-Georg Gadamer 1985; 2004, 214.

Hermeneutics and the Question of Language

According to Guignon and Gadamer, as we have seen, Dilthey can be credited with motivating the introduction of the language of “hermeneutics” and associated terms into Heidegger’s early thought. But what is hermeneutics? “Hermeneutical” signifies, according to Guignon, “a holistic field of “internal relations” in which we find ourselves most originally as place-holders in a wider field of significance relations” (1983, 3). Meaning occurs only through an interconnected nexus or network (*Zusammenhang*) in which the particular is understood in relation to greater wholes and wholes through the particulars that constitute them. This of course is the most basic account of the “hermeneutical circle.”

One controversy in the reception of the early Heidegger is the role of language and interpretation in his thought: is Heidegger operating within the paradigm of the primacy of perception and consciousness or does he recognize their constant meditation through structural processes of meaning? Already in the lectures of the War Emergency Semester of 1919, published as *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, Heidegger articulated the interpretive character of intuition, perception, and understanding. He described there how perceptual and intellectual processes inherently involve the meaningfulness of linguistic mediation. Language is not a theoretical object added on to a separate non-linguistic subject; language is more primordially a practical life-context and medium (GA 56/57, 219-20).

In contrast to interpretations that deemphasize the role of language in Heidegger’s early thought, Guignon rightly notes the priority of language in *Being and Time*:

If we assume that the primordial roots and sources of our heritage are also embedded in language, then the authentically historical encounter with the world may still be seen as constituted by language.

At the deepest level, language is the medium in which the possibilities of understanding of the heritage are conveyed to us. It contains the sources and origins of our most primordial understanding of the world. As Heidegger says, “the essential is always handed over to the future as the authentic *heritage*.” We reach this deepest level of language by “*doing violence*” to common sense and by actually working through world-history in order to remember its disguised message. (1983, 143)

“Intuition” and perception are not direct unmediated ways of accessing the givenness of the world. Experience is already hermeneutical in being linguistically constituted and, furthermore, occurs within “the immanent historicity of life” (Heidegger TDP, 187/GA 56/57, 219). According to Guignon, Heidegger is committed to a constitutive view of language:

On the constitutive view, language generates and first makes possible our full-blown sense of the world. The constitutivist maintains that the mastery of the field of significance of a *world* (as opposed to, say, an animal’s dexterity in its natural environment) presupposes some prior mastery of the articulate structure of a language. The idea that one can first have a coherent and fully worked-out grasp of a totality-of-significations onto which a

totality-of-words is later mapped is on this view incoherent. Instead, words and world are seen as interwoven in such a way that to enter into one is simultaneously to master the other. (1983, 124)⁴

In addition to the generative character of language, another axis of nineteenth-century hermeneutics, the art of interpretation developed by Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey, is not lacking in *Being and Time*, as Guignon emphasized (1983, 3). There is even a remainder of what Dilthey understood as the primary task of psychological interpretation, self-reflection (*Selbst-Besinnung*), in Heidegger's early depiction of the interpretive self-reflection of the self about itself from the perspective of its own self-world (*Selbstwelt*) as well as in relation to others (*Mitwelt*) and the environing world (*Umwelt*).

While the early Heidegger rejected in the vein of Dilthey the appeal to a non-linguistic ahistorical idealistic or vitalist intuition, he also stressed how intellectual and conceptual categories arise from the movedness or motility of life. Whereas the hermeneutics of facticity is the recognition that it is life interpreting itself, this life is more mediated than the bare biological or intuitive life of vitalism. Life involves from the beginning the need born of a lack that compels it to interpret and conceptualize itself. Dilthey and Heidegger both critiqued the vulgar life-philosophy and vitalism prevalent in contemporary popular German culture.

The need for reflection and thought are not alien to life or imposed from outside of it. The vital human need to reflect springs from life itself and life and thought are intertwined from the beginning in what Dilthey called the "categories of life." Heidegger elucidates how life's very "categories can be understood only insofar as factual life itself is compelled to interpretation" (PIA, 66/GA 61, 86-88). Though concepts can do violence to life and its particularities, the self-articulation of life from and to itself need not be "an unwarranted forcing" or the arbitrary violence of what is external to life being imposed upon the immanent self-movedness of life (Heidegger PIA, 66/GA 61, 86-88).

Human existence is inevitably entangled in language and history even as it remains irreducible to being an expression or instantiation of a linguistic system or historical generation. In the lecture-course *Introduction to Phenomenological Research*, Heidegger depicts how existence occurs in and through words, and how language is essentially hermeneutical: "All the primal conditions of language are, for this reason, hermeneutical in their basic character—they are not meanings regarding the matter of a "thing" but instead concern existence itself" (IPR, 240/GA 17, 314-16).

In *Being and Time*, language is not explicitly introduced as an existential category until over a third of the way through the text. This led Taylor Carman to assert that language does not have the priority suggested by Guignon (Carman 2003, 221). However, the question of language is present from the opening query into the sense and meaning of the word being and the discussion of the Greek concept

⁴Compare, however, Taylor Carman's critical discussion in *Heidegger's Analytic: Interpretation, Discourse, and Authenticity in Being and Time* (2003, 221).

of *logos*. The language at stake throughout *Being and Time* is that of *logos*, rather than everyday discourse as *Rede*. *Logos* does not mean reason or logic here but interpolation and being addressed in the address; in hearing to and listening with the other and oneself.

As the later Heidegger insisted, the *logos* is more than a gathering into one; this gathering, as self-same yet non-identical, transpires between different voices rather than being their assimilation to a monistic *logos* of identity. Heidegger's understanding of *logos* is rooted in his earlier elucidations of Aristotle. In the *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, Heidegger notes how hearing is a genuine perception (*aesthesis*, ἀσθησις) that makes visible the being of the human being through the care and concern of listening to the human being's speaking. It is not the phonetic sound that is primary for Heidegger, despite Derrida's charge of phonocentrism, as: "There is phonetic speaking only because there is the possibility of discourse, just as there is acoustical hearing only because being-with-one-another is characterized originally as being-with in the sense of listening-to-one-another" (HCT 266/GA 20, 366-68).

The empirical ontic hearing of sounds presupposes the ontological possibility of listening to and hearkening to the other to the extent that even the deaf can still listen, hearken, and respond to others. More questionable than physiological deafness is the existential "deafness" of ordinary human beings to each other who hear but cannot listen or hearken. Such denial in the pathology of not listening characteristic of them (*das Man*) presupposes the possibility of a genuine listening to and encounter with the other: "Someone who genuinely cannot hear, as when we say of a man, 'he cannot hear' (where we do not mean that he is deaf), is still quite capable of hearkening . . ." (HCT 267/GA 20, 368-69).

These and related passages from the mid-1920s lecture courses are the setting for Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein*, his technical term for the taking place of human existence, as a fundamentally listening being in *Being and Time*. Heidegger's earlier and later understanding of *ethos* as dwelling in relation to the world, self, and others resonates in this context when he speaks of being dispositionally attuned in and through speech and silence. Ordinary in contrast with theoretical language does not primarily concern referential propositions spoken from a neutral perspective; it is intonation, modulation, and the "existential possibilities of attunement," in which one is attuned to others, which disclose existence (Heidegger BT, 157/SZ, 162).

Mood and attunement are made manifest and known in discursive language, and: "Listening is constitutive for discourse. And just as linguistic utterance is based on discourse, acoustic perception is based on hearing. Listening to . . . is the existential being-open of *Dasein* as being-with for the other" (BT, 157-58/SZ, 163). Heidegger returns to the hearkening summoning character of hearing in the early 1930s in *Being and Truth*: "This hearing the other, and at the same time, one another, is therefore no merely acoustic phenomenon; rather, it means hearing a summons, lending an ear to a wish, listening to an order, assignment, and so on" (BAT, 123/GA 36/37, 157-58).

Hearkening, Heidegger notes, is a more primordial happening than psychological-physiological hearing. Hearkening is not simply a recording of sounds; it "has

the mode of being of a hearing that understands” (BT, 158/SZ, 163). In this remark, we find evidence of the difference between a purely intuitive or perceptual understanding of hearing and a hermeneutical one in which hearing is constituted by interpretive understanding (*Verstehen*). Along with *Befindlichkeit* (attunement, disposition, mood) and *Rede* (discourse, speech), *Verstehen* is one of the three lived constituents or “*existentialia*” of the “there” (the *da*) of *Dasein* through which human existence is disclosed in its interpretedness: “*Dasein*’s “happening” also has a hermeneutic structure: the events that make up a life gain their sense only from the projected point of the life as a whole, and the possibilities of projection are always determined by the events of that life” (Guignon 1983, 93).

Levinas, and other commentators relying on philosophy of the body, see a betrayal of phenomenology in Heidegger’s purported intellectualizing of the senses and the body insofar as these are elucidated through the notion of interpretive understanding (*verstehen*) (BT, 157-58/SZ, 163).⁵ The clear distinction in the German language between interpretive understanding (*verstehen*) and the intellectual representational understanding associated with *Verstand*, and with Kantianism, is lacking in other languages such as English in which both are translated as “understanding.”

Heidegger’s critics on the issue of embodiment are correct that he did not embrace the body and senses as entities that exist independently from relational processes of the generation of meaning such as interpretive understanding, linguistic-historical mediation, and pragmatic relations with things. This criticism presupposes a questionable gulf between embodiment and the bodily senses and linguistic understanding and historical mediation. It is a disembodied body without context, insofar as it is problematically assumed that the “elemental” can be isolated from the pragmatic and that the senses and the body can be directly intuited outside of language and history. It consequently risks reducing interpretive hearkening and the understanding of being to the status of the proposition; that is, to the cognitivist and the conceptualist interpretations of meaning that the hermeneutical and pragmatist traditions have rightly challenged.

Heidegger carried out a hermeneutical and historical turn in phenomenology that differentiates his thinking from existentialism and the phenomenological movement (Guignon 1983, 4, 79). The interpretive turn that Heidegger adopted from Dilthey and ontologically transformed entails that humans are always in a situation where they are forced to interpret and reinterpret themselves, their moods and emotions, and their senses and body.

Charles Guignon (1984) has described how moods offer a sense of *Dasein* as a relational whole in Heidegger’s articulation of *Befindlichkeit*. Mood constitutes a background context for what does and does not count as significant and mood is not simply given but interpreted and potentially transformable in their relation to interpretive understanding and discourse.

⁵On the problematic of the body in Heidegger and his critics, see Kevin Aho 2009.

A philosopher should not just look, see, and describe, and assume that what is seen applies universally beyond the perspectival care (*Sorge*) that orients a world. Because intuition and perception already involve stratified interpretations and conceptions, the destructuring (*Destruktion*) of those strata is called for in order to encounter the phenomenon and begin to understand them anew for oneself. This interpretive relation to one's own "hermeneutical situation," in which even the most basic elements of the world and the self are encountered, entails possibilities of revision and renewal as well as indifferent repetition. The interpretive finitude of an existence entangled in words and historical contexts and conditions suggests a precarious game; still, its dangerousness does not mean that it can be avoided.

Life-Philosophy, Historical Life, and Worldview

In addition to language, hermeneutics, and historicity, Heidegger stresses in his earliest remarks concerning Dilthey the priority of the question of life, and particularly the being and reality of the life that poses this question to itself. Heidegger describes in "Wilhelm Dilthey's Research and the Struggle for a Historical Worldview" (1925) how this question of life and human life reflects a crisis in both knowledge and life itself. This crisis has shaken the sciences and ordinary life itself and created the conditions of a "struggle for a historical world view" (S, 148).

What distinguished Dilthey's conception of life from other conceptions was the threefold articulation of life in Dilthey's mature magnum opus *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences* (1910): (1) as experientially lived (*Erlebnis*), (2) as structured through and embodied in its expressions and objectifications (*Ausdruck*), and (3) as interpretively enacted and re-enacted in understanding (*verstehen*). All three modalities are fundamentally historical insofar as they encompass relations of resistance, conflict, and the fullness of a greater life-context (*Lebenszusammenhang*) or interconnected web of overlapping and conflicting meanings and interpretations.

Heidegger differentiated Dilthey's interpretation of life as historically mediated from the immediacy of both biological—whether biology is construed to be mechanistic or vitalistic—conceptions of life as well as appeals to the self-intuitive certainty or introspective transparency of life or consciousness to itself in early lecture courses such as the *Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression*. Dilthey's flawed conception of "life" remains fundamentally that of the historian, since life becomes an external, formal, and ultimately aesthetic construction and reconstruction of life even as it cannot attain the presumed objectivity of the natural scientist.⁶

Despite Heidegger's suspicions throughout the 1920s of the exteriority and distance of life to itself in Dilthey, which is indeed what makes human life

⁶Compare, for example, Heidegger S, 152; PIE, 128, 159/GA 59, 145, 167; and Guignon 1983, 56.

intrinsically interpretive and hermeneutical in Dilthey in contrast to philosophical hermeneutics, Heidegger recognized at the same time the primordially of the question of life in Dilthey. Heidegger claimed in 1925 that “Dilthey penetrated into that reality, namely, human *Dasein* which, in the authentic sense, is in the sense of historical being. He succeeded in bringing this reality to givenness, defining it as living, free, and historical” (S, 159). This is not “pure life,” as Heidegger notes how Dilthey elucidates the “structures” of “the primary vital unity of life itself” (S, 159). What Heidegger gestures to here are Dilthey’s “categories of life” (such as selfsameness, doing and undergoing, and essentiality) that dynamically occur within the nexus of lived reality. Life-categories are constituted and enacted in the interpretive processes of life rather than grasped as fixed abstract categories or forms of the understanding (*Verstand*). Dilthey’s model of an immanent, self-generative, and worldly formation of networks of sense and meaning, which are not purely ideal or transcendental for Dilthey, informed Heidegger’s rethinking of categories as existentiell and existenzial structures even as Heidegger sought to eliminate their ontic and human scientific dimensions that were so significant for Dilthey.

The Ontic and the Ontological

Dilthey argued that two ways of accessing the world are manifest in the mathematization of nature and in the hermeneutic articulation of historical life, but neither can be taken as an absolute or exclusive perspective. Heidegger attempted in his fundamental ontology to articulate a more basic dimension from which to understand both nature and history and transcend their ontic and positivistic interpretation. Though Dilthey unfolded historical worldly life as the basis for all the sciences, this remained inadequate for Heidegger insofar as it did not reach the ontological questions of the being of that life and of being as such. Nor, according to Heidegger, did Dilthey achieve the necessary recognition of the difference and the intertwining between the ontological and the ontic, of being and *Da-Sein* (as Heidegger writes “*Dasein*” in his last detailed discussion of Dilthey), in the “ontological difference.”

Heidegger’s final sustained critique of Dilthey in *Introduction into Philosophy* (*Einleitung in die Philosophie*) turns against ontic difference (multiplicity) toward a more originary ontological difference. Heidegger throws into question the ontic difference of the empirical crucial to Dilthey as a practitioner of the human sciences.⁷ Instead of denying ontic or empirical difference in the name of identity, Heidegger questioned ontic multiplicity from the perspective of what he construed

⁷The problem of Heidegger’s monism is not of course new: Cassirer argued in 1931 that the “reduction to temporal finitude” in Heidegger’s interpretation of Kant is a monism that undermines the Kantian distinction between the knowable sensible and the unknowable supersensible. See Michael Friedman 2000, 140–42.

to be the more fundamental difference: the ontological difference between beings and being. Indeed ontological difference is necessary to think ontic multiplicity. In an intriguing passage from 1941, Heidegger claimed that: “As the same and the unique, being is, of course, forever different in and from itself Being in its *uniqueness*—and in addition to this, beings in their *multiplicity*” (BC, 44/GA 51, 52). Despite his critique of ontic difference in Dilthey, difference as ontological uniqueness and ontic multiplicity continues to arguably play a role in his thinking of being and beings.

According to Dilthey, a specifically modernistic conception of life-philosophy calls for interpreting life from out of itself (GS 5, 370). Dilthey confronted the idealization of the nonconceptual with the unavoidability of conceptual mediation and self-reflection. Notwithstanding Dilthey’s hermeneutical approach to the categories of life and the generation of meaning, Heidegger rejected Dilthey’s modernistic epistemological focus while contending that Dilthey—while coming closest, but like all “life-philosophy” in the end—did not adequately attain the categorical-conceptual clarity and ontological character of the self-articulation of life (LQT, 182/GA 21, 216; BT, 45-46/SZ, 46).

Whereas the turn toward the immanence of life led Dilthey to empirical and interpretive work in psychology, history, anthropology, and human scientific inquiry, Heidegger demanded a more radical distinction between ontic inquiry into entities (whether in the human or natural sciences) and the ontological task of phenomenology and philosophy. Heidegger accordingly concluded that Dilthey: “did not pose the question of historicity itself, the question of the sense of being, i.e., concerning the being of beings. It is only since the development of phenomenology that we are in a position to pose this question clearly” (S, 159).

Heidegger repeated the same charge in *Being and Time*. He credited Yorck with prefiguring the ontological difference by distinguishing the historical-ontological and the historiographical-ontic (BT, 378-80/SZ, 399-400).⁸ This distinction is not entirely absent in Dilthey, where it entails the unbreakable relation between history as science and history as facticity. For Heidegger, it constitutes the difference between the ontic science of history or historiography (*Historie*) and history as ontological enactment, occurrence, and event (*Geschichte*). Heidegger separated *Historie* from *Geschichte*, a tendency that culminated in his history of being (*Seinsgeschichte*), whereas Dilthey emphasized the mediated intertwinement of historical lived-experience (the lived history that we are) and historical research (the academic history that we study) through self-reflection and interpretation.

Heidegger revisited the question of multiplicity in 1927 and maintained that in Dilthey’s orientation toward the sciences and worldviews, being (*Sein*) is lost in beings (*Seiende*), the world vanishes in a plurality of worlds, and the ontological difference disappears in unending ontic differences (Heidegger GA 27, 367–68, 382–90). Human existence does not first ontically observe and inquire, generating and building a world through its experiences as Dilthey’s hermeneutical formational

⁸See Eric S. Nelson 2011, 33.

(*Bildung*) experientialism suggests, all interaction and learning presupposes the primordial understanding and intuiting world *as* the world. This separation of the ontological structure from the ontic superstructures in effect short-circuits the hermeneutical oscillation between whole and part, universal and particular, since there is a sense of the whole and the oneness of being that remains separate from the merely ontic and empirical particular and part.

As with Husserl's commitment to a conception of "the world" that excludes the possibility of multiple potentially incommensurable worlds, Heidegger feared the lack of unity, the inductive incompleteness, and the danger of relativity in Dilthey. He concluded that this dangerous situation is a consequence of Dilthey's pre-phenomenological methodology. Heidegger noted that Dilthey prefigured phenomenology and was one of the first to appreciate the radical nature of Husserl's project (GA 27, 367-68, 382-90). Nonetheless, Heidegger maintained throughout his active reception of Dilthey's work until 1927 that: "we are indebted to him for valuable intuitions, which, however, do not reach down to ultimate and primordial principles and to radical purity and novelty of method"; the self-evidence of things phenomenologically or—in effect, intuitively, non-hermeneutically—disclosed (TDP, 140/GA 56/57, 165; S, 160). Heidegger's thinking never became fully hermeneutical and the word itself disappears from his vocabulary after the turn in his thinking in the 1930s.

Resistance and Factual Life⁹

According to Dilthey, the phenomenon of resistance facilitates the formation of a worldly self—a self that cannot purely be itself to the extent that it is always thrown and entangled in relations with others, objects. Self and resistant world are neither independent nor derivative of the other, they are co-given or equiprimordial. It is difference that is therefore the condition of self-identity.

Resistance is a primary feature of Dilthey's thought for the early Heidegger. Its significance is to some extent underestimated in the reception of Heidegger due to his critique of "reality as resisting" in *Being and Time* (BT, 201/SZ, 209). In that context, Heidegger rejected resistance as proving the externality of the world, arguing that resistance already presupposes world. Despite his suspicion of an epistemological and ontic conception of resistance, resistance probably remains operative at various levels of Heidegger's thinking—from the resistance of things in the breakdown of their instrumental and pragmatic purposiveness to the resistance of existence to human projects and understanding in the impossibility of mastering and appropriating one's own death.

This-worldly phenomena of resistance continue to structure Heidegger's early hermeneutics of factual life. Experience is still related to the "resistant" insofar

⁹A more detailed account of this argument can be found in Nelson 2011.

as experience is both passive and active and implies a differentiating setting-apart-with (*Sich-Auseinander-setzen-mit*) and the self-assertion of what is experienced (PRL, 7/GA 60, 9). The origin and goal of philosophy is factual life understanding and articulating itself. Thinking springs from its facticity in order to return to it (PRL, 7, 11/GA 60, 8, 15). The resistance of facticity opens access to the world through differentiation. It equally resists and blocks access to itself in the everyday indifference of going along with things in factual life (PRL, 9, 11/GA 60, 12, 15-16).

Heidegger further modified Dilthey's conception of resistance as the ruination, counter-motility, and transversal of life. The "there" in and from which the "I" occurs is primordially resistant and ruining (Heidegger PIA, 139/GA 61, 185). Regardless of Heidegger's suspicion of resistance as an argument for the self-existence of the external world, Dilthey's notion of resistance is appropriated and transformed in Heidegger's thinking of life's ownmost facticity.

In contrast to the portrayal of resistance as (1) the key to individuation and (2) the counter-movement of life, which is immanent to life insofar as it is life itself that presents us with its own ruination and questionability, (3) Heidegger critically interprets Dilthey's account of resistance in *Being and Time* (PIA, 98/GA 61, 130-31; BT, 201-03/SZ, 209-11). Magda King notes how resistance "characterizes beings within the world, and by no means explains the phenomenon of the world" (2001, 261). Resistance occurs from out of the world instead of being the how or way in which the world can be grasped *as* world. It is significant that Heidegger provides an ontological basis for resistance while rejecting its apparent ontic and empirical character in Dilthey. Resistance: "gives a factual existence to understand his exposedness to and dependence upon 'a world of things' which, in spite of all technical progress, he can never master" (King 2001, 261).

Heidegger contended in his Kassel lectures that the epistemological and methodological aspects of Dilthey's thinking need to be reconsidered in light of the centrality of the question and conception of life. Historical knowledge is self-reflexive; it turns on the self that relates to itself as well as to its immanent worldly context. The life that reflects upon itself is confronted by its own historicity and conditionality in attempting to comprehend itself. The self is accordingly a world to itself along with an enviroing world and a world of others. For Heidegger, this "self-world in factual life is neither a thing nor an ego in the epistemological sense"; it has the character of "a definite significance, that of possibility" (GA 58, 232; PIA, 71/GA 61, 94).

The self-world is not a denial of others; it indicates how the "I" is unremittingly referred to and shaped through interactions with others and the world in the equiprimordiality of the self-world, with-world, and enviroing world (Heidegger PIA, 71-72/GA 61, 95). These three overlapping co-constitutive worlds make up the "life-world" such that they cannot be separated from each other or construed to be self-sufficient (Heidegger PIA, 72-73/GA 61, 96). Hence, notwithstanding the constitutive but cogiven significance of the self-world, Heidegger problematized the primacy of the subject as separate from life. Life can neither be understood as merely an object nor subject (GA 58, 236).

Dilthey's primary concern was with the historically embedded self and its potential for self-knowledge in which the being who questions is at the same time addressed by and included in the question of "who" it is. Life confronts me as basically personal in the first-person perspective. It is my own life to live even as the "subject" of that life is inevitably mediated and differentiated from itself by living in a historical and worldly context: "To understand history cannot mean anything else than to understand ourselves—not in the sense that we might establish various things about ourselves, but that we experience what we ought to be. To appropriate a past means to come to know oneself as indebted to that past" (Heidegger PS, 7/GA 19, 9–11). Life is not only the ground of knowledge, since it resists knowledge and life as lived is in the last instance unknowable. The facticity of life is the "last ground of knowledge," such that knowledge cannot penetrate behind its own facticity (Dilthey GS 13/1, 53).

Life endeavors to understand itself while remaining non-transparent and ineffable to itself; human life is consequently necessarily interpretive or hermeneutical. Such alterity, excess, and remainder that restlessly pulls life out of itself is a concern in Heidegger's thinking from the singular thisness (*haecceitas*) of his early work on Duns Scotus to the thisness and mineness (*Jemeinigkeit*) of my existence in *Being and Time*. As Dilthey explicated lived-experience as an exposure to life's facticity in its singularity and contingency, he should be considered a primary source for interpreting Heidegger's early philosophical project of a hermeneutics of factual, or resistant, life.

Heidegger's Final Confrontation with Dilthey

Heidegger unfolded his last sustained reading of Dilthey in *Introduction into Philosophy*, in which he appears to be answering his critic and Dilthey's student Georg Misch. Heidegger proposed in §39 to analyze worldview as world-intuition. He reinterprets intuition in opposition to its idealistic and vitalistic overtones in order to rehabilitate it against the Dilthey-school's "positivist" and "romantic" reliance on the false objectivity of empirical observation and the potentially relativistic subjectivity of artistic interpretation.

Heidegger redefines intuition as a "factically gripped being-in-the-world." It is "the differentiating confrontation [*Auseinandersetzung*]" between intuition and world that "renders being in itself available and not mere observation" (GA 27, 344). Heidegger construed Dilthey's empirical focus as wrongly prioritizing observation, which only accesses and discloses things ontically, inessentially, and in a derivative manner. Empirical observation is a deficient mode of the manifestness of truth, whereas intuition "expresses the immediate having of something in its entirety. Such having, as a sought after ideal, includes in itself the orientation toward not-having, not-possessing" (Heidegger GA 27, 344).

Observation and empirical inquiry in general presuppose intuiting as encountering and confronting things and the world as meaningful wholes without which they could not appear to observation. Heidegger rehabilitated phenomenological intuition

against his own earlier prioritizing of language and interpretation, Heidegger reenacts the transcendental turn in the late 1920s, much like his teacher Husserl, in response to the threat of hermeneutical relativity.

Intuition is not a direct immediate positive grasping but is rather structured by not grasping, by lack and absence, and ultimately by the nothing. Worldview is a world-having that cannot “have” the world. It is in “holding itself out in being-in-the-world” in which the basic lack of bearing [*Haltlosigkeit*] of *Da-Sein* is uncovered (Heidegger GA 27, 344). A worldview then merely offers the direction of bringing the world into my possession. *Da-Sein* is each time an intuiting of world, a having and not having of the world which it is. Worldview is, however, ordinarily treated as something objectively present, a fulfilled having of the world. Contrary to this reification of worldviews into fixed world-pictures, Heidegger shows how worldview expresses the lack and absence of bearing of *Da-Sein*. To have a world is to be decentered into the world (GA 27, 344-45).

Worldview is further misunderstood in the idea of a “natural worldview,” which is incoherent because of the historicity of worldviews:

One means by this a holding-itself in being-in-the-world that is natural to every *Da-Sein* and equal for each. Yet if every *Da-Sein* as factually existent is necessarily individuated in a situation, then factually there is not something like a natural worldview. Every worldview like every being-in-the-world is in itself historical, whether it knows this or not. There is no one so-called natural worldview upon which a first formed worldview is grafted, as little as a *Da-Sein* exists that would not always be the *Da-Sein* of the self and thereby dispersed in relations of self and other [*Ich-Du*]. The denial of a natural worldview does not to be sure imply that there is not something such as a common worldview, such as in groups, families, tribes, nations, peoples. In another direction there is also a common world of particular classes, castes, vocations. But this commonality is itself historical, according to the form as well as in consideration of the content. (Heidegger GA 27, 345)

Dilthey had argued that there is no one natural worldview common to all humans and that naturalism is only one possibility among others. Worldview is essentially historical, which means particular in being the perspective of *a* life. Dilthey argued further that the historicity of worldviews entails that there can be no one master worldview that can be employed to conclusively evaluate and rank the others. Instead, humans are confronted with the incommensurability, difference, and conflict (*Widerstreit*) of a plurality of worldviews from out of the perspective of their own personal life.

Heidegger confronted Dilthey’s notion of a unique factual biographical life and its pluralization of human existence with a notion of human existence that cannot be spoken in the plural and does not refer to the personal qualities and accidents of *a* life: *Da-Sein* (“being-there”). Heidegger’s *Da-Sein* does not have the identity or unity of a substance or subject even as it is contrasted with a conditional self that is a formation or bundling of empirical conditions and experiences. The ontic “bundle self” found in different ways in modern philosophers such as Hume, Nietzsche, and Dilthey is rejected through the negative unity of *Da-Sein*. The wholeness of *Da-Sein* is revealed in non-phenomena such as its anxiety, its profound boredom, its uncontrollable anticipation of death, and—in §39 of *Introduction into Philosophy*—its fundamental lack of orientation and bearing and dispersal amidst ontic beings (Heidegger GA 27, 346).

Heidegger proposed overcoming Dilthey's conditional personal and reflective self, i.e., his "psychological and epistemological concept of the subject," through a deeper more essential clarification of the way of being of *Da-Sein* (GA 27, 347). Heidegger notes the bundle of divergent contingent elements operative in Dilthey's self: "World-picture, life-experience, life-ideal . . . actuality, value, determination of the will are—according to Dilthey—aspects of worldview of 'diverse provenance' and various character (Heidegger GA 27, 347)." The next step of Heidegger's argument is that this ontic multiplicity from diverse sources in physical, biological, and historical life grasped through a variety of methods such as causal explanations and interpretive understandings cannot manifest the originary unity of *Da-Sein*. The self-intuition of its wholeness cannot be positivistically decomposed into a bundle of conditional elements. It is revealed at the ontological level of the question of being and the disclosure of the nothing that no form of empiricism, even if it is holistic and hermeneutical, can access.

Heidegger acknowledged that Dilthey interpreted world-views, including the naturalistic worldview, as consisting of much more than causally known nature; "the already known (*Erkannte*) operative in knowing (*Erkennen*), the lived psychic experiential-nexus, and binding principles of action" (GA 27, 347). Heidegger interpreted Dilthey's pluralism to be relativistic. He cannot accept Dilthey's inclusion of causal explanation and causally known nature as an "objectively present at hand ontic region" given in experience (*Erfahrung*) alongside regions that are subjectively known, felt, and willed in lived experience (*Erlebnis*) or intersubjectively known valid principles and virtues acted upon in practical ethical life. Heidegger's negative monism led him to repudiate Dilthey's pluralistic argumentation that there are basic forms of life- and world-views that are irreconcilable and irreducible to each other much less to a more originary understanding of being (GA 27, 348-49).

Cognitive, evaluative, and voluntative compartments, the differentiation of psychic-life that they presuppose and the life-stances and worldviews formed through them, point toward a more fundamental bearing and compartment of the same provenance: the bearing-lessness of *Da-Sein* in its worldly being (Heidegger GA 27, 348-49). Heidegger maintains that Dilthey allows for the factual and structural interconnection of all three dimensions, but he cannot move behind the multiplicity of modes of givenness (GA 27, 350). As a proto-phenomenological thinker, Dilthey failed to intuit their fundamental wholeness in the unity projected through and enacted in the way of being of *Da-Sein* (Heidegger GA 27, 349).

We might well ask here: Ought this indeterminacy between subject and object, the diverse ways of apprehending and the multiplicity of modes of givenness, be rejected for the sake of the lingering transcendental-like unity of *Da-Sein*? The problematic character of Heidegger's approach to ontic difference and multiplicity is revealed once again here. Can factual differences be eliminated in favor of the negatively achieved formulation of the unity of *Da-Sein* and Being? Heidegger challenged the priority of ontic difference at work in Dilthey's thought in the name of a more fundamental difference from out of which ontic multiplicity must be thought. Heidegger's ontological reduction of the ontic dualistically threatens to

undermine the recognition of and inquiry into ontic affairs. Heidegger's bracketing and subsequent radical critique of scientific inquiry into empirical conditions becomes the reification of a self-absorbed contemplation that listens to nothing but itself.

Dilthey is limited by his bundle theory of the self, according to Heidegger, while at the same time pointing toward the genuine subjectivity of the subject. Since Dilthey refers ontic multiplicity to the consciousness that apprehends it, there is a gesture toward the phenomenological unity of *Da-Sein*. This conception failed to the extent that it suggests a merely "psychological subject." Heidegger's argument for a subject behind the conditional worldly self reveals his lingering commitments to the idea of a transcendental phenomenological subject. This allowed Heidegger to claim that Dilthey's interpretive psychology remained beholden to the causal psychology that it differentiated itself from, as Dilthey did not adequately bracket causal conditions. This is a misinterpretation of Dilthey's project in light of the phenomenological project, since Dilthey never advocated the exclusion of causal reasoning even in the heart of interpretive psychology.

Heidegger contended that the failure of the bundle understanding of the self is interconnected with Dilthey's failure to achieve a decisive understanding of history. According to Heidegger, the question of *Da-Sein* is merely a psychological one in Dilthey, who considers the self as an ontic nexus of mental and physical occurrences. Instead of pursuing the question of the way of being of *Da-Sein*, Dilthey is trapped in a "higher positivism" in which *Da-Sein*, "on the basis of psychology," is a "problem of knowledge, theory of science, and culture." Because of this purported lack of radicalness, Dilthey's "most important insight of the historicity of life is not understood fundamentally, because it is not thought ontologically-metaphysically" (Heidegger GA 27, 350). Despite Dilthey's recognition of the difference between the history that we are (*Geschichte*) and the study of history (*Historie*), which Yorck and Heidegger adopted, Dilthey did not grasp history as *Da-Sein*'s own history. Dilthey introduced the problematic of historicity, but could not answer it, since history is interpreted as "cultural expression, the objectification of the psychologization of life, and an aesthetics of historicity and culture" (Heidegger GA 27, 350-51).

As a modernistic post-metaphysical thinker, Dilthey argued that we cannot go behind the multiplicity of ontic phenomena and the varying modes of givenness to reach an underlying metaphysical being, essence, or substance. Heidegger's project is to rehabilitate the metaphysical through a negative ontology. He accordingly concluded that Dilthey is captured in an ontic perspectivalism that precludes adequately posing the question of the way of *Da-Sein*'s being and of course the question of being itself. These two questions are negatively formulated and positive attributes are denied in order to avoid identifying being-there and being itself with a substance, principle or essence behind or beyond immanence even as *Da-Sein* leaps beyond and transcends worldly affairs.

Dilthey's psychology presupposes in Heidegger's estimation the ontological question of *Da-Sein*'s mode of being just as the ontic multiplicity of factualities

and facticities presupposes the ontological question of being (Heidegger GA 27, 351). Dilthey implicitly relies on an ontology of the human that it explicitly strives to exclude by interpreting humans ontically and empirically. Because this ontological question is excluded, the ontology of the human remains caught within the Western tradition of the subject that understands humans as rational animals. Dilthey remains within this ambiguous multiplicity, presupposing and using *Da-Sein* without clarifying it (Heidegger GA 27, 352).

The primordial structure of *Da-Sein* as a whole, which Dilthey implicitly and ambiguously employed in his quasi-phenomenology, is: “transcendence as being-in-the-world; *Da-Sein* is as such transcendence; it has in each case already jumped beyond beings . . .” (Heidegger GA 27, 353-54). *Da-Sein* already has in each case an understanding of being, beings, and its own being. This unitary understanding leaps ahead of beyond the scientist’s observation and studying of things such as minerals, butterflies, and stratification into social classes. It jumps beyond and in doing so jumps back to the unitary origin of the multiplicity of modes of comportment and givenness described and analyzed by Dilthey (Heidegger GA 27, 353). Dilthey’s subjective, objective, subjective-objective intersubjective dimensions of worldview each belongs to the comportment of *Da-Sein* as lack of bearing in the world and transcendence.

Dilthey’s ontic comportment consequently requires a transcendental turn to the ontological comportment of *Da-Sein*’s transcendence in the world. Heidegger locates the transcendental in the transcendence that reveals the nothingness and lack of bearing to which humans are exposed (GA 27, 353). Instead of rejecting ontic differences for the sake of the unity or identity of a positive essence or substance, ontic difference is only possible for Heidegger on the basis of the originary difference of *Da-Sein*—its thrownness into nothingness and the fundamental lack of bearing of its worldly comportment. Heidegger’s monistic critique of Dilthey’s pluralism is of a “higher order.” The wholeness of *Da-Sein* is glimpsed in exposure to the *via negativa* of anxiety, boredom, and lack of bearing in death, nothingness, and the ontological difference.

Heidegger contends that a worldview is not formed out of multiple and heterogeneous aspects and elements. World-viewing is an originary unified phenomenon arising from the transcendence of *Da-Sein* in its nothingness and lack of bearing (Heidegger GA 27, 354). *Da-Sein* is in each case betrayed and endangered in its transcendence-in-the-world; in “the each time of the facticity of transcendence” (GA 27, 358, 367). As such, *Da-Sein* does not first engage, observe, and inquire, but understands and “intuits the world” as one world through confrontation and conflict (GA 27, 367–68, 382–90). Dilthey’s elucidation of the conflict of worldviews and interpretations also one-sidedly points toward the truth that difference, conflict, and violence are constitutive of the wholeness of *Da-Sein* for Heidegger. The fundamental differences between perspectives led Dilthey to advocate a liberal tolerance and genial dialogue between them. Heidegger, however, rejected the multiplicity of perspectives and forms of life as leaving the necessary and needful in ambiguity and indecision.

Conclusion

Heidegger was less swayed by Dilthey's personalist interpretive psychology, even as he appreciated Dilthey as a thinker of human life as immanently worldly, self-interpretive, historical, and affective (Heidegger HCT, 117/GA 20, 161).¹⁰ Dilthey's project was, from Heidegger's standpoint, a flawed anti-naturalist personalism and a failed phenomenology that gave the naturalistic and historicist approaches, impersonal positivistic and personal aesthetic and biographical perspectives, too much validity (Heidegger HCT, 117/GA 20, 161). As scientific inquiry and the contingencies of personal auto-biographical life are beneath the dignity of philosophy, Dilthey is an ambiguous source for the new phenomenology and philosophy advocated by Heidegger.

Heidegger's criticisms did not go unanswered. Heidegger's earliest critics included former students of Dilthey, such as Misch, or scholars inspired by the "spirit" of his philosophical project, such as Helmuth Plessner. Misch's *Lifephilosophy and Phenomenology* (*Lebensphilosophie und Phänomenologie*) is one of the first sustained detailed critiques of Heidegger, which he responded to in his lecture-courses and correspondence.

Dilthey's full hermeneutical legacy only partially resonates in the ontologically oriented hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer. Neither of them further articulated the emergence and individuation of the biographical human individual immanently from the mediating contexts of a natural-biological and social-historical life. In contrast to Dilthey's historical-anthropological approach to human existence, Heidegger affirmed the dignity of the ontological and the transcendental against the complex mediations of life that call for continuing empirical observation, experimental inquiry, and interpretive understanding.

Misch responded that Heidegger marginalized the discourses of the natural and human sciences as ontic by separating them from the tasks of fundamental ontology. Heidegger did not recognize therefore the basic role that particular sciences play not only in research but in critical self-reflection. According to Misch, the "dispersion" into an ontic multiplicity that Heidegger criticizes in Dilthey is not a fall or decay "into" confusion but ontic multiplicity is the very starting point of life and reflection. Such multiplicity is not the negation of the essence and dignity of philosophy, if it is the arena in which philosophy takes place as an event and enactment not of impersonal being and neutral *Dasein*—a formal neutrality that is derived "after the fact" from the partiality and perspectivity of historical life in Misch's estimation—but, extending Dilthey's interpretive individualism, of individual and personal biographical life (Misch 1931, 47).¹¹

¹⁰Compare E. von Aster 1935, 149, 155.

¹¹On Misch's pluralistic and life-immanent personalism, in contrast with Heidegger's history of being, see Nelson 2012.

A basic move repeated throughout Heidegger's career is the claim that anthropology, psychology, and the entire range of human sciences, have nothing to say in response to the question of what it means to be human. This polemic against scientific inquiry, including the human sciences, is unfolded initially vis-à-vis Dilthey's pluralistically and empirically oriented manner of philosophizing that draws on the natural and human sciences of his day. Accordingly, it was not in Heidegger or Gadamer, but in the bio-hermeneutical anthropology of Plessner and the hermeneutical logic of Misch that the historically mediated character of nature and spirit continues to be analyzed in a way that combines critical self-reflection and inquiry into the ontic multiplicity of the world.

Resonating with Dilthey's elucidation of an individuated self in the midst of the conditions and forces of natural and historical life, Plessner corrected the partiality of naturalism and an anti-naturalistic personalism by clarifying their immanent consistency in the formation of a relational self: that is, the naturally eccentric and artificial constructive animal called human occurring within historical life.¹²

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¹²On the philosophical-anthropological turn stemming in part from Dilthey, and opposed by Heidegger, see Joachim Fischer 2008; and Salvatore Giammusso 2012.

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Chapter 9

A Phenomenological Reformulation of Psychological Science: Resources and Prospects

Blaine J. Fowers

This chapter details some of the many resources that the existential and phenomenological traditions offer for reformulating psychological science to recognize the social constitution of the person and the pursuit of constitutive ends that have inherent and cumulative meaning. This exploration is pursued through close examination of an intriguing neuropsychological study of honesty and dishonesty that reveals critical moves to abstract participants and investigators from ordinary human intercourse in an attempt to study mind independent causal processes. The analysis shows that these abstraction moves are embedded in a broader and deeper network of interpretations that are necessary to make the researchers' activities intelligible. This interpretive network is obscured in methods focused scientific reports. Psychological science is discussed as constitutive activity undertaken for the sake of knowledge, which is treated as choiceworthy in itself. Psychological scientists engage extensively in instrumental activity, but this form of activity is subordinated to constitutive action in the service of knowledge. This analysis is applied more broadly to psychological science, and an interpretive approach to psychological research is outlined that fosters a richer and more meaningful account of human action. I begin with a description of an intriguing study of the neurophysiology of honesty.

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Honesty and Its Neurophysiology

Greene and Paxton were interested in studying “what makes people behave honestly when confronted with opportunities for dishonest gain?” (2009, 12506). They studied two competing hypotheses to explain honest and dishonest behavior. The first hypothesis was based on the idea that incentives for dishonesty must be resisted willfully, which involves the cognitive control processes that enable people to delay reward. They called this the “Will” hypothesis. The second hypothesis is based on the concept of automaticity, in which individuals act quickly and automatically in response to particular environmental stimuli without thinking about it. If honesty is automatic, the individual would not be tempted to dishonesty, which they termed the “Grace” hypothesis.

They tested these hypotheses with two experimental conditions that involved predicting the outcome of a computerized coin flip, with financial incentives for correct predictions. The cover story of the study was that it was an investigation of a paranormal capacity to “predict the future.” In the No Opportunity to lie condition, the participants recorded their prediction in advance so they could not lie. In the Opportunity to lie condition, they reported their prediction after the coin flip, which gave them the opportunity to lie for financial gain. The participants were divided into two groups based on their responses in the Opportunity condition. A dishonest group included the people who reported improbably high levels of accurate “predictions” (69 % accuracy or higher, with a mean of 84 %). The honest group included the 14 lowest accuracy reporting subjects (mean of 52 % accuracy).

During the study, participants underwent functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to assess when and to what degree the control network of the brain was activated as participants chose their responses. This network includes the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, the ventrolateral prefrontal cortex, and the anterior cingulate cortex. In addition, Greene and Paxton assessed how long it took participants to report their prediction.

In the reaction time data, there were no differences in response times for the honest group across any of the comparisons, and all of these participants’ decisions were made quickly. When the dishonest group reported accurate predictions, there was no difference in their response times between the forced honesty in the No Opportunity condition and the “correct” predictions in the Opportunity condition (which included honest and dishonest correct predictions). The interesting contrast was when people in the dishonest group reported honest incorrect predictions in the Opportunity condition, their responses were slower. This means that when the dishonest subjects gave up opportunities for dishonest gain, it took them longer than any other response. Consistent with these results, honest and dishonest participants did not differ in the amount of time to report correct predictions in the Opportunity condition, but dishonest participants took more time than honest participants to report incorrect predictions.

The fMRI data were consistent with the response time data. Greene and Paxton found that there was increased control network activity among dishonest

participants who refrained from lying (honest incorrect predictions) compared to when they reported correct (honest and dishonest) predictions. In contrast, there was no difference in neural activity in the control network for honest participants when they reported incorrect predictions in the No Opportunity and Opportunity conditions. The investigators summarize that “the honest subjects, unlike the dishonest subjects, showed no sign of engaging in additional control processes (or other processes) when choosing to forgo opportunities for dishonest gain. These findings support the Grace hypothesis” (Greene and Paxton 2009, 12508). It is important that all of the honest participants reported awareness of the opportunity to cheat, meaning that they did not act in ignorance. Greene and Paxton concluded that “the behavioral and fMRI data support the Grace hypothesis over the Will hypothesis, suggesting that honest moral decisions depend more on the absence of temptation than on the active resistance of temptation” (2009, 12509). They found their results surprising because additional control processes appear to be activated in situations of limited honesty. The most likely reason for reporting incorrect predictions when one is actually cheating is to cover up the cheating with limited honesty. In other words, the researchers found that will power is not necessary for honesty among those who generally give honest responses, but it is necessary for honest responses among those who demonstrated a willingness to be dishonest in this context and seems to operate in the service of masking that dishonesty.

It is worth noting a number of positive features of this study before discussing its shortcomings. The topic of honesty is important and interesting, and the investigators used a clever research design to study it. The use of reaction time and brain imaging methods is very sophisticated and led to impressive results. The examination of the brain circuitry involved in honesty can provide important knowledge to support a psychologically realistic moral psychology (which is astonishingly rare). Finally, in a departure from most neuropsychological research, they indicate that they are studying the “*choice to lie*” (Greene and Paxton 2009, 12406; italics in original).

For all its interest and merit, Greene and Paxton’s study is an excellent example of a powerful and pervasive tendency in psychological research toward abstraction. This abstraction is practiced in four key ways. First, the researchers attempt to abstract themselves from their investigation by adopting the disengaged stance of investigating “will” and “grace” hypotheses about honesty, with the pretense of disinterest in the topic. They do not even touch upon why honesty is important or how it plays a role in ordinary human affairs. They introduce their study as focusing “on the respective roles of automatic and controlled processes in moral judgment” and the “cognitive processes that generate honest and dishonest behavior” (2009, 12506). All of this clearly suggests that they have no personal stake or interest in honesty; it is all just dispassionate science to them.

The second form of abstraction is no doubt obvious in the quotations above. Greene and Paxton are interested in cognitive processes that “generate” choices about honesty. They do not ascribe this “generation” to an agent, much less that honesty or dishonesty might play a role in purposive human action or in relationships. These processes are either automatic and beyond conscious control

or they are controlled by the “will” through the action of the brain’s control network to resist temptation in the form of a proffered financial incentive to lie. The cognitive processes are abstracted from a real person and are implausibly portrayed as impersonal. Having neural activity as the focal point of the study strongly encourages this impersonal perspective because it seems that the investigators are able to peer behind the curtain of personhood in examining blood flow patterns in the brain with the fMRI.

The third form of abstraction is that individuals are brought into a highly contrived laboratory situation. Even putting aside the elaborate equipment and esoteric expertise of the researchers, the level of contrivance in this research represents a powerful abstraction of individuals from everyday life in their induction into research participation. Participants were formally recruited, screened for handedness and psychiatric or neurological illness, asked to provide informed consent, asked to participate in a trivial task, given a contrived cover story to explain the task, offered financial incentives for excelling at this trivial task, and paid for their participation in the study (in addition to their “winnings”). To be fair, this study follows the classic experimental logic of attempting to strip away complications so that a very focal phenomenon can be investigated. Yet it is difficult to know what is being investigated by the time all this abstraction and contrivance has succeeded in isolating the presumed focal event of choosing whether to honestly report one’s prediction of the outcome of a computerized coin toss.

A facet of the abstraction of the research participants from ordinary activities is that it is reasonable to believe that honesty features very strongly in ordinary human life. There are many ways to construe the role of honesty in human relations, such as seeing it as a universal moral imperative, taking it as an inherent element necessary for any possibility of communication, viewing it as an essential aspect of meaningful human relationships, or taking a cynical view that it is the appearance of honesty, not honesty itself, that is at play. Greene and Paxton barely allude to the kind of human sociality that makes honesty worthy of our attention, much less to the kind of conceptual questions that are involved in seeking clarity about the nature of honesty in human relations. They just blithely assume that everyone operates in a space of moral conflict between honesty and maximizing gains through dishonesty.

The final form of abstraction is that Greene and Paxton discuss their study in isolation from a lifeworld that has compelling norms about honesty and cooperation. These researchers tacitly relied on some very strong assumptions about the nature of honesty to portray their work as an investigation of honesty. Unless one assumes that there is a universal obligation to be honest with strangers even in a very contrived situation, there is no reason to believe that honesty is in play in this study. Without a strong assumption of the cross-situational obligation to be honest with everyone, why would anyone think that honesty is at issue in such a bizarre situation? Why would we not conclude that the study is simply a matter of getting the most out of a strange situation or alternatively mere disinterest in the meager financial outcomes of a trivial task? I will provide an answer to this question below, but the point for now is that the researchers’ assumption that they are actually measuring honest behavior

in such an enormously contrived situation is rather stunning, all the more so because the assumption is so tacitly and blithely made.

A reader sympathetic to the aims and methods used by Greene and Paxton could object that I am being overly critical and picky in my critique of abstraction in their study. After all, they are quite faithfully following the canons of psychological science. And is it not important to get our facts straight before we start talking about the morality of honesty? Moreover, it is only one study, and any one study will always have shortcomings that can be superseded by combining it with other studies that do not suffer from the same flaws.

Although there is some merit to these objections, it is important to recall that my focus on this particular study is to illustrate the deep and pervasive limitations of precisely the canons of psychological science that Greene and Paxton so faithfully follow. The point I am arguing is that although they claim to focus just on the neural facts related to decisions about honesty, they cannot even begin to see their study as focused on honesty without assuming either a universal obligation that dictates honesty or the appearance of honest dealing as the proper response to strangers even in a bizarre setting. Without one of these assumptions, there is no point to the investigation whatsoever. There is no real separation of fact seeking and morality here in spite of the extreme lengths to which the researchers went to abstract themselves, their participants, and their participants' brains from anything like an ordinary situation.

It is fascinating to note the degree to which the two groups of participants in the study confirmed these assumptions about honest dealing. The honest participants quickly and automatically gave an honest answer when given the opportunity to cheat, which suggests conformity with an expectation of honesty. The only time that any of the participants showed effortful decision making (shown in reaction time and in control network activity) was when the dishonest participants decided to forgo an opportunity to cheat. The most straightforward interpretation of this effortful decision is as an attempt to appear honest by getting less than 100 % of the "predictions" correct. It is interesting that individuals who were manifestly willing to cheat found it worthwhile to forgo the financial incentive on some occasions in order to appear to be honest to a complete stranger whom they were unlikely to see again. This means that researchers and participants concur that honesty or its appearance has value, but they see that value differently, as I discuss in the next section.

Instrumental and Constitutive Activity

In his discussion of Heidegger's concept of authenticity, Guignon shed some light on the two forms of valuing that showed up in the study on honesty. Guignon highlights "two different ways to understand the relation of actions to the whole of life" (1993, 230). The first is a means-end or instrumental approach in which means and ends are separable and the means are only valuable to the extent that they produce the desired

end. The means are therefore external to the desired outcome and discardable if they prove ineffective. Guignon cites the actions of running to get healthy or helping a friend so one can expect return favors later. In contrast, in a constituent-ends approach to activities, the actions are seen as inseparable from the end because the means constitute the end. Rather than seeking an outcome, constituent ends actions are “undertaken for the sake of being such and such” (Guignon 1993, 230). In this approach, one runs as part of what it means to be healthy and helps a friend because that is what it means to be a friend. This distinction in the relationship between activities and one’s overall life makes it possible to understand the results of the honesty experiment in far richer ways than Greene and Paxton were capable of within the constraints of a value-neutral approach to science.

The means-end approach Guignon highlights was clearly adopted by the dishonest participants in their cheating to gain a better financial outcome. There are many circumstances in which one can obtain a better outcome in certain goods through cheating. What is more interesting is that they also refrained from cheating as a means to appear honest. This suggests that appearing honest is a likely means to be able to gain additional advantages later by making oneself appear trustworthy. It is also worth noting that the point of the cover story provided by the experimenters was to make it possible for the dishonest participants to believe that they could maintain the appearance of honesty in just this way.

The human capacity for deception and cheating is generally understood in this way by evolutionary psychologists. Human beings have evolved to have an extraordinary capacity for cooperation, which is based on trust. Evolutionary analyses suggest that cooperation evolved because it has enormous survival value when successful (Cosmides and Tooby 1992). Yet when one cooperates, one is vulnerable to being exploited by another person who is willing to cheat. There is great benefit to the cheater because he or she obtains a benefit at no cost. When a cooperator gets cheated, however, the cooperator loses valuable resources and gains nothing in return, thereby decreasing the cooperator’s likelihood of survival and successful reproduction. Therefore, the only way that cooperation could get off the ground is for humans to be capable of detecting cheaters. Cosmides and Tooby present a good deal of evidence that humans have a cheater detection capacity that involves evaluating whether others follow the simple heuristic of “if you take the benefit, you must pay the cost.” Evolutionary psychologists see a sort of arms race between cooperators and cheaters in which our ancestors developed the capacity for deception in order to appear honest even while cheating.

This species characteristic capacity for deception to conceal cheating appears to be in operation in the honesty experiment. The cost in the honesty experiment is to honestly report one’s predictions, which means that one can only obtain approximately 50 % of the financial incentives. But if one cheats, the gain can be greater. Maintaining the appearance of honesty is a strategy to deceive the other person to appear trustworthy in the interest of perpetuating the opportunities to cheat. This clarifies two complementary ways (cheating and appearing honest) in which the dishonest participants were acting instrumentally in their interactions with the experimenter to increase financial gain.

It is possible to view the honest participants as acting instrumentally as well if one sees the participant acting to demonstrate their honesty to the experimenter to maintain cooperation. But this interpretation is not parallel to the one for dishonest participants because the honest participants' actions are for the sake of cooperation, not increasing the financial outcome. It is important to recognize that a cooperative relation is an end that can only be achieved through cooperative activity. That is, it is a constitutive end. The point of honest responses is to pay the cost of honesty in order to enact cooperation. The possibilities of cooperation are truncated in this experiment because it was an episodic event, but when people are not abstracted away from their ongoing human relationships, the prospect of an ongoing cooperative relationship is extremely salient.

Of course, a skeptical reader could say that cooperation is just a means to greater resource acquisition, and this is exactly the position that the vast majority of cooperation researchers take. It is extremely common for psychologists to automatically interpret all behavior instrumentally, an approach I have described elsewhere as instrumentalism (Fowers 2010), but instrumentalism is a strong and unjustified assumption that is inconsistent with Greene and Paxton's data.

Another way to maintain an instrumentalist perspective is to see honesty as non-volitional. The rapid and automatic way that honest participants reported their predictions accurately could suggest that they are phenotypic cooperators, with little or no choice about it. As Greene and Paxton suggest, this would mean that these respondents are simply following an automatic script of honesty. On this interpretation, the dishonest participants are phenotypic cheaters. The rapidity and the low level of control network activity in their dishonest responses are consistent with this interpretation because it could be suggestive of an automatic response. This is Greene and Paxton's favored interpretation.

Tellingly, they do not even give passing consideration to a constitutive interpretation. Honesty can be understood as a constitutive activity in that individuals have intentionally cultivated a character trait of honesty or dishonesty. The goal of character development, from an Aristotelian point of view, is to cultivate the kind of ready, spontaneous response to situations that call for a character strength, and these would look exactly like the automatic responses Greene and Paxton found. From a Heideggerian perspective, this would amount to resolutely taking a stand on honesty, and what Guignon has called acting honestly for the sake of being an honest person.

Explanations of the findings in terms of character or taking a stand are difficult from the abstractionist standpoint of the experimenters because such explanations require agency and particularity whereas the abstractionist approach calls for general causal processes. The key point here is that this kind of experiment cannot differentiate between instrumental and constitutive interpretations of the results. Yet the constitutive view of honesty does not seem to occur to Greene and Paxton in spite of how well it fits their data and that it provides a more cogent explanation of their "Grace" hypothesis than some mysterious automatic cognitive process.

As in most psychological research, Greene and Paxton abstracted themselves as researchers from the scientific report. Unraveling this abstraction of the researcher

from the human endeavor we call psychological science reveals a fascinating, but obfuscated combination of instrumental and constitutive activities. To begin with, the researchers tell us only that they are interested in studying the “cognitive processes that generate honest and dishonest behavior” because “little is known about” them (Greene and Paxton 2009, 12506). This is a clear *prima facie* statement about the inherent value of scientific knowledge, and the absence of talk about practical application suggests that this knowledge may be good for its own sake. What is more revealing is that they say nothing at all about why knowledge regarding honest and dishonest behavior is worth having. Given the absence of an explicit rationale for this topic of study, it is reasonable to believe that Greene and Paxton thought the value of this topic was obvious. Of course, one can almost hear them saying, honesty is an important topic because it is central to human communication, intimacy, cooperation, and collaboration. But they do not take a stand on why honesty is an important topic. Yet they must believe that it is an important topic because conducting fMRI research is extremely resource intensive. Right away, these researchers’ ethical commitments to knowledge and to a better understanding of honesty emerge when the veil of abstraction through objectification is peeled back.

In contrast, Greene and Paxton very deliberately treated their participants instrumentally in three ways. First, individuals were invited to participate in the research and dismissed if their participation did not fit the parameters of the study (18 participants were excluded, 35 were included), and the included participants were dismissed when their usefulness was at an end. Participants were disposable means for obtaining data. Second, the participants were paid for their time. Third, without clarifying whether they appreciated the irony, the researchers deployed deception in their study of honest behavior. They rightly reasoned that in order to make the obvious opportunity to cheat plausible, they had to give the participants a cover story about the researchers’ interest in a paranormal ability to predict the future. Without this cover story, cheating would be less likely because it would be so obvious that the participants could not hope to give the appearance of honesty discussed above. The use of deception was clearly an instrumental action on the part of the researchers because they manipulated the participants into thinking that they had a non-obvious opportunity to cheat.

Did Greene and Paxton deceive their participants simply to attain an external end such as a publication, a research grant, or additional prestige? Such an interpretation would be very uncharitable. It is much more reasonable to believe that the purpose of the deception was to make it possible to gain scientific knowledge about honest and dishonest behavior, not just to pull a fast one on some research participants or gain a small increment of prestige through publication. They pursued their purpose of gaining knowledge through scientific procedures. Although there are many different procedures in psychological science, this science, as currently understood, is constituted by the practices of posing hypotheses, careful design of study procedures, data collection, error sensitive analysis, and justified conclusions. In other words, the pursuit of scientific knowledge amounts to an intricate set of constitutive activities for the sake of an end that is good in itself. If this is accurate,

then the instrumental deployment of deception was subordinated to the constitutive aim of scientific knowledge. Similarly, the inclusion, exclusion, and dismissal of participants and paying the participants were undertaken for the sake of knowledge. This hierarchy of ends has no place in Greene and Paxton's thinking about the roles of honesty and deception, but it puts their deception into a framework that makes its purpose explicit and justifiable. To be sure, investigators have to justify deception in research to human subjects review boards in just this way, but the hierarchy of aims becomes particularly important in this study because it justified deception in a study of honesty.

Greene and Paxton want us to believe that they have produced genuine scientific knowledge. Interestingly, they presented evidence that their dishonest participants exerted themselves to appear honest, even though these participants were demonstrably dishonest. Are we to believe the same about Greene and Paxton? They demonstrate a willingness to deceive their participants, so if one had a suspicious bent, one might worry that they are deceiving their readers as well, but making the deception plausible. There are, of course, three levels of assurances that they are not deceiving us about their research. First, they document their procedures meticulously, even the ones that cast some doubt on their findings. Second, this documentation is meant to make it possible for others to verify their findings through replication. Third, they are responsible for providing data and analysis results if there is a reasonable doubt about the accuracy of their report. These safeguards are also constituent aspects of contemporary science, which places a very high premium on the verifiability of knowledge claims among knowledge purveyors who are quite capable of cheating.

Psychological Science as a Social Practice

This brings us full circle in recognizing that the practice of science is, in some central ways, not very different from ordinary human activity. Practicing psychological science is a massively collaborative endeavor, including researchers, assistants, participants, review boards, peer reviewers, editors, publishers, and readers. Science cannot be practiced in isolation and it would have little value if the knowledge could not be shared. As in any cooperative endeavor, humans seek out others whom they believe to be honest cooperators, making the cooperation mutually beneficial. Given cooperative activities, some individuals will also attempt to cheat by appearing cooperative, but are actually freeriding. Freeriding through scientific fraud is painfully common. To make cooperation possible, human beings have evolved strong cheater detection capability and vigilance.

Scientists attempt to go beyond the honest signals of cooperative behavior to employ procedures designed to minimize the influences of personal bias and social influence. These procedures are generally described as supporting objectivity, but it is important to recognize that they are centrally founded on the recognition of the fallibility of human reason, on our vulnerability to bias, and on the

possibility of cheating. As phenomenologists already understand philosophically, this argument makes it clear in researchers' own terms that science does not give us a privileged view of truth that is guaranteed by method. Rather, our methods are specialized procedures that are useful in our pursuit of understanding within highly circumscribed parameters.

The accurate reporting of research findings is absolutely indispensable to science. From time to time, spectacular cases of scientific fraud remind us that we cannot take this honesty for granted. Given the enormously powerful incentives for fabricating results, it is no surprise that individuals would occasionally succumb to misrepresenting their findings, or "massaging" their data (e.g., academic tenure and promotion, grant funding, public notoriety, and political influence). Yet it is clear that honest inquiry and reporting are constituents of science because without careful inquiry and honest reporting of procedures and results, there can be no science. Because knowledge is the goal of science, dishonesty is inimical to the practice of science. Dishonesty about one's results is an act of bad faith because deceptive reporting undermines the very possibility of pursuing the most accurate account of a phenomenon. One could even say that scientists who willingly and consistently report procedures and findings accurately are enacting the virtue of honesty, and they may be seen as doing so out of a cultivated devotion to knowledge.

Psychological science and its methods can be very revealing as long as they are contextualized within a richer understanding of what it is to be human. The place of honesty and deception, instrumental and constitutive activity, and knowledge pursuit are not just aspects of scientific work, but part of what it is to be human. Our humanity cannot be reduced to impersonal causal forces. For example, the fact that human beings are impelled to reproduce cannot obviate the joy and communion possible in a loving sexual relationship, the meaningful activity of parenting, or the principled choice not to have children. As Guignon has reminded us, what is decisive here is whether or not a person takes a stand on her relationships, how she projects herself into a future that grows out of her thrownness in a particular time and place. Even if one accepts that much is given biologically, such as a drive to reproduce, an inclination to cooperate or cheat, or the capacity to detect cheating, these givens are only the building blocks of a human life, not that life itself. As we have described it elsewhere, "our nature or being as humans is not just something we *find* (as in deterministic theories), nor is it something we just *make* (as in existentialist or constructionist views); instead it *what we make of what we find*" (Richardson et al. 1999, 212; italics in original). Or, as Heidegger put it, "*the 'essence' of Dasein lies in its existence*" (BT, 67/SZ, 42; italics in original).

In taking a stand, the individual takes up the possibilities provided by biological nature and the historical culture and makes them her own. If honesty or dishonesty are seen as possibilities available to all, then choosing one or the other repeatedly amounts to taking a stand on the question of honesty. Such repetitive choices create a habit of honesty or dishonesty, which renders the action relatively effortless. This is especially true when a person makes the choices self-consciously, either by deciding to be an honest person or by deciding to be dishonest because it is a dog-eat-dog world, and a clever person has to seek advantage through deceptiveness. And taking

a stand on honesty is every bit as indispensable to being a good psychological scientist as it is to being a good friend. There is a strong parallel to Aristotle's concept of habituation, through which one forms one's character through repeatedly acting in a particular way. The aim of habituation is to form a settled character that makes it possible to spontaneously act in a virtuous way, without the kind of conflict between duty and desire that underlies Greene and Paxton's Will hypothesis. Having taken a resolute stand on honesty or having the character strength of honesty would be perfectly compatible with Greene and Paxton's Grace hypothesis. In their zeal to identify and document impersonal cognitive processes, these researchers apparently did not consider the rich explanatory power of stand taking or character.

A Broader Look at Psychological Science

Up to this point, my focus on a single study could give the impression that I have cherry-picked a single instance that is particularly vulnerable to critique. It is now time to clarify that psychology as a discipline is in need of reformulation along phenomenological lines and to say something about what that might look like.

From its very beginnings, the discipline of psychology had very strong leanings toward studying impersonal processes that could be described in terms of causal laws. In one of the first psychological laboratories, Hermann Ebbinghaus set out to study learning and memory through the use of nonsense syllables. He designed three-letter syllables to be meaningless, beginning and ending with a consonant and containing a vowel, and eliminating syllables that were similar to actual words. Ebbinghaus ([1885] 1913) published a monumental book describing his research, and several of the concepts he pioneered have remained important: the learning curve, the forgetting curve, and the spacing effect. Interestingly, he proceeded by being both experimenter and experimental subject. Yet all of his results were obtained by abstracting himself from the context of meaningful language and interaction because he wanted to study learning and memory purified from any personal or meaningful interference.

Others followed in Ebbinghaus's footsteps, including Edward Thorndike, the American psychologist who placed cats and other animals in contrived puzzle boxes to "discover" that learning occurred through trial and error (1911). Thorndike promulgated a number of "laws of learning" such as learning is incremental, learning is the same process in all animals, and learning occurs as a result of rewarding outcomes. Many critics have pointed out that although there may be some value in these "laws," their explanatory power diminishes rapidly outside of the artificial and abstracted environment of the laboratory. Moreover, his findings are largely artifacts of his procedure of placing animals in an entirely foreign environment.

The propensity to abstraction is also readily apparent in social, developmental, educational, and personality psychology. Experimental procedures and control are the sine qua non of these sub-disciplines, meaning that psychologists continue to

favor the kind of abstraction and impersonal explanatory approaches described in this chapter. To give one contemporary example, social exchange theory has been the most influential theory of romantic relationships in social psychology and it suggests that people enter, stay, and leave romantic relationships on the basis of whether they are getting the best exchange of rewards possible for them (Karney and Bradbury 1995). This theory has been updated in interdependence theory which seems richer in including terms like investment, commitment, trust, sacrifice, and satisfaction (Rusbult and Van Lange 1996). Yet the criterion for relationship quality is individual satisfaction, and this satisfaction is the primary causal source of everything else. Although satisfaction is subjectively experienced, these researchers focus on it as central to “the laws that govern the experience of interdependence irrespective of the specific outcome under consideration” (Rusbult and Van Lange 1996, 567). What they fail to notice is that concepts such as satisfaction, commitment, investment and trust are far from being either culturally or historically universal. Therefore, the contemporary Western interpretation of romantic relationships is under investigation in their studies, not some set of universal laws of interdependence. Guignon and others have supported and guided a number of similar critiques of these unacknowledged assumptions in a wide range of psychological sub-disciplines, such as cognitive aggression theory, cognitive development, marital research and therapy, and positive psychology (Fowers 2008; Guignon 1998, 2002; Richardson et al. 1999; Richardson and Guignon 2008).

Re-envisioning Psychology

In this brief chapter, I can only outline a few of the ways that psychological science can be reformulated with insights from phenomenology. Some of this is drawn from a book-length treatment that promoted a re-envisioning of psychology (Richardson et al. 1999). The starting point for this reformulation is to overturn the excessive claims to objectivity and realism in psychology. The attempt to make psychology a science along the lines of the natural sciences is deeply ingrained, and the aim has been to develop a science of behavior that is focused on a mind-independent reality. The use of experimental research and an extreme emphasis on removing interpretation from measurement through the use of physiological and observational measures have been primary methods in this quest for objectivity.

The attempt to remove interpretation from a science of human behavior is bound to fail because humans are, by nature, self-interpreting beings. Human behavior is never interpretation-free, whether that is everyday activity, the behavior observed by researchers in laboratories, or the behavior in which researchers engage. The truth of this is both revealed and obscured in the elaborate methods psychologists use in their attempts to pin down the sources of behavior. Recall that Greene and Paxton set up an experimental contrast where participants either had or did not have an opportunity to cheat. This method is presented as interpretation-free, but psychologists are very careful to design their studies in ways that channel their

participants' interpretations of their experience to match the specific interests of the researcher. In other words, the experiment is an interpretation of a social situation in which cheating is relevant and either possible or not. Greene and Paxton constructed a cover story to make the cheating seem legitimate. This deception was necessary because the participants had to interpret the situation as one in which they could cheat without being detected. The researchers were well aware that cheating would be much less likely if it seemed obvious in the social situation. Greene and Paxton, like virtually all experimental psychologists, obscured these interpretive moves with a detached description of the experiment and by framing the object of study as impersonal cognitive processes. This suggests that psychological research in general is impossible without an extensive network of interpretations that constitute the experimental situation, the experimenter, and the experimental subject as specific elements of a highly elaborated, knowledge seeking endeavor.

The second important point is that the interpretations of the experimental situation are not simply those of an individual or small group. These interpretations are part of a shared historical context that constitutes the activities of knowledge seeking and the roles of researcher, subject, and audience. These activities and roles are outgrowths of a historical culture in which psychological science is a sensible pursuit. The idea that human beings can be studied in a way similar to the study of the natural world is a relatively new one. The practice of psychological research, in both its institutional form and in the personal involvement of researchers and subjects has been built up gradually from very humble beginnings to being comprised of tens of thousands of researchers, vast physical facilities, enormous funding, and rapt professional and public audiences. This enormous expenditure of time and money seems sensible to many people in the modern West, but it would not have been reasonable prior to the Enlightenment and the successes of the natural sciences, and it is still not comprehensible to people who have not been socialized to see it as legitimate.

Third, the very large expenditure of resources and the deep interest evident in professional and public audiences in contemporary Western societies demonstrate that knowledge about the sources of human behavior is extremely valuable. Knowledge is a very important human good, and its pursuit therefore has an ineliminable moral dimension. Individuals who are particularly drawn to this pursuit engage in a decade of training, an arduous form of work, and receive relatively low salaries given their expertise and training. In other words, psychological science is a human endeavor like any other, and it is pursued for the sake of goods such as knowledge, improving human life, even though status and income figure in. No amount of abstraction, technical language, apparatus, or double-speak can alter the fact that psychological scientists pursue ends about which they care deeply. It is worth noting that the participants in Greene and Paxton's study were pursuing worthwhile ends as well (as I would suggest participants in all studies are doing). The dishonest participants were attempting to maximize their financial outcomes from their participation, whereas the honest participants were enacting honesty either for the sake of trustworthiness and cooperative relationships or to follow conventional rules about honesty.

I began this chapter with the question of whether psychological science was in need of assistance from philosophical phenomenology. I have answered that question in the affirmative through in-depth analysis of a single study and the extrapolation of the results of that analysis to the science of psychology in general. I have argued that the self-understanding of psychological scientists as engaged in the fully objective pursuit of a mind-independent reality of human behavior is erroneous from the perspective of philosophical phenomenology. In my opinion, philosophical phenomenology clarifies that psychological research is a much more interesting and human endeavor than its self-understanding suggests.

My conclusion is not that psychological science is irredeemably flawed. There is much to be gained in studying human behavior, but the value and the accuracy of the understanding we seek will be limited and distorted by the misperception of science as wholly distinct from other human practices. By recognizing that psychologists study self-interpreting beings whose actions are predicated on widely shared interpretations and directed toward intelligible goods, we can enrich our understanding of scientific practices and results. This enriched understanding can still accommodate a robust form of objectivity in that we can still employ the best available shared norms of inquiry, do our utmost to get our facts straight, strive to understand and minimize personal biases and interests, and remain open to critique of our inquiries and the valuable insights of others. I hope to have clarified that psychological science cannot be understood as a disinterested, neutral account of human behavior. It is instead part of the ongoing human drama of expressing, questioning, and shaping a way of life that is devoted to understanding and pursuing what is worthy or admirable. The pursuit of knowledge is a deeply ethical endeavor that can help us to gain greater insight into and enactment of the good life for human beings, and a phenomenologically informed psychology can aspire to this most worthy of ends.

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Chapter 10

Philosophical Hermeneutics and the One and the Many

Frank C. Richardson and Robert C. Bishop

The broad field of social and psychological theory is marked by an astounding degree of fragmentation and confusion. Richardson and Fowers characterize this situation as follows: “The social disciplines are greatly isolated from one another and enormously fragmented within their own borders. Hundreds, even thousands of little islands of theory and research within each discipline are pursued independently, with no apparent prospect of their being linked up in any coherent, overall picture of human activity” (1998, 465). There is just as much disagreement about the methods or approach to inquiry that would remedy this situation. Thomas McCarthy comments that in these disciplines today one often finds “a whole range of rational practices, some looking like textual interpretation of historical narratives, others trying to look as much as possible like natural-scientific rationality” (1988, 237). Many critics have marveled, as well, at the remarkable fragmentation, hyper-specialization, and many seemingly “trivial pursuits” characterizing research and theory in much of the humanities and philosophy (Bishop 2007; MacIntyre 1981; Root 1993; Taylor 1985).

There are two common ways that scholars respond to this situation. One way is simply to insist on the correctness, rightness, or validity of one’s preferred point of view or method of inquiry, perhaps on the basis that it appears to make some sense of a range of phenomena, reflects some arguably worthwhile social or moral values, or can lay claim to some degree of empirical support. However, just about all perspectives or interpretations, including some quite incompatible with one’s own,

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can also claim some degree of interpretive plausibility, decent aims, or empirical support, which means that the basic problem has been entirely sidestepped. The other way is to ignore the wider disciplinary situation and pursue one's inquiries in a way that looks to an outsider like a purely instrumental or careerist affair. Perhaps we might label these approaches pathways of dogmatism and despair. Over the long run, both tend to undermine any sense of convincingness, authority, or meaningfulness they may have held, for others or oneself, leading to a shriller and shriller dogmatism, cynicism, burnout or just going through the motions, or a kind of despair. Indeed, it seems possible to partake of several of those conditions at once or in turn.

No responsible thinker, we suggest, can fail to address this situation. That means struggling philosophically with thorny questions about the possible historical and cultural embeddedness of all knowledge and understanding in the social sciences and the humanities, how they are conditioned by a variety of cultural, ethical, and political influences, and what that says about any claims we might make about the truth, validity, or ethical soundness of our findings and interpretations. Much of our work has dealt with the ways these thorny questions about knowledge claims and the way they are entangled with cultural influences and moral values raise their ugly heads in the social sciences (Bishop 2007; Richardson et al. 1999). However, these same issues in different forms bedevil work in philosophy, the humanities, clashing political ideologies, and other cultural arenas. Clarity gained in one field of endeavor should help shed light on the dilemmas that crop up in others.

Attempts to avoid such questions may be seriously misguided about where their own views are really coming from. For example, modern positivist philosophy seeks to avoid such messy matters by positing criteria for the justification of any claims to knowledge that sharply distinguish proper scientific knowledge from any sort of ethical or political views or values, with the latter strictly confined to a realm of the "subjective," "irrational," or "noncognitive." But McCarthy (1978) summarizes Jürgen Habermas' powerful argument in *Theory and Practice* (1973) and elsewhere that positivist philosophy is "value-neutral in appearance only." It cedes "a monopoly to a particular type of theory-practice relationship" and sharply criticizes as false, mystifying, and harmful "all competing claims to a rational orientation of practice," including romanticism, existentialism, religious faith of all sorts, virtue ethics, and others (McCarthy 1978, 7). Mature human action is viewed as strictly instrumental in nature and all constructive social policy is oriented toward extending control over natural and social processes. Thus, in fact, this approach rather aggressively promotes a tendentious "disguised ideology" of what might be termed "utilitarian individualism" (Bellah et al. 1985), an influential modern philosophical outlook and ethic that is at best highly controversial (Richardson and Manglos 2012) and should be debated and critically assessed. For example, Fowers argues that this view "tends to trivialize cultural meaning, dissolve the capacity to respect and cherish others, and undermine the pursuit of common goals, thereby eroding the very social foundations necessary for effective instrumental action in a complex and interdependent society" (2005, 60).

Many types of social constructionist and postmodern thought also seem ultimately to sidestep the full force of these questions (Richardson and Fowers 1998; Taylor 1989). The leading American social constructionist theorist Kenneth Gergen argues that the “terms in which the world is understood” are strictly “social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges between people.” As a result, “Therefore, there is no ‘truth through method,’ no correct procedure that bestows a warrant of objectivity on our findings or theories.” Indeed, social constructionism bravely bites the bullet and “offers no alternative truth criteria.” Instead, Gergen admits that “the success of [our] accounts depends primarily on the analyst’s capacity to invite, compel, stimulate, or delight the audience, and not on criteria of veracity” (1985, 267).

Richardson et al. (1998) argue that this kind of postmodern theory, which appears on the surface to completely decenter the self into cultural contexts and social forces, in fact, subtly perpetuates the notion of a detached, self-enclosed, or “sovereign” (Dunne 1995) modern self of exactly the sort it rebels against. Such theory seems to be propounded from a point entirely beyond history and any cultural conditioning. From what seems like an almost God’s-eye point of view, it implicitly claims access to a final and certain truth about the relativity of all perspectives and strongly suggests that every grand theory other than its own is a kind of ideology or illusion.

Moreover, a close look at the writings of thinkers such as Gergen (1985) and Richard Rorty (1985), who assert a thoroughgoing relativism, suggests that their views are animated by ethical commitments that they do not regard as strictly relative or optional at all. For example, Rorty claims that that this kind of relativism or contextualism will not lead to social fragmentation or personal directionlessness, but to a deepened sense of “solidarity.” A sense of the pervasive contingency of life will actually tend to undermine dogmatism and yield a positive sense of connectedness and shared purpose with fellow practitioners of our particular way of life. These are familiar liberal ethical hopes and ideals, but ideals nonetheless.

Beyond Objectivism and Relativism

At least a few theorists in recent decades have dug deeper and sought what seem to us to be more profound and successful attempts to reconcile the desirability and indeed inescapability of serious ethical commitment with the historical and cultural embeddedness of all of our claims to understanding or moral insight. Richard Bernstein tackles this issue head on. He suggests that there is “an uneasiness that has spread throughout our cultural and intellectual life” due to an ongoing opposition and unresolved tension between what he terms “objectivism” and “relativism” (1983, 1). He defines objectivism as the “basic conviction that there is or must be some permanent, ahistorical matrix or framework to which we can ultimately appeal in determining the nature of rationality, knowledge, truth, reality, goodness, or rightness” (8). Relativism denies these claims and insists that all concepts of rationality, truth, or goodness must be understood as strictly “relative to a

specific . . . theoretical framework, paradigm, form of life, society, or culture” (8). Bernstein suggests that some form of this tension and unresolved opposition shows up in fields as diverse as the philosophy of natural science, social and political theory, and aesthetics.

Objectivism and relativism present themselves as mutually exclusive and exhaustive of the possibilities for a philosophy of human understanding. Thus, given the enormous problems each view encounters, we are left quite stymied. Bernstein suggests that moving beyond objectivism and relativism will require paying closer attention to how we actually reason, debate, judge, evaluate, and act in both more formal inquiry and everyday life. He concurs with Habermas that our situation is one in which “both revolutionary self-confidence and theoretical self-certainty are gone” (Habermas 1982, 222). We reason together in diverse ways and come to judgments and conclusions that we have no good reason not to think reasonable or right even though later they may (and almost certainly will) require improvement or revision. They can never lay claim to any sort of final or certain truth. Rather than promote the ideal of individual minds seeking timeless truths, which is a considerable distortion of how we actually think and behave, our primary goal should be “cultivating the types of dialogical communities in which *phronesis*, judgment, and practical discourse become concretely embodied in our everyday activities” (Habermas 1982, 223). Ideally, we would “dedicate ourselves to the practical task of furthering the type of solidarity, participation, and mutual recognition that is founded in dialogical communities” (Habermas 1982, 231).

It seems to us that moving beyond objectivism and relativism with clarity and conviction requires, above all, undermining the modern dogma that the business of knowing, learning, or coming to understanding together is fundamentally “representational.” In fact, both objectivism and relativism as Bernstein defines them presuppose a version of the representational ideal. The difference is that one of them believes that this ideal can be reached, the other that it is hopelessly beyond our grasp. For example, Charles Taylor argues that simply attacking foundationalist ambitions to secure an Archimedean point beyond all historical contingencies can lead to a reactive anti-foundationalism that is sterile and problematic. He contends that we would never entertain such ambitious objectivist or foundationalist ambitions in the first place if we did not conceive of knowledge as the “inner depiction of an outer reality” or the “correct representation of an independent reality” (Taylor 1995, 2). Then everything from truth to successful technology depends, we think, on anchoring our beliefs in that independent reality.

Of course, this representational view leads to insoluble puzzles concerning, among other things, how we can gain indubitable access to realities *through* our mental representations that are at the same time *independent* of them. Given this view of knowledge, we tend to oscillate endlessly, never satisfied, between realism and skepticism. Charles Guignon suggests that when it becomes clear that we can have no direct access to ‘Nature as it is in itself’ distinct from our interpretations, we may experience a “feeling of loss” which seems to dictate that we are merely “entangled in perspectives” or that “there is nothing outside the text.” Paradoxically, though, this postmodern “picture of our predicament as cut off from reality makes

sense only because of the way it contrasts with the binary opposition of self vs. world it is supposed to replace” (Guignon 1991, 96 ff.). For example, the view that “signs refer only to other signs” is parasitic on the very opposition between “sign” and “signified” it is trying to discard. Thus, this approach may confusedly perpetuate the very axioms of thought it is trying to replace!

Philosophical Hermeneutics

In our view, hermeneutic philosophy goes a very long way in taking account of these puzzles and arguments and offering a more plausible account of human action and social life (Gadamer 1989; Guignon 1991; Heidegger SZ; Taylor 1989, 1995). In this view, humans are “self-interpreting beings” (Taylor 1985). The *meanings* they work out in the business of living make them to a great extent what they are, in sharp contrast to the viewpoint that our behavior is determined by genetic and social influences to be described for us by a branch of natural science. Moreover, individual lives are “always ‘thrown’ into a familiar life-world from which they draw their possibilities of self-interpretation. Our own life-stories only make sense against the backdrop of possible story-lines opened by our historical culture” (Guignon 1989, 109). Instead of thinking of the self as an object of any sort, hermeneutic thought follows Martin Heidegger in conceiving of human existence as a “happening” or a “becoming.” Individual lives have a temporal and narrative structure. They are a kind of unfolding “movement” that is “stretched along between birth and death” (Heidegger SZ, 374).

What does it mean to participate in this kind of temporal and storied existence? We sometimes follow a path of abstraction and objectification, as in the natural sciences, and fashion a knowledge of lawfulness or of repeated patterns in events that occur regardless of the everyday meanings these events have for us (Bishop 2007, 113–122). This includes carving out a technical knowledge of reliable means to desired ends. But there is a more fundamental, ultimately *practical* kind of understanding, which humans always and everywhere work out together, one that does not primarily mean comprehending events mainly as “instances” of a general concept, rule, or law. In everyday life and in a more systematic way in the human sciences, people seek to understand the changeable *meanings* of events, texts, works of art, social reality and the actions of others so as to appreciate them and relate to them appropriately, along the story-lines of their living.

According to a hermeneutic ontology, this understanding or interpretation of meaning has a distinctive character. Historical experience changes the meaning events can have for us, not because it alters our view of an independent object, but because history is a dialectical process in which both the object and our knowledge of it are continually transformed. Thus, for example, both the meaning of the American Revolution and our lived understanding of freedom continue to be modified in the dialogue between them. So we are immersed in and deeply

connected to this process rather than essentially detached from it as, somewhat ironically, both scientific and postmodern approaches presume.

Colin Gunton's Philosophical Theology

The writings of the British philosopher and theologian Colin Gunton, we feel, represent a rich resource for confronting the cultural and intellectual dilemmas that Bernstein and hermeneutic thinkers seek to analyze and resolve (1993, 2006). In fact, those writings make clear that Gunton has carefully read and absorbed the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Charles Taylor. But he incorporates them in an original approach to these problems in a way that we find to be especially illuminating. In this paper, we would like to explore several of his main theses concerning the ontology of the human realm and the modern condition and suggest a few ways that his ideas and philosophical hermeneutics might buttress and enrich one another. Gunton sees these ideas as setting the stage for the articulation of a mature religious faith and understanding. But they stand on their own as reflections on social ontology independent of his (to us) quite interesting theological explorations, which we will not be considering in this paper.

Modern Dilemmas

Hermeneutic philosophy does not just speak to persistent philosophical problems and confusions in our age but is, in part, motivated by concern about concrete painful contradictions, paradoxes, and dilemmas that afflict everyday life and living, both personal and social. One familiar characterization of such dilemmas is Erich Fromm's (1969) analysis of how we have come to possess a well-developed sense of "freedom from" arbitrary authority and outmoded custom but sorely lack a corresponding sense of "freedom to" or "freedom for" that would give some context, direction, or deeper purpose to our new liberties. Another is Philip Cushman's (1990) description of how an insupportable, would-be highly autonomous "bounded, masterful self" almost inevitably collapses into an "empty self," whose characteristics of fragility, sense of emptiness, and proneness to fluctuation between feelings of worthlessness and grandiosity have been said to be the hallmarks of neurotic psychopathology in our day (cf. Kohut 1977).

Philip Selznick astutely summarizes the source of many of these modern dilemmas. He points out that our world brings (to some) benefits of greater individual freedom, increased equality of opportunity, efficiency and accountability, and the rule of law, but does so at the price of what he calls "cultural attenuation," namely the diminishing of "symbolic experiences that create and sustain the organic unities of social life" (1992, 8). In Selznick's view, there has been a "movement away from densely textured structures of meaning to less concrete, more abstract forms

of expression and relatedness.” This movement “may contribute to civilization—to technical excellence and an impersonal morality—but not to the mainsprings of culture and identity” (6). The price for such cultural attenuation becomes clearer with the passage of time. As Selznick puts it, “modernity, especially in its early stages, is marked by an enlargement of individual autonomy, competence, and self-assertion. In time, however, a strong, resourceful self confronts a weakened cultural context; still later, selfhood itself becomes problematic” (8).

Gunton refers to the philosopher Robert Pippin’s concise, painfully witty summary of these quandaries. Pippin writes that “modernity promised us a culture of unintimidated, curious, rational, self-reliant individuals, and it produced . . . a herd society, a race of anxious, timid, conformist ‘sheep,’ and a culture of utter banality” (1990, 22). As we hope to indicate, Gunton enhances our understanding of this predicament.

The Revolt of the Many Against the One

Taking a historical long view of our situation, Gunton (1993) argues that the “question of the one and the many” has been with us since the very beginning of Western philosophy and theology. He suggests that every worldview and cultural ethos represents, in part, a response to the challenge of reconciling these two facets or dimensions of the wider world and the human reality. Each seeks a way to respect the integrity of particulars while still linking them together in some sort of meaningful coherence or unity. The quest was up and running at the outset of Western philosophy with the disagreement between Heraclitus and Parmenides. “Heraclitus is the philosopher of plurality and motion” maintaining that everything at bottom is flux and strife, that reality is “suffused by forces pulling in both ways at once.” For him there is “a world order and not a radical pluralism,” but “the *logos* of the universe . . . is not a permanent substratum that remains the same in all its modifications” (Gunton 1993, 17). At the opposite pole of thought, Parmenides claims reason teaches us that “the real is totally unchanging,” notwithstanding appearances presented to the senses. “The many do not really exist, except it be as functions of the One” (Gunton 1993, 18).

Gunton argues that “the dialect of the one and the many has provided the framework for most subsequent thinking about many of the basic topics of thought” (18). This is because from the earliest roots of Greek philosophical thought going forward, plurality or unity have been envisioned as exhaustive alternatives with the battle lines drawn over which should have precedence: the universal or particulars? A central purpose of Gunton’s is to expose particular “false assumptions that the ancients and the moderns share” (18).

The presocratic philosophers sought the “reason for the overall unity of the way the world was,” and severely demythologized Greek mythological theology along the way. For them, a philosophical concept of the divine “had a rational and moral function” both trying to make “sense of the world as a unity and of the human

place within that world” (Gunton 1993, 23). Even Heraclitus’ emphases on plurality and movement serve as unifying principles for the world. Both Plato and John Calvin produced philosophical or theological systems that responded to periods of tremendous flux by aiming for deep coherence seeking to make “unitary systematic sense of the world” (Gunton 1993, 20). For both thinkers, the philosophical and theological coherence formed the basis for moral and political programs.¹

Modern approaches have generally sought to emphasize the individual over some metaphysical or theological unity. For instance, René Descartes explicitly sought to dismantle the metaphysical order of being that from antiquity through the Renaissance had provided some form of grounding for social order and personal orientation, and build a new kind of foundation (Gunton 1993, 15 and 95). However, in Descartes’ view, the multifarious reality of our experience gets reduced to two substances—extended substance and thinking substance—so that all material reality was homogenized as inert and mechanical while personal reality was grounded solely in interiority. John Rawls’ monumental *A Theory of Justice* (1971) exhibits this same unintentional Parmenidean pattern: individualism in his theory achieves social cooperation and justice at the expense of denying individual difference. Finally, this pattern even shows up in postmodernism which fails “to make any links between things at all, and so [treats] everything as of equal value” (Gunton 1993, 74). Whether by rendering the “other” irrelevant, eschewing all commitments, or making everything a matter of taste that cannot be judged, postmodern theorizing continues the modern drive towards homogeneity and loss of particularity in its very attempt to elevate the particular and negate the universal. Even when philosophical movements such as those found in postmodernism have favored Heraclitus, they have tended to bring Parmenides in through the back door.²

In the main, Gunton observes, the tendency of the Western philosophical and theological traditions has been to prefer “Parmenides to Heraclitus in search for a focus of unity. The God of most Western philosophy is single, simple, and unchanging” (1993, 24).

Therein lies the problem. In the view of many, Gunton points out, there is a mutually supportive link between “a strong stress on the unity of God” and “absolutist types of political institutions” (1993, 24–25). For example, the cultural historian Paul Johnson (1978, 115) notes that in the West, Christian institutions took shape according to the “idea of a total Christian society” that “necessarily included the idea of a compulsory society,” reflecting a stress on unity and a

¹Gunton looks with favor on Plato’s seeking to formulate an affirmative “engaged” philosophical outlook and encourages us to do the same today. But he points out there is no doubt that Plato “chose . . . unity rather than plurality. At times like his and ours, of real or threatened social disintegration, there is always a temptation to seek unity and stability above all, and that is one reason why totalitarianism is a constant threat in modern times” (1993, 21).

²This paradox is illustrated by a remarkable commercial for Dr. Pepper, where virtually every person ends up wearing a Dr. Pepper T-shirt, walking in the same direction and drinking the same soft drink while “I gotta be me” is playing as the background music. The particularity of being ‘me’ is completely lost in the overwhelming conformity to sameness.

resulting “suppression of the many by the one” (Gunton 1993, 25).³ This tendency recurs in many places. Thus, James Turner (1985) describes how the multiplicity of rationality and ways of knowing in Western societies—America in particular—became reduced to a narrow, monolithic form of evidentialism and objectivism in the nineteenth century.

A strength of these philosophical and theological foci on unity is in providing an orientation for individuals and society around some notion of the good, an orientation that could shape lives with genuine moral engagement. However, these conceptions of the good tended “to suppress particularity by deriving the essential being of things or people from their possession of identical or common properties. Their otherness-in-relation is not constitutive of their real being, which is rather seen to lie in a universal whose tendency is to render them homogeneous” (Gunton 1993, 51). Despite occasional exceptions, such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “much modern social and political thought can be understood as the revolt of the many against the one, and at the same time that of humanity against divinity” (Gunton 1993, 27). That, of course, fits with the well-known “thesis of Feuerbach, that the worship of God takes place necessarily at the expense of human individuality and freedom” (Gunton 1993, 26). But this revolt involves an even more radical or thoroughgoing rejection of the Parmenidean past that must be appreciated in order to come to terms with our present situation.

Gunton sees modern thought and culture following a path of “disengagement” much as Taylor has charted. “Disengagement means standing apart from each other and the world and treating the other as external, as mere object. The key is the word *instrumental*: we use the other as an instrument, as the mere means for realizing our will, and not as in some way integral to our being. It has its heart in the technocratic attitude: the view that the world is there to do with exactly as we choose” (Gunton 1993, 14). Taylor (1989, 1995) argues that this notion of a “punctual” self is as much a *moral* as a scientific ideal, reflecting the intense liberationist or anti-authoritarian temper of the modern era. The modern ideal of “freedom as self-autonomy” dictates that any overlap between self and world compromises the individual’s integrity and dignity. As Gunton puts it, “Descartes’ ethic, just as much as his epistemology, calls for disengagement from the world and body and the assumption of an instrumental stance towards them.” Thus we are impelled to “use the other as . . . the mere means for realizing our will, and not as in some way integral to our being” (1993, 13–14). Note that this disengagement is from world and body, not just God.

³The struggle of the one vs. the many continues in contemporary Christianity. For example, consider the emphasis on individual righteousness and freedom of many conservative evangelicals that leads them to march in lock step with the most conservative strands of the Republican Party and ostracize those Christians who do not follow suit. On the other side, many liberal Christians, out of a concern to avoid such dogmatism at all costs, limit their ethical outlook to fighting discrimination and domination and endorsing conventional (liberal) notions of “social justice” and criticizing those who do not “go thou, and do likewise.”

According to Gunton, in the modern rebellion of the many against the one, disengagement is accompanied by “displacement.” Gunton’s analysis of displacement seems to us particularly revealing. Displacement means that the functions attributed to God or a metaphysical focus of unity outside the world “have not been abolished but shifted” or “relocated,” typically to “forces within the world” (Gunton 1993, 28). For example, in the Western theological tradition the unity and coherence of all of creation is provided by “the Son and Spirit, by whom the world is held in continuing relation to God the Father.” After Augustine “that function comes, increasingly, to be performed by the universals, which are traditionally conceived to be a timeless conceptual structure informing otherwise shapeless matter” (Gunton 1993, 55). A decisive shift takes place in William of Ockham in the late medieval period by “positing . . . the real existence solely of particulars” and an “accompanying denial of the reality of universals.” As a result, “God was no longer needed to account for the coherence and meaning of the world, so that the seat of rationality and meaning became . . . human reason and will, which thus *displace* God or the world.” The “focus of the unity of things becomes the unifying rational mind.” There is a price to pay for this dramatic shift, namely the “fragmentation of human experience,” since “the world unified only by us ceases to be any kind of shared context for human society.” So, as much as this shift confers freedom and dignity, it “has subjected us to new and unrecognized forms of slavery” (Gunton 1993, 28–29).

The problem is that “in the absence of an adequate way of accounting for and realizing socially the relations of the many to each other (almost a definition of individualism) . . . a false universal . . . the public or ‘the people’ . . . or history or the market rushes in to fill the vacuum” (Gunton 1993, 31). Thus, Kierkegaard (2009) excoriated the leveling tendencies of the modern age that dissolved genuine individuals into a phantom “public.” J. S. Mill described the “modern *régime* of public opinion” that warred against “individuality” and independent thought (1991, 80). Vaclav Havel discerned, in his day, that repressive Eastern socialism and Western consumerism were mirror images of one another, each caught in the grip of a false universal or “the irrational momentum of anonymous, impersonal, and inhuman power” (1991, 267).⁴ How did it come about that personal liberty so easily morphs into a “monism” or the “flat unity of homogeneity” of the sort evident alike in so many warring opposites, as in the angry, fearful conformism infecting both the religious right and left-wing political correctness (Gunton 1993, 39)?

The sociologist and public intellectual Alan Wolfe illustrates and helps explain these paradoxical developments in terms of a “profound confusion about obligation” in our kind of society. He suggests that in one sense people today are remarkably

⁴There is a deep sense in which the liberationist aspirations of the Enlightenment are paternalistic in denying the particularity of individuals for the greater good of the very freedom of those individuals from oppression and false beliefs. Similar forms of hidden paternalism show up in contemporary Western consumerism and mercantilism. For example, Evgeny Morozov (2012) has analyzed how personal liberation lies at the heart of Apple’s values for the design and marketing of their products, while it paternalistically ignores the particularity of customers funneling them into the use of identical technology and features.

free and unencumbered by obligations. In another sense, however, “economic growth, democratic government, and therefore freedom itself are produced through extensive, and quite encumbered, dependence on others” (Wolfe 1989, 9–10). Enormously complex modern forms of social organization leave us with much attenuated but very real and ever-widening ties of interdependence and obligation to others, across one’s country and the globe. Unable to rely simply on traditional moral codes, we have generally sought to coordinate our affairs and resolve our differences through one of two large-scale, impersonal, bureaucratic mechanisms, namely the market or the state. The market allocates limited resources, restrains individuals’ desires, and coordinates their actions, but places a price on everything and turns individuals into cogs in the economic machinery governed by unseen forces or an “invisible hand.” Political approaches to moral regulation tend to undermine individual initiative and responsibility in another way. “When, for example, government collects my taxes and distributes the money to others,” it “assumes responsibilities that would otherwise be mine.” I am “not obligated to real people living real lives around me; instead my obligation is to follow rules, the moral purpose of which is often lost to me,” tempting me to avoid such “abstract and impersonal” obligations if I can (Wolfe 1989, 10). Wolfe comments wittily, “Unlike Rousseau’s natural man, who was born free but was everywhere in chains, modern social individuals are born into chains of interdependence but yearn, most of the time, to be free” (2).⁵

Gunton concludes that the “thought and practice of antiquity and modernity share a common failure in conceiving and practicing relationality. The many can find their true being as they are understood only as they are related to each other “and to some focus of unity” (1993, 37). To be sure, “freedom requires otherness.” But what kind of otherness? “Can there, however—and this is crucial question—be a unity that also respects plurality or, in human terms, individuality and freedom?” (Gunton 1993, 21).

Enlightenment and Alienation

Another strand of Gunton’s diagnosis of the modern predicament is his analysis of how Enlightenment epistemology led to the alienation of faith and knowledge as well as the alienation of the knower from objects of knowledge. In Gunton’s view, the Enlightenment is as much a historical movement as a cast of mind “characteristic of an era of human self-confidence” (2006, 3). Contrasting with the Augustinian tradition of faith seeking reason, the Enlightenment’s motto is “If you believe you will not understand” (Gunton 2006, 4). While the Enlightenment might be

⁵Looked at this way, current polarized debates in the U.S. about big versus small government represent an argument between a more or less oppressive false universal and a rebellion of the many against the one that denies the need for some focus of unity in the affairs of a nation.

characterized by the rejection of all traditions, as Gunton points out, this is just another prejudice—to reject all traditions is to unreflectively adopt an alternative to those traditions (4).

This prejudice has been anything but benign despite its proper undermining of many harmful prejudices. For example, during the so-called radical Enlightenment, faith and ethics were completely reduced to subjectivity while knowledge became only that which was demonstrable by reason and experience (Polanyi 1974; Turner 1985). This splitting off of faith and ethics from what is regarded as knowledge has deleterious consequences as “human relationships become either a matter of pure arbitrary choice or the subject of supposedly ‘scientific’ or impersonal theorisation” (Gunton 2006, 5).

Gunton argues that a significant contributor to the dissolution of knower and knowing is the Enlightenment emphasis on perception over listening in epistemology which ended up alienating us from our world, a key form of alienation being the sort of representationalism discussed earlier in this chapter, whether in its rationalist or empiricist form. In this view, we have no genuine relationship to the world but only indirect contact via our representations of the world. But representationalism is inherently unstable and skepticism-inducing (whether the appearances in our mental representations correspond to features of the actual world outside our minds is always highly questionable).

Representationalism, which flowered in the early modern period, flowed out of several ancient struggles with knowledge. First, the ancient conflict between being and becoming (Parmenides vs. Heraclitus) generates a problem concerning knowledge: perception registers a world of change and impermanence, but genuine knowledge requires a “claim to permanence, a reliability and consistency” (Gunton 2006, 12). This leads to a second problem of knowledge, namely reason became associated with the changeless and permanent while sense experience with the changeable and impermanent. From ancient thinkers forward, debate has centered on whether reason or experience should be privileged as the ultimate means to knowledge. A third problem of knowledge developed in these debates as sense experience came to be associated with passive reception of the world via sensory input, whereas reason became associated with activity in the exercise of thought. Sense perception is always directed towards particulars and never deals with the general, while reason alone is capable of contemplating the general and universal. Early modern natural philosophers such as Descartes pushed this direction to its logical conclusion: human subjects are always passive in their perception of the world, a conception of human agents that presupposes a sharp split between knowing subject and object to be known. This movement reached its zenith (or nadir) in David Hume, where “orphaned reason” is impotent “to penetrate the surface of the world that met the senses” (Gunton 2006, 23). Reason and perception are totally alienated from the actual world.

Together these three problems suggest that the material world is inferior in comparison with the intelligible (hence, for instance, matter was often considered base and unknowable whereas form was often considered noble and intelligible through pure thought). And since we “behave towards each other and our world

in ways which are bound up with the kind of beings we regard ourselves and it to be,” these problems of knowledge and our proposed solutions for them tend to cut us off from others and our world. It is in the “Enlightenment’s way of seeing things” and its largely unreflective adherence to dualisms—such as appearance and reality, active and passive, being and becoming, sense and reason—“that alienation is to be found, because by means of them a breach is torn between knower and known, person and environment . . . only the pictures thrown on the enclosed mental cinema screen, so to speak, can be known” (Gunton 2006, 24).

Immanuel Kant proposed a very influential solution to these problems of knowledge. He offered an account of how the mind organizes sensory input under categories such as space, time and causation, categories necessary for agents to understand the world presented by the senses. But this solution comes at great cost:

Kant’s view of the mind’s assertive activity generates what can only be called a technocratic attitude to the world about us, encouraging attitudes of dominance and disparaging receptivity. Despite the astonishing success of modern science in understanding the world—often, of course, in ways strongly at variance with those recommended by Kant himself—there is at another level a serious crisis in human life. The personal and physical universes we inhabit have been so divorced that the morality we should adopt to our world is a matter of scandal and confusion. Understanding is so divorced from questions of our being and that of the world that we are seeing the mindless rape of nature in the interests of short-term human gain. This divorce of the natural and moral universes is perhaps the worst legacy of the Enlightenment, and the most urgent challenge facing modern humankind. (Gunton 1993, 25)

Central to Enlightenment thought about epistemology, whether rationalist or empiricist, was its treatment of perception. There is no doubt that sight is a key form of perception and an important means by which knowledge of the world is mediated to us. However, “Could it be that by taking sight as a model of what is meant by perception we have imposed upon ourselves an alienated understanding of what happens in perception?” (Gunton 1993, 35).

For instance, seeing is a distanced mode of perception compared with touch where we must be in direct contact with that which we want to know. But if sight becomes the archetype for *all* perception, then the other senses are modeled as distanced modes of perception, too. Gunton identifies Coleridge as the first to note that this sight-based archetype alienates us from all our perceptions. This “despotism of the eye,” as Coleridge called it, is illustrated by John Locke’s model of the mind as an empty cabinet where, locked inside the cabinet, we are shut off from the world and its workings. “Although the ‘doors’ in the [cabinet] admit items from the world, we are within and the world is without, so that there is no way of knowing whether what enters is a true representation of what remains outside” (Gunton 1993, 36–37). One way the representationalist picture of epistemology alienates us from the world is by cutting us off from it. Making sight the archetype of perception exacerbates this gulf by suggesting that all our senses are passive and distanced rather than more intimate and active in their contact with the world.

According to Gunton (2006), this alienated picture of knowing contrasts sharply with that found in such thinkers as Coleridge and Michael Polanyi. For them,

knowing takes personal commitment so it is always intimate and active in some form rather than distanced and passive. Moreover, imagination is a key means by which we come to understand the world, whether that is through the choice deployment of apt metaphors or the creativity of an experiment. Knowledge is more about discovery than striving for certainty. Gunton suggests that here we touch base with two contrasting strands of thought about knowledge from the seventeenth century. On the one hand, there is Descartes, where knowledge is equated with certainty, with having clear and distinct ideas that are representations “inside” us of an “outside” reality. The knowing subject is distanced, cut off from the objects of knowledge. Descartes aims for omniscience and his knowledge is disembodied, completely a product of mind. On the other hand, there is Newton, where knowledge is equated with beyond reasonable doubt standards, with knowledge as provisional until we learn something that causes us to adjust our knowledge. Learning and knowing are engaged activity, both conceptual and experiential, in which we are personally invested in or indwelling our objects of knowledge. Newton aims for getting as close to certainty as is possible with empirical methods (as well as mystical) and his knowledge is embodied.

Gunton sizes up the Enlightenment’s response to the alienation of representationalism and particularly the passivity of visual perception as archetype for all sense experience: “[The] pervasive and problematic treatment of perception by the philosophers of the Enlightenment derives from the fact that they felt it an uncomfortable fact, below the level of human dignity to accept. The drive of the thought of this era was towards human control of thought and world, a drive that has brought in its train both benefit and disaster” (2006, 45).

Most responses to the deep Enlightenment assumption of the external determination of knowledge by objects entirely outside the self have usually taken one of two forms. The first is exemplified by Hume’s insistence on “the helplessness of the mind to understand nature by means of concepts not directly derived from sense” (quoted by Gunton 2006, 45). The second was Kant’s innovative construal of “the need of the mind to impose upon nature a conceptual pattern and thus compel nature to come to an order” (Gunton 2006, 45). It is interesting to note that both of these extremes represent attempts at domination of that before which we are passive and root us deeper in a kind of “control or be controlled” posture toward the world and even other people. (Towards God, as well, should that be of interest. A god we can brutally control is trivial and of no real interest, and one who brutally controls us truly is an affront to human dignity.) Is there an alternative to passivity or domination?

Conclusion: Gunton and Hermeneutic Thought

Both lines of Gunton’s analysis converge on the loss of relationality, the turn to instrumentalism, and the homogenizing of personal, social, and political reality. It seems to us that these analyses provide us with a longer historical view and

somewhat more refined conceptual analysis of modern confusions and dilemmas than the ones offered by much political theory and cultural criticism. For example, it has been suggested (we think rightly) by wise social critics (Bellah et al. 1985; Etzioni 1996; Sandel 1996) and also by philosophical psychologists (Cushman 1990; Richardson et al. 1999) that these kinds of social pathology and moral confusion are associated with a one-sided individualism in contemporary life. Robert Bellah and his colleagues use the term “ontological individualism” to describe this widespread modern notion that the basic unit of human reality is the individual person, who is assumed to exist and have determinate characteristics prior to and independent of his or her social existence (1985, 143). Social systems, in this view, must be understood as artificial aggregates of individuals which are set up to satisfy the needs of those individuals.

Critiques of this kind, astute as they are in many ways, seem better at identifying conditions that are out of joint in contemporary society and specifying many of their deleterious personal and social consequences than helping us re-envision compelling alternatives for our personal and social existence. Calls to resist our “culture of narcissism” and to cultivate a sense of community or nurture the common good speak to many of us and no doubt do some good. But they often seem vague and have only a limited ability to guide new and different kinds of activities and satisfactions from those encouraged by our official credo of rights-based individualism. Just listen to several hours of American television and you will encounter dozens of advertisements, one after another, for products that promise enhanced, possibly limitless mastery, control, “winning” and success in the games of life, and lasting security in a social world that is highly competitive and often quite dangerous. To be sure, many movies and television programs (when they are not promoting fantasies of revenge or reveling in one or another kind of apocalypse) do celebrate individuals who fight to advance the human rights and entitlements of others. But this kind of altruism leaves the familiar world of competitive individualism and dog-eat-dog world of politics largely intact, mainly aiming to allow dominated or disadvantaged citizens to enter the fray. What if one felt that mercy and forgiveness should be paramount in human life, or felt that it was wise to refrain from judging others to a very great extent, or sought some sort of spiritual peace in the midst of an ever-troubled world, or hankered after the kind of modesty or humility that might allow one to be creative and responsible without denying one’s considerable insignificance in the larger scheme of things? Images of and guidelines for that sort of living are sorely lacking.

Obviously, the kind of individualism and instrumentalism that dominate our thinking are hard to uproot, not to erase them but to put them in their place. Louis Dupré (1976) contended that while they only flower in modern times, their roots run deep in the tradition of the West. He argues that there is a “legacy of ideals and objectives” which precedes both traditional (largely Christian) and modern secular culture and in different ways animated both. Admitting that it’s a rough term, he labels them “objectivism.” They stem from a “new type of reflection” inaugurated by presocratic Greek philosophers who discovered the kind of objectivity achieved through “methodic thought” that attends to “the *physis*, the intrinsic nature of

things” and was interested “in the world as it is in itself rather than as it fleetingly impresses itself upon the perceiver’s momentary condition.” On the whole, “their glance remained outward” and the “subject, once they became aware of its role, seems to have meant little more than the window through which they saw the world” (Dupré 1976, 3). Dupré argues that “objectivism” in some ways exalts the human self, but it also leads over time to a significant “loss of self” and a choking off of inwardness that can be rectified only by regaining access to dimensions of meaning, including possibly a sense of transcendence, in which we experience things in a much more receptive, appreciative, in a sense passive manner.

Dupré argues that this kind of objectivism significantly colored and somewhat distorted classic Christian theology (a few, relatively isolated mystical sub-universes notwithstanding) and later becomes a major force in modern culture and the social sciences. There a kind of “analytic objectivity” yielded a “functional view” of humans and a largely “uninhibited pursuit of power” (Dupré 1976, 4), with the main options for persons being either an instrumental manipulator of events or causally manipulated by them, there being no qualitatively different way of relating to the world other than being “in control” or “out of control” in this sense, to one degree or another (cf. Richardson and Bishop 2002).

We suggest that Gunton’s critique of representationalism, including its view of perception as essentially passive, the alienation of self from world it imposes, and the way it almost forces modern selves to assume an overriding instrumental stance toward the world is of great help in identifying the roots of “objectivism,” as Dupré characterizes it, as it manifests itself in modern culture, thereby putting us in a position to more effectively rethink it. Gunton’s analysis of how many modern dilemmas and excesses derive not simply from a one-sided individualism but from a “revolt of the many against the one” might guide such a reassessment. Such a revolt does not banish the one or some focus of unity but displaces it into false universals and anonymous powers that end up actually undercutting independent thought and personal responsibility. This view provides a subtler diagnosis of our difficulties and presses us to conceive of a social ontology and understanding of the good or authentic life that might afford us coherence and integrity without constantly generating new oppressive forces requiring then more revolt, etc., etc.

Hermeneutic philosophy also is greatly concerned about the loss of relationality and the homogenizing of personal and social existence. Gadamer, for example, wrote that

The individual in society who feels dependent and helpless in the face of its technically mediated life forms becomes incapable of establishing an identity . . . In a technological civilization . . . in the long run the adaptive power of the individual is rewarded more than his creative power. Put in terms of a slogan, the society of experts is simultaneously a society of functionaries . . . inserted for the sake of the smooth functioning of the apparatus. (1981, 73–74)

Gunton’s analysis makes a fresh and compelling case for a hermeneutic ontology as a creative and constructive response to these concerns (cf. Gadamer 1989; Taylor 1989). The argument is that the hermeneutic view sketches a broad picture of

the life-world and human dynamics that goes a long way, in a post-traditional world, toward reconciling the long-standing tension or conflict between the one and the many.

In the hermeneutic view, humans are “self-interpreting beings” (Taylor 1985). They just *are* the meanings they work out in a profound interplay, which is interpretation “all the way down,” between present and cultural past and between self and other. The resulting storylines of their living are very much the *joint* product of a mutually shaping “conversation” or interplay of this sort. As John Shotter and Michael Billig put it, our actions “are always a complex mixture of influences both from within ourselves and from elsewhere. They are never wholly our own” (1998, 22–23).⁶ If we can stand this affront to our modern sense of autonomy, there is some good news to follow. This view does not limit the capacity for genuine selfhood and responsible agency but represents an engaged philosophy that in one writer’s words “[permits] individuals to once again focus attention on living their lives instead of constructing them” (Burns 2006, 167). In this context, “constructing lives” refers to the kind of narrowly instrumental or quasi-instrumental relationship to the world and ourselves, with deleterious consequences, that Gunton (1993) and Taylor (1989) argue is imposed on us by a “disengagement” from the world as part of a revolt against stifling universals.⁷

On the hermeneutic account, our lives have a temporal and narrative structure (Dunne 1995; Guignon 1989). Thus they have a genuine kind of what Gunton (1993) calls a “focus of unity.” It is what Alasdair MacIntyre terms the “unity of a narrative embodied in a single life,” which might also be characterized as the “unity of a narrative quest” (1981, 203). It is never completely fragmented into unrelated particulars nor does it ever achieve a final or lasting form. It is a genuine, living, life-giving kind of unity that in Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981) famous phrase is never “finalized.”

As well as with a credible focus of unity or the one, Gunton is concerned with what he calls “the disappearing other,” the loss of the full reality and integrity of particulars or the many that is so easily swallowed up in traditional metaphysical absolutes or the modern and postmodern impersonal monisms that return in the wake of revolt against them. In his view, we are profoundly social beings. In Gunton’s words, “[P]ersons mutually constitute each other, make each other what they are” (1993, 169). None of us are who we are right now merely due to ourselves or some abstract set of universals. Rather, we are who we are because of all the “others” who have been involved in our lives: family, friends, mentors, competitors, traditions, the material world, and God. For Gunton, humans are what

⁶According to Taylor, an action “is dialogical . . . when it is effected by an integrated, non-individual agent. This means that for those involved in it, its identity as this kind of action essentially depends on the agency being shared” (1991, 311).

⁷Richardson and Fowers argue that many kinds of postmodern and social constructionist theory, as well, partake of this form of disengagement and inscribe a distanced, somewhat manipulative stance toward the world and others (1998). For this reason, Selznick (1992) refers to this kind of postmodernism as the “wayward child of modernism.”

we *distinctly are* in our being and personality in virtue of our relationship to God, creation and each other. Only in those relations with others can there be authentic unity and particularity. “Our human freedom is in large measure what we make of our particularity: it is what you and I do or would do, as distinctly ourselves, and not as someone else” (Gunton 1993, 62).

Taylor sketches a broad picture of just this kind of mutual influence and constitution as self-interpreting beings. In both everyday life and human science inquiry, “understanding of a text or an event . . . has to be construed, not on the model of the ‘scientific’ grasp of an object, but rather on the model of speech-partners coming to an understanding” (Taylor 2002, 126). This process involves an exquisite, quintessentially human, sometimes almost unbearable tension. On the one hand, we harbor self-defining beliefs and values concerning things we truly care about, in which we have a “deep identity investment,” sometimes an investment in “distorted images we cherish of others.” On the other hand, since our ideals and our images of others and events are always partial or distorted in some way, we need to not just compromise and get along with others, but to *learn from* the past, others, or other cultures. In doing so, we sometimes incur a deeply personal, sometimes painful “identity cost” (Taylor 2002, 141).⁸

It seems to us that the hermeneutic conception of a temporal and storied existence concretizes and clarifies Gunton’s conception of an inescapable focus of unity in human life that does not necessarily undermine authentic particularity. Also, Taylor’s account of hermeneutic dialogue adds important detail and puts added flesh on the bones of Gunton’s discussion of how the one and the many might be genuinely reconciled in a post-traditional world. Or, we might put it, how we might find a credible way “beyond objectivism and relativism” (Bernstein 1983).

In turn, Gunton’s (1993, 2006) analyses of these issues clarify how hermeneutic thought might be a creative response to deep and long-standing problems and blind spots in the history of Western philosophy and civilization. Moreover, his ideas point to ways that hermeneutic thought might contribute to resolving other difficulties that stand in the way of an adequate philosophical anthropology. For example, a hermeneutic ontology’s portrayal of the way agents jointly, actively, and creatively interpret the meanings of events, actions, and utterances provides a powerful corrective for Coleridge’s “despotism of the eye” and the representationalist version of epistemology with its insistence on the passivity of perception that has caused so much difficulty in both theory and practice in modern culture. There is not the space here to pursue the topic further. But we hope to have opened the door to exploring other ways that hermeneutics and Gunton’s original analyses might stimulate and enrich one another, so that both might speak even more helpfully not only to the confused state of modern social research and theory, but more broadly to the ethical and spiritual dilemmas of our time.

⁸There is a close parallel between this conception of hermeneutic dialogue and Bakhtin’s (1981) idea of continual tension in communication between “centripetal” forces pushing toward unity and agreement and “centrifugal” forces seeking multiplicity and disagreement.

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Chapter 11

The Phenomenological Elements of Addiction: A Heideggerian Perspective

Frank Schalow

My aim in this paper is to apply the basic precepts of Martin Heidegger's phenomenology, in order to illuminate one of the most vexing problems in contemporary society, the plight of addiction. While throughout his writings Heidegger only briefly alludes to the self's potential to become addicted, he nevertheless provides several tantalizing clues on how to explicate this phenomenon in his *magnum opus*, *Being and Time*. Accordingly, the implications of my study are twofold. First, with its concrete and experiential focus, phenomenology offers an alternative way to uncover the key elements of addiction than can be found in the more conventional models of behaviorism and neuroscience. Second, Heidegger's phenomenology can not only uncover these elements, but, conversely, the phenomenological explication of them can also delineate a strategy for applying his thought to a specific set of existential issues. That is, by addressing the problem of addiction in phenomenological terms, I will open up a completely new context within which to appropriate Heidegger's thinking and, specifically, his account of authenticity, and ask of it questions that might otherwise remain dormant. As a foremost example, we must consider an undersubscribed dimension of Heidegger's account of being-in-the-world, namely, the embodied or "incarnated" condition that belongs to the concrete act of existing (Schalow 2006, 3–7), and which, as Charles Guignon (2000) suggests, provides an important clue to amplify Heidegger's concept of authenticity or ownedness.

While there are various kinds of addiction, as we will discover, in simplest terms the possibility of becoming addicted begins from the fact that we are embodied. And yet, by the same token, addiction is not reducible to any set of physiological components, e.g., brain chemistry. From a phenomenological perspective, embodiment

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includes as much the self's openness and dynamic of projecting its possibilities, as any factual elements we might ordinarily associate with "having a body," e.g., the "handiness" by which we use items of equipment. Indeed, the ultimate thrust of Heidegger's account of being-in-the-world lies in circumventing the dualisms of mind-body, subject-object as ordinarily conceived. On the contrary, the unitary structure of being-in-the-world dictates that, while the body is an important factor, the *phenomenon* of addiction exhibits a complexity which interweaves elements of (1) our capacity for self-understanding (or misunderstanding, and the practices of deception implied thereby), (2) our comportment toward and use of things we encounter within the world, and have at our disposal, as it were, from our "fingertips," and (3) our relations with others, which result in parasitic, "co-dependent" interactions. While all of these elements are interwoven to form a unique tapestry by which to understand addiction, for the purposes of this paper I will emphasize the first and second, which will guide us in addressing the overarching question: why and how do people become addicted? In attempting to answer this question from a phenomenological perspective, I will point to the constellation of a unique "craving," a "fetish-like" modification of our embodiment, which creates the "hook" of addiction. Along with this modification, I will identify the corresponding change in our proximity to things by which their "availability" matches our desire for their "use," that is, the transformation whereby an individual becomes a "user" in the literal sense and what is "used" (e.g., drugs, alcohol, or even the Internet) is relentlessly brought "within-reach" or at the disposal of one's fingertips.

In Part I of my essay, I will identify a methodological shift for studying addiction, beginning with the attempt to re-define this phenomenon: that is, by first bracketing the conventional model of viewing addiction as an aberration and then by uncovering an alternative presupposition to understand addiction—in Heidegger's terms the hermeneutic "fore-having" (*Vorhabe*) thereof—which implicates the entire existential predicament of the self. In Part II, I will address the specific dynamics by which the self can be "hooked" by its cravings, including the temporal enactment whereby the individual becomes entangled in its longing for immediate gratification. In conjunction with this temporal dynamic, I will distinguish, in Part III, the role that spatiality plays in determining the "availability" of any particular source of addiction and thereby the distinctive way in which our "handiness," or the attempt to "bring within-reach," facilitates our addictive cravings.

What Is in a Definition?

Rather than assume a definition of "what addiction is," or examine its different forms, let us begin with a methodological observation and a radical shift in orientation implied thereby. For the most part, clinicians and therapists embrace the assumption that addiction is an aberration of some kind: e.g., as in an obsessive-compulsive disorder, or a chronic disease (alcoholism), or a physical abnormality in regulating brain-chemistry, or a psycho-physical dependency involving withdrawal

symptoms.¹ In “bracketing” this assumption or performing a “phenomenological reduction,” let us appeal first to the example of the individual’s own life-situation and to the direct testimony of the individual’s own experiences.² In implementing this methodological shift, as it were, we begin from the larger existential predicament of the self and consider instead how addiction becomes possible on this basis. Following Heidegger’s lead, we understand this existential predicament in terms of the self’s “thrownness” (*Geworfenheit*) into it, including both an expanse of possibilities and their restriction by a factual set of circumstances (BT, 174/SZ, 135).

In this existential predicament, the perennial question of “who am I?” hangs in the balance, the heightening tension of my capability “to be,” and conversely, the prospect of acquiescing before this challenge in favor of the comfort zone of ready-made answers. In Heidegger’s terms, the self faces the challenge of either winning itself, i.e., the possibility of authentic, owned existence, or losing itself, i.e., the possibility of inauthentic, unowned existence. According to Heidegger, this contest of and for selfhood unfolds within the context of everydayness, in which the prevalence of a comfort zone in which the individual can take refuge is already the norm. In its everyday mode of existing, the self is already prone to “fall” in direction of the “they-self,” that is, toward conformity or adherence to the crowd. Given our phenomenological reduction, an interesting paradox emerges: that the prevalence of a norm, in fictiously suggesting a basis on which the possibility of the self’s uniqueness or its identity might be founded, harbors the underlying root of addiction, rather than any explicit “aberration.”

According to conventional wisdom, the addict is doing something “wrong” and thereby indulges in an activity which alienates him/her from the rest of society. But what if the actual facticity of the matter were completely the opposite? That is, what if addiction were a condition that begins instead by bowing to normalcy, insofar as a primary motivation for indulging in this or that activity or substance is the desire to “fit in?” Fitting in or conformity, however, is the hallmark of what Heidegger calls the “they-self.” In phenomenological terms, the tendency to fall toward the “they” emerges as the root of addiction, not only for the addict him/herself but for society as a whole. As such, “anyone” of us at “anytime” may already be condoning, if only by indifference, the impetus to fit in and thus the social acceptability of the activities, e.g., drinking, in which the so-called addict indulges. As a corollary, “who is susceptible to addiction?” Answer: anyone and everyone, at least as a development from and intensification of the proclivity for falling (*Verfallen*).

In Heidegger’s terms, the “they” is an *existentiale* or essential structure of human existence (BT, 167/SZ, 129). Correlatively, falling, and the desire to conform arising from it, belongs to everydayness, which, along with existence and facticity,

¹For a full spectrum of viewpoints and sources, see Abraham Twerski 1997, 8–9; Carlton K. Erickson 2007, 50–73; and Drew Pinsky 2003, 159–61.

²For a discussion of Heidegger’s rendition of “bracketing” as “phenomenological reduction,” see BP, 21–23/GA 24, 29–32.

comprises an essential structure of Dasein's being as care (BT, 219–24/SZ, 174–80). In the vernacular, we might characterize this obtrusiveness of the “they” as a kind of “peer pressure.” And this peer pressure takes a dual form, as both a commission and an omission, which ensnares the individual in a web of unquestioned, already accepted activities: (1) the comfortableness of “fitting in” and (2) the lackadaisicalness of complicity. The falling toward the “they-self” is already a turning away from one's potential for individuality. Through the dual vectors of this movement, the willingness to compromise (who one is) becomes an occasion—if nothing more than this at the outset—to set aside what previously had been “uppermost” in its echelon of concerns. In simplest terms, we might refer to such directives as “priorities,” which are signposts along the path of individuation and thereby express the self's finite claim to be uniquely who it is. As the priorities begin to shift, the self is confronted with options which, while at first they may appear to be the best and most promising, instead become the worst and most detrimental. At this crucial juncture, the seeds of addiction are planted for the first time. Prior to any compulsion, the individual stakes a wager in a dangerous game which blurs the distinction between truth and illusion, a sophistic gamble whereby “the worst appears the better and the better appears the worst.” We begin to get a glimmer of the sudden and abrupt movement, the intensification of falling, from which the possibility of addiction springs. As the self's priorities invert, the inertia of complacency, compromise, and complicity reverts into a slippery slope, the downward spiral (*Absturz*) whose enactment, re-enactment, and way of “acting out” we call “addiction.” The pervasive dissimulation triggering this downward spiral provides the factual basis for what addiction specialists call “denial,” in short holding to the illusion that, despite all evidence to the contrary, there really is no problem. Such denial is rooted in what Heidegger calls “evasive turning away,” which leads to “Dasein's getting entangled [*verfängt*] in itself” (BT, 175, 223/SZ, 135–36, 178–79).

Clinical definitions construe addiction in terms of an aberrant psychological tendency, for example, a form of “obsessive-compulsive” disorder. In contrast to such definitions, perhaps we can most succinctly define addiction this way: Addiction is a self-destructive and deceptive venture, originating from the self's inversion of its priorities, in which the pursuit of one activity monopolizes and occurs at the expense of all others. If we associate addiction with some kind of fixation, and this trait is most distinctive of the phenomenon in question, then the individual crosses the threshold of becoming addicted when a single preoccupation monopolizes all others and places everything else he/she does (career, family, and life) in jeopardy. As Heidegger emphasizes, in the phenomenon of addiction there is a “hankering after,” which narrows the self's disclosedness and “closes off” its possibilities. As he emphasizes further, the capacity to project possibilities into the future becomes restricted to its expedient pursuits or to what is ““just-always-alongside”” (BT, 240/SZ, 195). The question of the “meaning” of one's life is also swallowed up in the drive to satiate specific desires. In this regard, the forsakenness of self is simultaneously a plunge into despair and meaninglessness,

insofar as one's sense of direction becomes obscured and one's priorities become compromised in a relentless pursuit of the addiction.

In this regard, addiction is an extreme divestiture of oneself. The characterization of addiction in this way squares with the Latin root of the term, "*addictus*" (circa 1500), which means to be dis-possessed (versus self-possessed).³ Returning to our point of departure, addiction points to the self's thrownness into an existential predicament such that, rather than confronting this precedent and striving to discover who it is, the individual acquiesces, takes flight, "escapes," and seeks refuge through activities that forsake (his/her) uniqueness. In Heidegger's terms, *Eigentlichkeit* and *Uneigentlichkeit* mark the anchor points in the fundamental human drama of "falling prey" or succumbing to addiction. These terms have traditionally been translated as "authenticity" and "inauthenticity." The more literal renderings of these terms in English, as ownedness and unownedness, however, speak most directly to distinguish the enactment and "living-out" aspect of the phenomenon in question, insofar as the latter brings to fruition the "dis" in the extreme forsakenness and fugitive character of the self "acting out" under the "spell" (i.e., the dis-ownment and dis-possession) of addiction.

My definition, however, does not presume a finality in the sense of distinguishing an "essence," but instead serves as only a preliminary, and indeed, formal understanding of the phenomenon. Employing a hermeneutic twist in the development of Heidegger's phenomenology, we have arrived at only the "fore-having" for understanding the phenomenon. We must still proceed from a general description of addiction as a possibility rooted in everydayness to a specific development of human facticity, which draws an individual into the web of deceptiveness and dissimulation while all along promising ultimate fulfillment. To describe this unique dynamic, I refer to the "hook of addiction." Let us consider how this hook of addiction lures the self into a web of deceitfulness and denial, while extending the promise of immediate gratification.

Everydayness and the Hook of Addiction

In proceeding to the second stage of our inquiry, we will examine precisely how the individual crosses the "threshold" of addiction. There is, of course, a practical component to these issues, which will set the stage for our discussion: when does a repetitive or compulsive behavior become addictive? This enigma becomes most pronounced, for example, in the struggle to draw the line between a "social" drinker and a "problem" drinker. When interpreted in a phenomenological light, however, this "diagnostic" puzzle may provide an important clue to understanding addiction. Specifically, as great is the temptation to focus on the overtly physical and "symptomatic" side of the problem, ultimately a meaning-laden and signifying

³I am grateful to Michael E. Zimmerman for providing me with this reference. See Schalow 2003.

dimension creates the impetus for addiction, that is, its animating force and dynamic. For example, the hallmark of addiction may not lie only in the act of “using,” but in the wholesale preoccupation with the need to use both prior to and after the actual consumption. Heidegger succinctly summarizes this point in *Being and Time*:

What one is addicted ‘towards’ [*Das “Hin-zu” des Hanges*] is to let oneself be drawn by the sort for which the addiction hankers. If Dasein, as it were, sinks into an addiction then there is not merely an addiction present-at-hand, but the structure of care has been modified. Dasein has become blind, and puts all possibilities in the service of the addiction. (BT, 240/SZ, 195)

While we normally speak of an “addiction to” something, Heidegger’s emphasis on an “addiction towards” suggests to what extent there is a *directionality* and worldly character to the self’s desires, rather than simply biochemical and neurological responses.

As the basic thrust of Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology attests, the body is not a static, physical structure. Instead, our embodiment occurs within a wider compass of concerns comprising our everydayness, and through the power of its various gestures, e.g., a wink, a handshake, helps to shape the encompassing structure of significance of being-in-the-world itself. As already ecstatic, the body points to the locus of the expansion and contraction of possibilities, whereby even the most basic needs and desire become meaningful or infused with significance.

In providing the locus of addiction, the body yields the space of intermediation where the desires become emblematic of the self, that is, by marking directions, tangents, and diversions for its own potential fulfillment. In this regard the addictions, as diverse and multiple as they may be (e.g., from gambling to drinking, to sex to drugs, to shopping, to the use of the Internet) are not merely accidental and haphazard. Instead, the addictions themselves, and the desires they emblematically exhibit, divert, and intensify, rise to the level of premium importance, thereby becoming almost “iconic.” We might even say that the more disproportionately important the source of addiction becomes, the more destructive the outcome of the spiral descent will be. The case in point might be selling the services of one’s body, or prostitution, to maintain a lifestyle based on whatever “substance” provides the greatest source of euphoria.

The iconic character of the “allure” entails that the self always seeks its fulfillment in whatever promises to fulfill its desires. The fact that the desire and whatever promises to fulfill it are not directly correlated, for example, hunger and a sandwich, makes the desiring in its own right primary—fueling its intensity and urgency. Addiction, however, arises not simply as the result of this ever-increasing gap between the desire and its “object,” an insatiability, but the concealment thereby of already occurring in one’s falling-from who one is apart from these desires. This self-concealing, as it were, continually narrows the field of one’s possibilities to the pursuits which revolve around fulfilling these desires, so much so that the capacity of deferral, away from and toward what can still be, yields to the drive toward gratification. When gratification is then dictated by its “immediacy,” the dynamic of

addiction emerges for the first time. To the extent that immediate gratification takes hold, and the individual becomes captive to his/her desires, the hook of addiction is set. How can we describe this “hook?”

When the concealing inherent in the they-self explicitly covers-up one’s “can-be,” the capacity for deferral, then falling becomes intensified. As the double concealing occurs, and the tendencies toward deception, deceit and denial prevail, the spiraling down of addiction begins. Without this capacity for deferral, or what in the vernacular might be called “delayed gratification,” the desire becomes indistinguishable from its object—and fixation sets in. The fixation on the objects reveals the degree to which the desire has reached the apex of its iconic status. In the process, the urgency and intensity of desiring conceals itself to the point that now only what appears is the source of gratification itself. When the object itself becomes captivating in its own right, and thereby assumes a power that can monopolize an individual’s concerns over and above everything else, we can say a “fetish-like” attachment occurs. This fetish-like attachment, in which what the individual wishes to “possess” takes possession of him or her, constitutes the hook of addiction (for further discussion, see Schalow 2009). In phenomenological terms, the fetish-like attraction exaggerates and energizes an individual’s desires in a specific direction. The desiring becomes a craving, in which a synergy occurs between the self’s tendency to fall and the correlative endowing of things in the environment with added significance.

We refer to “fetish-like” in order not to suggest a simple equivalency with fetishes. Nevertheless, like a fetish, the focus of the fixation both stimulates and overpowers, as if casting a magical spell or incantation on the addict, and yet, correlatively induces an overpowering desire to consume that in itself consumes and overpowers the individual prior, during, and after the course of using itself. When desire surpasses need, the latter does not disappear, but, on the contrary, translates into a variation thereof as the addict’s sense of *dependency*. That is, the addict’s “need” to satisfy his/her relentless cravings overtakes his/her needs in the ordinary sense, e.g., food and shelter. When the allure of a fetish translates into a dependency of this kind, the possibility of an addiction arises—with its accompanying pathology.

What, then, is the hallmark of addiction, its distinguishing mark? We can answer this question most simply this way. When the individual’s cravings become so insatiable, the allure of addiction becomes so strong as to disperse one’s selfhood toward conflicting ends (e.g., good health versus immediate gratification), thereby giving inordinate power to a single impulse and *at the expense of removing the ability to control it*. As the individual’s capacity for disclosure centers exclusively on the object, the expanse of openness narrows to uncover only those possibilities which further the ends of addiction and provide access to the sources of immediate gratification. Michael E. Zimmerman describes this restriction of openness as an “ontical craving of beings,” a complete submission and attachment to these ontic sources of gratification and arousal (1995, 503). The fetish-like captivation by and attachment fuels the incessant craving of the addict, and, simultaneously, magnifies the destructive tendencies to lie, deceive, and deny in order to sustain the addiction. Because falling and the concomitant behaviors of lying, deceiving,

and excuse-making belong uniquely to human existence as care, no animal, as Heidegger suggests, can “sink as low as man” (FCM, 94/GA 29/30, 287). In falling, one forsakes one’s identity, as unowned or inauthentic, for an illusory substitute, e.g., the histrionics of gambling, which mirrors a desire to recapture the unity of the self that is otherwise lost due to the fragmentation incurred from being lost in the “they.” But such attempts to recapture one’s identity only amplify the self’s fleeing, fugitive tendencies, which fuel the craving(s) of addictions.

We must make explicit the key precept in Heidegger’s description of our openness (and restriction thereof) in order to complete our account of the hook of addiction and its distinctive dynamic: namely, the role of temporality. In the anticipatory movement of unfolding the future and coming back to rediscover the past, temporality makes possible the ecstatic openness of the self (in and through the fullness of the moment). Because the dimension of the future takes priority, in conjunction with the past, this temporal dynamic allows the self to pursue possibilities with long-term vistas, rather than actualize those on the basis of impulse and expediency. Given these vistas or horizons, the self can cultivate possibilities, both long and short term, of different level of importance and thereby set priorities for the development of its own existence. These priorities, and the temporal dynamic on which they are predicated, empower the “can” of deferral through which something like “delayed gratification” becomes possible.

But the converse also holds in terms of temporality. If the circular dynamic of temporality comes to fruition in the owned, authentic self, then the falling of everyday, linear time equally makes possible inauthentic, unowned selfhood. Unlike original or primordial time, the derivative, falling way of temporalizing centers on the “present,” of making present whatever appears in the proximity of one’s concern. In the intensified falling of addiction, the ‘present’ becoming even more prevalent by providing the occasion to fuse the craving and its source of gratification. As if by definition, the immediacy of gratification necessarily revolves around the “present.” Moreover, the iconic, fetish-like character of the addiction dictates an expectation to make present the gratification itself, even while the actual occasion of “use” may not be imminent. For example, when the source of gratification is alcohol, the individual in the course of his/her work may still be “thinking [about] drinking,” that is, as a pre-occupation which still “awaits” the present as an occasion to use again (Seeburger 1993, 84). By implication, we can also say that the future becomes parasitic upon the present, as merely providing the next occasion—and so indefinitely—to use. By the same token, the past establishes the pattern of use, the inevitability of repeating the same act, and in a way harboring the iconic character of the desire, the nostalgia for using once again. Without the fugitive, escapist character of the past, the obsessive-compulsiveness of addiction would be lacking. Indeed, addiction occurs as a faulty reconstruction of the routine of everyday life, in which its regiment is not defined by the entire course of one’s day but instead by a single activity—drinking or gambling. In pointing to the similar addictive effects that both stimulants and depressants may have, despite their contrary medical aims, one addiction theorist states: “both provide a way of regulating the organism’s

level of excitation, keeping it constant. It is precisely such sameness, such routine repeatability, that the addict seeks in the object of addiction” (Seeburger 1993, 127).

By showing how there is a distinctive dynamic to addiction, how its vortex of desire unfolds across these temporal dimensions of present, future, and past, we provide a more concrete understanding of the phenomenon. In this way, we follow the lead of Heidegger’s hermeneutics in establishing first, the fore-having for understanding the phenomenon, and secondly, the fore-sight (*Vorsicht*) or, specifically, the dynamic of addiction in terms of the temporal schematic directing its cravings. Because temporality makes possible human existence and unifies its structure as care, this schematic rendering of the phenomenon successfully shows how addiction arises from one of the essential structures of care, i.e., the temporal mode of falling as making present.

Yet, our analysis of addiction is not complete until we establish how addiction originates within the worldly compass of daily involvements, or, put in simpler terms, has an environmental dimension. In conjunction with the temporal dynamic of the phenomenon, a spatial dimension will become equally paramount in order to exhibit the fore-concept (*Vorgriff*) for understanding addiction in and through the enactment of the lived-body.

The “Handiness” of Use

As we develop our understanding of addiction, we must consider more specifically the character of using as manifested in diverse ways. Not only are these different kinds of addiction, but the sources thereof can harbor innumerable possibilities. The traditional distinction between “substance” (e.g., drugs) and “process” (e.g., gambling) addiction gives way to new possibilities which arise with each and every technological advance, e.g., the obsessive talking on cell phones, “texting,” video games, even surfing the Internet. A new terminology is developed to describe the birth of “sex addicts” and “shopaholics.” Yet, while the face of addiction continues to change, Heidegger’s discussion of the *Umwelt* shaping our relation to and use of things, the character of their “handiness,” still remains relevant. Ironically, technological advances do not obviate this facet of our embodiment, but instead give new meaning to the “ready-to-hand” as epitomized by hand-held devices which grant immediate access to the Internet.

In intensified falling, the individual becomes increasingly preoccupied with what appears closest, specifically the proximity of beings, including their appearance as items of use, their “readiness-to-hand.” In the ontical craving whereby beings assume priority, the individual forsakes the initiative of having its being “to be” in favor of what lies closest “within-reach” and can thereby be directly accessed as a source of immediate gratification. This turning away from one’s potentiality to be an individual, and turning toward the immediate accessibility of what is environmentally close or “within-reach,” creates the “space” in which the ontical craving of addiction can thrive. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes this way of

allocating space as “de-severing,” or the impetus to “bring close,” make available, or place within-reach. As Heidegger remarks, “‘De-severing’ amounts to making the farness vanish—that is, making the remoteness of something disappear, bringing it close. Dasein is essentially de-severant; it lets any entity be encountered close by as the entity which it is” (BT, 139/SZ, 105).

If we connect this de-severing to the facticity of the individual as spatially located, as incarnated and embodied, then this reallocation of space, *qua* addiction, entails making the substance or activity a physical extension of the individual. The best example of this scenario would be cigarette smoking, in which the wrapped tobacco becomes physically intertwined with the person’s lips and hands. We all know cases where an individual rarely appears without a cigarette being smoked, for that matter. And part of overcoming such an addiction is not just conquering the physiological dependence on nicotine; the problem also hinges on altering the manual habit which the smoker has acquired, e.g., lighting and handling the cigarette. The concreteness of the hermeneutics of facticity enables us to see that the physicality of addiction includes as much the bodily extension of the within-reach (i.e., the drink or cigarette as a second appendage) as the biochemical processes of either the substance (i.e., the metabolism of alcohol or the adrenalin rush triggered by computerized day-trading).

The enactment of space in this environmental way occurs within the expanse of the world, and thereby implicates the openness to which human beings belong but has already begun to narrow with the self’s fallenness. On the one hand, everydayness requires this narrowing in order to accentuate the accessibility of being for our use as items of equipment. On the other hand, the “bringing close” of intensified falling becomes so predominant that the environmental field shrinks to the direct availability of any given source of gratification. Regardless of the intensity of the craving or desire, the likelihood of addiction—environmentally understood—still depends upon the availability of whatever substance or process can promise gratification. To be sure, attempts can be made to make the availability more difficult, for example, through Prohibition (from 1920 to the early 1930s in the US) or the current regulation of illegal drugs. But whatever the artificial “spatial” barriers may be, the basic *modus operandi* of the bringing within-reach (of addiction) lies precisely in circumventing these barriers and gaining access regardless of the obstructions.

Accordingly, recent technological advances have accentuated this de-severing by providing new mediums to gain access to the same source of gratification. For example, venturing into a casino may be exhilarating to the “problem” gambler, but playing the same game of blackjack at a gambling site over the Internet may be even more captivating. Although environmental influences do not create different scenarios of addiction *per se*, we cannot discount their impact either insofar as “availability” is still a necessary prerequisite for addiction to occur. If addiction had indeed reached epidemic proportions as the “predominate health issue of our time,” as talk-show host and therapist Drew Pinsky claims, then cultural changes in consumer behavior, in the mentality of the “they,” has fueled this recent trend (2003, 159). A society which welcomes stimulation on various fronts,

while extolling consumption of all forms, creates more and more occasions for availability. We might then reasonably expect that such a society would spawn a greater rate of addiction among its members. A technologically based society of conspicuous consumption that fuels the impulse to buy, use, and discard, as an act of indulgence rather than necessity, offers the mirror image of the “icon” of fulfillment which orthodox religion once did, but as a vehicle of “instant” (versus delayed) gratification. Today the newest hand-held devices give new meaning to the “ready-to-hand,” in such a way as to place the opportunity to be addicted literally at our “fingertips.”

When de-severing extends into “cyberspace,” then the boundary between availability and use begins to close. This transformation becomes complete when “availability” matches the individual’s desire to use, and “using” becomes the primary way “to be” ahead of all other concerns. Whatever form the desire to use may take, whether “to be” tranquilized or exhilarated, the immediate access at one’s fingertips to various sources of gratification brings the addictive phase to its most dangerous and inevitable outcome. At this critical juncture, the cycle of availability and use must be broken, in order that the individual does not become completely enslaved to the craving, to the allure of addiction. Even if the extent of availability can be lessened if not removed from the environment altogether, the relentless craving to bring “within-reach” and to use, the initial allure of the hook, does not recede. Indeed, the prospect of any rescue resides more deeply in the moment of discovering an alternative way “to be” that is, through the influx of new possibilities that disclose beyond the narrow pursuit of its immediate gratification. The self’s opportunity “to be” *apart from* its craving to use implies an openness to self, others, and world, which precedes the expediency of immediate gratification.

In unownedness also resides the possibility of ownedness. For only by confronting the downward spiral of falling can the self also embrace the challenge of seeking to be an individual and claim “ownership” for its existence, including the capacity to choose and act. According to Heidegger, authentic or owned existence occurs when the self temporalizes through its anticipation of the future by cultivating those possibilities which disclose its uniqueness and exhibit its finitude. Conversely, addiction closes off the self’s future, restricting it to the next opportunity to pursue a source of immediate gratification, in short, to “get a fix.” By closing off the future, the fixity of addiction constricts the original openness of human existence. Because concealment and denial fuel addiction, the addict can overcome those tendencies only by cultivating this openness, which, however, remains foreign to him/her. Put another way, the predilection to be responsible, to be answerable, is what the addict possesses least, but requires most—“a double lack and a double not,” to paraphrase from Heidegger’s discussion of Hölderlin’s poetry—if recovery is to be possible (EHP, 64/GA 4, 47).

From an ontological perspective, the possibility of recovering from addiction appears to harbor something of a paradox. On a practical level, breaking the cycle of addiction is equally problematic, insofar as the prospect of a “relapse” is more the norm than the exception. The practical and the philosophical points of view converge, however, insofar as we ask: where does the pathway to recovery arise,

if not through a temporal indicator which points back to the origin of addiction in and through the temporalization of falling? Specifically, recovery is an ongoing task that “each day” summons the individual to confront the “can be” of existence and his/her potential to choose him/herself again, i.e., in sobriety. A.A.’s chief mantra of recovery, “one-day-at-a-time” proves to be efficacious as a guideline for treatment, precisely by approaching a life-crisis as it originates from its deepest root in human temporality—the self’s dis-ownedness of seeking immediate gratification in the present by escaping into an illusory future and fugitive past (Dick 1998, 136). The strategy of recovery, then, presupposes a dynamical view of the self. According to this view, the self exercises its freedom by acknowledging precisely those limitations which are set by one’s temporal finitude: that one’s power to refrain from addictive behavior, e.g., drinking, does not extend beyond the “day” and hence must be appropriated anew, i.e., *made one’s own, each day forward*.

Whatever the methodology of treatment may be, it always begins with the self’s own initiative to be liberated through its openness, the open resolve (*Entschlossenheit*) of accepting the abundance of each day, including the restorative, “curative” (in the sense of care) power of one’s own body. The “release” from the cravings and fixations of the body is another permutation of Heidegger’s concept of authenticity or ownedness, which, as Guignon emphasizes, is thought from the perspective of the lived-body and its “being part of nature” as an “expanded conception of Dasein’s finitude” (2000, 96). To be authentic is also to take “ownership” of one’s body, as a further dimension of “coming into own,” including the challenging task of confronting one’s deeply rooted feelings, managing them as a stage of self-discovery, and even cultivating good health (e.g., through nutrition and exercise).⁴ Such simple ways of exercising care require the self to set new *priorities*, in order to redirect its existence along a more fruitful and constructive path. In this regard, our discussion of addiction unfolds within the wider orbit of Heidegger’s account of authenticity, which extends from his lecture courses preceding *Being and Time* to his later attempt to revisit the question of embodiment in the *Zollikon Seminars* (ZS, 80–92/GA 89, 105–20).

When we show how desire and availability meet, how cravings join with the deserving movement of the bringing “within-reach,” we make explicit the embodied dimension of addiction, the fore-concept (*Vorgriff*) for understanding this phenomenon. The reference to embodiment points to the interplay of space and time as defining the dynamics of addiction, which human beings experience within the wider context of the existential predicament. By outlining this fore-concept, we discover not only how addiction can occur, for example, its distinctive hook, but also how the self can prompt its own recovery in and through its belonging to a wider expanse of openness. Within this openness, the individual can discover new possibilities that give direction to his/her life, and thereby cultivate broader horizons of meaning. This hermeneutic-phenomenological concept of addiction, then, provides a new footing for understanding one of most urgent cultural and

⁴For further discussion, see James Aho and Kevin Aho 2008, 149–54.

personal problems of today in a way that establishes a common ground between the addict and the non-addict, that is, through the facticity of life itself and the striving toward ownedness or authenticity.

Conclusion

By showing how the everyday enactment of spatiality and temporality underlies the self's tendency to be dominated by its cravings and fixations, I have provided a phenomenological account of the dynamics of addiction. More than just a bad habit, addiction implicates the entire care-structure of human existence. By recalling this primordial fact, we avoid any simplistic models of addiction that turn the phenomenon into either a fatalism of chemical processes of the brain or a voluntarism of the will's failure to exert mind over matter. The phenomenon of addiction cannot be reduced to different forms of privation: either to the physical plane of something amiss with the addict's brain chemistry or the spiritual plane of something lacking in the addict's exercise of self-restraint. On the contrary, wherever the "fault" supposedly lies—and the corresponding treatment thereof—the addict must still address the question of the meaning of life and wrestle with his/her plight against the existential backdrop that he/she shares in common with the non-addict. Insofar as the potential to be addicted unfolds on this existential stage, our temporal-spatial analysis of the dynamics of addiction reveals how intricate, complex, and encompassing this phenomenon is.

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Chapter 12

A Heideggerian Critique of Cyberbeing

Richard Polt

Heidegger and the Two Sides of Cyberbeing

Today every citizen of the “developed world” continually consumes and produces information. Not only do we deliberately process information with our omnipresent devices, but we involuntarily and even unwittingly participate in the global digital information network whenever we swipe a credit card, make a phone call, or have our home photographed by a passing Google Maps car. Discussions of cyberbeing or cyberspace have often focused on virtual reality, or immersion in a purely digital environment (e.g. McHoul 1997), but virtual reality remains a part-time amusement for most of us, while nearly everyone is enmeshed in the information web day in and day out. This is not a digital version of reality, but the digitization of everyday reality itself.

We also tend to conceive of the world in terms of information processing; we see entities as sources of information, and information as a source of entities. We live in an “information economy,” where prosperity depends on efficiently extracting and analyzing data. Politicians gather “input” from their constituents. We “process” our trauma as we recover from loss. The self-styled education industry takes teaching as an information delivery system. And we ourselves are generated by our so-called genetic code, which is itself now subject to data mining (Rossi 2010).

We need to question the pervasive term “information” both in order to avoid philosophical naiveté and to avoid getting caught in a system that we take for granted. “Information” proves to have a complex history and multiple senses that are difficult to define. Notions of information include semantic concepts (where information is significant) and nonsemantic ones. In traditional language “information”

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connotes truthfulness, but the megabytes in a digital file bring no expectation of truth, or even of reference. As we casually speak of information, we may be falling into equivocations and losing historical perspective (Borgmann 1999). Reflection on information, in all its polyvalence, is essential.

I use the term “cyberbeing,” then, to refer to two connected phenomena: the dominant interpretation of beings in terms of information processing, and our own way of existing in a world that revolves increasingly around such processing. Cyberbeing combines a set of metaphysical concepts with experiences that have their own distinctive tendencies and possibilities. What is the meaning of these two sides of cyberbeing? How can we gain critical perspective on them?

Heidegger contributes directly to these questions through his comments on cybernetics, which he knew primarily through the writings of Norbert Wiener, the American mathematician who coined the term. Heidegger’s critique of cybernetics suggests the limitations of the metaphysics of cyberbeing. Does it apply to the experiential side of cyberbeing as well? Heidegger’s early work distinguishes between the theoretical representation of beings and what is revealed in everyday experience. But his later work tends to focus on deconstructing metaphysics while neglecting the phenomenology of everydayness; he sees our every encounter as profoundly marked by metaphysics, and even claims that the very concept of “lived experience” is metaphysically compromised (CP2, 103–5/GA 65, 131–34). This mode of thinking is risky, as it may lead us to oversimplify actual life and overlook alternatives to metaphysics that can be drawn precisely from lived experience. When we reflect on cyberbeing from a Heideggerian standpoint, then, we can learn from Heidegger’s account of Western metaphysics, but we also need to examine the experience of living in the information age, without assuming that the cybernetic theory exhausts the phenomena. Here Heidegger’s earlier work is more useful, even though it precedes computing in our sense; his observations about everydayness, inauthenticity, and mass media provide insights into the twenty-first century way of life that cannot be gleaned simply from a conceptual analysis of cybernetics.

The Metaphysics of Cyberbeing

The main work on cybernetics that Heidegger read was Norbert Wiener’s *The Human Use of Human Beings* (Wiener 1967 [henceforth HU]; see Heidegger ZS, 92/GA 89, 118). Wiener’s writings were among the most influential reflections on information processing, its promises, and its dangers. A humane and broadly educated man, Wiener was concerned about the risks of a cybernetic future, yet he was evidently excited about the new paradigm that was emerging thanks to the work of researchers such as himself. Cybernetics has gone through several phases since Wiener, and now seems relegated to a marginal role, but Jean-Pierre Dupuy argues that today’s cognitive science is deeply indebted to cybernetics and would do well to learn from its failures (2009, 144–145). It can also be argued that Wiener was not

the most insightful representative of the movement (Dupuy 2009, 112). However, he offers a world view that has a truly metaphysical scope and still resonates today.

We use “cyber-” as a prefix indicating a connection to computers, but Wiener’s “cybernetics” is far more sweeping. Named from the Greek *kybernetes* or “steersman,” cybernetics theorizes the steering of both machines and animals (HU, 23–24). As such, it aspires to be the master science of “the present time [as] the age of communication and control” (Wiener 1961 [henceforth C], 39). Control requires commands—messages that trigger a perceptible reaction; in efficient systems, this response serves as feedback that modulates further commands, leading to an ever more precise result (HU, 24–25). The analysis of this exchange of messages requires a theory of information. So Wiener’s cybernetics is not merely about information technology, but also about the exchange of information in the animal nervous system, between animals and machines, and even in the universe at large.

To understand this last point, we need to grasp the cybernetic concept of information. Researchers such as Claude Shannon showed that messages could be treated purely as a question of engineering (1948, 1). Shannon’s mathematical, non-semantic theory of communication abstracts from the meaning of a message and from the presence of a human sender or receiver; a message, from this point of view, is a series of transmissible phenomena to which some metric can be applied. In principle, all messages can be treated as consisting of discrete units and can be represented in a binary scheme, as a series of “bits”; “the sharpness of the decision between ‘yes’ and ‘no’ permits [binary analysis] to accumulate information” precisely (HU, 89). The information content of the message is inversely related to its probability (HU, 31; cf. HU, 106; C, 61–64). For example, if the only possible message is an indefinitely continuing series of ones, it is completely predictable, so it can be transmitted with maximum efficiency; in fact, there is no need to transmit it at all, because, so to speak, it cannot tell us anything new. In this case, the information content of the message is nil. A somewhat unpredictable message carries information.

For Wiener, information theory is a powerful way of conceiving of nature itself. While the universe is gaining entropy in accordance with the second law of thermodynamics—that is, its energy distribution is becoming less differentiated and more uniform—there are local counter-entropic systems (HU, 20–21). These systems are living organisms and the information-processing machines that we build. Such systems differentiate and organize—they generate information. Thus, in Wiener’s usage, entropy and information are at odds. However, the term “entropy” must be used analogously, not synonymously, in cybernetics and thermodynamics if Wiener is correct to say that information is irreducible to matter or energy (C, 132). Wiener’s use of “entropy” is ambiguous, then; his defense is that “it is too much to expect a final, clear-cut definition of entropy” (HU, 21).¹

¹Shannon precisely defines his own “entropy” not as a lack of information, but as a “measure of uncertainty” and thus of possible information (Shannon 1948, 11, 20). Shannon’s definition is standard in information theory today.

From Wiener's point of view, the distinction between biological and artificial information-processing systems is merely "semantic"; organisms and computers are both "pockets of decreasing entropy" (HU, 46–47). Teleological behavior can be generated mechanically when an information-processing system is equipped with sensors, or input devices, that make feedback loops possible. Machines can "learn," much as animals can, when feedback alters the way they process information (HU, 54, 84, 86). Wiener refers to animals as "living machines" (C, xv); to "the logical machine, whether nervous or mechanical" (C, 125); to electronic sensors as "sense organs" (HU, 33); to computers' central processing units as "central decision organs" (HU, 48); and even to "the special sort of machine known as a human being" (HU, 107). This last phrase confirms that the cyberneticians were less interested in giving machines human characteristics than in "the mechanization of the human" (Dupuy 2009, 5).

We can briefly survey the implications for human life. Cybernetics teaches us that "the essence of man's inner life" (HU, 26) is not "stuff that abides, but patterns that perpetuate themselves" (HU, 130)—patterns of information processing. Wiener proposes that an individual's life is analogous to a "single run" of a computer, since our memory can never be cleared completely (C, 121, 146). Language is an information coding system, and our use of language is due to our "innate interest in coding and decoding" (HU, 116). Wiener interprets significance in terms of probability: "clichés . . . are less illuminating than great poems" because the less predictable content of poetic language gives it greater informative impact (HU, 31). A similar measure of "informative value" can be applied to innovative painting, and in general to cultural production that differs from "the community's previous common stock of information" (HU, 163).

Social life is a system of communication, control, and feedback (C, 24). Wiener doubts that society can be governed scientifically (C, 162–64; HU, 248); our life is highly contingent, and our modes of processing are transformed by learning, so a fascist social system that assigns fixed roles is more suited to ants than to human beings (HU, 71–72). Cybernetics does have a role to play in legal theory, since questions of law are "problems of orderly and repeatable control" (HU, 150). In industry, cybernetics can help establish automated factories (HU, 204), which may devalue labor and create social stresses (C, 27). In a twist on the Marxist view, Wiener points to the importance of "the control of the means of communication" (C, 160). However, he argues against the obsession with state secrecy typical of the Cold War, since the value of information quickly decays (C, 164).

There is even a cybernetic concept of good and evil—and Wiener is now being rediscovered as a thinker who provides uncommon depth to information ethics (Bynum 2008). For Wiener, entropy is fated to triumph. But like Augustinian evil as negation of the good, entropy is not a positive malicious force; it is the lack of differentiation and form (HU, 19–20, 259–260). "We are swimming upstream against a great torrent of disorganization In this, our main obligation is to establish arbitrary enclaves of order and system" (Wiener 1956, 324–25).

“[W]e are always fighting nature’s tendency to degrade the organized and to destroy the meaningful” (HU, 26). “Organism is opposed to chaos, to disintegration, to death, as message is to noise” (HU, 129). For instance, when our neurological feedback system breaks down, as in Parkinson’s disease (C, 108), our quality of life declines. Thus, “to live effectively is to live with adequate information” (HU, 26). The struggle against entropy applies to us not only as living beings but also as knowers, for Wiener’s analogue to the Heraclitean “nature loves to hide” is nature’s “resistance to decoding” (HU, 51).

Wiener introduced the educated public to concepts that are ubiquitous today: “information” as used in computer science, processing, input and output (HU, 34), feedback (HU, 36), machine memory (HU, 35), “taping” or programming (HU, 35), and digital versus analog (C, 117–118; HU, 88–89). Just as most of these concepts are used today beyond the confines of computing, Wiener’s vision extends to the human mind and body, society, biology, and the cosmos itself. Cybernetics does not simply gather information about some area of beings; it is a theory of information in general and of ourselves as information processors. It achieves the rank of a metaphysical worldview, centered on information as the supreme entity.

Similar conceptions are at work today, and may even be experiencing a philosophical resurgence. Luciano Floridi views the theory of information as a new *philosophia prima*, because information is “a concept as fundamental and important as Being, knowledge, life, intelligence, meaning, or good and evil—all pivotal concepts with which it is interdependent”; information is a concept “in terms of which the others can be expressed and interrelated, when not defined” (2011, 25). At the same time, Floridi recognizes that “What is information?” is “the hardest and most central problem” in the philosophy of information (30), because information is “a polymorphic phenomenon and polysemantic concept” (81). This does not stop him from developing a view of human beings as “semantic engines and conscious inforgs (informational organisms)” and of reality as “the totality of information” (xiii). Floridi does not claim that all ontological phenomena can be reduced to information, only that information is a lowest common denominator: “thick cultures with robust, vertical ontologies” can at least agree on this “lite, horizontal ontology” (2010b, 278). This itself, however, is a strong claim.²

Floridi’s ethics is very reminiscent of Wiener’s (Bynum 2010, 36). Floridi holds that “*being/information* has an intrinsic worthiness” and “evaluates the duty of any moral agent in terms of contribution to the growth of the *infosphere*.” Evil is “entropy,” where this means “any kind of *destruction* or *corruption* of informational objects . . . that is, any form of impoverishment of *being*, including *nothingness*” (Floridi 2010c, 84). We owe some respect to everything that exists, in virtue of its status as “an instance of information/*being*” (Floridi 2010b, 282).

²For Heideggerian criticisms of Floridi, see Capurro 2006 and 2008.

The Heideggerian Critique of Cybernetics

There is no denying that information theory “works”: not only does it help us construct highly powerful and useful devices, but it has shed light on neurology, genetics, ecology, and more. While there may be questions in various cases about the factual accuracy of Wiener’s views, the Heideggerian critique does not proceed on that level. Heidegger grants “the correctness of technological scientific rationalization,” but a theory, as he likes to say, can be “correct” yet not “true” (TB, 72/GA 14, 89). That is, it may uncover genuine phenomena but misinterpret their larger significance, or it may yield many facts about beings while misleading us as regards their being—their essential happening, their distinctive way of presenting themselves. Metaphysical worldviews typically distort beings in this way: they impose a homogenizing perspective that takes all beings as cases of a single type or relates them to some fundamental entity, while obscuring the qualitative differences among them and failing to inquire into the source of the ontological perspective itself.

Cybernetics, for Heidegger, must be understood in terms of the “history of being.” This history begins with the Greeks, who were granted an experience of *physis* as presence—that is, the being of beings as surging self-presentation, or emergence into unconcealment (e.g. IM, 15–16/GA 40, 16–17). *Physis* should not be identified with Heidegger’s own views; we must appreciate the first beginning of Western thought, but it must be transcended creatively in “the other beginning” (CP2, 44–48/GA 65, 57–60; cf. FS, 60–61/GA 15, 34–35). For despite the world-forming potency of the meaning of being as presence, the Greeks could not sustain a meditation on this meaning as a gift, and on their own status as its recipients. They focused on what was present, debated what was truly present, but could not inquire into the event in which presence itself was granted to them as their understanding of being. The Greeks thus began the tradition of metaphysics by theorizing about the principles of beings without sufficiently reflecting on our own relation to being.

Modern philosophy conceives of itself as a new beginning, free of the assumptions of ancient thought and its medieval codifications, but Descartes does not question what it means to be or think; instead, drawing uncritically on a traditional conception of being as underlying presence, he affirms the mind as the founding presence that has the power to represent the totality of things mathematically. In “representation” (*Vorstellung*) the subject posits objects and submits them to a controlling gaze. The “mathematical” character of this gaze is not limited to mathematics in the narrow sense, but consists in an *a priori* scheme that determines what counts as real (Heidegger BAT, 30–36/GA 36/37, 30–36). Modern representation is calculative: it sets beings up to be measured, and uses those measurements to construct a systematic “world picture” (Heidegger QCT, 115–154/GA 5, 75–114). Beings are judged by a standard we have conceived, which we do not allow to be transformed by any encounter with beings themselves. There is less room for meditation on the sense of what we are experiencing; philosophical thought tends to be crowded out by mere scientific research (Heidegger CP2, 113–23/GA 65, 144–58).

The technological age has roots in early modern philosophy: Descartes already plans to extract useful effects from calculable objects (*Discourse on Method*, Part 6). But full-blown technicism dissolves even objectivity, turning beings into “standing reserve” in the service of the will to power (Heidegger QCT, 17/GA 7, 17). All beings become fungible “resources,” ready to be exploited for energy that enables us to remake the world—not for the sake of some static telos, but in an endless process of “self-overpowering” (Heidegger GA 66, 20).

For Heidegger the deepest danger here is not the risk of physical self-destruction, but the degradation of our Dasein—our ability to “be the there” for the sense of being. Instead of meditating on the gift of being, we run the risk of becoming entangled in the technological mode of disclosure, so that we find no possibilities for ourselves other than willing, representing, and manipulating—and no possibilities for things other than to serve as fuel and raw material for our activity. As natural and human resources, nature and humanity will be locked into a regime that, while it accelerates its control and exploitation, manages only to run in place, crowding out other ways of dwelling and thinking.

Heidegger’s concept of standing reserve articulates a project of energy extraction that began in early modernity and picked up steam (literally) in the nineteenth century. Information technology, however, came into its own only in the mid-twentieth century, and it developed aspects of modernity that had been relatively latent until then. The rise of computing challenged Heidegger to extend his account in a series of comments on cybernetics (cf. de Beistegui 2005, 104–108).

Heidegger’s most sustained reflections on the topic are found in “The Provenance of Art and the Vocation of Thinking,” a lecture delivered in Athens in 1967. Here he claims that ancient Greek art was guided by an understanding of *physis*—“what arises from itself into its particular limit and abides in it.” “Limit means that through which something is gathered into its own, in order to appear from there in its fullness, to come forth into presence” (Heidegger 1983a, 138). Greek art fit the Greek understanding of being as defined, enduring self-display. Today, however, artworks “no longer arise from the formative limits of the world of a people and nation” (140). Instead they must respond to the demands of the modern scientific world, which is led by cybernetics.

Heidegger’s reference to “people and nation” (*das Volkhafte und Nationale*) stirs up the hornet’s nest of his politics, but we need not assume that he is advocating some simplistic nationalism; it may just be a fact that the most innovative and important art of the twentieth century responds to the international modern condition. It is true, however, that Heidegger is concerned with how we might find our way to our “own”; his “other beginning” understands being in terms of *Ereignis*, the happening of “owning” or “appropriation.”

Ironically, the way to our own is blocked by our own attempt to bring everything under our own steering power. For cybernetics, “the basic feature of all calculable world processes is steering. The steering of one process by another is mediated by the transmission of a message, by information” (Heidegger 1983a, 141). From this point of view, “the difference between automatic machines and living beings . . . is neutralized into an undifferentiated information process.” The relation between

human being and world becomes nothing but the ultimate feedback loop. The aspect of human beings that can best be understood as calculable information is “the program for development” that is “stored” in human genes (142). Biotechnology thus promises to control our evolution, although for the moment human behavior remains an unpredictable “disruptive factor” (143). Futurology and the cybernetic control of industrial society try to compensate for this unpredictability by creating a world where “humanity bases itself exclusively upon itself and on the domains of its lived world that it has formed into institutions” (144). Experience and activity are now confined by calculating will: “the human being remains closed up in the sphere of possibilities that have been computed by and for him . . . industrial society exists on the ground of its enclosure in its own contrivances.” Art threatens to become nothing but information processing (145). What is lost is openness to destiny—“what first sends humanity into its own vocation” (146). In an exchange of letters about his Athens lecture, Heidegger agrees with Arendt’s comment that in the futurological calculation of the future, the genuine future as what comes toward humanity, rather than from it, is abolished (Arendt and Heidegger 2004, 170–171).

This regime cannot be broken by some act of will—that would simply perpetuate the dynamic of control. Our representation of beings in terms of information and steering depends, ultimately, on the Western understanding of being as presence, and on the appropriating event that eludes all information gathering and control. What is required, then, is meditative thought that retrieves the Greek beginning to discover what remained unthought in it: the event of primal unconcealment that first illuminates what is present. The role of art may be to indicate the concealment that accompanies this unconcealment, alerting us to “what cannot be planned or steered, cannot be calculated or made” (Heidegger 1983a, 148).

In other texts, Heidegger clarifies why he sees our entire age as cybernetic. Cybernetics is not just one science among others, but the master science, and as such, it is taking the place of philosophy. Philosophy can no longer creatively open ontological domains. Science has taken over the exploration of beings within the already exposed domains, and cybernetics can coordinate all sciences, since it allows us to organize all knowledge and steer all objects (Heidegger TB, 58/GA 14, 72; FCM, 368/GA 29/30, 534–35; PA, 259n/GA 9, 341; FS, 26, 63/GA 15, 51, 59; 2009a, 328).

But what is “steering”? Does it necessarily involve coercion? Perhaps cybernetics itself is steered by a noncoercive steering (Heidegger and Fink HS, 12). It may be that the essence of cybernetics is nothing cybernetic: that is, our approach to the world in terms of control may itself be guided, in a non-controlling way, by a destiny that cybernetics itself cannot understand.

What is “information”? *Informatio* originally meant the formation of matter, its acquisition of a form. “Information thus implies, on the one hand, the stamping and, on the other, information-giving, upon which the informed being reacts” (Heidegger and Fink HS, 14). Ironically, information now blocks our way to the *forma* or essence (Heidegger ZS, 58/GA 89, 75). “The more frantically the volume of information increases, the more decisively the misunderstanding and blindness to the phenomena grows” (ZS, 74/GA 89, 96). That is, the mass of ontic data gets

in the way of ontological reflection, and the information is accumulated in order to “stamp” beings in the image of our will, rather than for the sake of understanding beings themselves.

Heidegger could also have critiqued the concept of information using his distinction between truth as unconcealment and truth as correctness. A correct proposition can discover some entity only if the world is originally opened in a nonpropositional way. Cybernetics ignores this primal unconcealment and deals only in propositions reduced to the level of atomic assertions, *yesses* and *nos*. The ones and zeros of computing are, in effect, affirmations of the presence or absence of some minimal element. These assertions need no asserter and no audience: they can be generated automatically (say, by a camera) and processed by machine. They can be transmitted as “messages” from machine to machine, never revealing anything to anyone. This is all technically feasible, but to reduce all truth and thought to information is to presume that a world can then be reconstructed from meaningless and nonrevelatory bits. Heidegger would deny that this can work, any more than meaningful perception can be constructed from meaningless sense data (SZ, 98–100, 164). If we lacked caring engagement in a world, no information-processing system could inform us, that is, reveal anything.

Heidegger attacks the cybernetic conception of language along similar lines (Heidegger TB, 58/GA 14, 72; Capurro 1981). For cybernetics, “language can be explained scientifically as something computable, that is, as something that can be controlled [and] measured” (Heidegger ZS, 92/GA 89, 123–124). The cybernetic approach is an updated version of the old definition of the human being as the animal with *logos*, which Heidegger often criticizes for missing the founding potency of *logos*—the way it gathers us into an understanding of being—and reducing it to a mere faculty (IM, 187/GA 40, 184). When *logos* is further reduced to information processing, it becomes a manipulative technique, and we become nothing but manipulators. In theory, our very role as speakers can be supplanted by a “language machine” (Heidegger 1983c, 100/GA 16, 548). Heidegger sums up the cybernetic notion of language as *Benachrichtigung als tragende Einrichtung* (GA 76, 357). A possible translation is “informing as foundational organizing,” but there is also a play on *Richtigkeit* (correctness) and *Richtung* (direction, directing). Language becomes purely a means of control—accurate, precise steering. It is “ordering/positing” (*Be-stellung*), a perfect example of the *Ge-stell*—“im-position” or “enframing” as the essence of technology. Through effective communication, the deployment of commands and propositions, beings become ordered and available as present resources. Our control over beings is enabled and sustained by a system of information gathering (Heidegger ZS, 278/GA 89, 346).

As an alternative, Heidegger suggests that we need to respect language as a happening that sustains us or “speaks” us, initiating us into a relation with being. Language is best instantiated not in “messages” as the transmission of information, but in poetry, which first opens the world (de Beistegui 2005, 150). Wiener’s claim that great poetry is distinguished from clichés by its greater unpredictability illustrates the poverty of the cybernetic approach. Maximally unpredictable speech is nonsense, not poetry. Poetry may well be surprising, but the best poetry also

brings us back to elemental meanings and experiences, bringing recognition. This phenomenon cannot be captured statistically.

More broadly, Heidegger objects to the characterization of human beings as information processing systems. He quotes a cybernetic description of the human being as the “configuration of a mnemonic-information plan” and Wiener’s comparison of our nervous system to the feedback mechanism of an anti-aircraft gun (Heidegger ZS, 91/GA 89, 119; Wiener 1961, 5–6). (Today we are Floridi’s “semantic engines and conscious inforgs.”) Such conceptions amount to “the destruction of the human being” (Heidegger ZS, 123/GA 89, 123). A machine can be programmed to react to noise, but “does the machine hear the noise as noise? The machine has no possibilities for decision making” (Heidegger ZS, 22/GA 89, 26). Heidegger rejects Wiener’s claim, then, that we have invented “sense organs” for machines (HU, 33). Nothing is revealed to machines, because they cannot care about anything. As Dreyfus puts it, if we assume that “man must be a *device* which calculates according to rules on data which take the form of atomic facts,” we are ignoring “the role of human purposes and needs in organizing the situation so that objects are recognized as relevant and accessible” (Dreyfus 1992, 231, 234).

Heidegger is attempting, then, to retrieve the proper dignity of human beings. In contrast, “humanism,” in the Heideggerian sense, destroys humanity by attempting to found all truth and purpose on calculative reason and controlling will. The “humanist” project dismisses the true human condition: our voluntary and rational acts are based on a caring engagement in the world and on the gift of an understanding of being (Heidegger PA, 247/GA 9, 323–24). “Humanism” ends up treating human beings themselves as calculable objects, and thus degrades us at the same time as it unrealistically exalts our powers. This paradox is on view in cybernetics, as Dupuy explains:

In mechanizing the mind, in treating it as an artifact, the mind presumes to exercise power over this artifact. . . . The mind can now hope not only to manipulate this mechanized version of itself at will, but even to reproduce and manufacture it in accordance with its own wishes and intentions. . . . For man to be able, as subject, to exercise a power of this sort over himself, it is first necessary that he be reduced to the rank of an object, able to be reshaped to suit any purpose. No raising up can occur without a concomitant lowering, and vice versa. (2009, 20–21)³

The Experience of Cyberbeing

The greater part of a century has passed since the construction of the first electronic computers and the development of cybernetic theory. How do we find ourselves participating in cyberbeing from day to day? Computers have become ubiquitous elements of our everyday environment—most conspicuously in the form of mobile

³For these reasons Dupuy claims that cybernetics is an anti-humanism and that Heidegger wrongly sees it as humanist; but this claim misunderstands what Heidegger means by “humanism.”

smartphones. But even those of us who do not own such devices depend, knowingly or unknowingly, willingly or unwillingly, on information technology.

As we did with cybernetics, we have to grant the “correctness” of this development from the start. We need and desire information in countless circumstances, so our devices yield clear rewards. They are effective, efficient, and empowering. They can expand our knowledge, save lives, make money, enable new artforms, strengthen friendships and communities, and even undermine tyranny. But these benefits are so clear, and the possibilities so alluring, that they may lure us deep into a way of existing that some are beginning to regret. Many today are concerned about the mental health effects of the overuse of digital devices: distraction, addiction, loneliness, depression, even psychosis.⁴

But concern for our mental health remains superficial unless we investigate what health is, what the mind is, and thus what it means to be human or Dasein. An analysis of the “pros and cons” of cyberbeing needs to respect the richness of the phenomena. For instance, as both friends and foes of the contemporary lifestyle like to point out, the bursts of information from our devices provide our brains with “a dopamine squirt” (Richtel 2010). But to remain on this level is to exemplify the reduction to the measurable that is characteristic of cybernetics. A deeper understanding would have to interpret phenomena such as pleasure, desire, and addiction as manifestations of Dasein’s way of being as care (Heidegger SZ, 194–196). This interpretation in no way denies any correct findings of neurology, but it attempts to put them into the appropriate ontological context.

Here we can only sketch some ways in which our everyday use of information devices illustrates the inauthentic “falling” delineated in *Being and Time* (cf. Dreyfus 2009, Chap. 4). These “negatives” are tendencies and temptations rather than inevitabilities, and they go hand in hand with “positives.” By “inauthenticity” (*Uneigentlichkeit*), Heidegger means a mode of existing that is not one’s own (*eigen*). Instead of being alert to who I am, to the fact that my own being is at stake and I am responsible for becoming someone in the face of mortality, I tend to plunge into the tasks immediately at hand, and lose myself in busyness. I do “what one does” instead of acting as an individual. It would be misguided to issue a blanket condemnation of this falling. Falling is a normal and universal tendency, even though its prevalence varies (Heidegger SZ, 129). Furthermore, authenticity does not mean simply turning away from everydayness, but seizing on it individually (169). Heidegger does not ask us to be teetotalers when it comes to falling—that way would lie a state of constant anxiety. But he does ask us to be ready to snap out of falling when the time is right. Then, as Charles Guignon puts it, “the individual can clear-sightedly take over the task of being a clearing by realizing the structure of lived time in his or her actions in a way that is vivid, focused, steady, and intense” (Guignon 2008, 284).

⁴For accessible summaries of this research see the 2010 *New York Times* series “Your Brain on Computers”; Turkle 2011; Carr 2011; Dokoupil 2012; and Rushkoff 2013.

The aspect of falling that cyberbeing most obviously facilitates is curiosity (Heidegger SZ, §36). *Neugier* is a craving for the new, simply because it is new. In our restless “knowing-it-all” (178), we flit from one information snack to the next. We do not seek a deepening interpretation, but pure novelty. This craving is now given free rein by our inexhaustible supply of tweets, updates, and videos. As the quantity of information increases, the quality of understanding decreases. We skim rather than reading or “gathering” (Heidegger IM, 131/GA 40, 127; Carr 2011, Chaps. 5 and 7). Skimming is useful in many situations, but the habit of multitasking and seeking new information is eroding our ability to focus and reflect: “we’ve got a large and growing group of people who think the slightest hint that something interesting might be going on is like catnip. They can’t ignore it. . . . A significant fraction of people’s experiences are now fragmented” (Clifford Nass, quoted in Richtel 2010).

Curiosity is an inauthentic form of “understanding,” that is, our ability to deal with beings in the light of our own possibilities for being. In Heidegger’s example, one picks up a hammer and uses it appropriately (SZ, 84). Such well-practiced use involves a deep familiarity with a tool, even if it is not expressed in language, much less in philosophical analysis. (Familiarity may not even be intelligible in terms of information: Borgmann 1999, 14.) Our computing devices, however, bring us novelty that often hardly has time to become familiar before we move on. The use we make of the information can be minimal, and the project in terms of which we encounter it can easily fade into the background as we become absorbed in the data stream that the device provides. Instead of dwelling on the familiar, meditatively recollecting it, we sprint onward to the new (Carr 2011, Chap. 9).

Curiosity also involves an inauthentic form of spatiality. We essentially tend to “de-sever” things or bring them near in our attention (Heidegger SZ, §23). Thanks to our cyberdevices, we can almost instantly de-sever remote text, images, and sounds, skipping imperceptibly over the earth from which these phenomena have grown. For instance, a hyperlink on a Web page allows us to travel through hyperspace: it can pinch space, as it were, so that it takes us to any site without passing through an intervening terrain. We can easily discover some phenomenon, then, without caring about its context. Both distance and genuine proximity are eroding (Heidegger BFL, 3–4/GA 79, 3–4). Heidegger writes in *Being and Time* that the radio destroys the everyday world by eliminating distance (SZ, 105). *Introduction to Metaphysics* complains that “any incident you like, in any place you like, at any time you like, becomes accessible as fast as you like.” “When you can simultaneously ‘experience’ an assassination attempt against a king in France and a symphony concert in Tokyo; when time is nothing but speed, instantaneity, and simultaneity, and time as history has vanished from all Dasein of all peoples . . . then, yes then, there still looms like a specter over all this uproar the question: what for?—where to?—and what then?” (Heidegger IM, 40/GA 40, 41). What was an exaggeration in 1935 is less so in the age of YouTube, when we can call up an experience at will from the ever-growing stockpile of recorded events. It takes us only a few seconds to access the newsreel footage of the assassination of King Alexander I of Yugoslavia in Marseille, which apparently inspired Heidegger’s remarks.

As the information we gather through our devices is torn from its context, the phenomenon of ambiguity (Heidegger SZ, §37) becomes unavoidable. Words and deeds can be absorbed faster than ever into a sphere where genuine and ungenuine get confused, where everything is soon characterized as *passé*, and where ready-made interpretations get slapped as fast as possible on every event. Every expression becomes one message among billions; it can be copied instantly, and instantly published; its author can always be pseudonymous; ironic quotation marks grow up around every saying, and it gets passed around as a “meme” whose origin is unknown and whose value is dubious.

Such memes are the ultimate triumph of “idle talk” (Heidegger SZ, §35). The inauthentic form of discourse, idle talk circulates statements about beings without experiencing the beings themselves. Our devices make it easier than ever to find statements on any topic, as well as nonverbal expressions, and pass them on in a highly efficient form of hearsay. For example, Tumblr offers an easy way to create a stream of blog posts (usually images) by reblogging others’ posts. Do these posts mean anything to the blogger, or are they just ways to keep up with the Anyone (*das Man*)? The environment is so ambiguous that the question is unanswerable.

In such an environment, temporality takes an inauthentic form, focused on an evaporating present and the accumulation of manipulable representations. Instead of drawing deeply on our heritage for the sake of some ultimate possibility—a possibility always shadowed by death—we tend to be absorbed in “the ever-present assault of simultaneous impulses and commands” (Rushkoff 2013, 4). The past becomes a storehouse of the re-presentable. The future is nothing but a source of new additions to that stock. Is anyone mortal anymore, or are there only representations of demise, representations that can always, it seems, be revisited and revised? Carl Schmitt describes some facets of this temporality in his remarkable story “The Buribunks,” which anticipated the age of social media in 1918 by envisioning a world in which everyone constantly produces public diaries. In this world

the present is nothing but the midwife that delivers the lived, historical past out of the dark womb of the future. As long as it is not reached, the future is . . . a dark rat hole from which one second after the other, just like one rat after the other, emerges into the light of the past. . . . The death of an individual is also nothing but such a rat second, which has no content in itself—whether one of happiness or grief—but only in its historical registration. (Quoted in Kittler 1999, 241–242)

Our everyday cyberbeing also involves a manipulative relation to truth. If, for technologized *Dasein*, beings in general appear as resources, then for cyber-*Dasein*, knowledge and truth appear as information resources. Rather than hard-won moments of finite unconcealment, truths become instantly available, easily malleable representations, to be used as we please. Once pulverized into atomic assertions—piles of *yases* and *nos*—truth can be “processed” and reshaped.

The ease with which the data tsunami can be searched and used makes the Internet into the ultimate panopticon. “Our” information is accessible to corporations, governments, hackers, and countless automated processes, raising the specter of the death of privacy itself. This is not just a legal and ethical issue, but an

ontological one. The principle “All that happens must be known” (Eggers 2013, 68) expresses the relation between thinking and being in the cybernetic age. What “happens” is what can be represented digitally; to “know” is to have access to digital representations. The very possibility of something irreducible to the digital offends against our age’s imperative to expand the infosphere to encompass all being/information.

It might seem that as the ultimate knowers, we human beings are the masters and possessors of all that happens—but we, too, are parts of the manipulable universe. We are “human resources.” This now means that we are on call as recipients and providers of information, ready to be provoked to respond, constantly absorbing and emitting bursts of data. Instead of perceiving this as a reduction or imposition, we usually eagerly participate in the information-resource order: we keep our devices ready at hand—or keep ourselves ready at hand for them—as we wait for them and other Dasein to activate us. Inauthenticity can involve busyness and excitement (Heidegger SZ, 43); the typical attunement of the user getting a message combines excited busyness with a certain disengagement, as one reacts to the demand that one subject the new “rat second” to efficient surveillance. This mood is expressed in the characteristic smartphone squint: a peering, scanning gaze as one breathes shallowly and blocks out one’s environment while one is summoned by the digital paradigm. This narrow, reactive attunement hardly displays the “clarity, courage and integrity” characteristic of authentic participation in public life (Guignon 2004, 150).

Our digital devices enable, even encourage, these forms of inauthenticity. Is this simply the fault of the metaphysical errors of the cybernetic theory that undergirds the devices? That hardly seems plausible, since similar forms of inauthenticity were evident to Heidegger in 1927. We should accept his claim that inauthenticity is a permanent tendency in Dasein; it could be manifest in a Bavarian barley field in 1370 no less than in the skyscrapers of Shanghai in 2014, and it is never a blind necessity, but can be broken through in a moment of authentic insight.

Being and Time also points out, however, that the extent and dominance of inauthenticity can vary from one historical period to another (Heidegger SZ, 129). The ubiquity and ease of our digital devices offer constant temptations to inauthentic behavior, while cybernetic conceptions of the good are gaining strength. Wiener and Floridi understand goodness as resistance to entropy: a good life accurately gathers and processes information, acts effectively on the environment, and preserves and enhances differentiation. This variant of modern subjectivism, combined with consumerism, is used to market digital devices today, and the devices in turn funnel more marketing to us. This environment invites us to conceive of ourselves as a series of “likes”—a data set that is itself a valuable resource for computerized marketing—instead of resolutely choosing a possible way to exist. Through such synergies, cybernetic metaphysics blends with moneymaking and the human inclination to inauthenticity to form our cyberbeing.

Forms of Resistance

How far can cyberbeing go? It has hardly begun to exhaust its possibilities. Sergey Brin, a cofounder of Google, has proclaimed that “certainly if you had all the world’s information directly attached to your brain, or an artificial brain that was smarter than your brain, you’d be better off” (quoted in Levy 2004). What does it mean to be “smart”? What does “better off” mean? What is “all the world’s information”? The limit of the world’s information is only the universe itself. Our technological leaders seem less interested in reflecting on their assumptions than on expanding cyberbeing until it becomes an all-encompassing reality.

As Floridi puts it, information technology is “re-ontologizing” the world: current developments are transforming the “intrinsic nature” or “essence” of beings themselves, which are now coming to belong to the “infosphere”: “in the re-ontologized infosphere, there is no longer any substantial difference between the *processor* and the *processed*.” “The digital is spilling over into the analogue and merging with it. . . the infosphere is progressively absorbing any other ontological space” (Floridi 2010a, 6–8). He predicts that “when the migration is complete, we shall increasingly feel deprived, excluded, handicapped or poor to the point of paralysis and psychological trauma whenever we are disconnected from the infosphere, like fish out of water. One day, being an inforg will be so natural that any disruption in our normal flow of information will make us sick” (13). Would this be a salutary merger with the fundamentally informational nature of reality? Or does the informational “re-ontologization” of the world and of ourselves bring distortion and loss, so that “information is about to overflow and suffocate reality” (Borgmann 1999, 213)?

In the phantasmagoric vision of Ray Kurzweil, once we reach the “Singularity” (when the power of artificial intelligence exceeds our own), the entire universe, from atoms to galaxies, will swiftly be transformed into a complex of hyperintelligent, hyperpowerful computers and cyborgs. The “goal of the Singularity” is for “a technology-creating species [to] engineer the universe it wants” (Kurzweil 2005, 364). In effect, this means turning all objects into subjects, that is, information processors and manipulators. This would be the deification of cybernetic subjectivity (Zimmerman 2008). Yet this breathtaking progress would be no progress at all: it would relentlessly implement a monotonous, unquestioned understanding of being as the will to power. In this future, there is no future.

Does Heidegger suggest a solution? No—that approach would be too naive and manipulative. If the underlying problem is that we overestimate our powers and neglect our indebtedness to the gift of being, then taking *responsibility* for “fixing” cyberbeing would just entrench the misunderstanding. But we may be able to develop *responsiveness* to a possible new understanding, if only we can establish some distance from cyberbeing. This is not to negate the modern world: Heidegger calls for “thought’s retreat from world civilization, at a distance from it, but by no means denying it” (1983a, 147). In fact, distance is a precondition for the genuine proximity of an appreciative encounter.

Distance from cyberbeing would require a paradigm shift for which a few thinkers may be able to prepare the way. “Perhaps there is a thinking which is more sober than the irresistible race of rationalization and the sweeping character of cybernetics. Presumably it is precisely this sweeping quality which is extremely irrational” (Heidegger TB, 72/GA 14, 89). But in a time when history is being “leveled out into the uniform storage of information,” the risk is that “thinking will . . . come to an end in a bustle of information” (Heidegger PA, xiii/GA 9, ix–x). Imagining how thought might be preserved, Heidegger uses a metaphor from guerrilla warfare: “‘Cells’ of resistance will be formed everywhere against technology’s unchecked power. They will keep reflection alive inconspicuously and will prepare the reversal, for which ‘one’ will clamor when the general desolation becomes unbearable” (Heidegger ZS, 283/GA 89, 352).

What sort of thinking is needed? Heidegger suggests that if we learn to appreciate the technological understanding of being as a gift, we will open up to a dynamic that cannot itself be understood in technological terms—a dynamic of granting and receiving, thinking and thanking (QCT, 32–33/GA 7, 19). The first step in this direction would be some historical perspective, which would expose the contingency and particularity of the metaphysics of cyberbeing, its roots in the experience of being as presence that characterizes the West. The next step might be an openness to the *Ereignis*, the transformative event that grants a founding experience of being. Such an event would be the true Singularity.

But let us remember that cyberbeing is not simply a matter of metaphysics and historical destiny. It is also how we each allow our situation to entice us into inauthenticity. This means that one does not have to be an epoch-making thinker in order to start a cell of resistance. With practice, one can develop balance and perspective. “We can use technical devices as they ought to be used, and also let them alone as something which does not affect our inner and real core” (Heidegger DT, 54/GA 16, 527). On the individual level, a few steps toward such perspective might take the form of habits such as “digital sabbath,” a day when one refrains from using information devices and instead pursues person-to-person interactions, physical work, or meditation—cultivating rich, intrinsically valuable activities or “focal practices” (Borgmann 1984, 196–210). Such small, simple episodes of sanity may, in the long run, develop forms of experience that can enable human beings to keep their distance from cyberbeing and remain receptive to truth that is not information, thinking that is not processing.

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Part III
Phenomenological Considerations
of Death and Ethics

Chapter 13

An Attempt at Clarifying Being-Towards-Death

Adam Buben

Heidegger's account of death in *Being and Time* is one of the most controversial and difficult in the history of philosophy's dealings with the topic. In the preface to Carol White's *Time and Death*, she claims that "the discussion of this issue in *Being and Time* is far from clear; its intentional false starts and dead ends easily mislead the reader" (White 2005, 1). Even though I believe that there is a cohesiveness to Heidegger's account that makes sense of these so-called false starts and dead ends, I agree with White's general assessment of its misleading nature. Otherwise capable navigators of Heidegger's thought run aground when attempting to maneuver through the sharp reefs of his early treatment of death. One recent example of such a harrowing journey is Bernard N. Schumacher's newly translated *Death and Mortality in Contemporary Philosophy*, which mischaracterizes Heidegger's notions of certainty and indefiniteness with respect to death, and thereby fails to grasp the core insight of Heidegger's discussion. Since I am yet to find an explication of Heidegger's death chapter that clarifies all of its contents, I intend, with reference at crucial points to Charles Guignon's latest work, to provide a more detailed explication here.

Death in *Being and Time*

Heidegger first takes up the problem of death at the beginning of "Division Two." It is here that, in an attempt to grasp the primordial Being of *Dasein* ("being-there," Heidegger's word for the sort of being that humans have/are), he claims that it must

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be grasped in its wholeness. Such a complete and fundamental understanding of itself is necessary if Dasein is to uncover the meaning of “Being,” a basic notion that is often taken for granted.¹ Because Dasein is “that entity which understands what it is to be,” as Guignon puts it (1983, 68), Heidegger is interested first and foremost in the Being of Dasein (BT, 24–28, 35/SZ, 5–8, 14–15). And since a partial or derivative account of Dasein will not provide a clear and thorough picture of how Being shows up for Dasein, he must work out a complete and foundational account.² Heidegger states, “if the Interpretation of Dasein’s Being is to become primordial, as a foundation for working out the basic question of ontology, then it must first have brought to light existentially the Being of Dasein in its possibilities of *authenticity* and *totality*” (BT, 276/SZ, 233). Unfortunately, it seems that Dasein can never be grasped in its wholeness because “there is in every case something still outstanding” about it—its death (BT, 276/SZ, 233). Death is notoriously difficult to get a handle on since once it happens there is no longer Dasein. If one is to grasp the wholeness of Dasein, one will have to find a way to deal with this troublesome death issue.³ Thus, Heidegger seems to embark upon a quest for an understanding of death in which, contra Epicurus, death and I coexist (BT, 279–80/SZ, 236–37).⁴

Heidegger begins his search by considering common approaches to death in order to expose its proper characteristics.⁵ In ¶47, for example, he reflects on the possibility of grasping the wholeness of Dasein by witnessing the death of the other, but determines that the other’s death is not something that I, as this particular Dasein, can encounter in the relevant sense. Heidegger points out that, “we have no way of access to the loss-of-Being as such which the dying man ‘suffers’” (BT, 282/SZ, 239). Thus, he concludes that only Dasein’s own death is of interest for the sake of grasping its wholeness:

¹The inquiry into these matters is what Heidegger calls “fundamental ontology”—his overall project in *Being and Time*.

²By questioning what one really (“authentically”) is apart from the views handed down by the metaphysical tradition (e.g. a rational animal, a created being, a thinking thing, etc.), one becomes free to see how whatever is shows up without looking through the lenses that these views require one to use (Huntington 1995, 46–7).

³Inversely, given its constant inclusion in the death chapter, it would seem that incorporating the notion of wholeness is absolutely crucial to understanding Heidegger’s inquiry into death. Hubert L. Dreyfus’ foreword to White’s book, however, suggests that few significant interpreters of Heidegger on death emphasize the centrality of wholeness, with Guignon as the notable exception. While Dreyfus raises some concerns about Guignon’s early account (White 2005, xviii–xxxi), Guignon has recently updated his views on Heideggerian death while still maintaining the centrality of wholeness (2011a).

⁴For more on the anti-Epicurean aspects of Heidegger’s account, see Buben 2013, 976–7.

⁵Theodore Kisiel (1993, 339–440) and Iain Thomson (2004, 465) both offer helpful statements of the Heideggerian concept of “formal indication” in connection with death. Briefly, formal indication is the process of looking to “factual life as the inroad for developing concepts to bring what is hidden on a pre-philosophical level to an explicit philosophical understanding” (Schalow 1994, 311).

Dying is something that every Dasein itself must take upon itself at the time. By its very essence, death is in every case mine . . . death signifies a peculiar possibility-of-Being in which the very Being of one's own Dasein is an issue. In dying, it is shown that mineness and existence are ontologically constitutive for death . . . if 'ending', as dying, is constitutive for Dasein's totality, then the Being of this wholeness itself must be conceived as an existential phenomenon of a Dasein which is in each case one's own. (BT, 284/SZ, 240)

In addition to getting at the first formal characteristic of death, "mineness" (*Jemeinigkeit*) or "ownmostness,"⁶ this passage also hints for the first time that death is not to be understood in the usual way as an event that comes at the end of life. Since it is rather to be conceived as an "existential phenomenon," Heidegger begins to explain this conception of dying (*Sterben*) by making it distinct from the "perishing" (*Verenden*) of living things (BT, 284–85/SZ, 240–41). However, as this is only the first of a few such distinctions, his explanation of this importantly odd use of otherwise common language will require more than one section of the death chapter to complete.

Because death is often said to be the end of Dasein, ¶48 considers the different common ways of understanding the ending of things in order to determine which might apply to death. Among the possible ways of understanding ending is the fulfillment characteristic of ripening fruit. While Heidegger ultimately rejects ripening as the appropriate kind of ending for a description of Dasein's death (ripening is a realizing of a goal, while death initially seems to be what makes this sort of achievement impossible in that it often leaves projects unfinished), there is an aspect of his consideration of ripening that he retains in his understanding of death as an ending (BT, 288/GA 2, 244). This aspect is the fact that, like the fruit which carries its "not-yet" ripe with it as it ripens, Dasein carries its not yet at an end with it while it exists. That is, it carries its death with it as that which it is not yet. He states:

[J]ust as Dasein is already its 'not-yet', and is its 'not-yet' constantly as long as it is, it is already its end too. The 'ending' which we have in view when we speak of death, does not signify Dasein's Being-at-an-end [Zu-Ende-sein], but a *Being-towards-the-end* [*Sein zum Ende*] of this entity. Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is. (BT, 289/SZ, 245)

Not only does this passage begin to explain Heidegger's notion of death as "a way to be" instead of as an event, it also gives the reader the first glimpse of how death makes possible a proper grasp of the whole of Dasein (BT, 290/SZ, 245). Since I am always my death, in the sense of being toward it (cf. Guignon 2011a, 194–95), Heidegger may have found a way of showing how death and I can coexist.

To go with his new equation of Dasein's dying with Being-towards-death, Heidegger's ¶49 supplements the explanation of his peculiar use of otherwise

⁶See BT, 297/SZ, 253 for an association of these two terms: many things might be accidentally mine, but what is "essentially mine" (death) seems to be part of my "ownmost self." See BT, 67–71/SZ, 42–45 for a more general discussion of the essential "mineness" of my existence.

common terminology that he began when he distinguished death from the perishing of living things. He does so by adding a further term, “demise” (*Ableben*), and claiming that it signifies the specific sort of passing away that only happens to Dasein. In other words, demise is to Dasein what perishing is to something alive. Heidegger explains:

The ending of that which lives we have called ‘perishing’. Dasein too ‘has’ its death, of the kind appropriate to anything that lives . . . as codetermined by its primordial kind of Being. . . . Dasein too can end without authentically dying, though on the other hand, *qua* Dasein, it does not simply perish. We designate this intermediate phenomenon as its ‘demise’. (BT, 291/SZ, 247)

Once he makes this further distinction, Heidegger suggests that demise is the actual object of study when any ontic science (as opposed to ontological inquiry) picks up on the topic of human death. For example, psychology merely concerns itself with how people feel about the impending, final, and irreversible moment that shuts down their relationships, projects, and perspective; and theology deals with, among other things, what might happen after such an event (BT, 291–92/SZ, 247–48).

According to Heidegger, these ontical investigations into the significance of demise must not be allowed to contaminate the ontological, or existential, understanding of death as Being-towards-death. He asserts, “methodologically, the existential analysis is superordinate to the questions of a biology, psychology, theodicy, or theology of death” (BT, 292/SZ, 248). Heidegger is attempting to provide a purely formal account of what Dasein is. Such an account will be sufficiently general so as to apply to (or underlie) any of the more content laden and specific accounts of what it is to be human that are provided by the various sciences. As Heidegger has laid things out, Being-towards-death is the appropriately general sense of death for understanding the structure of Dasein. Because the sciences, in their dealings with death, address only the specifics of their respective views of demise, they cannot contribute to Heidegger’s treatment of Being-towards-death. In order to demonstrate further the importance of this treatment and show that it is not some arbitrary construction, Heidegger concludes this section by claiming that it must be connected with his earlier analysis of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world (BT, 293/SZ, 248–49).

In the last chapter of “Division One,” Heidegger designates the Being of Dasein as “care,” which he defines as “ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in-(the-world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world)” (BT, 237/SZ, 192). That is, Dasein is essentially oriented toward its future, while already thrown into a past that includes not only its own past actions but also its capabilities and cultural background, and engaged with the things and others it encounters and the projects it is concerned about. To each of these three components of care, Heidegger gives a name of sorts—the “ahead-of-itself” he calls “existence,” the “Being-already-in” he calls “facticity,” and the “Being-alongside” he calls “falling” (BT, 293/SZ, 250). The purpose of ¶50 is to explain how each of these components of care is manifested in Being-towards-death.

Heidegger begins this explanation by discussing Dasein's ahead-of-itself/existence as manifested in the impending nature of death. Having given up on the idea of death as something still outstanding, because this idea understands death as an event that has not yet taken place, he must offer an account of death's impending nature that does not make this same mistake. Thus, he provides his first list of the formal characteristics of death as an impending possibility—characteristics indicative of important features of Dasein's Being. He begins with the ownmostness already mentioned and adds that death is “that *possibility . . . which is non-relational, and which is not to be outstripped [unüberholbare]*” (BT, 294/SZ, 250–51). As Being-towards-death, Heidegger points out that Dasein is its own possibility of no more Dasein, and he believes that this means two things. First, in honestly accepting itself as the possible disconnection from all that it has been, including its purely accidental relations to others, Dasein comes to understand its individuality in such a way that it can no longer rely on these relations to explain itself. It must rather take full responsibility for itself and its choices. Second, as its own constant possibility of no more Dasein, Dasein's Being-towards-death always stands before it and cannot be gotten beyond. In other words, so long as one is, one can never finish with death or actualize this unique possibility. It is in this sense of something always standing before it, i.e. ahead-of-itself, that Heidegger sees death as impending. In fact, because nothing else seems to stand before Dasein in such a distinctive way, he states, in reference to the ahead-of-itself, “this item in the structure of care has its most primordial concretion in Being-towards-death” (BT, 294/SZ, 251).⁷

Since Dasein is essentially ahead-of-itself-Being-towards-death, it must have found itself “*thrown* into this possibility” (BT, 295/SZ, 251). That is, in existing, Dasein has from its beginning, as a fact of its existence, its possibility of its no longer being. Whether or not a particular Dasein is explicitly aware of it, this facticity is in some sense revealed by the presence of anxiety. Heidegger claims:

Anxiety in the face of death is anxiety ‘in the face of’ that potentiality-for-Being which is one’s ownmost, non-relational, and not to be outstripped. . . . This anxiety is not an accidental or random mood of ‘weakness’ . . . but, as a basic state-of-mind of Dasein, it amounts to the disclosedness of the fact that Dasein exists as thrown Being *towards* its end. (BT, 295/SZ, 251)

This passage refers back to both the definition of anxiety in the last chapter of “Division One” and the discussion of state-of-mind (*Befindlichkeit*) in the penultimate chapter. Although it would surely be worthwhile to explore the origins of these ideas for Heidegger (e.g. in Kierkegaard), it is most important, for my present purposes, simply to note that despite Dasein's ever-present state of anxiety, he believes that most of the time Dasein remains ignorant of the fact that it is essentially Being-towards-death (in fact, Dasein often remains unaware of its anxiety as well). Rather, Dasein “falls” into “the ‘world’ of its concern” (BT, 295/SZ, 252). In other words,

⁷As will become clear, this association of death and the ahead-of-itself aspect of the care structure is among the most important points made in the death chapter.

instead of owning oneself as the possibility of no more possibility, one is often guilty of ignoring this fact by losing oneself in everyday activities and thereby “fleeing in the face of one’s ownmost Being-towards-death” (BT, 296/SZ, 252).

Having explained how all three components of care—existence, facticity, and falling—are manifested in Being-towards-death, Heidegger’s account of death does indeed seem less arbitrary. At the very least it now seems to fit in with the rest of *Being and Time* so far. However, Heidegger claims that this connection of care and death (where care contributes the basic structure of Dasein’s Being and death contributes the appropriate “ahead-of-itself” approach to Dasein’s end), which he makes in order to get the whole of Dasein into view, requires some “phenomenal confirmation” in the way Dasein relates to its end in everyday dealings with the world (BT, 296/SZ, 252). While his account is purely formal in the sense that it intentionally offers only the skeletal description of Dasein without recommending any particular material ways of life to fill it out (which Heidegger is careful not to do in order to avoid contaminating his inquiry with the ontic assumptions and baggage that come along with or make up such material), it is still helpful, both for understanding and corroborating his account, to see how death is dealt with on the ontic/existentiell level, particularly in common everyday parlance.

In search of his phenomenal confirmation, Heidegger’s ¶51 reminds readers of chapters four and five of “Division One” that everydayness is characterized by the “idle talk” of the public “they” (BT, 296/SZ, 252). The “they,” taking death as something like mere demise, and relying on worn out clichés and the old standard statistics of the ontic sciences, “tempts” Dasein both to forget that death is its own and to treat the event of death as something that need not be worried about just yet. In a passage that could easily be used to describe Epicurean views, Heidegger points out that:

In such a way of talking, death is understood as an indefinite something ... which is proximally *not yet present-at-hand* for oneself, and is therefore no threat. ... ‘Dying’ is leveled off to an occurrence which reaches Dasein, to be sure, but belongs to nobody in particular. (BT, 297/SZ, 253)

Here idle talk not only provides a questionable account of demise, but it also hides the fact that death, understood as Being-towards-death, is no mere eventual actuality; it is one’s constant possibility. This hiding of Dasein’s essential Being-towards-death by the “they” can often be seen in its “tranquilizing” of death, which involves focusing on the everyday world of concerns. To those who are more clearly near the end of life, this tranquilization manifests itself in the consolation that assures the dying that they will soon be back on their feet engaged with their everyday concerns. To the rest, tranquilization shows up in the attitude that treats the dying of others as an inconvenience that should be dealt with quickly so as not to disturb the everyday concerns of the living (BT, 297–98/SZ, 253–54).

In addition to temptation and tranquilization, the “they” also “alienates” Dasein from itself. This alienation is the result of a sort of double concealment of Dasein’s essential Being-towards-death. As already pointed out, anxiety is the primordial state-of-mind of Dasein as thrown into its own Being-towards-death. Focusing on

death in Heidegger's sense of demise, the "they," however, transforms "this anxiety into fear in the face of an oncoming event" (BT, 298/SZ, 254). But this initial concealment of Being-towards-death is not enough for the "they," which then goes on to treat the fear of the event of demise as something weak and cowardly. In depicting such fear in this way, and recommending instead a sort of indifference to death, the "they" buries the anxiety that is a necessary part of Dasein as Being-towards-death under an extra layer of deception. Already removed from anxiety by one layer due to the substitution of fear in the face of demise, Dasein is then further encouraged to avoid an intimate encounter with this fear.

After concluding this explanation of alienation, Heidegger states that, "temptation, tranquilization, and alienation are distinguishing marks of the kind of Being called 'falling'" (BT, 298/SZ, 254). More specifically, these three approaches to death suggest a falling in with the entities and activities of the everyday world in a way that encourages "fleeing in the face of death" (BT, 298/SZ, 254). But even if one is unaware of what one is doing, fleeing is still a way of Being-towards-death. Given the connection of Being-towards-death and falling (discussed in the previous section), which is one of the three components of care, it seems that fleeing provides the sought-after everyday confirmation of Heidegger's connection of care and Being-towards-death (BT, 298–99/SZ, 254–55). In looking at everydayness and its various death-related mistakes, however, it has become clear that his list of the formal characteristics of death is in need of expansion. Thus, the next step for Heidegger is "to try to secure a full existential conception of Being-towards-the-end" (BT, 299/SZ, 255).

As one might guess based on the errors of idle talk, ¶52 will add certainty and the indefiniteness of this certainty to Heidegger's list of the formal characteristics of death. In everydayness, the "they" admits the fact that death, as the event of demise, is certain in the sense of "not doubted" (BT, 299, 301/SZ, 255, 257). But Heidegger believes that this claim of certainty merely convinces the "they" that since it has already grasped death's certainty, it need not look into this matter any further. Thus, the proper sort of certainty that belongs to death as Being-towards-death remains hidden from the "they" (BT, 301/SZ, 257). Heidegger is distinguishing here between certainty as way to be (perhaps like an attitude in the sense of self-assurance), as in "Being-certain," and the sort of certainty that he claims is derived from Being-certain and applied to the things one is certain about (BT, 300/SZ, 256). For example, I can be so assured that I must be prepared for rain that I manifest my attitude in the way I structure my day, e.g. the way I dress, the route I take to work, the activities I choose; and this Being-certain of myself as "prepared for rain" has nothing to do with whether or not it actually rains.⁸ This latter issue comes up when considering whether or not my attitude is appropriate given the likelihood of precipitation. It is this secondary concern with "actual" events, rather than ways of being, that leads to (often indifferent) statements like "it will certainly rain today."

⁸Cf. BT, 355/SZ, 307, where the key component of "Being-certain" is appropriation.

Because death is not to be understood as the event of demise for Heidegger, but rather as a way to be, it is clear that he must not be interested in the derivative sort of certainty that the “they” applies to this event. If Dasein is to grasp the original certainty of death, Dasein must *be* certain of itself as Being-towards-death, but this is precisely what is made difficult, if not impossible, by viewing death’s certainty as the “they” does. Heidegger believes that “the ‘they’ overlooks the fact that in order to be able to be certain of death, Dasein itself must in every case be certain of its ownmost non-relational potentiality-for-being” (BT, 301/SZ, 257). Due to its focus on demise, the “they” can at best have only an empirical certainty based on witnessing the demise of others, but this empirical sense is mere distraction and contributes nothing to the only certainty that belongs to Being-towards-death according to Heidegger.

Despite the hiding of Being-certain of Being-towards-death behind the illusion of the empirical certainty of demise, Heidegger claims that even in everydayness there is still some vague hint of this Being-certain. The very persistence of Dasein’s, perhaps not obvious, state of anxiety about itself as Being-towards-death, which is even found in Dasein’s falling, betrays some, albeit disowned, sense of Being-certain of Being-towards-death. Heidegger says, “the falling everydayness of Dasein is acquainted with death’s certainty, and yet evades *Being-certain*” (BT, 302/SZ, 258). Just as Being-towards-death is attested in falling everydayness, so is Being-certain of Being-towards-death. As odd as it may sound, everydayness is Being-certain by evading Being-certain; the mere fact that such evasion is possible shows that there is something to be evaded.

With the certainty of death comes its indefiniteness, but the “they” in its everyday way, once again demonstrates its concealing of death’s certainty by failing to acknowledge such indefiniteness. Heidegger states, “death is deferred to ‘sometime later’ . . . the ‘they’ covers up what is peculiar in death’s certainty—that it is possible at any moment. Along with the certainty of death goes the *indefiniteness* of its ‘when’” (BT, 302/SZ, 258). Because the “they” treats death as an event that is not due to take place anytime soon, it is clearly guilty of failure to acknowledge the indefiniteness as to when demise will take place. Rather than facing up to this mistake, Heidegger claims that the “they” retreats into a false definiteness associated with the activities of the everyday world of concern. That is, the “they” finds itself primarily, if not entirely, engaged in actualizing possibilities, accomplishing goals, and producing definite results in everyday matters before it passes away. The problem with this sort of definiteness is that, given the fact that demise can happen at any time, it is purely an accident if any particular possibilities reach “definition” or actualization. Here one can see, in the everyday evasion of the indefiniteness as to when demise will take place, an indication of the essential *Being*-indefinite that goes along with the Being-certain of Being-towards-death. The fact that all definiteness or actualization is accidental for Dasein suggests that Dasein is essentially possibility or unfinished indefiniteness. Viewed in this way, the “they” does not merely have a mistaken approach to demise; the “they” also uses this mistaken approach to conceal the true indefinite nature of Dasein’s Being-towards-death (BT, 302/SZ, 258).

After adding the indefinite certainty of death, Heidegger finally has a “full existential-ontological conception of death” (BT, 303/SZ, 258). Before moving on to the last section of the death chapter, however, he offers something in the way of a review. Given that he has now made explicit all of the formal characteristics of Dasein as it is “*towards*” its “not-yet,” Heidegger reminds the reader that, “in Dasein, as being towards its death, its own uttermost ‘not-yet’ has already been included—that ‘not-yet’ which all others lie ahead of” (BT, 303/SZ, 259). As mentioned earlier, it is this inclusion of its own death, in the sense of Being ahead-of-itself towards-death when explained in terms of Dasein’s essential care structure, that makes grasping the wholeness of Dasein possible without its encountering demise. Heidegger’s understanding of death allows the ahead-of-itself aspect of Dasein to be seen in unity with the other aspects of the care structure, as opposed to seeking the ever-elusive characterization of the event that concludes or completes life. Even though Heidegger is approaching his stated goal of grasping the wholeness of Dasein, he still has a great deal of work left to do. To begin with, while he has made “*inauthentic* Being-towards-death” sufficiently clear as “everyday falling evasion *in the face of* death,” such inauthenticity presupposes the possibility of an authentic (*eigentlich*) Being-towards-death (BT, 303/SZ, 259).⁹ Heidegger himself asks, “can Dasein maintain itself in an authentic Being-towards-its-end?” Until such a question is answered, his account of death will not be complete (BT, 304/SZ, 260).

¶53, the final section of the death chapter, begins by suggesting that there may have been no point in providing the full existential-ontological conception of death, since there seems to be no existentiell instance (appearance in the world) of authentic Being-towards-death. All one sees in the world is inauthentic Being-towards-death (BT, 304/SZ, 260). However, given this evasive Being-towards-death as a kind of example of what not to do, it should at least be feasible to describe what the Being toward this possibility, or taking on of one’s death, in a non-evasive, authentic way would be like (BT, 304–05/SZ, 260). Heidegger begins this description by ruling out the various ways in which one might relate oneself to death understood as the event of demise. These ways of relating—“actualization” (in the sense of suicide), “brooding,” and “expecting”—are alike in that they all seek in some way or another to diminish death’s possibility by looking for its actuality (BT, 305–06/SZ, 261–62).

But as the discussion of indefiniteness implies, Dasein’s Being-towards-death has nothing to do with actualization. Rather, death understood in this sense shows that Dasein “at the most basic level is a reaching forward into possibilities,” as Guignon explains (2011a, 197). Heidegger eventually comes to the conclusion that the proper way to maintain Being-towards-death in its pure possibility is by what he calls “anticipating,” or “running forward toward” (*vorlaufen*), death (BT, 306/SZ,

⁹*Eigentlich* literally means something like “enownable.” Thus, becoming authentic means becoming one’s own, or owning up to what one is; and authentic Being-towards-death is an owning up to oneself as this sort of Being.

262; cf. Guignon 2011a, 197).¹⁰ What is revealed in anticipation is that Dasein is pure projection into possibility, and thus, there is nothing essential to be made actual so long as one exists (and obviously there is no actualization once existence ceases). Heidegger states:

Death, as possibility, gives Dasein nothing to be ‘actualized’, nothing which Dasein, as actual, could itself *be*. It is the possibility of the impossibility of every way of comporting oneself towards anything . . . the anticipation of this possibility . . . signifies the possibility of the measureless impossibility of existence. In accordance with its essence, this possibility offers no support for becoming intent on something, ‘picturing’ to oneself the actuality which is possible, and so forgetting its possibility. Being-towards-death, as anticipation of possibility, is what first *makes* this possibility *possible*, and sets it free as possibility. (BT, 307/SZ, 262)

This passage and others like it on page 307 are perhaps the most obscure in the entire chapter, but what Heidegger seems to be suggesting here is that in anticipating death, viz. authentically Being-towards-death, Dasein finds a certain freedom in being somewhat undefined as to the specific content of its existence. Dreyfus (in an apparent gloss on the sort of impossibility Heidegger is getting at) sees the anticipation of death as illustrating “that Dasein can have neither a nature nor an identity, that it is the constant impossibility of *being* anything specific” (1991, 312). This is not to say that one is absolutely free in the superficial sense of “anything is available to me” since, after all, the purely formal structure of Dasein as this projecting into possibilities up to a point sets certain limitations on the shape and scope of these specifics.¹¹ Nonetheless, no concrete way of life can ever be essential to Dasein in the way that pure possibility is. In order to see clearly how Heidegger reaches these conclusions about authentic Being-towards-death, he must re-view his formal characteristics of death through the lens of anticipation.

He goes through each of these characteristics in turn, repeating much of what he has already said about them, but now emphasizing the lessons that each characteristic provides when one anticipates death. Since Dasein has its ownmost possibility in death (no one else can take on my Being-towards-death), there is at least one possibility in which Dasein is distinct from the “they.” While this is always true, it is through authentic Being-towards-death that one can become aware of oneself in this distinction from the nebulous anonymity (BT, 307/SZ, 263). Because it is one’s own self that becomes an issue in this way of encountering death, there is a sense in which one must stand alone in anticipation, independent of relationships with other Dasein and things in the world. An authentic grasp of one’s Being-towards-death is non-relational in that it individualizes Dasein and demonstrates that while such an individual is always connected to these others, this connection cannot be wholly determinative of what one is. The anticipation of death, therefore, leads Dasein to take responsibility for itself (BT, 308/SZ, 263–64).

¹⁰Although Heidegger does not make such a connection explicit, Thomson and others claim that the term *vorlaufen* implicitly refers to the *Blitzkrieg*—blindly running out into the field of battle toward almost certain death (e.g. Thomson 2004, 464).

¹¹As will become clear, there are other limitations on Dasein’s freedom.

That death is not to be outstripped means that Dasein's Being-towards-death, unlike all of the thoughtless accidental possibilities of the "they" that Dasein accrues like barnacles throughout its existence, always stands before it and cannot be gotten beyond. Whereas these other possibilities and projects can be finished or given up, one can never actualize or be done with this one unique possibility. Once Dasein realizes this in anticipation, it becomes clear that no particular possibility, other than Being-towards-death, is essential to Dasein, despite the attitudes of the "they" that say otherwise; and so, Dasein recognizes its freedom before all of the possibilities that are factually available to it so long as it is.¹² Heidegger states, "one is liberated from one's lostness in those possibilities which may accidentally thrust themselves upon one . . . Anticipation . . . shatters all one's tenaciousness to whatever existence one has reached" (BT, 308/SZ, 264). Because the anticipation of death opens Dasein up to its essential projection into the possibilities that lie before the one that is not to be outstripped, Dasein is able to realize its constant ahead-of-itself orientation, which is a necessary part of grasping its wholeness (BT, 308–09/SZ, 264).

The anticipation of the certainty of death, or authentically Being-certain of Being-towards-death, means being assured "of what is revealed by being-toward-death" (Guignon 2011a, 198). What is revealed, in connection with the notion that death is not to be outstripped, is of course that Dasein is pure projection into possibilities. Heidegger declares, "the certain possibility of death . . . discloses Dasein as a possibility" (BT, 309/SZ, 264). But being certain of itself as essentially possibility cannot be like the ordinary objective "taking something as true," which may dictate behavior in the sense of "given fact x, I must proceed with behavior y." Although no doubt helpful in particular cases, this sort of indifferent truth seems inappropriate given that it is Dasein's very Being that is up for discussion here. Rather, Heidegger is suggesting a comprehensive and personal way of being true that compels and colors all of one's behavior. He states, "holding death for true does not demand just *one* definite kind of behaviour in Dasein, but demands Dasein itself in the full authenticity of its existence" (BT, 309–10/SZ, 265). An important part of this "holding death for true" in anticipation involves cultivating indefiniteness. As previously pointed out, the uncertainty with respect to the "when" of demise implies that Being-certain of Being-towards-death means proceeding into possibilities with no guarantee of completing or actualizing any of them, which might thereby allow one to define oneself as a particular sort of being. In the anticipation of death, one learns not only of the insecurity or anxiety of being such an essentially indefinite being, but also how to embrace this anxiety as a necessary part of existence (in contrast to how the "they" deal with fear) (BT, 310–11/SZ, 265–66).

¹²The idea here seems to be something like this: if I am paying attention, I can see that none of my specific pursuits are necessary. These possibilities can be "out-run" if I choose to pursue others instead, but what cannot be avoided or "out-run" is the fact that I am able to pursue things up until I *am* no longer.

Taking all of this together, Heidegger offers a summary “characterization of authentic Being-towards-death”:

*[A]nticipation reveals to Dasein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself, primarily unsupported by concerned solicitude, but of being itself, rather, in an impassioned **freedom towards death**—a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the ‘they’, and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious. (BT, 311/SZ, 266; cf. BT, 443/SZ, 391)*

The freedom towards death that results from the anticipation of the various aspects of death is, as suggested before, the freedom from ever being essentially determined by any particular possibilities or ways of understanding. In authentic Being-towards-death, Dasein is liberated not only from everyday ways of understanding death, but also from everyday ways of understanding anything, including itself. Rather than being defined by the goals and projects that the “they” expects one to complete in life, Dasein becomes free to be what it really is—ahead-of-itself for the sake of itself. Although Heidegger will have more to say on this topic in later chapters, perhaps such freedom is best described simply as Dasein’s being pure possibility—being open to the totality of available possibilities standing before it, with less concern about which particular possibilities may or may not be actualized (cf. Guignon 2011a, 198; 2011b, 93–98).¹³

Since the anticipation of death only accounts for the “final” third—the ahead-of-itself, or “futurity”—of Dasein’s care structure in its authenticity, Heidegger must still explain the other two thirds in their authenticity.¹⁴ Although his views on authentic “pastness” and “presentness” are closely bound up with the anticipation of death, a thorough treatment of these ideas is perhaps unnecessary given our stated goal of clarifying Heidegger’s discussion of Being-towards-death. Nonetheless, it will perhaps be helpful to say something more about the limitations of the freedom exposed by the anticipation of death. Heidegger begins to take up the issue of Dasein’s thrownness or pastness in the second chapter of “Division Two,” when he introduces the notion of existential “guilt” (*Schuld*). The idea here is that while Dasein is pure projection into possibilities, it does not determine these possibilities for itself; rather it finds itself thrown into a situation in which certain possibilities are available and others are not. Heidegger states, “every Dasein always exists factually. It is not a free-floating self-projection; but its character is determined by thrownness as a Fact of the entity which it is” (BT, 321/SZ, 276). Even though Dasein has

¹³In his own words, Heidegger “has made visible the *ontological* possibility of an existentiell Being-towards-death which is authentic . . . without holding up to Dasein an ideal of existence with any special ‘content’” (BT, 311/SZ, 266).

¹⁴Of course, none of these three essential structures happens before the others according to some sequential or chronological understanding of time. Rather, they are the three equiprimordial aspects of Dasein’s being as care (although “*the primary phenomenon of primordial and authentic temporality is the future*” [BT, 378/SZ, 329]) that make any ordinary understanding of sequential temporality possible (Guignon 2011a, 198–9). See BT, 370–80/SZ, 323–31 for Heidegger’s initial connection of care and temporality. These key ideas are the indispensable lens for viewing the rest of “Division Two.”

freedom from the “they” as to certain specifics, Dasein is not absolutely free in that it does owe a debt of gratitude “to the culture for an understanding of itself” (Dreyfus 1991, 308) within a certain horizon of what is available to it. This debt is Heidegger’s notion of guilt, which he has cleansed of any moral or theological connotations. As an expression of Dasein’s thrown Being-already-in, such guilt is an essential part of Dasein as care; thus, if Dasein is to reach its authenticity, its guilt or pastness (like its death or futurity) must be related to properly (BT, 329–30/SZ, 283–84).

One must not ignore one’s debt and behave as though all things are possible, or what is just as likely, use one’s thrownness to deny any freedom or “say” in one’s existence at all. Instead, Heidegger believes that Dasein, as the Being that has an interest in what it is, must appropriate and take responsibility for its guilt even though it did not choose *to be* or to be in its particular situation. He claims:

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. . . . Dasein has been thrown *into existence*. It exists as an entity which has to be as it is and as it can be. (BT, 321/SZ, 276)

Although Dasein is in a sense constrained by its thrownness, just as no particular possibility to be actualized is as essentially determinative of Dasein’s Being as pure projecting into possibilities, there is no particular possibility or set of possibilities that Dasein is thrown into that can absolutely account for Dasein’s choices. It is in the choosing rather than in what can be chosen that Dasein essentially defines itself. While Dasein has to choose to act on certain possibilities that are available to it, Dasein does so to the exclusion of other available options, and its choosing some rather than others cannot simply be blamed on its thrown situation. Dasein chooses, or projects itself into possibilities, with nothing in its pastness or futurity to justify its choices. Heidegger states:

Freedom . . . is only in the choice of one possibility—that is, in tolerating one’s not having chosen the others and one’s not being able to choose them. . . . Thus ‘care’—Dasein’s Being—means, as thrown projection, Being-the-basis of a nullity (and this Being-the-basis is itself null). This means that *Dasein as such is guilty*. (BT, 331/SZ, 285)

This passage suggests that, in making unsupported choices based on its foundation of available options, Dasein freely takes on the debt or guilt (whether one knows it or not) of having such options.¹⁵ Completing Heidegger’s account of the temporal structure of Dasein as thrown projection would involve discussing the concepts of “the call of conscience” (*Ruf*) and “resoluteness” (*Entschlossenheit*), which characterize an authentic relationship to Dasein’s guilty “past,” as well as the “moment of vision” (*Augenblick*) that binds this sense of where one comes from

¹⁵Cf. Jeff Malpas’ interesting account of this constrained sense of freedom and responsibility in which he intentionally avoids relying on Heideggerian terminology (1998, 122–23, 194).

to the authentic sense (anticipation) of where one is going.¹⁶ However, as such a discussion would dilute, somewhat, our focus on Being-towards-death, it would be best at this point to conclude this exegesis by saying something about what authentic Being-towards-death might mean in a more concrete sense.

Insofar as anticipation shakes Dasein loose from the common and unreflective ways of going about everyday life, which allows for a more clear-sighted and responsible taking on of the options that are available, Heidegger is adopting something like primal Christian dying to the world. It is, of course, true that the Heideggerian version avoids the specific religious trappings of early Christianity. Nonetheless, just as the Christian must sacrifice worldly bonds, pleasures, and interests in order to understand their ordinary sinful existence in terms of a more meaningful redemption, Heidegger recommends foregoing the ease of “doing what one does” in order to forge a more meaningful and authentic path. Thomson comes close to this understanding of Heidegger when he describes death in *Being and Time* as a “movement in which we turn away from the world, recover ourselves, and then turn back to the world, a world we now see anew, with eyes that have been opened” (2004, 456). Since I provide a more detailed discussion of Heidegger’s existential take on the Pauline conversion experience elsewhere (Buben 2013, 978–82), I believe it will be worthwhile instead to turn my attention briefly to common misunderstandings of this and other aspects of Heidegger’s approach to death.

Missing the Mark

One mistake to avoid, when seeing in Heidegger’s approach a kind of dying to the world, is the temptation to understand this dying as a kind of one-off achievement. What worries me about Thomson’s description, for example, is that he puts the anticipation of death in terms of an “actual experience of complete world-collapse” (2004, 453). But it is not obvious to me that Heidegger acknowledges such a particular experience that one returns from better for having gone through it. While Dasein’s becoming authentic does indeed bear a striking resemblance to the Christian notion of metaphorically passing through death to life, one must be careful not to overly-dramatize what Heidegger is saying by portraying death as some kind of emotional/spiritual breakdown (akin to Paul’s humiliation on the road to Damascus). The more nuanced and, I think, accurate reading says that the conversion is not some particular event, but a constant struggle to own up to what one is (similar to the Christian’s constant struggle against sin). Although there is much to like in Thomson’s reading, his formulation might give the impression that one could pass through and be finished with death, whereas Heidegger sees death as a task for a lifetime, a possibility to exist in but not to be actualized (see my previous discussion of ¶50).

¹⁶See especially BT, 314, 322–23, 330–31, 346–47, 351–55, 374, 387–88, 426, 435–43/SZ, 269–70, 277–78, 284–85, 299–300, 303–08, 326, 337–39, 374, 383–91.

In addition to this sort of subtle interpretive oversight, there are other more basic, and serious, errors in the surrounding literature on the topic of death in Heidegger. Perhaps the most frequent mistake that is made when trying to get a handle on Heidegger's notion of Being-towards-death is the failure to move beyond thoughts of demise. To be fair, Heidegger is perhaps not clear in every instance about what sense of death he is discussing. What should be clear by now, however, is that by the end of the death chapter, and certainly beyond it, his claims about death are more about a way of being than they are about any sense of passing away or ceasing to be. It is this fact that makes it all the more perplexing when interpreters of Heidegger's work have a hard time letting go of demise in offering a general overview of his account of death. While some amount of confusion is to be expected given Heidegger's method of extracting insights from the mostly unenlightened views of everydayness, one must not lose sight of his deeper purpose in speaking about death.

Schumacher's reading of Being-towards-death is an excellent example of letting this deeper purpose fade into the background. Although he addresses the difference between death as the end and death as a way to be, his mistake is the direct result of failing to grasp the nature of this distinction and thus describing the certainty and indefiniteness of death as though they are characteristics of impending demise. Schumacher laments that Heidegger's attempt "to establish the certainty of human mortality while bracketing off ontical experience is . . . unconvincing" (2011, 60). When he later elaborates upon this complaint, Schumacher adds that what Heidegger is missing in his account of certainty is reference to "the ontical experience of another's death" (2011, 80). He claims that without such reference, Heidegger must simply be assuming "*a priori*" that death is certain. Schumacher bases his argument upon the idea that we could have no knowledge whatsoever of our own finitude unless we first encountered such finitude in those like us. The problem with Schumacher's criticism is that Heidegger might actually concede this point in some sense just before reminding Schumacher that the sort of certainty that he is interested in is not the certainty of some future concluding event. Schumacher fails to notice this when he says, "'anticipation' provides the certainty of having to die" (2011, 79). What anticipation really provides is a way of being, an appropriation of oneself as a certain kind of Being. Heidegger may derive this notion of Being-certain in response to the thoughtless and disowned everyday acknowledgements of the inevitability of demise, but as for this inevitability itself, Heidegger actually seems quite unconcerned.

Schumacher makes a similar mistake when briefly mentioning the indefiniteness "as to the moment of decease" (2011, 76). There is no doubt that Heidegger makes mention of this sense of the uncertain "when" of passing out of existence, but in anticipation Dasein comes face to face, not with a fear that some fatal accident might be around the next corner, but with an anxious sense of itself as essentially indefinite. This structural indefiniteness is the key insight of Heidegger's treatment of death, and it is Schumacher's failure to give it the attention it deserves that marks his most crucial mistake. For Heidegger, such indefiniteness undermines the compulsion of the "they" (which seeks to confine and define), freeing Dasein up to

pursue its available possibilities on its own terms. The primary purpose of discussing death in *Being and Time* is to liberate and open Dasein up to the possibility of taking complete ownership of itself as the Being that is essentially open to possibilities. Because Schumacher pays little attention to this sense of indefiniteness and instead persists in understanding Heidegger's certain uncertainty in terms of the cessation of life, he sees Being-towards-death as simply an approach to the limit of human freedom—a limit that, following Epicurus, humans never actually encounter (cf. Sartre 1956, 547–48). Schumacher goes on to argue, against his distorted depiction of Heidegger, that rather than consisting of an essential approach to its conclusion, human Being is essentially a perpetual desire that continues making plans into the future as though there will be no conclusion (2011, 83–84). Without realizing the similarities between his sense of desire and Heidegger's notions of freedom and pure projection that spring from authentic Being-towards-death, Schumacher claims that “this existential desire comes into conflict with Being-towards-death” (2011, 84). Schumacher's mistaken view of certainty and indefiniteness in Heidegger ultimately leads him to miss the fact that Heidegger's goal is more about liberation than limitation.

In singling out Schumacher for criticism, I do not mean to suggest that he is the only interpreter of Heidegger who still makes these sorts of mistakes. I simply mean to drive home the importance of revisiting a difficult text that is easily misunderstood. If such a skilled interpreter, with comfortable access to secondary materials in numerous languages can still fail to grasp the meaning of Heidegger's discussion of death, then it is clear that a legitimate consensus on the topic has not been reached. While neither the brief account presented here, nor that found in Guignon's recent work, could hope to eliminate every hint of opacity in the text and resolve every disagreement in the surrounding literature, it will have been worthwhile if certain errors (e.g. errors about certainty) are made less frequently.

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Chapter 14

Mortality and Morality: A Heideggerian Interpretation of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*

Megan Altman

Introduction

Judge William, the pseudonymous author of Søren Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, holds the view that ethical existence requires the ability to make a commitment that reaches beyond the irresolute and fleeting motivations characteristic of an aesthetic way of life. His claim is that ethical existence involves a personal life-defining choice in which the individual must be committed to having her duty outweigh her immediate first-order desires and needs. At the same time, however, the individualization required for making this choice is destroyed by one's commitment to the universal duty of the ethical. Judge William characterizes the relationship between individuation and ethical existence as a "dialectic of duty": "As a particular individual I am not the universal, and it would be absurd to require it of me. So if I am to be able to perform the universal, I must be the universal at the same time as I am the particular, but in that case the dialectic of duty is within me" (Kierkegaard 1992, 554). The dialectic of duty, then, implies a unified internal relation of what appears to be two opposing forces of the human condition.

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From one point of view, insofar as the ethical bedrock of sociolinguistic practices binds and sustains a people's life together, the dialectic of duty sets up an opposition between the individual and the community. On one hand, in order to be a member of the community, one must be committed to the universalizable duties of social existence. This means that morality expunges particular individual preferences and inclinations in the name of duty, that is, for the sake of the general good. Yet, some of the most honored heroes in Western culture were moral revolutionaries who dared to go against the ethical. In challenging the conventional wisdom of their times, they defied and redefined the ideals of our biblical and civic traditions. For example, Abraham Lincoln's

dual commitment to the preservation of the Union and the belief that 'all men are created equal' roused the hostility of abolitionists and Southern sympathizers alike. . . . In the face of almost universal mistrust, he nonetheless completed his self-appointed task of bringing the nation through its most devastating war, preaching reconciliation as he did so, only to be brought down by an assassin's bullet. (Bellah et al. 1996, 146)

What moral revolutionaries such as Abraham Lincoln, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Jesus of Nazareth have in common is that their self-appointed tasks, which encompassed their need for personal meaning, clashed with the moral duties of the social world. In these cases, the mere fact that everyone does something and reasons can be given for why they do it is not a sufficient reason for the individual to follow suit. That is, there are times when the ethical fails to provide a normative force for the particular individual to act, and these situations undermine the belief that the ethical can justify the individual's self-chosen way of life.

In "The Gift of Death" (2008), Jacques Derrida uses Kierkegaard's critique of the ethical in *Fear and Trembling* (2006) to vitiate the mainstream approach to ethics, where justification refers to universalizable duties and obligations. *Fear and Trembling* uses the biblical story of Abraham in order to illustrate that, in matters of faith and religious existence, the call of the ethical is held in abeyance for the sake of a higher calling. As the paradigmatic figure of the knight of faith, Abraham is prepared to step outside of the ethical and to act as a particular individual when he serves God and fulfills this commitment of faith through the sacrificial offering of his son Isaac (see Kierkegaard 2006, 46–58). Setting aside the religious components of Kierkegaardian existentialism, Derrida's analysis of Abraham's dialectic of duty argues that the language of justification strips away the personal and individuating features of being human, thereby rendering responsible agency a moot point. Understood as a normative activity, justification requires that one offer reasons for others to accept her decision, but this means that one must also renounce ownership of her decision. "This is ethics as 'irresponsibilization,'" according to Derrida, "as an insoluble and therefore paradoxical contradiction between responsibility *in general* and *absolute* responsibility" (2008, 62). Again, we see a practical contradiction in the relationship between ethical existence and moral agency: while Abraham lives as if the general duties of the concrete life-world are the most important, his commitment to his personal absolute requires him to leap outside of the realm of ethical responsibility. This is a very burdensome mode

of human life that, Derrida argues, cannot be captured or justified in the medium of language, because to act as a particular individual is to betray the ethical (60). As we previously saw, while Abraham is committed to the ethical and he lives as the ordinary person in the most ordinary way, meaning that he upholds his duties to his family, friends, and the state, he is also prepared to sacrifice his social and civic duties and murder his only child for the sake of a higher duty. However, even though Abraham is prepared to go against his ethical commitments, he still takes responsibility for his decisions without using God to justify his actions. Abraham's betrayal of the ethical, according to Derrida, overturns the "most widely shared presumption" of ethics: "that responsibility is tied to the public and to the nonsecret, to the possibility and even the necessity of accounting for one's words and actions in front of others, of justifying and owning up to them." The truth of the matter is that "far from ensuring responsibility, the generality of ethics incites to irresponsibility" (Derrida 2008, 61).

Ian Duckles' reading of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* illustrates the applicability of Derrida's conception of the irresponsibilization function of ethics to the dialectic of duty. Specifically, Duckles claims that Judge William's defense of ethical existence represents an attempt to evade mortality and individual responsibility. Duckles argues, "In hiding behind my duty I avoid taking responsibility for my action as this singular individual, and in doing so I avoid recognizing the thing that confers singularity and individuality upon me, namely, my death" (2011, 225). His argument is based on the existential interpretation of mortality wherein death is understood as the individuating feature of human existence. The existential claim is that in facing up to one's own death, one encounters her identity as an individual who has to stand on her own feet. In Duckles' words, "The fact of my mortality makes me a responsible agent in the first place" (220). In taking up the Derridian line, Duckles argues that, since the ethical appears to be a disguised attempt to get others to share the burden of choosing to make a choice, Judge William's justification of "the ethical involves an avoidance of mortality" (230).

The existential question, then, is about the relationship between mortality and morality. What are we supposed to do with a life that goes nowhere but to death? Does the mere fact of my mortality *make* me a responsible agent? Is the goal or purpose of ethical existence a disguised attempt to evade mortality and abnegate individual responsibility? That is, does Judge William offer an account of ethical existence as a way to escape or flee from personal responsibility?

In a recent graduate seminar (2011), Charles Guignon used Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* to gain access to Heidegger's phenomenological inquiry of death, conscience, and guilt. In this paper, I follow Guignon's lead and try to show how Heidegger's existential interpretation of death can help us resolve the supposed tension between morality and mortality in *Either/Or*. In my attempt to achieve this task, I begin with a description of some of the key features of Heidegger's approach to understanding mortality and morality. Specifically, I argue that Heidegger's notion of existential death opens up an enriched view of the purpose of ethical existence, understood as an individuating task of self-constitution. In the end, I offer a Heideggerian interpretation of the movement from the aesthetic to the

ethical in order to show that Judge William is not attempting to offer some kind of rational justification of ethical existence. I believe that Kierkegaard, in this particular authorship, uses the pseudonym of Judge William to articulate a secularized form of the ethical that involves a personal transformation wherein one owns up to the task of fully realizing one's own potentialities for being human.¹

Heidegger on Mortality and Morality

In this section, I turn to the Heideggerian view of mortality and morality in an attempt to broaden the horizon of ethical existence. This is helpful because the thrust of my thesis—that Judge William's description of the constitutive features of the ethical specifies the core ideas of human agency—requires a broader understanding of ethics and individualism than mainstream moral philosophy allows. In contrast to modern ethical theory, with its emphasis on individual autonomy, Heidegger considers the practical and normative conditions that make moral agency possible and justify ethics in relation to other areas of human life.

On the Heideggerian picture of human agency, our basic or common mode of existence is always based on and guided by the public language and norms of our socio-historical community. In our everyday ways of doing and handling things, we move around in our ordinary, competent, habitual coping within the familiar life-world, which is always already responsive to the modes of intelligibility that are in the shared public language. For example, in my daily activities, I do not understand myself as distinct from the social world; rather, my cares and concerns only make sense against and in relation to this shared and common background of meaning and intelligibility, which Heidegger identifies as "Being-in-the-world." As Being-in-the-world, *Dasein* ("being-there") can be understood as the general name for the fact that human existence is always already engaged and caught up in the midst of things and with others, and, therefore, always already has some grasp or understanding of

¹To be clear, I am not making any claims about Kierkegaard's own view(s) of ethical existence. For the sake of brevity, I am not addressing the congruency of Kierkegaard's view of the ethical in *Fear and Trembling* and *Either/Or*. Given that Kierkegaard uses two different pseudonyms, the congruency cannot be established simply by reference to the author himself. As far as I can tell, the most sufficient way to work out a correspondence in the ethical of *Fear and Trembling* and *Either/Or* would involve a three-part analysis. First, I would have to establish Kierkegaard's relationship to both pseudonyms. Then, I would need to create a dialogical relation between Johannes de Silentio and Judge William on the issue of ethical existence. And lastly, I would try to make the strongest case for either an agreement or disagreement between the Silentio-Kierkegaard and the William-Kierkegaard. Since this is a multifarious matter that cannot be adequately addressed at this time, the most I can say is that I do not think Silentio's problematization of the ethical is applicable to Judge William.

what it is to be in the broadest sense. That is to say, Dasein's Being springs from a like-mindedness grounded in the fact that language constitutes its reality.²

The constitutive role of language sheds light on the normative and practical aspects of human agency. Insofar as language refers to life in a social world, Dasein is a social being made for life in a community. As a member of a linguistic community, the self is experienced as inseparable from and entangled in shared understandings of life that embody fundamental commitments characteristic of the social world. The common ways that we define ourselves as individuals is in terms of the possibilities or social roles that unthoughtfully make up our identity. This is what Heidegger refers to as Dasein's "thrownness": Dasein finds itself always already thrown into a world, already underway in the midst of projects in a shared historical context that it has not created itself, which constitutes its Being to a great extent (see Heidegger SZ, ¶38). In other words, part of being human is to be attuned to the standardized norms of the practical life-world. The normative constraints of the linguistic community ensure commonality insofar as they produce particular ways of acting for a particular group of people. On the Heideggerian picture of human agency and prior to the existentialist interpretation of being human, Dasein's mode of existence is constituted by its identity as a placeholder in a social nexus. More to the point, "Dasein's situated and responsive selfhood allows for a more robust conception of ethical responsibility that is intrinsic to human existence, as socially engaged all the way down" (Hatab 2000, 82).

On Heidegger's account, individualism is a derivative and particular mode of Being-in-the-world that, for the most part, does not arise in Dasein's thrown situation (BT, 152–53/SZ, 117–18). Rather, in our daily lives we ourselves are, proximally and for the most part, the ensemble of our social interactions with others: we are placeholders in a social grid in which our relations with others determines our identity. This co-constituted embodied way of being an individual in the shared, public world is what Heidegger refers to as *das Man* ("the They")—"in this kind of Being is grounded the mode of everyday Being-one's-Self" (BT, 149/SZ, 114). Even

²However, according to Heidegger, language flattens out, stabilizes, and puts this at the level of the least common denominator, so people do not realize their sense of reality is "reduced" to conduciveness and usability. Our ordinary understanding is rooted in the constraints of the sort of artificial and contrived interpretation of things that has been passed down through the past 2,000 years in an increasingly obscure way (see Heidegger SZ, ¶34). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger attempts to work our way back to the "birth certificate" of the Western intellectual tradition in order to simultaneously challenge and put into question the contemporary interpretations of the leveled-down possibilities of social existence (BT, 44/SZ, 22). This involves a dual process of de-structuring the average, everyday sense of things. The function of destruction is to take that average everyday description of things and to try to see what the shortcomings are, the problems it generates, how it can be distortive, and how it can play a role in concealing deeper or "primordial" ways of Being-in-the-world. Through this process Heidegger tries to arrive at a new level of interpretation that is responsive to the prohibitive moment of de-structuring; namely, the aspect that tells us that we cannot understand the phenomenon in the traditional terms or concepts because they are misleading in some way or other (see Heidegger BP, 23/GA 24, 31–32).

though *das Man* is an essential structure of Being-in-the-world, the issue of personal responsibility has no bearing or foothold in average everydayness. In Heidegger's words,

Yet because the 'they' presents every judgment and decision as its own, it deprives the particular Dasein of its answerability [*Verantwortlichkeit*]. . . . It can be answerable for everything most easily, because it is not someone who needs to vouch for anything. It 'was' always the 'they' who did it, and yet it can be said that it has been 'no one'. In Dasein's everydayness the agency through which most things come about is one of which we must say that 'it was no one.' (BT, 165/SZ, 127)

Heidegger brings our attention to the ways in which there is an inclination to become a They-self in the sense of an automaton—i.e. one who simply does what one does in the sort of situations that arise in life. For Heidegger, what is distinctive about Dasein's modern forms of everydayness is the ways in which being the They contains an inexorable tendency or temptation toward simply living in the mode of the They, i.e. simply becoming a They-self. As the They, Dasein falls into the conformity of anonymous and representable possibilities of the public world. "The great multiplicity of ways of Being-in-the-world in which one person can be represented by another," Heidegger writes, "not only extends to the more refined modes of publicly being with one another, but is likewise germane to those possibilities of concern which are restricted within definite ranges, and which are cut to the very measure of one's occupation, one's social status, or one's age" (BT, 283/SZ, 239). That is, insofar as we are all initiated into a social context in which we internalize and enact the norms and conventions of the community we live in, we can be regarded as successful in that community to the extent that we succeed in realizing those possibilities of understanding and self-interpretation. Even though one is clearly making choices at every point, there is a quality characteristic of this life that looks simply adrift; and since it lacks any kind of organizing focus, there is a tendency for this type of life to be disjointed and episodic.

This mode of existence is what Aristotle refers to as *poiēsis* (producing or making), which is directed toward the level of our immediate concerns. *Poiēsis* characterizes the ordinary understanding of where the issue is always already grasped in terms of outcomes and products; that is, *poiēsis* is concerned with results and focuses on the successful production of things. For example, in *poiēsis*, being a student is grasped in relation to an open range of possibilities where the focus is directed toward the possible outcomes or accomplishments of this social role, e.g., earning a degree, finding a job, making money, and so on. In *poiēsis*, one makes something that is separate or distinct from oneself. Once that product has been produced, one no longer needs to have anything to do with it, because the goal in this activity was just to make or produce something (see Aristotle NE, 1094a5–14). Exploring the Aristotelian conception of *poiēsis*, Heidegger suggests that, insofar as our *poietic* activities are governed by practical obligations of everyday social existence, *poiēsis* is an ordered experience of an *ethos* or a shared moral outlook for members of a linguistic community. That is to say, the normative dimension of human agency inhabits the practical life-world. The problem is that "in the process of becoming a productive member of society, one loses any sense of what this means for oneself, the dimension of agency called *praxis*" (Guignon 2011b, 87).

On Heidegger's view of human agency, "*poiēsis* and *praxis* are two possibilities that, perhaps, only designate two distinct modes of appropriation" (BCAR, 12/GA 18, 13–15). Whereas *poiēsis* has its end or goal outside itself, *praxis* is an action where the goal is in the action itself (see Aristotle NE, 1140b7–8). For example, in *poiēsis*, a doctor is concerned with trying to make sick people healthy, and the outcome or fulfillment of this possibility is separate from her life as a whole. At the same time, however, the practice of medicine is also a self-making activity (*praxis*) in the sense that the doctor is working on being a person of a particular sort, e.g., a person who is skilled, contentious, caring, etc. (see Aristotle NE, 1137a25). In practicing medicine, the doctor is doing two things simultaneously. She is producing a state or product that is distinct from her agency, and, at the same time, she is forming her identity as a human being of a particular sort. The distinction between *poiēsis* and *praxis*, according to Heidegger, "lies in the fact that *praxis* depends on the *how*." In *poiēsis*, training "has the precise sense of reducing deliberation insofar as it is through training that the completedness of attaining a *result* comes about." That is, since the goal of *poiēsis* is grasped in terms of results and productivity, the activity or work is subordinate to the product. On the other hand, Heidegger continues, "in the case of an *action* [*praxis*]*—*in the narrow sense in which it is opposed to *poiēsis**—*it does not, according to its sense, depend on the action simply ending, on a result coming about" (BCAR, 127–28/GA 18, 189–91). Instead, what is decisive in *praxis* is the self-habituated obligation and motivation to take responsibility for one's own existence.

As we shall see, Heidegger's existential interpretation of death points us toward an understanding of ourselves that is not focused on production/*poiēsis*, but rather on *praxis*.³ Recall for a moment that, in *poiēsis*, the goal of projecting into possibilities is to fulfill those possibilities through completion, accomplishment, and successful production. The impending possibilities that we are directed towards as members of the They have the characteristic of the "not-yet," but still we grasp these possibilities in terms of something that *can be* (Heidegger BT, 276, 287–89/SZ, 233, 243–45). In everydayness, one's relationship to worldly possibilities is characterized by one's preconceptions and expectations of how things can or should be brought to completion, which is based on the public norms and conventions of the They. But, as Heidegger points out, the experience of death shows that being-possible is not at all what we think it is. Death, "*as the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all* . . . gives Dasein nothing to be 'actualized,' nothing which Dasein, as actual, could itself *be*. It is the possibility of the impossibility of every way of comporting oneself towards anything, of every way of existing" (BT, 307/SZ, 262). The basic idea is that death is the one possibility that Dasein cannot achieve or experience, and it throws Dasein back onto the unfolding of its life rather than pointing forward toward accomplishing something.

³In an effort to clarify the force of Heidegger's analysis of death, it is helpful to note that "existence" is a technical term understood as "*ex-sistere*," as being outside itself in "being-toward" (Guignon 2011a, 199).

The individualization of death “pulls Dasein back from its lostness [*Verlorenheit*] in the public averageness of the ‘one.’ ‘One’ can no longer be the ‘one,’ one can no longer have others replace or choose in lieu of oneself” (Heidegger CT, 44/GA 64, 53). In everydayness, one tends to understand possibilities as impersonal and anonymous social roles or customs. Our normal way of experiencing possibilities is to cover up or mask the possibility, because we are awaiting or expecting the actualization of the possible (Heidegger BT, 305–06/SZ, 261–62). However, death is the one possibility that essentially belongs to Dasein, which cannot be overtaken or “outstripped” (BT, 308/SZ, 264). That is, no other possibility (or person) can take it away or get beyond Dasein’s comportment toward its death. The individualization of “being-towards-death,” according to Heidegger, challenges our understanding of our own possibilities for being. In being-toward-death, Dasein encounters its identity as an individual who can actually take responsibility for the direction and meaning of its life. “Being-toward” has to be understood as being who one is independent of any particular goals whatsoever. This is why Heidegger says, death “is a possibility in which the issue is nothing less than Being-in-the-world” (BT, 294/SZ, 250). When understood as one’s ownmost ability-to-be, death is the one possibility that does not come from *das Man*; when it is approached properly it establishes first and foremost the possibility of taking over ownership of ourselves from *das Man*.⁴ Such enownment (*eigentlichkeit*) is what Heidegger calls authentic existence.

It should be clear by now that Heidegger’s existential interpretation of death indicates that human existence is marked by a finitude or mortality, which means that not everything is possible. As a finite being aware of the finality of its own existence, Dasein recognizes the fact that it cannot be everything in life, so it is going to have to make some fundamental decisions. However, since the uncanny individualization of death undermines the belief that the worldly possibilities of the They can validate one’s way of living, we find that, in terms of the ownmost possibility of our lives, we lack a reason that warrants us being in any of the particular They-self possibilities that we have drifted into and no proper reason that dictates to us what is the right way to be human in any sense. We lack a ground for understanding specifically how we ought to be living our lives, and this lack undermines the belief that the worldly possibilities of the They can validate our ways of living. This is why Heidegger emphasizes, “Death is a possibility-of-Being which Dasein itself has to take over in every case” (BT, 294/SZ, 250). The implication is that we are going to have to be self-making in a certain way without any ground or foundation for understanding how we ought to be living our lives. However, this does not lead to Kierkegaard’s knight of faith and the teleological suspension of the ethical. Rather, Heidegger stresses the point that, since we can never get an absolute distance from the common intelligibility of our linguistic community, we have to make ourselves from the materials around us. As Guignon clarifies,

⁴For a more thorough account of Heidegger’s phenomenological description of death please see Adam Buben’s chapter in this volume.

“Although the actual stances that we take and the contexts that we live in are shared and public, the final configuration of meaning we give to our lives—what we make of ourselves—depends on us alone The task of realizing my life as a totality is mine alone: it cannot be delegated” (1983, 93). On Heidegger’s view of ethics, this self-constituting practice/*praxis* is what is fundamental of being human.

The other key point that death makes clear is that while you are a constant work in progress, there is no specific project or goal that essentially defines you. Authentic existence is not a matter of successes or accomplishments, but a matter of constantly facing up to and embracing our own finite project of being self-constituting individuals, whatever the specifics involved may be.⁵ “When it stands before itself in this way,” Heidegger writes, “all its relations to any other Dasein have been undone.” Dasein must face up to and take a stand on its “ownmost non-relational possibility” (BT, 294/SZ, 250) before it chooses other choices, because its other choices will be dependent on this ultimate choice of how it stands in relationship to its own finitude. Death discloses that, rather than simply being a They-self drifting into different concrete possibilities from time to time, I can take responsibility for the past choices that have made me what I am and I can become the person I am (in *potentia*). Since in every case we have decided on our existence, even though we may not even be “aware” of the fact that we have decided our existence, there is a “mineness” (*Jemeinigkeit*) that gives us the possibility to be a responsible individual, but it is not yet realized until we become authentic (Heidegger BT, 68/SZ, 42–43). This ethical stance, according to Heidegger, is going to arise and manifest in the self-transformation from a They-self to authentic self-being.

I will return to this notion of personal transformation in the third section where I argue that Judge William’s discussion of the movement from the aesthetic to the ethical should be read as a phenomenological description of ethical self-transformation. At this time, I think it is important to understand that even though Dasein is individuated in death, death does not make anything an issue. Instead, as Guignon argues, “Heidegger’s claim is that being-toward-death . . . names that essential structure of human existence that consists in our always being ‘out there,’ moving *toward* something, and in general caring about where we are going” (2011a, 199). We have seen how, in being-toward-death, Dasein finds itself thrown into a finite and mortal world that can no longer validate or affirm its worth as living in that world. As a result of this radical uprootedness, Dasein recognizes that it has to be in some world and yet no world can justify its existence because any world is contingent. In this case, existence itself is the issue, and death forces Dasein to confront its ownmost ability to be a self—i.e. the finitude that it always already is so long as it is alive. This is why Heidegger emphasizes that death properly understood is not an end, but “is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is” (BT, 289/SZ, 245).

⁵In a similar fashion, Heidegger’s existential interpretation of the “call of conscience” emphasizes an individual and personal feature of human existence (see SZ, Division II, Chap. 2).

Part of Duckles' argument for the connection between death and moral agency relies on seeing a motivational force in the gap between who one *is* and who one *can be*. For instance, he argues,

Because my actions and choices can result in my death (or the death of others), and because there will eventually be a time at which I can no longer act or choose, my actions and choices become meaningful and significant. Through a meditation on death I become aware of what is at stake when I act, and this awareness translates itself into a kind of responsibility and freedom. (2011, 224)

However, notice that, on Heidegger's view, death shows us that Dasein can actually take responsibility for the direction and purpose of its life, but "those possibilities of existence . . . are not to be gathered from death" (BT, 434/SZ, 383). That is, the fact that we are going to die at some future point does not assure us that our lives have any kind of meaning or direction. In connection with my previous discussion of the extreme uprootedness of death, we can now say that there is nothing in our thrownness that warrants or justifies our existence, and there is nothing in the future projections that assures us that our existence will be justified. On Heidegger's phenomenological description of death, this double lack or groundlessness becomes an issue for Dasein. The implication is that individual agency is not something that is given in reflection on death, but it is a self-chosen way of being that is carved out from complete absorption in the They.

The key to understanding death, then, has to do with the continuity and connectedness of *praxis*, which is an individual undertaking. On the other hand, there is nothing in this description of death that would motivate Dasein to take over and own up to the task of making something of its life.⁶ To know that it is your own life to live, that in some sense it is up to you to impart some meaning through your actions, is interesting but not motivating. As I hope to show in the next section, in Judge William's account of the ethical, we find that the normative force to undergo this self-transformation has to come from within the individual.

⁶To be fair, I am not taking into account what Heidegger has to say about the call of conscience and Dasein's authentic way of being-towards-death (Division II, Chap. 2). At this point Heidegger argues that, if *Being and Time* is going to be phenomenological in the proper sense, then its existential discoveries must be based on existentiell or lived-world reality. (This dialogical methodology, which is essential to phenomenology, is also exemplified in St. Augustine's *Confessions* and Bertrand Russell's *The Quest for Happiness*.) Even though Heidegger grounds his analysis of being-towards-death in a primordial experience that attests to the correctness of the existential characteristics of death, I am leaving aside the justification offered in *Being and Time* in order to fill in the gaps with Judge William's justification of ethical existence. Also, I should reiterate that I am using Heidegger's analysis of death to problematize the existential conception of individual agency, which seems to be at the heart of Derrida's critique of the mainstream view of ethical responsibility. I think Heidegger and Derrida agree that the pervasive individualism in modern ethical theory is misguided (to say the least), but I find that Heidegger's description of death offers us something more than a critique of the nature of justification. Instead, it provides us with a deeper, broader understanding of ethics. Heidegger is trying to describe what is involved in confronting a situation that calls for the ability to make a decision and to stand by it. On this view, individualism is an engaged, clear-sighted, and responsible mode of social existence.

Judge William on Striving to Be Ethical

In what follows, I offer a Heideggerian interpretation of Judge William's view of ethical existence.⁷ I suggest that, in his description, the movement from the aesthetic to the ethical is a self-appointed task in adopting a form of life and developing an identity in the social world. In the self-transformation from the aesthetic to the ethical, there is a tremendous normative force from within the individual, which is not something impersonal and impartial like the categorical imperative or moral law. The indebtedness and the obligation to take responsibility for one's own decisions and actions is no longer a matter of being the moral law, but is a matter of having the normative force to accomplish whatever one sees as at stake in being the person one is.⁸

Recall that, on Duckles' account of the "paradox and irresponsibilization function of ethics," "the individual is not responsible for his actions; he is merely following already existing ethical norms" (2011, 225, 229). Specifically, Duckles' Derridian reading of *Either/Or* argues that Judge William is attempting to put forth a Kantian ethics of duty (2011, 220).⁹ This is not an uncommon or unfounded interpretation of Judge William's discussion of the dialectic of duty. Yet, I find two points of discrepancy in the attempt to filter Judge William's ideas through the universalizable criteria of Kantian morality. First, it assumes that the self that makes the individual change into the responsible agent she can be is the Kantian pure self, capable of pure action. However, as Judge William argues, the unencumbered Kantian self is as fictitious as a king without a country (Kierkegaard 1992, 543, 582–83). Second, whereas Kantian ethics of duty focuses on universalizable duties to and for the Other, Judge William emphasizes the individual's duty to find and choose him or herself (549). The mistake in the Kantian (or modern) understanding of duty is "that the individual is placed in an external relation to duty. The ethical is defined as duty, and duty again as a mass of particular propositions, but the individual

⁷To be more precise, I am focusing on the Aristotelian-Heideggerian features of Judge William's phenomenological description of ethical self-constitution. Although this is a less conventional way of approaching *Either/Or*, I should note that it is not unfounded. As George Stack argues, "while it is true that there are some minor indications in the later portions of *Either/Or* that Kierkegaard was aware of the general features of Kant's ethics of duty, there are numerous aspects of his description of ethical existence which are clearly derived from his reading of Aristotle" (1974, 2).

⁸For a more in-depth look at the insurmountable difficulties involved in modernity's attempt to superimpose the notion of a pure moral law or utilitarian principle into the context of our practical life-world see Alasdair MacIntyre 2008; and Bernard Williams 1972 and 1993. Especially noteworthy for my present discussion of the misunderstandings of individualism and moral agency in modern moral philosophy is Williams' argument that "the morality system itself, with the emphasis on the 'purely moral' . . . actually conceals the dimension in which ethical life lies outside the individual" (1993, 191).

⁹In an effort to avoid redundancy and maintain clarity, please keep in mind that whenever I refer to Duckles' reading of *Either/Or* I am always referring to his Derridian reading unless stated otherwise.

and duty stand outside each other” (Kierkegaard 1992, 545). Judge William argues that the ethical person finds *her* duty within herself because she has undergone a kind of personal transformation. On this refined conception of moral duty, “even though it is impossible for another man to say what *my* duty is, it will always be possible for him to say what *his* duty is” (545). It seems to me that this is not a simple difference between other-directed and self-directed duties, but concerns understanding the conditions for the possibility of moral agency.

I would like to suggest that these points of discrepancy in Duckles’ reading of the self-transformative movement from the aesthetic to the ethical are rooted in a distinctly narrow approach to ethics, which is characteristic of modernity. Modern moral philosophy presupposes an individualistic ontology of the social world, which is what Robert Bellah and his colleagues refer to as “ontological individualism”: the “belief that the individual has a primary reality whereas society is a second-order, derived or artificial construct” (1996, 334). However, we have already seen that, according to Heidegger, to try to imagine a human without socialization is not to imagine a more pure or genuine instance of human but rather someone or something that is not really human at all.

I think that the same point can be made about Judge William’s description of the ethical individual. It seems to me that both Heidegger and the Kierkegaard of *Either/Or* argue for an ethical individualism that is always already situated within the world and that calls for reflective self-evaluation of one’s place in that world.¹⁰ In contrast to the obtuse view of responsible agency that follows from the baseless assumptions of ontological individualism, ethical individualism is an onerous task and high achievement for participants of a certain sort in a particular linguistic community.¹¹

What I am referring to as ethical individualism is meant to capture the points of correspondence in the Heideggerian conception of authenticity and the Kierkegaardian picture of individuality (as presented in *Either/Or*). To clarify, I would like to show how Judge William’s distinction between aesthetic possibilities and an ethical task is congruent with the aforementioned *poiēsis-praxis* “structure of motivation.” In *poiēsis*, “humans act on the basis of first-order desires, mere impulses to satisfy their desires and provide for their needs” (Guignon 2011b, 83). As a functional

¹⁰I am indebted to Guignon’s seminar (2011) lectures where he pointed out the connections between Heidegger’s view of authenticity and Kierkegaard’s description of the ethical in *Either/Or*.

¹¹For further clarification see Stack 1974. Especially helpful is his argument connecting Aristotle, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger on the issue of moral development. Stack writes, “The moral development of man is a contingent process insofar as the ‘essence’ or ‘nature’ of man may never fully be realized in a lifetime. In the case of man exclusively, the realization of his ‘nature’ requires persistent striving. For Aristotle, as well as for Kierkegaard and Heidegger, the essence of man is an ideal *goal* which one ought to seek to attain in order to be an authentic human being” (1974, 5). In my discussion of ethical self-transformation I try to make explicit this connection between moral development and self-realization, which I see as fundamental for understanding the relationship between morality and mortality. However, I should point out that there are some authors who would disagree with associating an Aristotelian or Kierkegaardian ideal of self-realization with Heidegger’s notion of authenticity (e.g., see Dreyfus 1991, 284–340).

member of society running on automatic, aesthetic practices are carried out in the present *in order to* accomplish immediate goals (see Kierkegaard 1992, 568). This is a blind and impulsive mode of comportment toward possibilities that is reminiscent of Heidegger's They-self, and these character traits are apparent in what Judge William describes as the "self in immediacy." Motivated by the immediate thrill of peak experiences in satisfying personal desires and needs, the aesthete lives the life of a rolling stone, simply drifting into a multiplicity of available possibilities of social existence.¹² For the aesthete, all of these possibilities are "accidentally specified," which is why Judge William says, "[s]omeone who lives aesthetically is the accidental man" (Kierkegaard 1992, 547). In other words, what is normative for the aesthete has been decided to a great extent, and the possibilities and roles he or she is going to enact are largely accidental. The aesthetic sphere of existence is comparable to everydayness due to the ways in which the norms, rules, and standards that we follow are laid out for us, but we have failed to take hold of these possibilities (cf. Kierkegaard 1992, 477; and Heidegger BT, 312/SZ, 268).

On the other hand, as we saw in the previous discussion of *praxis*, humans "are capable of acting on the basis of second-order motivations, discerned by reflection or reasons (*logos*), concerning the worthiness of their first-order desires" (Guignon 2011b, 83; cf. Kierkegaard 1992, 477).¹³ The *poiēsis-praxis* structure of motivation shows us that, for humans, every action itself manifests a shared, social self-understanding and a *for-the-sake-of-which* (*hou heneka*) that is the overarching purpose for which they act.¹⁴ The biaxial nature of human agency is captured in the following passage from Judge William: "This concretion is the reality of the individual, but since it is in respect of his freedom that he chooses it, one can also say that it is his possibility, or, to avoid such an aesthetic expression, that it is his task" (Kierkegaard 1992, 543). The task of the ethical is to take what is initially something that is only accidental and to form it into something that can have an overarching meaning and direction for one's way of life. For instance, if I am a student, partner, and friend, rather than drifting disjointedly from one social role to the next, I am going to bind these possibilities together into a configuration that is definitive of who and what I am. In other words, while the aesthetic way of life is subordinate to the fulfillment of immediate, first-order desires, the ethical way of life is an internal movement toward the task of self-constitution.

The essential difference between the aesthete and the ethical individual is that, whereas the former sees an endless array of possibilities, the ethical person's choices are bound by her own second-order motivations that constitute her identity as an individual agent. In the ethical sphere of existence, an individual's way of life

¹²See Guignon 2006, 281; Guignon and Pereboom 2001, 5; and Bellah et al. 1996, 291–92.

¹³For more on first-order and second-order motivations see Williams 1993 and Harry Frankfurt 1988.

¹⁴In the section on "Heidegger on Morality and Morality," this teleological structure of motivation was discussed in terms of one's ownmost potentiality for being an authentic self. Also see "Excerpts from the Mörchen Transcription" in Heidegger BCAP, 229–30/GA 22, 84–85.

in the social world is carved out from the anonymity of social conformity and is directed toward “himself as a task which is set for him even though it has become his through his having chosen it” (Kierkegaard 1992, 553). Although the obligation to be bound by one’s second-order motivations and commitments is not found in the public norms of everydayness, as a self-chosen task, ethical individuation is always made concrete and expressed in the shared possibilities of the social world. Accordingly, ethical self-transformation “wants not to make an individual into another but himself; it wants not to do away with the aesthetic but to transfigure it” (Kierkegaard 1992, 544).

That is to say, ethical individuation requires the ability to make a choice that not only reaches beyond the irresolute and fleeting motivations characteristic of the aesthetic sphere of existence, but also reaches back to and transforms the self of immediacy. Ethical individuation is a second-order choosing in which one chooses to be the first-order chooser that one has always been. In that sense, one is going back to who one has always been in *potentia*, which was fundamental to one’s existence for as long as one is (Kierkegaard 1992, 552). The teleology of self-constitution has always been there and so in transforming oneself into a person who seizes on and embraces what it is to be human one has only raised to concrete realization what was implicitly there all along.

To be a responsible individual one must make a commitment to one possibility that one can hold for what is definitive of one’s potentiality for being. This does not mean that one only cares about one thing, but that everything one cares about is colored by this overarching commitment that one has made. This is why the goal of ethical existence should be grasped as a mode of individuation, not subordination. As Judge William says,

One can only choose *oneself* in respect of one’s freedom when one chooses oneself ethically; but one can only choose oneself ethically by repenting oneself [i.e. changing one’s mind], and it is only by repenting oneself that one becomes concrete, and it is only as a concrete individual that one is a free individual. (Kierkegaard 1992, 540)

On Judge William’s view of finite freedom, in choosing oneself, one must tolerate the fact that one did not make other possibilities the center of one’s life. This same idea can be expressed in Heidegger’s terms: freedom “*is* only in the choice of one possibility—that is, in tolerating one’s not having chosen the others and one’s not being able to choose them” (BT, 331/SZ, 285). To take an ethical stance in making life-defining choices is to give up or sacrifice other possibilities in order to make this one’s central aim.

What role does traditional forms of ethical justification have to play on this two-tiered view of ethical existence? As the previous discussion on self-transformation indicated, there is a certain self-reflective capability in our mode of comportment to Being so we can ask: even though everyone is doing this, why should I? The mere fact that everyone does something and reasons can be given as to why they do it is not a sufficient reason for me to do it. Since one is what one does and if what one does is no different from what others do, how can one justify or be certain that what one is doing is right or good? Judge William’s compelling (but vague) answer is:

One owes it to a person who has gone astray in this way to shout: 'Think of the end!' and to explain that the word 'end' does not mean death, for even that is not a person's hardest task, but life; to explain that the moment comes when the real question is that of beginning to live, and that therefore it is a dangerous thing to be compelled so to split oneself up that it involves the greatest of difficulty to gather oneself together again . . . (Kierkegaard 1992, 585; cf. Heidegger BCAR, 126/GA 18, 186–88)

In other words, when grasped as a way to be, death is not an end but is a way that life can be lived with the recognition of that finitude (cf. Heidegger SZ, ¶ 53). As previously discussed, when choosing the direction of our lives, there is no concrete path that we ought to be following. There are paths, which we ourselves do not create, that will define the significant possibilities or options that are available to us and will also give us some sense of what kind of deliberation and criteria can be operative in making choices. However, those criteria cannot be ground in some foundation that assures us that it is the right way to live. Whereas before the possibilities one drifted into were sort of accidental and provisional, in the movement from the aesthetic to the ethical, the individual takes an open stance in making life-defining choices, which means that its cares, concerns, and solitudes are organized and gathered together by its self-defining relation to its ownmost ability-to-be.¹⁵ In Judge William's words, "The individual has his teleology within him, has an inner teleology, is himself his own teleology, and his self, then, is the goal for which he strives" (Kierkegaard 1992, 561).

Concluding Thoughts

Approached in terms of motivation and self-transformation, the question concerning the relationship between morality and mortality reveals that the dialectic of duty is not a suppression of individuality. But in fact, for Judge William (and Heidegger), we are surrounded by the self-understandings of life in a shared socio-historical world that, together with personal goals and commitments, make up the conditions

¹⁵I would also like to offer this idea of the existential choice that gathers the self as a response to MacIntyre's reading of *Either/Or*, which is comparable to Duckles' critique of the dialectic of duty. MacIntyre finds a "deep internal inconsistency" in *Either/Or*'s "concept of radical choice," which "lies beyond reasons, just because it is the choice of what is to count for us as a reason," and "its concept of the ethical" (2008, 41–42). On MacIntyre's reading, "Kierkegaard combines the notion of radical choice with an unquestioning conception of the ethical" (2008, 43). That is to say, Judge William articulates a necessarily arbitrary and criterionless choice about choosing between the aesthetic and ethical—one must just leap from one to the other. However, when read through a Heideggerian lens, I find that Judge William presents a much more substantive notion of freedom of choice, which assumes that we have a clear understanding of what possibilities are worthwhile and we have the character formation to reach the point in our lives where we can make good choices. Judge William seems to find a stronger and more concrete notion of our finitude and limitations in being part of a greater whole than MacIntyre's (and Duckles') arbitrary freedom of choice allows for.

for the possibility of moral agency. As we have seen, death forces us to confront the actions and choices that have made us what we are. Ethical existence itself is a task or burden to live out our lives and make something of our lives as our own, not as someone else's life. The defining characteristic of ethical existence is that it is a *to be*—we all have something to be. You cannot live someone else's life. You can only live your own life. And so, as a “world-historical individual,” you can emulate somebody but you cannot be someone else (Kierkegaard 1992, 489). This is the essence of existence: we find ourselves thrown into a situation where we have a task before us that is to be ourselves in our own way. As Guignon says, “Selfhood is something we have to do rather than something we find” (2004a, 125).

This is not to deny the Derridian critique of traditional ethical theories' unsuccessful attempts to justify moral behavior; however, I find it hard to accept Duckles' application of this critique to Judge William's account of ethical existence. Recall Duckles' argument: “the ethical is a turning away from singularity, an avoidance of those qualities that make the individual an individual (which, following Derrida, include my mortality), in favor of an abstract conception of the self that is defined by a series of ethical obligations one needs to fulfill” (2011, 229). However, on Judge William's (and Heidegger's) broader picture of moral agency, we find that the ethical does not undermine or overshadow individual agency. Since we have to be part of a community in order to be functional and we have to have a life to live in order to be a responsible individual, the ethical embraces and owns up to what it is to be human. This broader picture of human agency is what Judge William refers to as the “twofold nature” of ethical life (Kierkegaard 1992, 550). He writes,

But although he himself is his aim, this aim is nevertheless at the same time something else, for the self that is the aim is not an abstract self which fits everywhere, and so nowhere, but a concrete self which stands in living interaction with these determinate surroundings, these conditions of life, this order of things. (553)

The ethical individual can still perform the same concrete actions she carried out in the aesthetic stage. Insofar as ethical individualism is a “metamorphosis” of the aesthetic self, there might be no observable difference in the outward manifestations of the aesthetic and the ethical (Kierkegaard 1992, 559). Actually, in Judge William's description he is very explicit that nothing externally visible about the individual is going to change as a result of this movement from the aesthetic to the ethical. In his way of describing it, we strive to be a self, but that does not mean that there is some kind of new configuration of possibilities that we take up. Nor does it mean that the individual becomes detached or isolated from the world.

Rather, the ethical individual chooses a role model or hero that then gives her an ideal of what she wants to be, and then she shapes her life to be like that ideal, which is of course outside herself. In Judge William's words, “Only within himself does the individual have the goal he must strive for, though in striving for it he has that goal outside himself” (Kierkegaard 1992, 550). This is a person who has, in a sense, internalized the role models and ideals of the public world. But it is not a person who is in some way or another detached from the public world in any sense. On the contrary, it is a person who is always involved in civic life: “The self which is the aim is not just a personal self, but a social, a civic self” (Kierkegaard 1992, 553).

I agree with the Duckles-Derridian position that the mainstream approach to ethics precludes the possibility of taking up personal responsibility in the moment of decisive action, but I do not think that this critique is applicable to Kierkegaard's version of the ethical in *Either/Or*. Judge William explicitly rejects any attempt to transform one's own self-appointed duty into a pre-given list or formula of moral imperatives (Kierkegaard 1992, 546, 582–83). Instead, he tries to describe what it is to make a choice. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that the agent's decisions "will not usually be solitary or unsupported, because they are part of an ethical life that is in an important degree shared with others" (Williams 1993, 191). One must do what is accepted in the particular socio-historical community (e.g., not commit murder or adultery), but do it as the *phronimos* or moral exemplar would do it. Furthermore, I think that one of the hardest things about making a choice is continuing to live with and stand by that decision. Ethical existence does not diminish the moment of choice, because, as Judge William reminds us, "the original choice is constantly present in every subsequent choice" (Kierkegaard 1992, 520). It seems to me that the force of Judge William's articulation of the ethical is found in the ways in which he focuses on developing one's moral character, not actions *per se*.

Whereas the modern ethical rule of impartiality tells people to bracket their own cares and concerns, for Judge William (and Heidegger), there is a finite range of things that we care about, which make our lives worth living in the sense that if we did not honor these commitments, then we would not be the people we are. As Harry Frankfurt argues, "A person who cares about something is, as it were, invested in it. He *identifies* himself with what he cares about in the sense that he makes himself vulnerable to losses and susceptible to benefits depending on whether what he cares about is diminished or enhanced" (1988, 83). In striving to be a self, the ethical individual is emotionally invested in her commitments in such a way that to try to make her bracket her identity what you would be left with is not a pure basis of ethical choice, but rather a fragmented and fractured human being that is incapable of any action whatsoever. Indeed, Judge William's discussion of ethical choice brings out important shortcomings and self-defeating tendencies of modern moral philosophy. Although this would be a topic for another time, I would like to conclude by pointing out that, instead of looking for ethical justification for the actions of self-encapsulated individuals, "we need to see that our identity-conferring identifications are drawn from, and are answerable to, the shared historical commitments and ideals that make up our communal world" (Guignon 2004b, 155).

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Chapter 15

Rethinking Levinas on Heidegger on Death

Iain Thomson

Heidegger and Levinas: Beyond the Standard View

The explosion of interest in Levinas over the last 15 years followed in the wake of the recent wave of “post-Farías” furor over Heidegger’s Nazism, and not by chance: That latest eruption of “the Heidegger controversy” cooled into the received view that Heidegger’s inability to articulate an ethics demonstrated the blind spot of this otherwise uncircumventable thinker of the twentieth century, and Levinas—a Jewish philosopher who developed his ethical perspective precisely as a post-Heideggerian response to the Holocaust or *Shoah*—appeared to many to be just the right figure to fill this ethical gap. The standard view here is that Heidegger’s own early affiliation with the regime responsible for the horrors of Auschwitz, combined with his subsequent failure ever to even try to come to terms with this great trauma of

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the twentieth century, render the ethical deficiencies of his ontological perspective obvious and so demonstrate the need to ground Heidegger's ontological thinking in the supposedly more "fundamental" ethical perspective opened up by Levinas. Now, this received view of the relation between Heidegger and Levinas makes for a dramatic narrative, and one with reassuringly unambiguous moral contours, but there are at least two things wrong with it: It gets Heidegger wrong, and, in so doing, it gets Levinas wrong as well.

That the received view misreads Heidegger I shall not dwell on here, except, no doubt a bit too provocatively, to make two minor but controversial points of correction and then draw out some of their admittedly contentious implications. First, it is true that Heidegger, to the end, obstinately refused to publicly repudiate or apologize for his early Nazi affiliation, instead insisting, with forlorn pride, on the self-serving illusion that a very different National Socialism had been possible in the early 1930s, if only more intellectuals had been willing to get their hands dirty—a fantasy Sluga thoroughly vitiates by showing that Hitler never cared a whit for the views of *any* living intellectual (see Sluga 1993, 186–93). At the same time, however, we also know now that Heidegger's supposedly damning "silence" on the Holocaust is in fact something of a myth.¹ Heidegger, at least, thought he had articulated the philosophical perspective necessary for understanding Auschwitz, as we can tell from the public remarks he made about the death camps in 1949. Quite understandably, it has not been easy for readers to see the point behind Heidegger's shockingly callous and abbreviated treatment of so momentous an issue. Heidegger's nearly constitutional incapacity to admit his own mistakes apparently sat too uncomfortably with the "growing shame" he privately confessed to Jaspers the following year (1950) for him to be able to develop his analysis in any detail.

Nonetheless, as I show in *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education* (2005), the later Heidegger's central critical insight is that our "technological," Nietzschean ontotheology, which preconceives the being of entities as "eternally recurring will-to-power"—that is, as mere forces coming-together and breaking-apart with no end other than their self-perpetuating increase—works tacitly to shape (or "enframe") our sense of reality, leading us increasingly to transform all entities, human beings disastrously included, into intrinsically-meaningless "resources" (*Bestand*) standing by merely to be used with optimal flexibility and efficiency. Once we recognize this, I think we cannot help but acknowledge that Heidegger's 1949 evocation of the way "the gas chambers and the death camps" reduce human beings to mere "resource materials standing by

¹It is true that Heidegger never made a public apology for his Nazi affiliation, a deeply unfortunate matter I discuss in, e.g., 2007, 113, 119–20, note 25; and 2000, 205. Traditionally, however, critics of Heidegger's notorious "silence" advance the broader allegation that Heidegger *never* addressed the significance of the Holocaust or *Shoah* in any of his later public speeches or writings and, as I show below, this more damning allegation is false.

for the manufacture of corpses [*Bestandstücke eines Bestand der Fabrikation von Leichen*]” indicates that he understood Auschwitz as an extreme symptom of the “technological” ontotheology undergirding our age (GA 79, 56).²

Because Heidegger’s later work as a whole seeks to help us think beneath and beyond this nihilistic ontotheology, enthusiastic Heideggerians might be tempted to conclude that, rather than simply ignoring Auschwitz, Heidegger, in his own way, dedicated his later career to contesting what he understood to be the ontotheological roots of such devastating historical effects. Yet, whether one finds Heidegger’s ontotheological understanding of Auschwitz convincing or not (and I shall suggest reasons for finding his view unconvincing in this crucial case), such an aggressive strategy of hermeneutic de-Nazification would be rhetorically excessive and misleading, too similar to and so potentially complicitous with the now discredited exculpatory narratives long disseminated by Heidegger and his orthodox Heideggerian apologists. More importantly, such a reading risks obscuring the fact that, even if Heidegger’s critique of ontotheology does help us to understand the Holocaust, it does so seemingly only as an afterthought, and certainly not, as with Levinas, as the fundamental philosophical motivation for learning to think *ethically*.

This brings me to the second problem with the received reading of Levinas’ relation to Heidegger, which, being less controversial, I shall simply state: Heidegger characterized his later endeavor to address the ontotheological roots of contemporary nihilism as his own “originary ethics,” by which he meant that he was developing an *ethics* pitched at the level of the original sense of the Greek word *êthos*, our basic comportment or way of being-in-the-world (see Heidegger PA, 271/GA 9, 354). Yet, if we connect the first point to this one, then the conclusion that undermines the standard view of Heidegger and Levinas seems to follow inexorably: The later Heidegger’s “originary ethics” sought to develop a comportmental attunement he hoped would help us transcend the underlying ontotheology that he held responsible for the greatest traumas of the twentieth century. To be clear, this is precisely not to claim that Heidegger took himself to be articulating an ethical response to the Holocaust in particular. For, Heidegger clearly understood the death camps only as an extreme expression of the same underlying ontotheology he also saw revealed in such phenomena as Russia’s post-war blockade of Germany (which sought to starve human beings for the sake of political leverage) and, much more shockingly, in mechanized agribusiness (by which we treat nature merely as an intrinsically-meaningless resource to be optimized). To many of us, Heidegger’s comparison of the death camps with mechanized agribusiness sounds almost obscene, and clearly reveals an incredible insensitivity to the real suffering of human beings, whose cries seem almost inaudible from the lofty perspective of

²For a more detailed discussion of this difficult and troubling matter, see Thomson 2005, esp. 82–83.

the history of being—drowned out, perhaps, by the swan song of the earth itself, to whose somber notes Heidegger’s ear remains so singularly trained.³

Whatever the reasons for Heidegger’s inability to recognize Auschwitz in its historical uniqueness (including his anti-Semitic beliefs), one can conclude that this failure prevents his own “originary ethics” from ever providing a genuinely ethical response to the Holocaust as such. This, however, is not because Heidegger fails to formulate the kind of clear and unambiguous action-guiding principles we need in order to preempt future genocides. That objection is not without merit, but in our context it misses the point that Levinas’ own “ethics”—widely celebrated precisely as providing the requisite ethical response to the Holocaust—remain “ethical” only in the same sense as Heidegger’s “originary ethics.” Indeed, Levinas and Heidegger pitch their “ethics” *at precisely the same level*, addressing the basic comportment of our everyday interactions rather than providing moral decision procedures. Thus, while their ethical views remain different (in some obvious and some surprisingly subtle ways), neither thinker can simply claim to be the sole proprietor of a more “fundamental” ethical perspective, as Levinas liked to do.⁴ In the end, of course, it might well turn out that Levinas’ ethics represent the more appropriate lesson to be drawn from Auschwitz, in the sense that what I shall call Levinas’ *metaphysical humanism* might make for a better firebreak against future genocides than Heidegger’s ethics of dwelling, but that views needs to be argued for rather than simply asserted, and, I shall suggest at the end, the case for it is less obvious than is generally assumed.

In fact, as I have argued elsewhere, Heidegger’s and Levinas’ ethical views—as two different kinds of *transcendental ethical realism*—remain surprisingly similar. The main difference between them is that Levinas’ metaphysical humanism restricts the ethical domain to relations between human beings, whereas Heidegger’s more broadly concerns our relations to other non-human realms. Levinas himself recognizes this and repeatedly dismisses the Heideggerian concern for our relations

³As I explain elsewhere: “For Heidegger, the traditional farmer is a paradigmatic figure, an exemplary embodiment of the *poietic* mode of disclosure that patiently struggles with the earth in order to creatively bring forth what is hidden there. This romantic figure contrasts most starkly with the technological mode of revealing that imposes predetermined ends on nature with minimal regard for any of its meaningful solicitations or inherent possibilities. The technologization of such farming in ‘mechanized agribusiness’ is thus for Heidegger a sacrilegious profanation, and so a particularly ominous sign of our ongoing desecration of the source of genuine meaning, a technologization of the *poietic* itself, as it were. This helps explain, but does not at all excuse, Heidegger’s scandalously insensitive (indeed, rather inhuman) comparison of this technologization of farming with the murder of millions of human beings in the Nazi death camps. His own sense of ‘shame’ got in the way, but he should instead have recognized the death camps as by far the most sacrilegious and devastating form of technologization ever devised” (2011, 106–07, note 57).

⁴When Levinas claims that his ethical perspective is more fundamental than Heidegger’s ontological thinking, his main target is Heidegger’s *Being and Time* claim that our only access to “entities”—that is, to anything that in any way “is,” including other people—comes through a prior understanding of the *being* of those entities. This, however, is a claim to which later Heidegger no longer subscribes, as I show in Ch. 1 of *Heidegger on Ontotheology* (2005).

to other animals and to non-human “things” as a return to a pre-Judeo-Christian “paganism.” As a consequence, however, Levinas’ own metaphysical humanism leads politically to a “speciesism” that remains both phenomenologically problematic and ethically tractionless in a wide range of cases, unable to recognize, let alone resist, what an increasing number of contemporary ethicists now recognize as the almost indiscriminate slaughter of non-human animals as well as the broader ecological catastrophe.⁵ In other words, if thinking about the Holocaust helps motivate Levinas’ humanism, worrying about other kinds of ethico-political disasters reveals the continuing suggestiveness of Heidegger’s ethical “paganism,” Heidegger’s belief that what Levinas calls “alterity” can also be discovered in our relations to things that are not human.

So as to avoid any unnecessary controversy here at the outset, let me make clear that I am not claiming that Heidegger actually succeeded in working through Auschwitz, let alone that his understanding of the Holocaust should be accepted or even privileged—for example, as providing philosophical antibodies cultivated from the very subject originally infected with the totalitarian virus, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Dallmayr influentially suggest.⁶ I am more inclined to conclude the very opposite, namely, that Auschwitz is precisely what Heidegger’s critique of ontotheology *cannot* explain, and what thus reveals the limits of the critical perspective distinctive of his later thought. I think Heidegger’s understanding of Auschwitz as an extreme expression of our nihilistic Nietzschean ontotheology does help shed a revealing critical light on both (1) the inhumanly rational system the Nazis developed in order to carry out their attempted genocide and (2) the broader framework behind the “biologicistic metaphysics” of racial indigeneity which Heidegger discerned in the Nazi pursuit of a eugenically purified “master race.” But what jumps out as conspicuously absent from Heidegger’s perspective is that it cannot explain why the Nazis focused so obsessively on the Jewish people in the first place.⁷ Put simply, there is still quite a leap required to get from the idea

⁵I develop the former argument in Thomson 2004b.

⁶The seminal text here is Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe 1990, but the most plausible version of the view can be found in Fred Dallmayr’s *The Other Heidegger* (1993). Nonetheless, the metaphors of infection remain alarming here, given their central role in the paranoid and biologicistic eugenic views at least partly responsible for the Holocaust.

⁷But does not the same criticism also hold true of Arendt’s remarkably similar views concerning the “industrialization of death” (in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*) and “the banality of evil” (in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*), as well as of Horkheimer and Adorno’s understanding of Auschwitz as the end result of enlightenment rationality gone mad through its own fulfillment (in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*)? I find more convincing Horkheimer and Adorno’s suggestion (in the same text) that Nazi anti-Semitism should be understood as the scapegoating of a symbolic figure in whom were concentrated the worst excesses of capitalist-industrial modernization, so that the elimination of “the Jew” could substitute for a critique of the system actually responsible for the worst suffering associated with industrialization (a view that is at least partly telling against Heidegger, in my view). Still, the question Arendt (among many others) raised as to why the Nazis fixated on the figure of “the Jew” remains an important one. Adorno’s views on the historical role some Jews played in spreading Roman jurisprudence and, later, owing to the Christian prohibitions

of the earth as an historical arena for the struggle between races (an idea that Heidegger's longstanding critique of Nietzsche's metaphysics helps us to uproot and reject) to the idea that the supposed Jewish "race" in particular had to be eradicated, and this is a leap about which Heidegger's view leaves us entirely in the dark, as far as I can see. Or, to approach the same problem from another angle, one may conclude that Heidegger's critique of our Nietzschean, "technological" ontotheology compellingly illuminates the deeper historical logic behind the "total mobilization" of the Nazi war machine (and the global arms race it catalyzed, in which we remain caught to this day), but one must still recognize, with Hannah Arendt, that the resources the Nazis poured into the Holocaust did not in fact serve this total mobilization but, instead, undermined it, diverting valuable resources from the war effort right to the end, such that the Holocaust stands out as a terrible exception to the Nazi's otherwise total mobilization.⁸ From the perspective of Heidegger's critique of ontotheology, in short, Auschwitz as such remains a dark and terrible anomaly.⁹

My own less controversial theses here, then, would only be that Heidegger and Levinas both understood themselves as struggling to articulate the requisite ethical response to the great traumas of the twentieth century, and that if we compare their thinking at this level, we can better understand the ways in which Levinas—like all other important post-Heideggerian thinkers—genuinely diverges from Heidegger even while building on his thinking.¹⁰ I began by suggesting that the received view of the relation between Heidegger and Levinas has impoverished our understanding

on usury, in international banking, while problematic, at least address the question in its specificity and (along with the infamous, forged "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" and various biographical influences) help explain Heidegger's own anti-Semitic beliefs (the details of which are only now coming to light). For an interesting development of Arendt's initial analysis of the historical dimension of this question, see Enzo Traverso 2003.

⁸On Heidegger's view of America's military-industrial complex as a fulfillment of the underlying logic behind the Nazis' "total mobilization" for war, see Thomson 2011, Ch. 7. On Arendt's important point (in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*) that by the end of the war the resources the Nazis poured into the Holocaust were clearly undermining rather than serving their war effort, see Robert Pippin's insightful essay, "Hannah Arendt and the Bourgeois Origins of Totalitarian Evil" (2005). Levinas tries to make some philosophical sense of this troubling question (without making explicit that this is what he is doing) in his discussion of the relation between "murder" and the "face," suggesting that Nazi genocide reached such terrible proportions because it was desperately trying to do the impossible, namely, to eliminate the very possibility of a different future (in this case, a future in which Nazi power would have come to an end and the Nazis would be judged for their crimes, and so a future for which, Levinas suggests, the persecuted figure of "the Jew" represented the philosophical witness). See Levinas TI, 197–201.

⁹And the debate continues as to which would be worse: If the *Shoah* could not be understood rationally, or if it could—a divisive issue that pits, e.g., Adorno against Agamben and the earlier Arendt of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* against the later Arendt of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

¹⁰Doing so, moreover, bestows the traditional philosophical advantage of allowing us to understand their important disagreements by situating them against the background of the still too infrequently recognized common ground which, I shall try to show here, underlies their philosophical projects as a whole. (Of course, I can only develop a small piece of this larger project here.)

not only of Heidegger but also of Levinas himself, and one of my main goals in what follows will be to suggest that if we want to fully understand Levinas' own views, then instead of treating his ethical thinking simply as a propaedeutic or groundwork to Heidegger's ethically impoverished ontological perspective (a reading which authorizes Levinasians to ignore or dismiss Heidegger), we do much better to appreciate Levinas as a post-Heideggerian thinker, that is, as someone often working critically against the background and within the perspectives opened up by Heidegger's work. If, with a few notable exceptions, Levinas scholarship has been slow to emerge from hermeneutic insularity and isolation (even within "continental" philosophy), Levinas is at least partly responsible, because his growing hostility to Heidegger, visible in the remarkably "un-Levinasian" spirit of some of his Heidegger interpretations, helped convince many Levinasians that they could understand Levinas without recognizing just how integrally entwined the essential themes of Levinas' thinking are with Heidegger's work, especially (but by no means exclusively) *Being and Time*, the great philosophical importance of which Levinas, to his credit, never ceased insisting upon. However understandable this hostility was in Levinas' own case (a more extreme case of Bloom's "anxiety of influence" would be difficult even to imagine!), its effects have not served Levinas scholarship well. The main problem, I think, is that Levinas' rhetorical exaggerations of his distance from Heidegger have obscured their common phenomenological ground, thereby blocking the recognition that Levinas was not only one of the earliest but also one of the most faithful and creative interpreters of *Being and Time*.

I am not claiming that the only way to be hermeneutically faithful to a creative philosopher like Heidegger is to betray him or, more precisely, to betray the letter of his text in order to respect its spirit by creatively developing its insights well beyond anything to which Heidegger himself would or could have assented, but such creative betrayal is greatly preferable to the myrmidonian devotion that still passes for thinking in some circles. In fact, even Heidegger's own notion of "repetition" (*Wiederholung*) suggests that such hermeneutic betrayal is justified when it is motivated by a deeper fidelity to the phenomenon whose attempted description we have "inherited" (where *inherited* means actively taken up from the otherwise ossified "tradition" and updated, via a "reciprocative rejoinder," to meet the deepest needs of the contemporary world), just as Heidegger insisted he had broken with Husserl out of a greater faithfulness to the phenomenological project itself, that is, the attempt to describe the matters that matter without distorting these things themselves by reading them back through our unnoticed metaphysical categories and frameworks.¹¹ If this is right, then rather than trying to gauge Levinas' faithfulness to Heidegger, we need instead to understand the phenomenon

¹¹See Heidegger 1967, xiv–xv. This distinguishes Heideggerian repetition (concerning which, see my *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity* (2011), Ch. 5) from Benjaminian Marxian-messianic repetition, which stresses the need to actualize potentials in history that were betrayed by their own development, as liberalism supposedly betrayed the universal liberation glimpsed in the French revolution.

both seek to describe, see exactly where they disagree and what is really at stake in their disagreement, and then independently evaluate the phenomenon for ourselves. To begin to do this here, I shall focus on that crucial phenomenon Heidegger calls “death,” which Levinas rightly insisted was at the heart of his disagreement with Heidegger.

Of course, to say that what Heidegger means by “death” is controversial would be to strain the limits of understatement. This is owing, first, to the obscurity and confusingly non-commonsensual terminology of those passages in *Being and Time* where Heidegger provides phenomenological descriptions of what he calls “death”; second, to the obvious centrality of the subject to the text as a whole (Haugeland observes, and Levinas would agree, that “death, as Heidegger means it, is not merely relevant but in fact the fulcrum of Heidegger’s entire ontology” (2000, 44)); and, third, to the particular difficulty that readers have had in phenomenologically attesting to (and thereby verifying or else contesting) Heidegger’s phenomenological description of “death.”¹² Rather than devote this entire paper to presenting and defending my interpretation, I shall instead draw on some earlier work in order to present my view rather schematically, and then go on to emphasize those elements of Heidegger’s account most relevant to Levinas’ critique.¹³ It is my hope that this decidedly non-standard interpretation will gain plausibility from the way it allows us to recognize just how profoundly Heidegger’s phenomenology of death influenced Levinas’ own view of the matter (and so, although I cannot show this here, the way “death” was subsequently interpreted

¹²The reason death plays such a crucial role in *Being and Time*, in a nutshell, is that the experience of the phenomenon Heidegger calls “death” discloses “futurity,” which is itself the first horizon we encounter of originary temporality, that fundamental structure which makes possible any understanding of being at all. The problem for the phenomenologist, as Heidegger recognizes, is that the experience by which we come to understand what he means by “death” (an experience of “‘real’ anxiety”) is both quite “rare” and extremely difficult to endure (BT, 234/SZ, 190). The requirement that we must undergo this experience for ourselves in order to testify for or against the adequacy of Heidegger’s analysis of it thus seems excessively demanding; Heidegger himself acknowledges that this demand “remains, from the existentiell point of view [that is, from the perspective of our ordinary life-projects], a fantastically unreasonable demand [*eine phantastische Zumutung*]” (BT, 311/SZ, 266). Nonetheless, without experiencing the phenomenon at issue for ourselves, we can at best approach Heidegger’s phenomenological descriptions of death from the outside and so find them, for example, suggestive, impressive, or deep-sounding, or perhaps fanciful, idiosyncratic, or even absurd. It is thus revealing to contrast this kind of superficial evaluation—typical of but not limited to neophyte readings of *Being and Time*—with the critical interpretations advanced in the 1940s by Heidegger’s first “existentialist” readers, especially Levinas but also, to a lesser degree, Sartre. Both sought to contest and revise Heidegger’s phenomenology of death by drawing on their own experiences of the phenomenon at issue or, in the case of Sartre (who would later boast that he had never experienced “anguish” himself), his experience of an alternative phenomenon (namely, “the look of the other [person],” which is similarly supposed to result in “the death of my [existential] possibilities”). See Sartre 1956, 247, 264; Sartre and Lévy 1996, 55, cf. 108; and Levinas TO.

¹³See e.g. Thomson 2004a and the detailed treatment in Thomson 2013.

and contested in the “Continental” tradition stretching from Levinas and Sartre to Derrida and Agamben as well as Haugeland, Lear, Butler, Cavell, and others).¹⁴

From Heidegger to Levinas: The Basic Terms of the Dispute

I have elsewhere made the case that Heidegger develops a “perfectionist” philosophy of education in *Being and Time*, a phenomenological account that links his *ontological* understanding of what most importantly distinguishes our human form of life with his *ethical* view of the way developing this distinctive “essence” enables human life to reach its greatest “fulfillment” (*Vollendung*).¹⁵ Building on my earlier account (which itself builds on the work of Blattner, Dreyfus, Guignon, and others), I would like to show here that the deepest and most interesting set of disagreements between Heidegger and Levinas concerns precisely this central perfectionist question: *How do we become genuinely or fully ourselves?* Heidegger’s and Levinas’ competing phenomenological descriptions of what authentic self-fulfillment entails, I shall suggest, follow from their quarrel over the meaning of “death.” This famous disagreement concerns not only the proper phenomenology of death but also its relation to the ultimate meaning of life, and, owing to its formative influence on thinkers such as Derrida, Agamben, Haugeland, and Butler, this *gigantomachia* over the phenomenology of death remains one of the most important disputes in twentieth century continental philosophy.¹⁶ (This means that, even if this interpretation should turn out to be wrong about what Heidegger really meant by “death,” it would still help us to better understand how Heidegger’s analysis of death has influenced some of the leading continental thinkers who follow, however critically, in his footsteps.)

¹⁴What I will suggest is that the question most fundamentally at issue, first between Heidegger and Levinas, and then between the other important continental thinkers influenced by their disagreement, is this: What does it mean to become oneself, to become *genuinely* or *fully* oneself? One of the larger philosophical questions I am interested in concerns how the great traumas of the twentieth century have changed the political implications of this *perfectionist* question, and so transformed our ways of thinking about it.

¹⁵See esp. the references in footnote 13 above.

¹⁶My main goal will simply be to try to set out its terms as clearly as possible. Immediately complicating matters, however, is the fact that, although Levinas usually criticizes “Heidegger” as if thereby designating a fixed philosophical view or position, there are really at least three different views of what is entailed in genuinely or fully becoming oneself at issue here. For, not only do Heidegger’s and Levinas’ phenomenological descriptions of self-fulfillment diverge radically from one another, as we will see, but Heidegger’s own view undergoes a profound transformation between his early and later work (as I show in *Heidegger on Ontotheology* (2005)). Still, I shall bracket the later Heidegger’s understanding of self-fulfillment here, not only for reasons of space but also because I think the best way to understand this three-way disagreement is to situate it against what is in fact its common background in the early Heidegger’s phenomenological description of how one becomes authentic, and of the roles played by “death” and “resolve” in the secular conversion whereby one becomes such an authentic self.

What, then, are the basic coordinates of the dispute between Heidegger and Levinas over the phenomenology and, consequently, the ontological significance of “death”? Otherwise put, in what ways do Heidegger and Levinas disagree about how we become *genuinely* or *fully* ourselves? Their competing answers to this perfectionist question diverge sharply; Heidegger and Levinas disagree both about what self-fulfillment *is* and about *how* it can be achieved. Remember that in *Being and Time* Heidegger conceives of self-fulfillment in terms of *becoming authentic*, contending that we achieve authenticity by traversing its two structural moments, “anticipation” (*Vorlaufen*) and “resolve” (*Entschlossenheit*). As he succinctly puts it: “Dasein becomes ‘essentially’ Dasein in that authentic existence which constitutes itself as anticipatory resoluteness” (Heidegger BT, 370/SZ, 323).¹⁷ In other words, Heidegger thinks we become ourselves through a two-step process of, first, “anticipating” or “running out” toward what he calls “death”—an experience of radical individuation in which we die to the world, as it were—and then, on the basis of the insight gained by this encounter of the self with itself in death, we find a way, through what he calls “resolution,” to reflexively reconnect to the world lost touch with in death. Thus, authenticity, as anticipatory resoluteness, names a double movement in which the world lost in anticipation is regained in resolve, a literally *revolutionary* movement by which we are involuntarily turned away from the world and then voluntarily turn back to it, a movement in which the grip of the world upon us is broken in order that we may thereby gain (or regain) our grip on this world.¹⁸

Levinas, I now want to suggest, builds his own account of how we become fully ourselves upon the structure of Heidegger’s phenomenology of authenticity, indeed, so much so that Levinas’ phenomenology of self-fulfillment simply cannot be understood without this Heideggerian background, which Levinas continually

¹⁷Anticipation is to expectation as anxiety is to fear, so we can begin to understand the former by thinking of the latter deprived of an object, as in an expectation that does not know what it is so nervously expecting, or a fear that is afraid of (the) *nothing*, as it were. (On how Heidegger thinks art can teach us to turn our tragic fear of the nothing into a heroic embrace of the possible, see Thomson 2011, Ch. 3.)

¹⁸I should perhaps qualify my claim that we are “involuntarily” turned away from the world. In an illuminating discussion of death, Pippin observes that: “We are simply not ‘in charge’ of whether care fails or not or how to think our way into our out of such an experience” (2005, 71). I shall suggest that Pippin’s view is actually closer to Levinas than Heidegger, because Heidegger thinks we can precipitate world-collapse by unflinchingly confronting our anxiety. (We cannot directly make our worlds collapse, no more than we can directly make ourselves sneeze, but just as we can indirectly make ourselves sneeze, say by exposing ourselves to something to which we are allergic, so Heidegger thinks we can indirectly make our worlds collapse by confronting our anxiety and tracing it back to our basic existential homelessness or “uncanniness” (*Unheimlichkeit*), the fact that there is nothing about the ontological structure of the self that can tell us what specifically we should do with our lives. I explain this view in “Heidegger’s Perfectionist Philosophy of Education” (2004a) and “Death and Demise in *Being and Time*” (2013).) Heidegger also believes that we can get beyond this world-collapse through resolve. Between these two important decisions, however, I think he would acknowledge that the experience takes on a momentum of its own, that we reach a point of no return in our confrontation with anxiety after which we can no longer choose to flee this anxiety back into the tranquilizing hurry of everyday busyness.

presupposes but never explicitly acknowledges or explains.¹⁹ We can begin to see this if we recall that authenticity's double movement of anticipation and resolve, death and rebirth, has long been thought of as Heidegger's phenomenological version of *conversion*, since it is a movement in which we turn away from the world, recover ourselves, and then turn back to the world, transformed by the process.²⁰ Levinas too is centrally concerned to provide a phenomenological description of such "death" and its role in what he goes so far as to call the self's "resurrection," and the structure of Levinas' account is almost identical to Heidegger's, in the following way (Levinas TI 56, 284). Just like Heidegger, Levinas thinks we become fully ourselves only when we confront our "death" and then—on the basis of the transformative realization afforded by this confrontation with death—we find a way back to the world, a world which we thereby come to understand and inhabit quite differently.²¹ Only if we keep this Heideggerian structure of Levinas' phenomenology of self-fulfillment in mind, I submit, will we be able to recognize their genuine *substantive* disagreements, understanding exactly where, and why, Levinas breaks with Heidegger and seeks to elaborate his alternative account of how we becomes truly or fully ourselves.

For, in what amounts to a formidable immanent critique of Heidegger's phenomenology of authenticity, Levinas challenges four interconnected aspects of Heidegger's account and offers his own positive alternatives. I shall quickly sketch these four differences, then devote the rest of this paper to exploring them in more detail. *First, Levinas objects to Heidegger's phenomenological description of the self confronting itself in "death."* According to Levinas' famous critique, what Heidegger calls "death" reveals the self's indomitable "virility" and "lucidity," whereas Levinas himself thinks that death delivers the stroke of a paralyzing passivity which this self is unable to surmount of its own power. *Second, Levinas disputes the nature of the crucial insight afforded by the self's confrontation with death.* For Heidegger, confronting death enables us to discover something about ourselves that remains more powerful than death, an aspect of the self (which he calls our "ownmost ability-to-be") that does not go down with the shipwreck of our life-projects but rather survives for as long as each of us do. By contrast, Levinas thinks that death renders us utterly powerless and passive, thereby revealing the other person as providing our only chance to pass through death toward a future this death has placed beyond our reach. Levinas holds, moreover, in perhaps the definitive claim of his work, that recognizing the other person as the only vessel

¹⁹If this is right, however, it constitutes a fairly devastating objection to the many Levinasians who seek to understand Levinas without recourse to Heidegger.

²⁰This reading of Heidegger, most prominently developed by Cavell, can be traced back to the early Heidegger's theological colleagues in the Marburg circle around Bultmann. On the latter point, see Joachim L. Oberst 2009.

²¹This is central to Levinas' broader philosophical project (see note 24 below); indeed, he calls the confrontation with death "the ineluctable moment of my dialectic" (TO, 92).

capable of transporting us through “death” into the future allows us to understand the other person as the sole bearer of “what is not yet,” that is, of *alterity*.

Third, Levinas contests Heidegger’s account of how it is that the self lives through death and thereby reconnects to the world. What Heidegger calls “resoluteness” relies upon the lucidity and virility death reveals, incorporating its new-found power over death into a second-order decision that frees the self to reconnect to its world by choosing the projects that define it. Levinas, for his part, believes that the self can reconnect to the world only by acknowledging its own powerlessness and so giving itself over to another person—paradigmatically a “teacher” or “master”—with whom this self can grope, in conversation, toward a future it cannot comprehend. *Fourth, and finally, Levinas opposes Heidegger’s description of how the self who finds a way back to the world is transformed by the adventure.* Heidegger’s authentic self becomes itself fully by seizing its “fate” and thereby helping to shape the communal “destiny” of its generation, which it accomplishes through a creative “repetition” of a project drawn from the past, enabling this self to establish the relatively continuous identity of itself and its community. Levinas, by contrast, thinks that we fully become ourselves only by being reborn as another person, becoming radically different from our previous self-conception. Through a process Levinas calls “transubstantiation,” we are transformed into wholly other-directed selves, committed to a community of those dedicated entirely to alterity (that is, to what is not yet), and so to the future, to continual transformation, even to the “permanent revolution” of “incessant death and resurrection,” as Levinas rather dramatically puts it.

Of course, Levinas, an avowed enemy of all “totalizing” systems, would never present his immanent critique of Heidegger’s secularized phenomenological account of the conversion to an authentic existence so schematically. The four “moments” just sketched remain tightly interwoven, moreover, both in Heidegger’s phenomenology of authenticity and in the alternative “dialectic” of self-fulfillment Levinas develops through his immanent critique of Heidegger. For the sake of clarity, I shall nevertheless endeavor to explain these points in turn in the final section of this paper.²²

Levinas’ Challenge

Let us begin with Levinas’ challenge to Heidegger’s phenomenological description of the self confronting itself in “death.” Levinas emphasizes that, in Heidegger’s phenomenology of authenticity, “death” reveals Dasein’s indomitable “virility” and “lucidity.” As he puts it in his 1946 lectures on *Time and the Other*:

²²I hope that this will help us understand Levinas’ differences from Heidegger in a way that leaves room for the fact that some of his views—both his criticisms of Heidegger and his own positive alternatives—remain more plausible than others.

Being toward death, in Heidegger's authentic existence, is a supreme lucidity and a supreme virility. It is Dasein's assumption of the uttermost possibility of existence, which precisely makes possible all other possibilities, and consequently makes possible the very feat of grasping a possibility—that is, it makes possible activity and freedom. (Levinas TO, 70)

I think Levinas' point, however strangely put, is basically sound. For Heidegger, death allows Dasein to experience its ownmost ability-to-be, an inalienable *projecting* or *existing* (from *ek-sistere*, "standing out" into temporally-structured intelligibility) that survives the shipwreck of all one's practical life-projects. This core volitional self which survives the collapse of its life-projects then finds itself able *resolutely* to reconnect to the world, lucidly choosing to project itself into a defining project once again. Levinas contests precisely this view, contending that the global collapse of defining projects we experience in "death" should instead be understood as a paralyzing stroke which undoes the self's power entirely, reducing the self to a state of radical passivity (TO, 70). Levinas nicely suggests that we can capture the basic difference between his view and Heidegger's through a simple inversion of Heidegger's famous formula: Whereas Heidegger understands death as "the possibility of an impossibility," for Levinas death is instead "the impossibility of . . . possibility" (TI, 235). This is no mere rhetorical chiasmus; for Levinas, "[t]his apparently Byzantine distinction has a fundamental importance," and not just because the two phrases are not logically equivalent (TO, 70n43).²³ The significant difference between Heidegger's "the possibility of an impossibility" and Levinas' "the impossibility of all possibility" is *phenomenological*, although this will take some explaining.

We can see how Heidegger's and Levinas' phenomenologies of "death" initially part ways²⁴ if we remember that, for Heidegger, when my projects all break-down or collapse, leaving me without any life-project to project myself upon, projection

²³As one can see by formalizing the two phrases, "the possibility of an impossibility" is not logically equivalent to "the impossibility of possibility." The latter is logically equivalent to "necessarily not possible," which is obviously not the same as the former's equivalent, "possibly not possible." The point could also be expressed in possible worlds semantics: "There is a possible world in which (there is no possible world in which X)" is not logically equivalent to "there is no possible world in which (there is a possible world in which X)." Still, one should not be misled; Heidegger has *existential* rather than logical possibility in mind here. (See note 25 below.)

²⁴To be clear, I am not claiming that this is the starting point of Levinas' critique of Heidegger; strictly speaking, his critique begins with an interesting but rather implausible challenge to Heidegger's notion of thrownness: Levinas seeks to get back behind our thrownness so as to begin his account from a foundationless *Il y a*, an "anonymous" existing without an existent. It is in this sense that, as Hoy recognizes, "Levinas still aspires to 'first philosophy,' that is, to a foundationalist account of human existence" (2004, 149). What Hoy (like most commentators) does not notice is that, in so doing, Levinas is seeking to redeem a Biblical understanding of *Genesis* (i.e., the entrance of being into time), the successive moments of which (creation, the garden, eating of the tree of knowledge, nakedness and shame, and so on) provide the skeletal framework of the original phenomenological "dialectic" Levinas unfolds and develops in his main philosophical works (*Time and the Other*, *Totality and Infinity*, and *Otherwise than Being*). I think Levinas' still largely unnoticed attempt to read the *Torah* as containing a progressive account of the ontological fulfillment of self (one which leads the self beyond itself, as we will see) is what

itself does not cease (see Steven Crowell 2001). When my being-possible becomes impossible, I still *am* this inability-to-be. My ability-to-be becomes blind, unable to connect to my world, but not *inert*. This strange condition—in which, stranded by the collapse of my life projects, I experience myself as a *projecting* deprived of any life-projects to project into—is what Heidegger characterizes as “the possibility of an impossibility,” or *death*. In Heidegger’s words: “Death, as possibility, gives Dasein nothing to be “actualized,” nothing which Dasein could itself actually *be*. It is the possibility of the impossibility of every way of comporting oneself toward anything, of every way of existing” (Heidegger BT, 307/SZ, 262). For Heidegger, in “death” I experience myself as cut off from a world I nevertheless strive desperately to reach, and so encounter my self as a naked “thrown *projection*,” a brute “that-it-is-and-has-to-be.” Hubert Dreyfus helpfully comments that: “In non-terminal breakdown [that is, death not accompanied by demise or other apparently permanent forms of world collapse], Dasein as an ability-to-be does, indeed, collapse, but something remains aware of the collapse and survives to open the new world” (2005, xxxiv–xxxv).

As Dreyfus sees, this “raises the difficult question: Just what survives world or identity-collapse so as to be aware that collapse has occurred” and subsequently reconnect to the world? Dreyfus’s answer to this question of what survives in Heideggerian “death” is: “naked thrownness or [in Heidegger’s words] the that-it-is-and-has-to-be” (2005, xxxv, note 59). Of course, “that-it-is-and-has-to-be” (my emphasis) is not only “naked thrownness” but also naked *projection*, in other words, pure “ability-to-be” (*Seinkönnen*) deprived of all “being possible” (*Möglichkeitsein*), all the positive projects one usually projects oneself into and understands oneself in terms of (teacher, husband, father, citizen, pet-owner, and so on). Accordingly, what survives the “death” of its projects, Dreyfus rightly adds, is Dasein as “an individualized *solus ipse* [a “self alone,” that is], . . . pure, isolated, world-needy mineness” (2005, xxxv, note 59). Again, if we do not fail to notice Dasein’s *having-to-be*, its *world-neediness*, then we will see that its “ability-to-be,” its *projecting*, is precisely what does *not* collapse, but merely gets stranded, separated from its “being-possible,” its self-constituting *projects*. Dasein is “collapsed” in death in the sense that it cannot do what it normally does (it cannot reconnect to its collapsed world), not in the sense that it stops trying or gives up entirely (Dreyfus 2005). As Guignon nicely expresses the crucial point, for Heidegger death reveals “that what I *am* at the most basic level is a reaching forward into possibilities, not an actualizing of possibilities” (2011, 197).²⁵ We can thus

ultimately explains what Hoy recognizes as Levinas’ attempt “to be even more fundamental than phenomenology” (162).

²⁵Guignon continues: “I exist as a ‘running ahead toward’ or ‘directedness forward to,’ which Heidegger calls ‘fore-running’ or ‘anticipation’ (*Vorlaufen*). Human existence is defined by a futurity or future-directedness, a standing out into an open space of possibilities, where actualizing specific possibilities, while generally important, is not what is crucial to our being” (2011, 197). Indeed, we only *discover* “what is crucial to our being” in the phenomenon of existential death, when the shipwreck of our existentiell life-projects reveals this future-directed, world-hungry

get a sense for the phenomenon Heidegger is describing as “the possibility of an impossibility” by generalizing from more common experiences such as an identity crisis, an anxiety attack, the work of mourning, a serious case of writer’s block, or an experience of genuine philosophical *aporia*, or even (as Pippin rightly suggests) the lonely isolation of old age, insofar as each of these experiences is characterized by a desperate striving for what no longer seems possible, a struggle to project oneself into identity-bestowing existential possibilities experienced as no longer within one’s reach.²⁶

By contrast, I would like to suggest, we can approach the phenomenon Levinas calls “death”—which he describes as “the impossibility of every possibility, the stroke of a total passivity”—by considering a severe depressive episode, in which the depressed person completely gives up and, for a time at least, no longer even tries to reconnect to her world (TI, 235). For Levinas, in a telling critique of Heidegger, death is not “the inanity” of “a paralytic’s freedom” (TI, 241), that is, the ability to *try* to do what has become impossible, but rather a kind of “suffocation in the impossibility of the possible” (TI, 57). For Levinas, the experience of “death” delivers the stroke of a paralyzing passivity, rendering the self utterly powerless, helpless even to “assume” death. Desperately unable to cross, under my own steam, “the infinitesimal—but untraversable—distance” that now separates me from the future (Levinas TI, 57), I suffer death’s *impossibility*: “The death agony is precisely this impossibility of ceasing,” that is, of eradicating the paralyzed remainder of self left over in death (56). It is thus telling that Levinas translates Heidegger’s *Angst* not as *anxiété*, “anxiety,” but rather as “*angoisse*,” “anguish,” which suggests a deeper torment, and one suffered more passively: “No exit,” but also no hope of ever finding one by oneself.²⁷ (In his early work, moreover, Levinas suggests another phenomenon remarkably similar to the anguish of being unable to cease, namely, “insomnia,” an experience in which I remain riveted to the world, unable even to let go, and increasingly without hope of ever getting beyond or escaping the experience.)²⁸

mineness as its sole survivor, thereby allowing us to recognize this core self—the existential projecting shorn of its specific existentiell life-projects—as the volitional and intentional core of existence.

²⁶See Pippin 2005, 165. As Pippin explains, Arendt saw totalitarianism as a “suicidal escape” from this dead end. (As a Hegelian more committed to than alienated by the modern world, Pippin contests Arendt’s Heideggerian tendency to equate such deadening experiences with modern bourgeois society in general.) For the early Heidegger, the “way out” of this deadlock is *action* (a view obviously influential on Arendt, who, as the muse of *Being and Time*, knew it well); for Levinas, it is, ultimately, *teaching* (giving a new, phenomenological meaning to the old saw, “Those who can’t do, teach”).

²⁷See Levinas 2000; unfortunately, the translator decided to override Levinas’ far from irrelevant decision (see 251n3).

²⁸In Levinas’ early work, however, the phenomenon of insomnia is supposed to attest to an experience in which the (post-hypostasis) subject, who has individuated itself from the anonymous “existing without an existent” of the *Il y a*, nevertheless maintains some experiential access to that pre-subjective experience of anonymous existing, and so can attest to it phenomenologically.

What, then, are we to make of this subtle but important disagreement between Heidegger and Levinas over the phenomenology of “death”? One tempting supposition would be that Levinas, as a phenomenologist similarly trained in the Husserlian school, sought to undergo and so experience first-hand the same phenomenon Heidegger had described in *Being and Time*, only to find himself stuck in what Heidegger called *anticipation* (or running-out), completely unable to pick himself up, as it were, and accomplish the autonomous reconnection to the world that Heidegger called resoluteness. So, when an alternative (Biblically-inspired) route back to the world occurred to Levinas (perhaps taking shape during his intensive tutelage with his famous Talmudic teacher, master Chouchani), he made it the basis of his own competing phenomenological account of self-fulfillment. (Here, moreover, the way Levinas challenges Heidegger’s secular, neo-enlightenment ideal of autonomous salvation implicitly raises the question of the relation in Levinas’ work between his phenomenological descriptions and his religious commitments, a question I must leave in parentheses here.)²⁹ Alternatively, those of us inclined to psychology as well as phenomenology might suppose that, rather than treating Heidegger’s *active but paralyzed striving* and Levinas’ *passive and suffocating collapse* as offering us competing descriptions of the same phenomenon, we should instead recognize these as powerfully evocative descriptions of two different psychological experiences involving world-collapse, namely, to put it in the most brutally simplified terms, Heideggerian *anxiety* and Levinasian *depression*. (That explanation, moreover, opens another set of difficult questions about how to understand the relationship between phenomenology and psychology.)³⁰ Nonetheless, however we account for it, we are witness here to a subtle but important fork in the road of the tradition of continental phenomenology, one which, we will see, continues to diverge until it becomes a major parting of the ways between Heidegger and Levinas (and which will exert a competing pull on such subsequent continental wayfarers as Derrida and Agamben).

To trace and examine this growing divide, let us turn to their second major difference, visible in Levinas’ alternative understanding of the nature of the crucial

Insomnia is thus the lynchpin in Levinas’ attempt to get back behind Dasein’s thrownness to a more radical (neo-Cartesian) starting point, seeking thereby to undercut Heidegger’s *Being and Time* claim that Dasein cannot get back behind its thrownness.

²⁹I would suggest that the specific way Levinas’ phenomenology challenges Heidegger’s neo-enlightenment ideal of self-salvation obliquely raises the issue of the integral relation between his phenomenological works and his Talmudic scholarship—domains Levinas rather misleadingly claimed to have kept separate (see note 24 above). Foucault points out, however, that the idea of “[n]ot being able to take care of oneself without help from someone else was a generally accepted principle” among the ancient Epicureans, Cynics, and Stoics (Foucault 2005, 496). Indeed, the early Heidegger’s idealization of this radical existential individualism seems to suffer from the same rather obvious masculinist biases as the other modern fantasies of radical autonomy. (The feminist critique of Levinas should not obscure this important affinity.)

³⁰Do phenomenology and psychology range over the same experiences? If so, do they have the same “object domain”? Can one be subordinated or reduced to the other? What is the place of the *unconscious* in phenomenology? Guignon is rightly renowned for his work on such issues.

insight afforded by the self's confrontation with death. I pointed out that for Heidegger, confronting death enables us to discover something about us that remains more *powerful* than death (BT, 436/SZ, 384), an aspect of the self—our basic existential *projecting*—which does not go down with the shipwreck of our life-projects but rather survives for as long as do each of our individual Daseins. Levinas, by contrast, thinks that when the approach of death renders us utterly *powerless*, what we discover—in the “passion” of this radical passivity—is that it is only through another person that we have any chance of passing through death into the future that death places beyond our reach.³¹ According to Levinas, to recognize the other person as the only vessel capable of transporting us through “death” into the future is, at the same time,³² to understand other people as the sole bearers of “what is not yet,” that is, of otherness in general. Now, Levinas is usually misunderstood here and taken to be insisting that, *pace* Heidegger's explicit claim in *Being and Time*, we do have access to death through other people. In fact, however, Levinas' critique of Heidegger is basically the reverse: Levinas is not claiming that we have access to death through other people, but rather that we gain access to the crucial dimension of alterity—including the alterity of the other person—through the experience of death. Here we encounter perhaps the most difficult and distinctive claim of Levinas' phenomenology: Death reveals “alterity” (*altérité*), the link invisibly “connecting” (*religio*) the “other person” (*autrui*) with “otherness” (*autre*) in general.

Levinas' defining claim, in other words, is that *through the experience of death we encounter the alterity of the other person*.³³ This “alterity” of the other person

³¹As Levinas' metaphors suggest, at this point in his “dialectic” he is articulating a fundamentally *Christian* phenomenology, which might help explain his attraction of Catholic followers such as Jean-Luc Marion. In Levinas' larger “dialectic of being,” “death” constitutes “the ineluctable moment,” but the earlier moments of his dialectic—in which Levinas seeks to get back behind thrownness to the anonymous existing which precedes existents (that is, God before the creation)—are inspired by *Genesis*, and it is here that Levinas explicitly seek to attain a deeper foundation (for his “first philosophy”) than Heidegger thought was possible (see note 24 above). Nevertheless, Levinas' next move establishes the metaphysical *humanism* definitive of his work (the view, put simply, that God *is* only in the ethical relationship between human beings), which places his phenomenology in the closest proximity to atheism, at least as traditionally-conceived (see note 33 below). Moreover, although the paradigm of the salvation Levinas describes may be Christ, for Levinas it is exemplified by the “master” or “teacher” more generally, and can clearly happen inadvertently as well (e.g., when the famous comments of a passing music teacher to his student—“Too tight and the strings will break; too loose and the instrument will not play”—enabled Prince Siddhartha finally to attain the enlightenment of the middle way.)

³²“The time of an impossible diachrony,” Levinas likes to say, so as to suggest the splitting of the subject in two, father and son, and the transubstantiation by which I survive only in (and as) my own son.

³³I think Levinas' distinctive claim concerning the relation between other people and otherness has not been well understood, especially in its relation to death. In his implicitly “religious” phenomenology (*religious* because it discerns and describes *connections* that, Levinas insists, remain invisible—even non-*phenomenal*—and yet “reveal” themselves nonetheless, and thus constitute a kind of *non-phenomenal revelation*, a problematic notion to be sure), the key insight,

is what Levinas famously refers to as the “face” (*Visage*), which is his name for the intersection of otherness and the other person. The term “face” is misleading, however, because this alterity is not experienced visually, but rather linguistically, through what Levinas calls “discourse” or “apology.” That is, the “face” is not what I see when I look at you (and even less when I look in the mirror, since Levinas thinks, rather implausibly in my view, that—except by becoming an other person—I cannot be other to myself, no more than I can tickle or surprise myself). Instead, the face is what I experience when you speak to me or otherwise communicate your viewpoint and thereby add something new or different to the discussion and so to my sense of the world. When the other person thus explains or clarifies her views, she *brings something new into existence*, and in this sense shows herself (to be made, as it were) “in the *image of God*,” the *Creator*—hence Levinas’ choice of the misleading term “face.” In sum, for Levinas otherness “is” only when it is revealed through the other person, and this is a revelation I can experience only when this other person says or does something that alters my world.

With this background in place, we are positioned to see that when Levinas makes his crucial claim that *through the experience of death we encounter the otherness of the other person*, his point is twofold: First, that through death we explicitly

put simply, is that *only the other person reveals otherness in general*. This is the claim at the heart of Levinas’ *metaphysical humanism*, a view by which he seeks to negotiate a safe path between what are for him the Scylla and Charybdis of *idolatry* and *atheism*. As Levinas describes these dual dangers, to approach the absolute *as absolute*, that is, as *non-relative*, would be to have no *relation* to it; this would be “atheism” (TI, 58). Conversely, to have a relation with the absolute is to risk the *idolatry* of treating that through which we relate to the absolute as if it were itself the absolute. (Levinas variously refers to the “absolute” as “infinity,” “alterity,” “exteriority,” and even “God”). Now, what makes this dual danger of atheism or idolatry look like an inescapable double-bind is Levinas’ metaphysical humanism, his distinctive claim that *otherness is revealed only through “the face” of the other person*. Yet, because he holds that otherness “is” only through the other person—that the absolute “is” only in its relation to us; that God “is” only in and through relations between human beings; that otherness “is” only when the other person alters my world—it is not clear how Levinas can avoid both atheism and idolatry, and, indeed, his metaphysical humanism seems to enter into a perilous proximity to both. Reconstructing Levinas’ interesting but rather tortuous logic would take us too far afield here, but it is clear that “the face of the other”—which essentially connects, and yet somehow does not conflate, the other person and otherness in general—acts as the fulcrum for Levinas’ rather delicate balancing act between atheism and idolatry. Still, Levinas’ *humanism* looks like (a more traditional conception of) “atheism” in that he refuses to conceive of *infinity* as a noun. (“Infinity does not first exist, and *then* reveal itself. Its infinity is produced as revelation” (TI, 26).) For Levinas, the infinite *is* only in the act of “*infinition*” (TI, 26)—that is, in breaking the plane of the currently existing finite totality so that something new may enter into the world. Moreover, the *totality* of what is (a totality Levinas calls “history”) immediately assimilates anything new; for even to appear it must appear for us, here, within what is. So “God” exists only in the (non-historical) time of “*diachrony*,” in which the instant opens the totality to something which exceeds it. What is most important for us here, however, is to recognize that Levinas’ metaphysical humanism—his view that *otherness is revealed only through “the face” of the other person*—is both (1) the crucial insight he thinks the experience of death reveals and (2) the thesis that most clearly distinguishes his ethical thinking from that of the later Heidegger, who held that human beings have access to alterity not only through other people, but also (and, indeed, paradigmatically, in his thinking about poetry) through a relationship to non-human “things.”

experience the capacity of the other person to change us, to alter our world, and second, that through death we experience ourselves becoming other to ourselves, that is, we experience our self become another, different self.³⁴ In the strange experience of death, these two points are connected; I become other to myself through the experience of that which remains different, surprising, able to change me—or, as Levinas says simply, “other”—about the other person, who helps me find a way forward which I could not have found on my own. It is, moreover, through this experience of the otherness of the other person in death that I learn to become other to myself, to become another person. How exactly does Levinas think this happens?

Here we reach the third major difference between Heidegger’s and Levinas’ competing phenomenologies of authentic self-fulfillment. Levinas challenges Heidegger’s account of how the self can live through the death of its world and then come to reconnect to a world. For Heidegger, “resolve” builds upon the bare projecting revealed by death; in a second-order decision (a “choosing to choose,” as he puts it), this unsinkable core of the self is able to reconnect to a world by lucidly or explicitly projecting into a defining project.³⁵ If Heidegger thereby suggests that the best response to the anxiety-like phenomenon he describes is basically to “tough it out,” that is, to confront it, dig deeper, and find a way to get past it, Levinas himself insists that one simply cannot get oneself out of the depression-like phenomenon he evokes, indeed, that here one’s only hope is to be saved by someone else, through what he calls “love” or *Eros*.³⁶ Levinas believes that the self can reconnect to the world only by giving itself over to another person—paradigmatically a “teacher” or “master”—with whom this self can grope, in conversation, toward a future it

³⁴This is what Levinas means when he writes that: “An event happens to us . . . without our being able to have the least project. This approach of death indicates that we are in relation with something that is absolutely other, something bearing alterity not as a provisional determination we can assimilate through enjoyment, but as something whose very existence is made of alterity. My solitude is thus not confirmed by death but rather broken by it. Right away this means that existence is pluralist. Here the plurality is not a multitude of existents; it appears in existing itself. A plurality insinuates itself into the very existing of the existent . . . In death the existing of the existent is alienated” (Levinas TO, 74–75). Or: “Death . . . is *present* only in the other person, and only in him does it summon me urgently to my final essence, to my responsibility” (Levinas TI, 179).

³⁵How is this supposed to work, and how does Heidegger’s account of resolution avoid the charge of arbitrary decisionism? The account is complex, but as I explain in detail in “Heidegger’s Perfectionist Philosophy of Education,” the recognition that (1) there is nothing about the structure of the self laid bare in death which can tell me what project to choose is what enables me (2) to give up the paralyzing idea that there is a single correct choice to make, thereby (3) freeing me to select and update an exemplary life-project from the tradition, one that allows me to employ my factual skills and aptitudes in a way that (4) helps me to play a role in determining and shaping the issues that matter to my generation.

³⁶It is tempting nonetheless to explain this “triumph over death” (“love, stronger than death”) in terms of an experience, in death, of alterity as the “sublime” (*Erhaben*), which “lifts up,” out of depression (TI, 79), and Heidegger does seem to move in this direction later (see note 16 above).

cannot yet comprehend.³⁷ I think the pedagogical, religious, and psychoanalytic implications of Levinas' view remain extremely suggestive, but what is confusing for many readers here is that, in good Platonic fashion, Levinas' descriptions of this process of transformation trade heavily on erotic metaphors, which his feminist critics especially have long insisted on literalizing, thereby obscuring Levinas' ultimate point.³⁸ For, when Levinas describes the way the "caress"—which "gropes" toward something it cannot reach or understand rather than *grasping* something it can—enables me to find a way through the "fecundity" of the "feminine" so as, ultimately, to live on in my "child" (indeed, my "son"), Levinas is not simply using sexist language to describe from his masculine perspective the way that, as Plato suggested, those "impoverished in soul" seek to live on in their children. Levinas' erotic metaphors do work on that level, which he characterizes as the level of "biology," but—as he repeatedly emphasizes—this biological substrate of human life is only Levinas' own version of what Heidegger calls our *ontic* everyday reality, the deeper *ontological* meaning of which both seek to describe phenomenologically, and to almost the same effect (TI, 277, 279). In other words, Levinas uses his initially sexist and biologically-grounded metaphors to try to describe how the self, rendered powerless by death, can nevertheless find a path to the future, in which it will be reborn as a radically different person.³⁹ Yet, *different* in what way exactly?

This question brings us to their fourth and final difference, in which Levinas opposes Heidegger's description of how the self who finds a way back to the world is transformed by the adventure. Although Dreyfus rightly suggests that there are actually degrees of self-fulfillment that Heidegger has yet to recognize in *Being and Time*, Heidegger's early view is that the authentic self becomes itself fully by seizing its "fate" and thereby helping to shape the communal "destiny" of its generation (See note 39 above). It does this through a creative "repetition" of projects drawn from the past which enable this self to establish the relatively continuous identity

³⁷As Levinas puts it, "The relationship with the other will never be the feat of grasping a possibility," rather, the relationship should be understood in terms of "the erotic relationship," as groping (or "the caress") rather than grasping: "The caress does not know what it seeks. This not knowing, this fundamental disorder, is the essential. It is like a game with something slipping away, a game absolutely without project or plan, not with what can become ours or us, but with something other, always other, always inaccessible, and always still to come [*à venir*]. The caress is the anticipation of this pure future [*avenir*], without content" (TO, 89).

³⁸This tendency toward a reductive misunderstanding of this crucial point is almost as old as second wave feminism itself, since it originated in the preface to Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*.

³⁹As Levinas says with respect to his concepts of the "son" and "fecundity": "the son is not me, and yet I *am* my son. The fecundity of the I is its very transcendence. The biological origin of the concept nowise neutralizes the paradox of its meaning, and delineates a structure that goes beyond the biologically empirical" (TI, 277). "If biology furnishes us the prototypes of these relations . . . these relations free themselves from their biological limitations" (279). "*To be* one's son means to be I in one's son, to be substantially in him, yet without being maintained there in identity. Our whole analysis of fecundity aimed to establish this dialectical conjuncture, which conserves the two contradictory movements. The son resumes the unicity of the father and yet remains radically exterior to the father" (278–79). Also, cf. Marcel Proust 2003, 805.

of itself and its community. Levinas, by clear contrast, thinks that we become ourselves fully only by being reborn as another person, a person who is radically different from his or her previous self-conception. This is accomplished through a “transubstantiation” in which I am reborn as the “son” of myself and so transformed into a radically *other-directed* self. Levinas thinks that this newborn *ethical* self will recognize the paramount importance of the alterity of the other person (glimpsed in and understood through death), and so become committed to a dispersed community of ethical individuals dedicated to serving, eliciting, and respecting the alterity of other people.⁴⁰ This is an ethical community committed to bringing newness into the world, and so dedicated to the future, to continual transformation, and, ultimately, to serving others as “teachers” of this “permanent revolution” of “incessant death and resurrection.”

What this all shows, I think, is that the endpoints of the structurally analogous processes of death and rebirth described by the early Heidegger and by Levinas remain worlds apart. Indeed, their visions of self-fulfillment are almost inverted images. For the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, we genuinely become ourselves, realizing our greatest possible ethical fulfillment, through the self’s *revolutionary* return to and repossession of itself. For Levinas, by contrast, we become ourselves fully only by making a literally *eccentric* passage in which the center of our being is moved outside our selves: I become myself by learning to be for others. Early Heideggerian self-fulfillment describes the path of an existential odyssey that brings us full circle back to ourselves by first turning us away from the world in which we are usually immersed and then turning us back to this world in a more reflective way. The “victory over death” Levinas evokes through his “phenomenology of Eros”—whereby I become “resurrected,” “transubstantiated” into the son of myself—contrasts sharply with Heidegger’s circular odyssey. As Levinas writes, through “Eros,” “a subject . . . goes toward a future which is *not yet* and which I will not merely grasp but I *will be*—it no longer has the structure of the subject which from every adventure returns to its island, like Ulysses” (TI, 271).

How, then, are we to evaluate all of these differences (which become even more complicated if we introduce the later Heidegger into the discussion)? I hope others will help me with that rather large question, but since my expression of that hope might be taken as a kind of inadvertent confirmation of Levinas’ ethical perspective (since Levinas suggests that we can be helped through genuine philosophical aporias only by another person), I shall also conclude by proposing—so as to bring us back into the vicinity, at least, of the political issues with which we began—that

⁴⁰In the definitive transformation by which we truly become ourselves, Levinas writes, “The I, . . . the center around which [the subject’s] existence gravitates, is confirmed in its singularity by purging itself of this gravitation, purges itself interminably, and is confirmed precisely in this incessant effort to purge itself. This is termed goodness. Perhaps the possibility of a point of the universe where such an overflow of responsibility is produced ultimately defines the I” (TI, 244–45).

Levinas' most famous criticism of Heidegger rebounds upon his own view as well.⁴¹ Levinas famously objects that Heideggerian authenticity fails to secure itself against totalitarian violence, but it is hard to see how Levinas' own indiscriminate embrace of alterity—by which he means all as of yet unknown experiences of human otherness—can itself rule out *anything* different, new, or creative. Unfortunately, *pace* Levinas, not everything different, creative, or new is good (although the temptation to think so is a perennial danger for those of us on the Left; one thinks here for instance of Foucault's enthusiastic reaction to the rise of Islamic theocracy, as well as of homegrown reactionaries celebrating the surprise attacks of September 11th).⁴²

In other words, Levinas' equation of ethics with alterity is much too quick. His indiscriminate ethicization of everything human beings create that is new, original, unheard, different, or surprising is too broad to serve ethics very well, for it fails to distinguish between good and bad surprises, to put it simply. It does not help us distinguish, for example, between those intense surprises which, even if they wound us initially, eventually help us grow, and those which traumatize us, never to heal, permanently stunting our growth (as September 11th sometimes seems to have done in the USA by reversing the erratic but undeniable progress our liberal democratic institutions had been making).⁴³ The problem here, to put it provocatively, is that if

⁴¹“I think’ comes down to ‘I can’ . . . Ontology as first philosophy is a philosophy of power. It issues in the State and in the non-violence of the totality, *without securing itself against the violence from which this non-violence lives*, and which appears in the tyranny of the state. Truth, which should reconcile persons, here exists anonymously” (Levinas TI, 46; my emphasis).

⁴²“The face to face is . . . the primordial production of being on which all the possible collocations [ways of setting in place together] of the terms are founded. The revelation of the third party, ineluctable in the face, is produced only through the face. Goodness . . . consists in going where no clarifying—that is, panoramic—thought precedes, in going without knowing where. An absolute adventure, in a primal imprudence, goodness is transcendence itself” (Levinas TI, 305).

⁴³An interesting test case can be found in Levinas' famous exchange with Father Richardson. (The basic story runs as follows: Levinas generously accepted Richardson's invitation to sit as an outside examiner on Richardson's thesis committee for his doctoral degree at Louvain, where Richardson defended the text that would become his renowned treatise on Heidegger, *Through Phenomenology to Thought*. During the long defense Levinas never raised the issue of Heidegger's Nazism, about which Richardson says he was prepared to respond. Afterward, during the rush of customary congratulations, Levinas came up behind Richardson, poked him sharply in the back, and then, when Richardson turned around expecting to shake Levinas' hand, Levinas instead interjected something like: “You say in your thesis that ‘1942 was a very prolific year’ . . . In 1942, my mother was in one concentration camp and my father was in another. It was a very prolific year indeed!” Levinas then spun on his heel and walked away, never to speak to Richardson again. Richardson recounts the story in several places, including his contribution to *From Phenomenology to Thought, Errancy, and Desire: Essays in Honor of William J. Richardson, S.J.* (1995); I thank him for an extended conversation about it.) Perhaps the lesson to be drawn from this exchange is that, rather than representing a bizarre aberration to be explained away as an uncharacteristic outburst of anger on Levinas' part, Levinas' surprising attack on Richardson should instead be understood as an exemplary embodiment of his ethical view, a powerful example of what Levinas called “the traumatism of the other.” (And anyone who has read or heard Richardson's narration of these events will recognize that this is a trauma he has never fully worked-through.) Of course,

the Holocaust or *Shoah* was historically unique, that is, if through it something new, surprising, or unprecedented was indeed introduced into human history (as many of us believe), then the question with which we began returns with renewed insistence: Is Levinas' ethical perspective really the most appropriate philosophical response to the Holocaust or *Shoah*? And, however inspiring his view remains, what ethical traction does it provide with which we might help combat or resist the outbreak of *other* political horrors, now and in the future?⁴⁴

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one should recognize that, as Salomon Malka points out: "It is nevertheless easy to imagine how reading a book of 700 pages on the evolution of Heidegger's thought without the least reference to his political involvement . . . could have been painful for Levinas," especially when this extremely galling sin of omission was committed by a Jesuit priest (2006, 166). Indeed, it is easy to imagine Levinas' indignation piqued by the then prevailing norms of scholarly propriety which worked to preclude any public discussion of Heidegger's complicity with the Nazis.

⁴⁴I am not the only one to raise such worries. Even Derrida, one of Levinas' most sympathetic critics, pointedly objects to the troubling ethical blindness evident in Levinas' treatment of non-human animals: "The animal remains for Levinas what it will have been for the whole Cartesian-type tradition: a machine that doesn't speak, that doesn't have access to sense, that can at best imitate 'signifiers without a signified,' . . . a monkey with 'monkey talk,' precisely what the Nazis sought to reduce their Jewish prisoners to." Levinas' failure of moral empathy or imagination prevents the great ethicist from responding to what Derrida recognizes as that "industrial, mechanical, chemical, hormonal, and genetic violence to which man has been submitting animal life for the past two centuries," a violent "war against the animal" which Derrida nevertheless hesitates to describe as *genocide* (even though "there are also animal genocides: the number of species endangered because of man takes one's breath away"), since much of the "torture" involves "the organization an exploitation of an artificial, infernal, virtually interminable survival" (Derrida 2008, 26, 101, 117).

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Chapter 16

Dumas and Heidegger on Death to Come

Mariana Ortega

Nothing happens in the real world unless it first happens in the images in our heads.

—Gloria Anzaldúa

Philosophers need to cross borders that limit our thinking and constrain the presentation of our ideas. I am thus interested in the intertwining of images and words, in the way that philosophical thought is represented in art (Ortega 2009). Here I would like to explore this intertwining in order to see how that which has color, texture, and form can reveal what has been written in text. I provide a discussion of the ways in which the work of the South African-born Amsterdam-based painter Marlene Dumas calls forth the Heideggerian notion of being-towards-death in order to show how Dumas' works of bodies, figures, and subjects that are barely painted on the canvas, seemingly unfinished and yet powerful, call me and may also call you and others to understand our mortality, which, according to Heidegger, includes not just the end that is to come, but our responsibility for our choices as we project ourselves into the future.

Despite living in a culture that glorifies violence we desperately try to ignore death. The subject of death and dying is one that remains hidden away, especially as it concerns visual representations of our dead in wars in far away places. Stories of death and dying are manipulated so as not to disrupt our everyday doings and sensibilities. In various circles, writing about death has even become passé. Relegated to the realm of adolescent preoccupations or to the musings of pessimistic, apocalyptic philosophers, death has become trite or morbid—a nuisance either way. Perhaps we want to kill death, take it out of our lives so as not to remember that writer, poet, painter, daughter, teacher, friend, lover—of flesh and bone, of hope and desire—inflexibly and inevitably will have an end. Yet, let us follow Wittgenstein, as José Saramago does in his work, *Death with Interruptions*, when he says, “If for example, you were to think more deeply about death, then

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it would be truly strange if, in so doing, you did not encounter new images, new linguistic fields” (cited in Saramago 2008). It would be strange indeed.

Just as Saramago paints with black ink a fresh, even more human, more sensitive, death, Marlene Dumas’ work as shown in her 2008 and 2009 retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, *Measuring Your Own Grave*, brings forth a new way of representing our mortality. As I walked through the exhibit halls, I was transported to an old familiar text, *Being and Time*, and its discussion of being-towards-death, the Heideggerian attempt to grapple with the fact that human beings or *Dasein* as he preferred to call us, does end and that this end is not merely an end but also a beginning and a call to understand our responsibility as we project ourselves toward the future, as we make choices that affect not only my life but also the lives of those around me.

As I recalled Heidegger’s work and his understanding of being-towards-death in terms of the impact they had earlier in my academic endeavors, I found myself standing in front of the namesake of the exhibition, the painting “Measuring Your Own Grave,” wishing to explore further this connection of painting and text on such an urgent topic as our finitude.¹ The invitation to commemorate the work of Charles Guignon prompted me to reflect further on Dumas and Heidegger, bringing me back to that powerful exhibit in Los Angeles and back to Heidegger’s words on self, death and anxiety, words that Guignon has helped us understand through his generous reading of the Heideggerian existential analysis of our humanity.

Following Guignon’s commitment to engage philosophical work in an accessible manner—even in the case of the incredibly difficult and elusive Heideggerian philosophy—my wish is not to engage in a theoretical discussion of the complex topic of the meaning of art for Heidegger, but to provide a personal reflection of the connection between words and images, some words by Heidegger and some images by Dumas.² For me, words by Heidegger that reveal being-towards-death appeared in color and texture on Dumas’ canvases; that is, Dumas’ canvases revealed Heidegger’s words on death. They also disclosed that which is but has been covered over, our own mortality and our responsibility. I cannot pretend that my experience is one that would be shared by viewers of the exhibit *Measuring Your Own Grave* who are also familiar with the Heideggerian notion of death. I can only offer this reflection with the hope of showing the intertwining of words and images prompted by Dumas’ compelling work.

¹I must add here that my relationship to Heidegger’s work, and more specifically to *Being and Time*, is a difficult one. While I deeply admire various elements of his existential analytic, I cannot forget or downplay his adherence to National Socialism. Debates regarding the relationship of the content of his work to his personal political choices are heated and they continue to this day. I thus find it necessary to keep a certain distance and to engage his ideas comparatively and constructively.

²There is a significant body of work discussing the Heideggerian view of art ranging from Heidegger’s attack on the modern aesthetic understanding that detaches art from historical, practical, and communal endeavors and emphasizes the pleasurable to debates regarding the importance of the discussion of Van Gogh’s painting of a pair of shoes in Heidegger’s famous text on art, “The Origin of a Work of Art.” See Kockelmans 1985; Harries 2009; Young 2001; Thomson 2011.

A reviewer of the exhibit *Measuring Your Own Grave* states, “Together her pictures have a cumulative power, and at moments they seem to stare out at us as if emblematic of everyone who has ever disappeared, and with the knowledge that one day, we, too, will be among the missing” (Solomon 2008). When asked why she chose the title *Measuring Your Own Grave*, why such a somber name for her exhibition, Dumas replies in a poem,

I am the woman who does not know
 Where she wants to be buried anymore.
 When I was small, I wanted a big angel on my grave
 With wings like in a Caravaggio painting.
 Later I found that too pompous.
 So I thought I'd rather have a cross.
 Then I thought—a tree.
 I am the woman who does not know
 If I want to be buried anymore.
 If no one goes to graveyards anymore
 If you won't visit me there no more
 I might as well have my ashes in a jam jar
 And be more mobile.

But let's get back to my exhibition here.

I've been told that people want to know,
 why such a somber title for a show?
 Is it about artists and their mid-life careers,
 or is it about women's after-50 fears?
 No, let me make this clear:
 It is the best definition I can find
 for what an artist does when making art
 and how a figure in painting makes its mark . . .
 What an artist does when making art and what a philosopher does in doing philosophy turn
 out to be the same—learning how to die. (Butler 2008, 194)

We are reminded of Plato's *Phaedo* here in that the philosopher must practice dying, finally detaching from the burdensome body and being able to reach truth. But how does making art and doing philosophy turn out to be the same? What does learning to die mean? Paradoxically, for Dumas and, as we shall see for Heidegger, this is done by living. As Dumas states, “One of the things that art does is to assert that you are here. I find it very hard to accept death. One of the few certainties is that we are going to die and we can't quite do it gracefully or we can't quite accept it . . . I want to learn to accept death, not by dying, but by living” (Enright 2004, 33).

Dumas, whose Museum of Contemporary Art exhibit in Los Angeles drew critics to praise her as brilliant, but also to criticize *Measuring Your Own Grave* by saying that it would make a heavy metal band proud, exposes us to a range of unfinished looking images of children, terrorists, corpses, strippers, and other beings that may disclose the Heideggerian existential notion of being-towards-death. Being-towards-death is not an easy concept to grasp intellectually but walking through the rooms of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art's exhibit of Dumas work revealed its meaning in a poignant way and in a different way than reading Heidegger's text. It is here that art and philosophy meet. While it is not possible to convey fully how my experience of viewing the whole range of Dumas' works inspired me to

think of the Heideggerian notion of being-towards-death, I can nevertheless give you a glimpse of some of the intersections between her images and this important Heideggerian notion.

Let us briefly consider the meaning of the Heideggerian notion of being-towards-death. As is well known, the Heideggerian description of human beings, or *Dasein*, is one of the most important discussions on selfhood in the history of philosophy. Rather than appealing to the traditional account of the epistemic subject or the subject that connects to the world primarily through knowledge, Heidegger introduces an existential conception of the self as “being-in-the-world,” as having a primarily practical orientation in the world. Like being-in-the-world, Being-towards-death is one of our key ontological characteristics or ways of being.

According to Heidegger, we have the possibility of understanding our being-towards-death. However, Heidegger notes that in our daily existence we have what he calls an everyday understanding of death that is dominated by the mode of the they, or *das Man*, a mode in which we follow the norms and practices that we are supposed to follow given our social locations. Under this everyday mode—and here you should consider our current understanding of death—we don’t grasp the meaning of our-being-towards-death. Instead, we think that death is something that happens but not to me or to those that I know. It also includes the view that death means the stopping of the heart, the cessation of breathing. Ultimately this everyday understanding of death constitutes an avoidance of death, a movement away from the understanding that we are finite beings that will certainly die.

Yet, in Heidegger’s view, a proper understanding of our being-towards-death is possible; it amounts to seeing death as one’s *ownmost* possibility, as “in every case mine,” as the end of my being-in-the-world. It is the understanding that no one can die for me and that my death is not merely the cessation of my biological organism but the end of my dwelling in the world as a being that makes choices. Heidegger believes that we have the possibility of reaching this proper understanding of death and thus of anticipating our own death, because we experience the basic mood or attunement of anxiety. As Guignon explains,

Moods or attunements are the specific, concrete modes in which the essential structure of *Befindlichkeit* is expressed and realized at any given time . . . They determine the quality and ‘feel’ of the context in which we find ourselves . . . they color in advance the way things can matter to us—whether they are amenable or irrelevant, attractive or threatening. (2009, 196)

In the Heideggerian analysis, *Befindlichkeit* has to do with how “you are situated or disposed in your everyday involvements in the world” and thus the mood of anxiety is an expression of a particular way in which the self is feeling or is situated in the world (Guignon 2009, 196). Yet, for Heidegger, anxiety is a distinct way in which we are disclosed, feel that we are neither here nor there, and become anxious of the very possibility of our being, of our being in the world. Heidegger explains it in the following way:

Anxiety thus takes away from *Dasein* the possibility of understanding itself, as it falls, in terms of the ‘world’ and the way things have been publicly interpreted. Anxiety throws *Dasein* back upon that which it is anxious about—its authentic potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world. Anxiety individualizes *Dasein* for its ownmost Being-in-the-world, which as something that understands, projects itself essentially upon possibilities. (BT, 232/SZ, 187)

Anxiety prompts us not to rely on the interpretations that we have relied upon in our everyday mode and thus leads us to understand our own possibilities by way of an encounter with and our anticipation of being-towards-death.

In the Heideggerian existential account, anticipation of our death constitutes a key possibility of our being and such a possibility is connected to the notion of resoluteness or authenticity, a phenomenon prompted by what Heidegger calls the voice of conscience or “call of conscience.” Since Heidegger believes that we are temporal beings that are projecting ourselves towards future possibilities, he describes us as being “ahead of ourselves.” That is, our actions and choices in the present are already connected to our future possibilities, including the possibility of our end. In this sense, we can anticipate our being-towards-death, not by preparing to die but by understanding ourselves as temporal beings whose future includes our death and who consequently have to live resolutely. Through resoluteness we can bring ourselves back from the way of being that dominates everyday thinking and stops us from taking responsibility for our actions. You may be familiar with this mode of being as it is all around us—we dress the way we are supposed to dress, think the way we are supposed to think, watch the movies we are supposed to watch, and like the art that we are supposed to like. Under this everyday inauthentic mode of the They our choices are not really ours, but are part of everyday norms and, consequently, we are not ourselves—thus, Heidegger’s claim that under this mode we stop taking responsibility for our actions.

Being resolute and taking responsibility for our choices is connected to what Heidegger calls our being-guilty. Generally the notion of guilt is associated with doing a wrong action, breaking a moral standard. However, in Heidegger’s view, being-guilty is connected to a sense of a lack, and a sense of “having responsibility for” or “Being-the-basis for.” In other words, being-guilty amounts to understanding that we are here in this world, thrown into this world, without an essence and that we have to make ourselves by the choices we make, by projecting ourselves upon our possibilities. The call of conscience, what Heidegger thinks is revealed in an *Augenblick* or an instant, a moment of vision, leads us to understand ourselves as finite beings who can take responsibility for what we become.

In the Heideggerian analysis, this call of conscience that prompts us to consider our responsibility for our lives is quite puzzling and mysterious, as it is not supposed to come from specific people or from God; it comes from our own selves. While looking at Dumas’ work, I experienced this call of conscience that brings me back both to my own mortality and to my responsibility for my being—and I wonder if others did too. Her canvases, her visible strokes of colors, prompted this call of conscience that called forth my being-towards-death. Painting here becomes an existential philosophical medium. Dumas’ paintings attain existential meaning in the sense that they express a dimension of life. As Guignon says in his discussion of the meaning of the work of art,

The meaning of a work of art is determined by the way the work brings to light and makes manifest a dimension of life that is already meaningful, a significance that first becomes formulated and fully illuminated through its presentation in the work of art. (2003, 44)

Following the hermeneutic tradition of Dilthey, Gadamer, and Heidegger, Guignon considers the meaning of art beyond the artist's intentions and connects such meaning to what the work discloses. That is, the meaning of the work of art is not to be found in the "subjective," in figuring out what the artist intended in the work or even in the feelings or experiences that the viewer has when encountering it, but in the work's disclosure of aspects of the world that were previously covered up. As Heidegger puts it, the work is an "opening up of a world" (PLT, 44). Guignon discusses existential meaning as having to do with "something counting or mattering in relation to someone's life" (2003, 43). That is to say, the existential meaning of works of art—and here Guignon is referring to works of art in general not just to great or monumental works of art—is connected to the work disclosing something that matters in our lives, something that has been hidden that the work brings forth.

So let us consider "Measuring Your Own Grave" and reflect on its existential meaning. While I admittedly concentrated on the way Dumas' work impacted me, on my experience of the work of art, and thus my reflection could be thought as too subjectivist in the sense that the hermeneutic tradition's treatment of art criticizes, I later realized the existential meaning of Dumas' work in the sense that Guignon describes it.



Dumas, "Measuring Your Own Grave" (2003)

Various commentators see the painting primarily as a statement on the death of painting, on what is to be done after painting is dead. Christopher Knight from the Los Angeles Times says,

It's a work Dumas probably couldn't have made before racking up some time on the job. Any artist, especially one with her ambition and success, is anxious about the legacy she

leaves for the future. In that sense painting is indeed an act of measuring your own grave—passing time from one lived moment to the next while carving out a place in history. (2008)

While I acknowledge the sense in which this painting may be a commentary on painting itself, it is more revelatory than that. Not only does “measuring our own grave” reveal my utter finitude, the fact that there is a grave waiting for me—in the painting, the canvas itself is the coffin—but it also reveals my agency as a being that can make choices about my life even when I am subject to social, discursive, and material circumstances that influence the kind of person that I am. I have the ability to make choices to the point of measuring my own grave. But what does this measuring amount to? Is it a preparation for death? Dumas is the woman who does not know if she wants to be buried anymore, who wonders whether to have an angel on her grave, or a cross, or simply to be more mobile and not be buried at all but cremated and carried in a jam jar. How does she measure her own death? By looking at the trajectory of her own work and seeing how she has developed as an artist? By seeing how she will continue to do art until she is no longer? How do we prepare? Does the measuring of our deaths amount to knowing how we have lived our lives? Heidegger sees our lives from birth to death as wholes—but wholes that are not yet finished as we have to continue to make choices until the very end. We are indeed always preparing to die by living.

The figure in “Measuring Your Own Grave,” sometimes interpreted as female and sometimes as male, stands in the middle of a Manichean division of darkness tempered by purple and of light, measuring and bowing at the same time, almost suspended in between night and day, guilty for his or her own doings, and at the same time calling forth my own being-guilty for my existence. As Dumas says, “Meaning comes with the consciousness of the viewing process; it’s an interrelational process, not a static identity. I understand the notion of existentialism that refuses an essentialism of meaning. We all are responsible for what we say we see” (Nys Dambrot 2008). Here Dumas concentrates on the process of viewing the work and the ways in which the viewer experiences the work of art. As I first encountered this painting in the exhibit, I also became highly aware of my experience of the painting, of the feelings that this almost crucified figure conveyed to me, the restlessness, the apprehension, a certain uneasiness as I couldn’t understand what the image meant and yet it had a strong effect on me. The reaction was not just to this painting but to the cumulative experience of Dumas’ works, of the figures and faces that stared from the walls. Looking at a photograph of this painting or others in the exhibit cannot really do justice as compared to standing in front of the works.

Yet, although there is a circularity in our viewing of an art work, a hermeneutic circle that informs the experience of art—I interpret it largely by my own history, motives, and interests—the work also reveals something more. In this sense, the painting touches us—just as Dumas says that she herself is “touched by our bruiseability” (Enright 2004, 22). It is this aspect of Dumas’ work—the fact that her work touches us by exposing our vulnerabilities—that discloses a crucial and existentialist dimension in her painting. Although she has repeatedly said that her work refuses any isms and thus we must move away from calling it existentialist

painting, its impact nevertheless brings to light major existentialist themes. Some of these major existentialist themes such as anxiety, fear, and death are deeply felt by us, but are difficult to grasp and to represent for both artists and philosophers. Yet the work of art, with its paint, color, and form has the power to call us and to point to our mortality.

Recalling Guignon's view of existentialist meaning inspired by the hermeneutic tradition, I would like to think in terms of what Dumas' painting "Measuring Your Own Grave," as well as other works have disclosed. In prompting me to consider the Heideggerian view of being-towards-death, Dumas' work disclosed not just my own mortality but the ways in which such mortality is connected to my responsibility to others—a link that is unfortunately lost as we live our lives preoccupied with our own subjectivity and immersion in an everydayness that robs us of our responsibility for not just our existence, but for the well-being of others.

That figure in the middle of the canvas represents our agency to the extent that we are capable of measuring our own grave, of taking our lives into our hands. If we take into consideration our previous discussion of the Heideggerian notion of being-towards-death, the question that arises is whether we are ready to accept that agency or the extent to which we are willing to accept our agency. But that is not all. To what extent is that agency implicated in the lives of others, responsible with and for others?

Now consider "Against the Wall," a more recent painting by Dumas from her 2010 exhibit in New York at the David Swirner Gallery.



Dumas, "Against the Wall"
(2009)

The question of being-towards-death is urgent here, as the figure is caught against the wall, as the figure may actually be facing his imminent end or a painful future. The question of agency responsibility becomes more pressing. And the viewer is again faced with a challenge—to interpret the future of this man pinned against the wall—will he be yet another casualty of brutality or will he be able to escape? What if it were us who were in this situation? What if we were the ones watching? How would we be involved? What would our choices be?

The paintings just discussed are not of corpses, although Dumas has painted corpses and figures reminiscent of corpses, most notably “Jen,” “Stern (Ulrike Meinhof),” “The Kiss,” “Lucy,” “Dead Girl,” “Dead Marilyn,” and “Fog of War.” They are of those in preparation to become a corpse. Art, as Dumas has said, is and always has been a preparation for death (Enright 2004, 33). In what sense can those words be declared about art? In the sense that painting is capable of disclosing our utmost possibility of death by bringing forth images and colors that call us to accept our finitude, leaving us with a choice to acknowledge it or to run away from it, mostly afraid of the certain future that is to come. As we have seen, acknowledging that our lives are being towards death, as Heidegger suggests, is paradoxically a call to life, choice, and responsibility.

But what about Dumas’ paintings of corpses? Paradoxically, too, they don’t just point to death as the end of all possibilities. Many have commented on how works such as “Stern” and “Jen” portray a crucial ambiguity as it is not clear what the images represent.



Dumas, “Jen” (2005)



Dumas, "Stern" (2004)

Is Jen sleeping, her pink nipple creating a *punctum*, that points and cuts, that according to Roland Barthes, pierces us and calls us to look further into the image? Does its vibrant color call for our thinking about life in the midst of death? When commenting on this work, Dumas said that in her painting she made "the woman less dead" (Butler 2008, 146). Is "Stern" portraying a dead Ulrike Meinhof, the left wing militant and protester, or a sleeping one, or one in ecstasy? Dumas says, "Images don't care. Images do not discriminate between sleep and death" (Butler 2008, 146). And she effectively uses this ambiguity to disrupt what is represented and to force the viewer to interpret the work. We, the viewers, are the ones who care about whether we are seeing the calmness of sleep or the triumph of death. Our choice, however, is crucial and it is telling about our willingness to consider death, to grapple with it, even if it is through a visual image. Now consider our willingness to grapple with our own finitude, with the bruiseability or vulnerability of others.

Interestingly, Dumas works from photographs and, knowing this, instills in us a sense that we are not watching a merely created image, but one representative of reality, representative of a being that once was or is, of a being that is bruised. And yet again, we feel the call of conscience that reveals our being-guilty. In this instance though, it is not the being-guilty, the being-responsible for my own being, but a societal being-guilty, a sense that even though I am responsible for my own being I am not alone. There are others whose death is to come too, but in a more drastic way, others that Dumas has also represented visually, the immigrant, the political demonstrator, the ones that are treated as lesser beings because of the color of their skin.

Here I thus have to depart from Heidegger. In his account, being-towards-death utterly individualizes us. Properly understanding my death amounts to understanding the responsibility for *my* life. But I am interested in *our* being-guilty, in the ways in which my choices and actions are interconnected in a web of relationships that are infused with power and powerlessness. Despite Heidegger's understanding

of self as always a being-in-the-world, always interacting within a whole nexus of equipment and equipmental relations in which we find other human beings and human relationships, our dependence on each other, our co-vulnerability and co-bruisability do not get much attention in his account. While Heidegger sees all of us as having being-with, or *Mitsein*, an ontological characteristic that points to the self's always being able to understand others, or always being connected to others, this being-with remains in the background, and not a vibrant, colorful background that enhances the whole, but a muted background that is barely noticeable. While the inclusion of being-with points to possibilities of connection, of the ethical in Heidegger's work, Heidegger himself does not develop these possibilities in his work and he also fails in his personal political engagement. In *Being and Time*, he emphasizes the negative aspects of our sociality in his account of the they. Being-in-the-world remains under the dominion of the they while Being-towards-death remains closer to the I. After all, my death is mine; no one can die for me.

Yes, *I* am the one who will die but others can indeed die for me, for us. There are actions that we take that are not just about me, that risk my being for the well-being of others, those others that are marginalized and that are utterly bruisable and that a painter like Dumas discloses in her paintings while many others, artists, philosophers, writers, politicians, make them invisible. Sadly they are made invisible by those who can measure their own grave too. If only our bruisability, our shared mortality, could remind us that the "I" is always a "we" and not an "I" concerned only about his own grave. Yet, here is where art and philosophy do meet, when we look at a painting that calls us, not only to my mortality but *our* mortality. I can look at "Measuring Your Own Grave" and completely dismiss it, not being prompted to think about how it can take me to my finitude and mortality. I can look at "Jen," see her as sleeping or resting, and not look deeper into the meaning of that touch of red and pink arising out of somber, dark colors. I can look at "Stern" and see ecstasy rather than death. I can look at "Against the Wall" and quickly dismiss it as too simplistic. But what happens when we look at these works and see something else, when we are called by the image, color, texture to think about who, what, when, why, with whom—what about my mortality and yours? The work of art can call us to confront death and to confront us in my and our being-guilty.

I do not mean to imply that Dumas' work is a primarily moral work and that it is thus primarily made to evoke moral thinking and doing. It is clear that Dumas refuses to be put in a box as the political or moral painter and that she understands the ways in which we, the viewers, finish her canvases. Yet, these canvases bring to light the existential dilemma of our own death as well as the death of others. In so doing, they disclose an inner moral dilemma. What am I to do about it? How am I implicated? Anxiety but also the strength of her subjects permeates her paintings—some of whom are seen by some only as victims because they are women; they are people of color, they are overly sexualized; or they are dead. This is not how Dumas sees them. As she states in an interview—"these people are strong" (Brand 2008). It is both their strength and their vulnerability that the energetic strokes of subtle and yet vibrant painting that Dumas' canvases reveal—while at the same time revealing

not just our own vulnerability and strength as we gaze at them, but also that which already is, but is continually covered up in our everydayness, the intertwining of my life with the lives of others.

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Part IV
Questions of Agency and the Social

Chapter 17

The Phenomenology of Agency and Deterministic Agent Causation

Derk Pereboom

On one widespread conception, in any situation in which I am deliberating about what to do, I will have a number of distinct options for action or refraining from acting, and these options are genuinely available to me in a sense that requires the absence of causal determination by factors beyond my control (e.g., van Inwagen 1983). This conception reflects a core sense of freedom of the will. Some, such as Jean-Paul Sartre (1943; cf., Guignon and Pereboom [1995] 2001), and more recently by Timothy O'Connor (2000), Terry Horgan (2007), Martine Nida-Rümelin (2007) have argued that this ability is reflected in the phenomenology of many of our actions, and thus that the phenomenology of agency might be taken to support the view that we have free will in a libertarian sense. Horgan and Nida-Rümelin, as well as others such as Tim Bayne and Neil Levy (2006), have suggested in addition that the phenomenology of agency at least *prima facie* conflicts with the influential state- or event-causal theory of action, championed by Donald Davidson (1963), among others. The phenomenology appears to reveal that in paradigm cases, actions are caused not solely by events or states, but are rather actively caused by agents themselves. Putting this together, the conclusion one might draw is that the phenomenology supports agent-causal libertarianism. I will argue that the phenomenology does not strongly support a libertarian conception of agency, but that together with theoretical considerations it does substantiate agent-causation by contrast with state-causation or non-causation of action in paradigm cases of action. In accord with these claims, I explore the sort of compatibilist or determinist agent-causal theory defended by Ned Markosian (1999, 2010) and Dana Nelkin (2011).

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Three Kinds of Libertarianism

Let's begin with libertarian free will. The claim to be evaluated is that the phenomenology of agency supports the view that we have the capacity to freely will action, with the understanding that an action's being freely willed is incompatible with its being causally determined by factors beyond the agent's control. Here it's important to distinguish the three main versions of this libertarian position, since they potentially differ with respect to support from the phenomenology. In *event-causal libertarianism*, actions, conceived as agent-involving events—as agents acting at times—are caused solely by prior events or states, such as an agent's having a desire or a belief at a time, and some type of indeterminacy in the production of actions by appropriate events is held to be necessary for the kind of free will required for moral responsibility (Kane 1996; Ekstrom 2000; Balaguer 2009; Franklin 2011).

According to *agent-causal libertarianism*, free will of the sort required for moral responsibility is accounted for by the existence of agents who as substances have the power to cause decisions without being causally determined to do so (Kant 1987; Reid 1788/1983; Taylor 1966, 1974; Chisholm 1964, 1976; O'Connor 2000, 2009; Clarke 1996, 2003; Griffith 2010). It is essential that the causation involved in an agent's making a free decision is not reducible to causation among events, and what ensures this is that the agent *fundamentally as a substance* has the power to cause decisions. Determinism is compatible with agent causation, but according to agent-causal libertarianism, for a decision to be free it's crucial that the agent not be causally determined to cause it.

A third conception is *non-causal libertarian* (Bergson 1910; Ginet 1990, 1997, 2007; McCann 1998; Goetz 2008). Non-causal theorists, such as Carl Ginet, Hugh McCann, and Stewart Goetz endorse a non-causal requirement for free action; free actions, or at least free basic actions, are not caused at all. On Ginet's account, besides being uncaused, the key conditions for a basic action's being free are that it has an agent as a subject, and that it has an actish phenomenological feel. In place of such a phenomenological feel, McCann specifies that the action be intentional, and intrinsically and fundamentally so. According to Goetz, the action must satisfy a teleological requirement, and since McCann's intrinsic intentionality is teleological as well, these views are related.

In the present philosophical climate, event-causal libertarianism is typically regarded as *prima facie* the most attractive of these views. The idea of an uncaused event and the notion of a substance-cause are regarded with suspicion. But as we shall now see, event-causal libertarianism faces serious objections, both phenomenological and theoretical.

The Phenomenology of Agency

First, many agree the phenomenology of agency lends support to a view of action according to which in the paradigm case, the agent could have acted otherwise from how she in fact did. Horgan endorses this claim:

Normally, when you do something, you experience yourself as *freely* performing the action, in the sense that it is *up to you* whether or not you perform it. You experience yourself not only as generating the action, and not only as generating it purposively, but also as generating it in such a manner that you *could have done otherwise*. (Horgan 2007, 189)

On one natural interpretation, this phenomenology is libertarian. But let me note that there is a dispute in the experimental philosophy literature as to whether this phenomenology is libertarian or compatibilist. The studies of Eddy Nahmias and his colleagues have ruled in favor of the compatibilist option (2006, 2010), while a recent survey by Deery et al. (2013) supports the libertarian alternative.

Second, a number of philosophers contend that the phenomenology of agency is agent-causal rather than state- or event-causal. According to the Davidsonian model of agency, action is caused by mental states or events, and not fundamentally by agents as substances (Davidson 1963). As David Velleman illustrates:

There is something the agent wants, and there is an action that he believes conducive to its attainment. His desire for the end, and his belief in the action as a means, justify taking the action, and they jointly cause an intention to take it, which in turn causes the corresponding movements of the agent's body. Provided that these causal processes take their normal course, the agent's movements consummate an action, and his motivating desire and belief constitute his reasons for acting. (Velleman 1992, 461)

To some this state-causal picture at least initially appears to be mistaken. John Bishop, for instance, remarks:

Intuitively, we think of agents as carrying out their intentions or acting in accord with their practical reasons, and this seems different from (simply) being caused to behave by those intentions or reasons. (1989, 72)

Velleman allows that borderline cases of action, such as weak-willed action, count as action without the agent participating in it, but what he calls *full-blooded action* is at odds with the state-causal model:

In full-blooded action, an intention is formed by the agent himself, not by his reasons for acting. Reasons affect his intention by influencing him to form it, but they thus affect his intention by affecting him first. And the agent then moves his limbs in execution of his intention: his intention doesn't move his limbs by itself. The agent thus has at least two roles to play: he forms an intention under the influence of reasons for acting, and he produces behavior pursuant to that intention. (Velleman 1992, 462)

These remarks are in accord with the ancient Stoic theory of action (Inwood 1985). On that view, a mature human agent normally has the power to freely and voluntarily assent to, dissent from, or suspend judgment with regard to any proposal for action suggested by her motivational states. Its source is the rational and ruling part of the soul—the *hegemonikon*. In the Stoic theory, no matter what one's motivational

states, a mature human agent can keep herself from deciding in accord with them. Thus, even if, all things considered, the net force of her motivational states strongly favors an irrational or immoral proposal for acting, she can nevertheless dissent from this proposal, and thus not act on it. In this conception, the agent has an independence of all of her motivational states, and cannot be identified, for example, with the collection of its states. Given these specifications, it is not unnatural to identify the agent that exercises this executive control with the agent, fundamentally as substance. Crucially, a further feature of the Stoic theory is that in order for a decision to take place, this agent in fact *must* exercise this executive control. With only the causal efficacy of the various motivational states in place, we don't yet have a decision. Rather, a decision doesn't come about until the agent makes up her mind and brings it about.

The concern for the inadequacy of the state or event-causal theory of agency plausibly gains support from the phenomenology of agency. Suppose you raise your arm and clench your fist. Horgan remarks:

You experience your arm, hand, and fingers as being moved by *you yourself*—rather than as experiencing their motion either as fortuitously moving just as you want them to move, or passively experiencing them as being caused by your own mental states. You experience the bodily motion as generated by *yourself*. (Horgan 2007, 187)

This phenomenological report accords with Velleman's claim about full-blooded actions. Note also that it conflicts with event-causal libertarianism on responsibility for full-blooded actions, for the reason that given this account of the phenomenology, there is no action unless the agent per se generates it, and it's also intuitive that the agent would be responsible for such an action precisely by playing this role.

Nida-Rümelin (2007) adduces an additional claim about the phenomenology that would count against the state-causation view. On her account, when we actively do things over moderately extended periods of time, such as playing pieces of music or even just raising an arm, the phenomenology is as of one's being active throughout the process. It's not like merely experiencing a causal connection between one's intention and a bodily change. Nida-Rümelin writes: "When a person experiences herself as actively raising her arm she does not thereby have an experience with the following content: I have an intention to raise my arm and the intention causes my arm to go up" (2007, 259). Horgan elaborates on this point. He argues that in the case of raising one's arm and clenching one's fist, it's not as if the phenomenology involves "first experiencing an occurrent wish for your right hand to rise and your fingers to move into clenched position, and then passively experiencing your hand and fingers moving in just this way," or first experiencing this occurrent wish "and then passively experiencing a causal process consisting of this wish's causing your hand to rise and your fingers to move into clenched position" (Horgan 2007, 186). Such a feature of the phenomenology of agency would be *prima facie* at odds with a state-causation view, and would nicely be accommodated by the agent-causal alternative. All of these considerations give rise to a *disappearing agent* objection to state or event-causal theories of action, or at least of full-blooded action (Hornsby 2004a, b; Steward 2012).

A related but distinct disappearing agent objection targets the event-causal libertarian's claim to secure moral responsibility by way of her theory. Critics of libertarianism have argued that if actions are undetermined, agents cannot be morally responsible for them. A classical presentation of this concern is found in Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1978, 411). There he argues, more specifically, that if an action is uncaused, it will not have sufficient connection with the agent for her to be morally responsible for it. Some objections that reflect the Humean concern are called luck objections (Mele 2006), for the reason that they attempt to show that on the libertarian view at issue whether the action occurs is a matter of luck—good or bad, and thus it is not sufficiently in the control of the agent for her to be morally responsible for it. I think the objection in this family that reveals the deepest problem for event-causal libertarianism is this other disappearing agent objection:

Consider a decision that occurs in a context in which the agent's moral motivations favor that decision, and her prudential motivations favor her refraining from making it, and the strengths of these motivations are in equipoise. On an event-causal libertarian picture, the relevant causal conditions antecedent to the decision, i.e., the occurrence of certain agent-involving events, do not settle whether the decision will occur, but only render the occurrence of the decision about 50 % probable. In fact, because no occurrence of antecedent events settles whether the decision will occur, and only antecedent events are causally relevant, *nothing* settles whether the decision will occur. Thus it can't be that the agent or anything about the agent settles whether the decision will occur, and she therefore will lack the control required for moral responsibility for it. (Pereboom 2004, 2007, 2014; O'Connor 2009)

The concern raised is that because event-causal libertarian agents will not have the power to settle whether the decision will occur, they cannot have the role in action that secures the control that moral responsibility demands.

From the libertarian perspective, it appears that what would need to be added to the event-causal libertarian account is involvement of the agent in the making of her decision that would allow her to settle whether the decision occurs, and thereby have the control required for moral responsibility in making a decision. Agent-causal libertarianism proposes to satisfy this requirement by reintroducing the agent as a cause, not merely as involved in events, but rather fundamentally as a substance. If the agent were reintroduced merely as involved in events, the disappearing agent objection could effectively be reiterated. Thus what the agent-causal libertarian introduces is an agent who possesses a causal power, fundamentally as a substance, to cause a decision—or more comprehensively, as O'Connor (2009) specifies, “the coming to be of a state of intention to carry out some act”—without being causally determined to do so, and thereby to settle, with the requisite control, whether this state of intention will occur. My sense is that the disappearing agent objection counts decisively against event-causal libertarianism as an account of moral responsibility, and O'Connor (2009), for example, agrees.

Error Theories

One possible route to countering the apparent implications of the phenomenology of agency is by appeal to error theory. One might hypothesize that it's only by virtue of inaccuracy in the phenomenology that we are led to believe that state- or event-causal accounts of action are insufficient, and also to believe that we can do otherwise in a way that is incompatible with the agent's being causally determined to act. I will argue that while the aspect of the phenomenology of agency that supports libertarianism may be inaccurate, the aspect that corroborates the insufficiency of the state-causal theory of action is not plausibly in error.

Let's begin with the phenomenology of being able to do otherwise. One concern is that while the pure, i.e., belief-independent, phenomenology of agency may not be in error, there are certain associated beliefs we commonly form that are false. Given that beliefs can cognitively penetrate the phenomenology, the resulting impure phenomenology may be in error. In particular, one might argue that the pure phenomenology of agency does not represent an agent as being able to do otherwise. Rather, we represent ourselves this way by a belief we naturally form. Hume (1978, 408–09) suggests that a belief of this type results from the fact that if after performing an action we then attempt to refrain, we succeed, and assuming that the circumstances on the second occasion haven't changed, we infer that we could have done otherwise the first time around. (Hume thinks the circumstances have in fact changed: on the second occasion we're motivated by trying to show that we're free.) This might then be reported as a feature of the phenomenology of agency. But on this account, while the pure phenomenology reveals the consideration of alternatives and the decision to act, it doesn't also feature the sense that one could then have acted differently.

Spinoza proposes an explanation as to why the belief that one could have acted differently is natural but mistaken. He contends that we believe we are free only because we are ignorant of the causes of our actions; “experience itself, no less than reason, teaches that men believe themselves free because they are conscious of their own actions, and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined . . .” (Spinoza 1985, 496). On this proposal, phenomenology apt to generate a belief that we could have done otherwise would be just the same if our decisions were instead causally determined and we were ignorant of enough of their causes. It is in fact highly plausible that we are ignorant of some of the causes of our actions. For example, people weigh moral and self-interested reasons differently—some more selfishly, others more altruistically. But these tendencies, while they often make a crucial difference to decision, are typically not evident to introspection. Neural causes of action are also not evident to introspection, although it is clear that they exist. Given the likelihood of such ignorance, the phenomenology does not offer greater epistemic support for the belief that we have an indeterministic ability to do otherwise than for the hypothesis that we lack this ability and we are ignorant of some of the causes of our actions (cf. Wykstra 1984). For this reason, the phenomenological evidence for the belief that we could have done otherwise

is weak. Add to this, as Horgan points out ([forthcoming](#), 20), that “there is no strong scientific evidence, at least none that educated laypersons know about—to suggest that neural activity that directly subserves human deliberation, decision, and action is subject to any significant degree of causal indeterminacy.” All of this gives us reason to take seriously a theory that does not feature the indeterministic ability to do otherwise.

What about the aspect of the phenomenology that is at odds with the pure state or event causation of action? We should agree at the outset that Horgan and Nida-Rümelin are right to point out that in our doings the phenomenology is an active one. But here again we might propose to draw the distinction between pure and impure phenomenology. On the Humean side, Hume himself argued that introspective phenomenology reveals no state-independent subject or agent, and many, including Kant, have found this persuasive (Hume [1978](#), 251–53; Kant [1987](#)). This might cast doubt on whether the phenomenology of agency features settling by a state-independent agent. True, it’s natural to believe that when you decide to move to Tampa rather than staying in Burlington it’s not that the decision is caused just by the Tampa-favoring beliefs and desires, but rather that you as agent settle which way to decide in the light of those reasons. But it may be that the language we use to report such beliefs is misleading us by suggesting a mistaken metaphysics of self. Descartes argues that there is only a conceptual distinction between *res cogitans*, the thinking subject, and the attribute of thought (Descartes [1985](#): 215–16; *Principles of Philosophy* I: 63–64). The idea is that the subject/predicate form gives rise to the belief that the substance/property distinction is exclusive, and when applied to ‘I think’ or ‘I do’—type thoughts, this occasions the belief that there is an exclusive distinction between the self and its states. But in actual fact, this is an illusion; there is no self independent of states, considered generally.

However, despite all of this, in paradigmatic circumstances of deliberation, it does seem that I, and not my states, settle which decision is made. One possibility is that this is really a belief, and at least not pure phenomenology. In the next section I’ll argue that it’s also a reasonable belief, given that it’s clear that I can settle which decision is made in circumstances of motivational equipoise. It may then also be phenomenology, but impure because cognitively penetrated by this reasonable belief.

Event/State-Causal Solutions

One might attempt to solve the disappearing agent problem for agency and the related difficulty for moral responsibility within the event-causal framework by providing an account of the role of the agent in event- or state-causal terms. Such a view aims to explicate the distinctive role of the agent in action by certain core desires or standing preferences, with which the agent, in its role in acting, can plausibly be identified. Velleman endorses a position of this sort. On his proposal,

the role of the agent is played by a *desire to act in accord with the reasons* (Velleman 1992, 478–79), and this attitude is sufficient to constitute the role the agent has in acting:

Although the agent must possess an identity apart from the substantive motives competing for influence over his behavior, he needn't possess an identity apart from the attitude that animates the activity of judging such competitions. If there is such an attitude, then its contribution to the competition's outcome can qualify as his—not because he identifies with but rather because it is functionally identical to him. (Velleman 1992, 480)

Is a desire to act in accord with the reasons really suited to the role that intuitively the agent must have? One might first of all object that this desire won't account for the active causation that Nida-Rumelin and Horgan highlight. A further concern is that it does not satisfy the settling role in action that the agent intuitively has. This potential problem for Velleman's proposal can be illustrated by the phenomenon of torn decisions, which Mark Balaguer defines as follows:

A torn decision: a decision in which the agent (a) has reasons for two or more options and feels torn as to which set of reasons is stronger, that is, has no conscious belief as to which option is best, given her reasons; and that (b) decides without resolving the conflict—that is, the person has the experience of 'just choosing.' (Balaguer 2009, 72)

Balaguer illustrates with an example (2009, 72, 80):

Ralph is deciding whether to stay in Mayberry or move to New York. Favoring the move to New York are his desire to play for the Giants, and his desire to star on Broadway. Favoring staying in Mayberry are his desire to marry Robbi Anna, and his desire to manage the local *Der Weinerschnitzel*. Suppose Ralph makes the torn decision to move to New York—he just decides to move to New York.

The worry for Velleman's proposal is this. In the case of torn decisions it can't be a desire to act in accord with the reasons that settles which decision occurs, since the reasons are in equipoise. But still, it's clear that the agent—Ralph in Balaguer's example—can still settle which decision occurs. Thus in such cases the role of the agent can't be played by a desire to act in accord with reasons.

For the same reason, this account appears to fall short of an answer the disappearing agent objection for event-causal libertarianism when it is applied to torn decisions. In Kane's example of the businesswoman who is torn between stopping and helping the assault victim for moral reasons and speeding on to work for self-interested reasons (1996, 182–83), the desire to act in accord with the reasons can't settle which of the two possible decisions becomes actual. Thus given Velleman's functional account of the agent, the businesswoman herself can't settle which option becomes actual, and so she as agent intuitively can't be morally responsible for the actual decision, whichever it turns out to be.

Laura Ekstrom presents an account of this event- or state-causal type as well, but one that highlights certain kinds of general preferences instead (Ekstrom 2000, 2003). She proposes it as an account of moral responsibility, but we can also test it as an account of what would seem to be missing the state-causal theory of agency. By her specification, a decision for which an agent is morally responsible must result by a normal causal process from an undefeated authorized

general preference of his, where such preferences are non-coercively formed or maintained, and are caused but not causally determined by considerations brought to bear in his deliberation. In Ekstrom's picture, these conditions on the formation of such preferences intuitively tie them to who the agent is, and thus, as in Velleman's proposal, have the functional role of the agent (Ekstrom 2000, 2003). But does it solve the disappearing agent problem for moral responsibility in the case of torn decisions? Suppose again that Kane's businesswoman can either decide to stop and help the assault victim for moral reasons, or else decide to speed on to work for self-interested reasons, and these reasons are in motivational equipoise. In addition, she, like most people has both moral and self-interested undefeated authorized general preferences. Let's suppose that these preferences are in motivational equipoise as well, so that now the decision would not only be torn, but in this sense meta-torn. But, intuitively, the businesswoman can still settle which way the decision goes. Imagine that she decides to stop and help. We can now ask: with all of this motivational equipoise in place, what was it that settled that her moral reasons and her moral preference would be causally efficacious? It seems that Ekstrom can only say that this occurred without anything about the agent settling that it did, since the extent to which the agent is involved at this point is exhausted by the reasons and the general preferences, which by hypothesis are in motivational equipoise.

Crucially, in this case the general preferences, formed as Ekstrom specifies, do not make it intuitive that the agent settles which decision occurs, as would be required if she is to be morally responsible for her decision. For the same reason the account can't solve the disappearing agent problem for the state-causal theory of agency either. These preferences, given that they are in motivational equipoise, can't settle which decision is made, so these preferences can't play the functional role of the agent to settle which decision is made. Yet it's intuitive that agents can settle which decision is made given torn-decision situations of this sort, and so the account falls short.

Non-causal Theories

Let's now consider whether the plausible phenomenological and theoretical considerations can be accommodated by a non-causal theory. One of the earliest and greatest of the non-causal views, that of Henri Bergson (1910), is deeply phenomenological in character. Bergson in fact maintains that the phenomenology of conscious agency constitutes the whole story of conscious agency, with no remainder. In short, his position is that although actions occur in time, the time of agency as revealed in the phenomenology does not resolve into the kinds of (extensive) magnitudes required for the applicability of causal laws. Any attempt to theorize about conscious agency will involve invoking physical concepts that do not in fact apply to it, but are merely metaphorical, and thus causal conceptions of conscious agency are merely metaphorical as well. Conscious agency, and the mental more generally, are *sui generis*, and as they really are they are not subject

to theorizing, and are not causal in nature. This independence of causality, on Bergson's account, allows actions to be freely willed.

One might propose that a view of this sort yields a solution to the problem disclosed by the disappearing agent objection. What needs to be added to the event- or state-causal account is involvement of the agent so that she can settle which decision occurs, and, at least on libertarian views, thereby be its source in a way that allows for moral responsibility. Here the agent-causal libertarian thus appeals to substance-causation and its instantiation by agents. But at this point one might contend, as Ginet does, that a non-causal position fares at least as well. In his view, an agent's agent-causing simple mental acts would have no advantage over her *simply performing* such acts, where 'performing' can be analyzed non-causally—in terms of the agent's being the subject of the act and an actish phenomenological feel (Ginet 1990). Such an account has the *prima facie* advantage of avoiding an appeal to substance causation, whose legitimacy is controversial. Here, in outline, is Ginet's resulting position on free action (1997, 2007):

- (i) Every action either is or begins with a simple mental action, a mental event that does not consist of one mental event causing others.
- (ii) A simple mental event is an action if and only if it has a certain intrinsic phenomenological quality, that is, an "actish" quality
- (iii) A simple mental event's having this intrinsic actish phenomenological quality is sufficient for its being an action, but not for its being a free action.
- (iv) A simple mental free action must, in addition, not be causally necessitated by antecedent events (1997), and not even probabilistically caused by antecedent events (2007).

The objection I will now set out for Ginet's account, and for non-causalist accounts generally is that their advocates use *prima facie* causal language to express the purportedly non-causal relation, and that either causation is being invoked, or if it is not, the problem for agency and for moral responsibility remains unsolved (Pereboom 2014, ch. 2). Ginet remarks, for instance: [Making] It was up to me at time T whether that event would occur only if I *made it the case that it occurred* and it was open to me at T *to keep it from occurring* (2007, 245). But now against Ginet we might object that the making-relation is just the causal relation (and the same is true for the keeping-from-happening relation). After all, isn't causation fundamentally just *making something happen* or *producing something*? Randolph Clarke specifies, for example: An event that nondeterministically causes another brings about, produces, or makes happen that other event, though it is consistent with the laws of nature that the former have occurred and not have caused the latter (Clarke 2003, 33). And Ginet, just before the remark quoted above, writes:

To suppose it is possible for there to be indeterministic causation is to suppose that causation does not reduce, Humean fashion, to universal regularity but is rather a brute relation among particular events, a relation of *production*, a relation that may be impossible to specify in non-synonymous terms. (Ginet 2007, 244)

The challenge for the non-causalism of Ginet's account is that when he says "I made it the case that the event occurred," this is equivalent to "I caused the event to occur," for the reason that saying that A caused B is really just to say that there is a relation of production from A to B.

David Lewis advocates a different characterization of causation that also compromises the non-causalism of the views under consideration: We think of a cause as something that makes a difference, and the difference it makes must be a difference from what would have happened without it (Lewis 1986, 161). But Ginet's [Making] would seem to be close to equivalent to: It was up to me at some particular time whether that event would occur only if at that time I made it the case that it occurred, and at that time I made the difference as to whether it would occur. Then, on a difference making account of causation, the event's occurring and its being up to me whether that event would occur involves my causing it.

This objection can also be directed against McCann's theory (1998, 180), on which an agent's exercise of active control has two essential features. Any basic action must be:

- (a) a spontaneous, creative undertaking on the part of the agent, and
- (b) intrinsically intentional. The intentionality of a basic action is a matter of its being intrinsically an occurrence that is meant, by the individual undergoing it, to be her doing.

The provision that the basic action is a spontaneous, creative undertaking is suggestive of the agent's making it the case that the basic action occurs, which also risks invoking the causal relation. The same would seem true for the specification that the basic action features intrinsic intentionality. It seems plausible that McCann's conditions (a) and (b) could not be satisfied if the agent neither makes the basic action occur nor makes the difference whether it occurs. How could an action be a spontaneous and creative undertaking on the part of the agent, or an agent's doing, without her making it happen or making the difference whether it will happen? But if it's specified that the agent has a making-happen and a difference-making role, the account would appear to be causal after all. Objecting to McCann's view, Clarke contends: "Where intentionality is divorced from an appropriate causal production, it does not seem that it can, by itself, even partly constitute the exercise of active control" (2003, 20–21), and this seems right to me.

Deterministic Agent Causation

Given the phenomenological and theoretical considerations canvassed thus far, it makes sense to explore a version of agent causation compatible with the causal determination of action (Markosian 1999, 2010; Nelkin 2011). On such a view, as on the libertarian version, agency (or at least full-blooded agency) is accounted for by the existence of agents who as substances have the power to cause decisions, and it is essential to (such) agency that the causation involved in acting is not reducible

to causation among events, and what ensures this is that the agent, fundamentally as a substance, has the power to cause decisions or intention-formations. But by contrast with the sort of agent-causal theory advocated by agent-causal libertarians, it's acceptable if in the exercise of their agent-causal power agents are in general causally determined by factors beyond their control.

Nida-Rümelin (2007) argues that full-blooded agency, understood as involving active causation of intention, rules out such causal determination. I think the phenomenology of agency indicates otherwise. An example of Susan Wolf's, which she uses to show that deserved praise is compatible with causal determination, can be used to make this point:

Two persons, of equal swimming ability, stand on equally uncrowded beaches. Each sees an unknown child struggling in the water in the distance. Each thinks 'The child needs my help' and directly swims out to save him. In each case, we assume that the agent reasons correctly—the child *does* need her help—and that, in swimming out to save him, the agent does the right thing. We further assume that in one of these cases, the agent has the ability to do otherwise, and in the other case not. (Wolf 1990, 81–82)

Imagine being the second swimmer. You turn to see the child struggling in the water. Immediately you actively form an intention to jump in and save the child. The phenomenology is as of being causally determined by the perception of the circumstances to actively form this intention. On a more complete account, you would be causally determined by that perception and features of your character to actively form the intention.

Ned Markosian argues (2010) that agent causation can solve all of the compatibilist's problems. In my view it solves one—the problem it potentially shares with event-causal libertarianism—but not the other, which is pressed by the manipulation argument against compatibilism (Taylor 1974; Ginet 1990; Pereboom 1995, 2001, 2014; Kane 1996; Mele 2006; Todd 2012). The disappearing agent argument shows that in order for an agent to settle which of two options for action becomes actual, an agent who does not reduce solely to states or events is required. The manipulation argument shows that even if this requirement is satisfied, the agent may not be morally responsible (in the basic desert sense). One might think of these requirements as two aspects of the sort of control required for moral responsibility. On the one hand, agents need settling control, and this kind of control might be spelled out in such a way as to make it compatible with determinism (for a contrary view, see Steward 2012). But for moral responsibility they also need an aspect of control that's precluded by determinism, and depending on one's predilections, this might amount to the control required to do otherwise in the "all in" sense, or the control required to be the ultimate source of one's actions.

There are pitfalls to formulating a genuinely deterministic notion of agent causation. Markosian's own proposal, I think, faces a problem which Nelkin points out (2011, 94), one that is evident in how he envisions it answering a manipulation argument against compatibilism. In his example, Tom is caused to steal by alien neuroscientists manipulating his brain. COMTAC is the compatibilist theory of agent causation:

Suppose the compatibilist endorses COMTAC. Then she can point out that there are two possible ways of filling out the details of Tom's story. Either the aliens alter Tom's brain in such a way that the resulting person causes his own action of stealing, or not. If the aliens succeed in bringing it about that Tom causes his own action when he steals, then it is no longer implausible to say that Tom is morally responsible for his action (and hence is acting freely). For in that case, Tom is a cause of his action. We will no doubt also want to criticize the aliens for changing Tom from an honest person into a thief, but we can at the same time say that the resulting individual is a bad person who performs a morally wrong action. And although a standard compatibilist can say some similar things without appealing to the idea of agent causation, she (the standard compatibilist) cannot say the one thing that makes this response on the part of the proponent of COMTAC especially powerful: that even though there is a causal chain (involving the manipulative aliens) leading from outside of Tom to his action, there is also another causal chain leading to Tom's action *that originates with Tom himself*, and this is the reason why he is responsible for what he does. (Markosian 2010, 395)

The problem for Markosian's view, as I see it, is that the agent-causal stream is not causally deterministic and not compatible with the causal determination of the agent, for the reason that the agent in making his agent-causal contribution is not caused at all, and hence not causally determined. Such agent-causal contributions thus threaten to be outside of the natural causal order. In this respect, Markosian's theory is similar to Kant's (Pereboom 2006), and does not meet the desiderata I have in mind.

As Nelkin (2011, 91) suggests, a compatibilist or determinist agent-causal theory can be formulated in accord with O'Connor's proposal for the nature of the agent-causal power. I think this is the advisable route to take. In setting out his view, O'Connor recruits Fred Dretske's (1993) distinction between structural and triggering causes. To illustrate, the structuring cause of the explosion is the process by which the bomb is constructed, while its triggering cause is the lighting of its fuse. On O'Connor's conception, reasons are structuring causes of a decision by virtue of structuring the propensities of the agent-causal power, the exercise of which results in the decision, while the agent-as-substance, in her exercise of this structured power, is its triggering cause. The outcome of the causal structuring by reasons is the alteration of the propensities of the agent-causal power toward a range of effects. O'Connor views the relation between the propensities and the effects as fundamentally probabilistic, but this feature of the account can be modified:

... [An] agent-causal power is a structured propensity towards a class of effects, such that at any given time, for each causally possible, specific agent-causal event-type, there is a definite objective probability of its occurrence within the range (0,1), and this probability varies continuously as the agent is impacted by internal and external influences... [T]he effect of influencing events is exhausted by their alteration of the relative likelihood of the outcome, which they accomplish by affecting the propensities of the agent-causal capacity itself. (O'Connor 2009, 197–98)

The core of O'Connor's account is that the reasons structure the agent-causal power by changing the objective and determinate probabilities of its propensities toward effects—toward intention-formations and decisions. On a deterministic version of this account, the influencing events will structure the propensity of the agent-cause toward a class of effects. But the structuring is such that the resulting propensity in

conjunction with further circumstances of deliberation and decision will issue in the probability of the agent's triggering any alternative being either 1 or 0.

What happens, on this deterministic conception of agent causation, when an agent makes a torn decision? Given this view, the agent's settling which decision is made will not reduce to causation by events, and so the phenomenology and the theoretical advantage are secured. How could the agent's settling the torn decision nevertheless be deterministic? One option is that the agent as substance has the power to *just decide*, that is, to *just settle* in the case of a torn decision, and in a particular instance how that power is exercised will be causally determined. Crucially, how that power is exercised won't be causally determined just by virtue of how the reasons structure the propensities of the agent-causal power. It's reasonable to propose that the exercise of the power to just decide will instead be determined by neural states that are distinct from those that underlie the agent's processing of reasons, but are nevertheless included in the states on which the agent-causal power supervenes.

In contrast, Helen Steward (2012) argues that settling which action occurs is essential to agency and action, and that settling is incompatible with determinism:

If determinism were true, the matters in question would already be settled, long before it even occurred to me that I might, by acting, come to settle any of them. And surely it is a condition of being truly able to settle something that it has not already been settled in advance of one's potential intervention. If determinism were true, then, I would not be able to settle matters that it is essential for me to be able to settle, if I am to be an agent. And so, if determinism were true there could not be agents and there could not be actions. (Steward 2012, 39)

Steward agrees that there is a notion of settling that is not committed to the absence of causal determination: "one might perhaps speak, for instance, of the fall of the third domino's having settled that the fourth would fall, even in a context in which one took it for granted that the fall of the fourth was already guaranteed by the fall of the first (or indeed by events and circumstances occurring long before the fall of the first) . . ." (2012, 41). Steward calls this a weak conception of settling, by contrast with the strong indeterministic notion that she links with action and agency. She then argues that the weak conception is insufficient for action (2012, 41–69). But it seems that her argument restricts the determinist to a state or event-causal theory of action, and such an account crucially features "the disappearance of the agent" (2012, 62–69). This seems correct to me, but an account of settling that invokes deterministic agent causation is not addressed, and my sense is that such an account can resist Steward's counterarguments.

One might think of settling by an agent as a kind of difference-making. Carolina Sartorio (2013) proposes an event-causal compatibilist account of the sort of difference-making required for moral responsibility, which can be tweaked so as to yield a deterministic agent-causal account of the kind of settling required for agency. On Sartorio's account, moral responsibility requires difference-making in the sense that the agency-involving actual sequence leading to the action makes an agent responsible for the action only if the absence of that actual sequence would not have made the agent responsible for the action. More generally, she holds that

moral responsibility is a causal notion, and that causes, conceived as events, make a difference to their effects in that they make a causal contribution to their effects that is unparalleled by their absences (Sartorio [manuscript](#)). This is so even if, as in cases of pre-emptive causation, the effects would have occurred in the absence of their actual causes. Note that this conception of difference-making does not require that the agent be able to do otherwise, and for this reason it is not threatened by causal determination. Following this lead, the advocate of deterministic agent causation can propose:

(S-AC) An agent settles whether an action occurs only if she agent-causes it, where the absence of her agent-causing the action would not have caused that action.

Put in terms of David Lewis's (1986) semantics for counterfactuals, the idea is that an agent settles whether an action occurs only if she agent-causes it and in the closest or most similar possible worlds in which she does not agent-cause the action the absence of the agent-causing would not have caused that action. By analogy with Sartorio's condition, (S-AC) does not require that the agent be able to do otherwise, and for this reason can hold of an agent even given causal determination.

A deterministic account of agent causation might be dualistic or physicalistic. If it is physicalistic, it will not reduce the agent-causal power to underlying event-causal powers. Rather it will be nonreductively physicalistic, physicalistic in the sense that agent-causal power is necessitated by the underlying physical event-causal powers without the need for an emergence law. Emergence laws are invoked when higher level property instances are causal powers that might result in contraventions of microphysical laws that can ideally be discovered without taking into account any higher level properties—henceforth, *ordinary* microphysical laws (Pereboom 2011, 145–47). O'Connor provides an illustration of this idea; "If, for example, the multiple powers of a particular protein molecule were emergent, then the unfolding dynamics of that molecule at the microscopic level would diverge in specifiable ways from what an ideal particle physicist . . . would expect by extrapolating from a complete understanding of the dynamics of small-scale particle systems." (O'Connor 2009, 195). On this picture, if C were an instance of an emergent property, C could then cause E with the result that ordinary microphysical laws would be contravened. As Clarke explains, such a capacity of an emergent property instance to contravene the ordinary microphysical laws would not be necessitated by a base that includes ordinary laws alone (Clarke 1999, 309). The base would require, in addition, a fundamental emergence law. Suppose, for example, that the capacity for contravening the ordinary laws in a particular way is part of an emergent property's essential nature. An instance of such a property would then not be necessitated by a base that includes only the ordinary laws (Pereboom 2011).

While conceiving libertarian agent-causation may, as O'Connor suggests, invoke an emergence law, it doesn't seem that deterministic agent-causation would need to do so. On the supposition that the lower-level laws, say at the physical or biological level, are deterministic, it would be no surprise if the laws governing action were also deterministic. The agent-causal power would be new relative to the underlying biological causal powers, but biological causal powers are also (arguably) new

relative to microphysical causal powers. On the supposition that lower-level causal powers are all powers to cause by virtue of states or events, the agent-causal power is different in that it is a power to cause by virtue of a substance. There may be some mystery here, but it's not clear that emergence would solve it. We'd need to see the objection first.

But on one alternative conception, proposed for example by Jonathan Lowe (2008) and Richard Swinburne (2013), the general fundamental sort of causation is substance causation, and this is to be preferred to the essentially Humean event-causal alternative. In Lowe's view, an event-causal sentence, such as "the explosion caused the collapse of the bridge" is correctly cashed out as the more fundamental "the bomb caused the collapse of the bridge" (Lowe 2008, 5). Event-causalists familiarly endorse the reverse, and they claim that substances cause effects only in virtue of events involving these substances. But according to Lowe, causing is a kind of doing, and only substances qualify as doers in the relevant sense. Events, by contrast, can only happen and therefore cannot cause. (Lowe 2008, 4, 165). Given a physicalistic version this view, agent causation supervenes only on yet more substance causation, and the problem is solved.

Conclusion

The phenomenology of agency supports attributing to ourselves the libertarian ability to do otherwise and agent- by contrast with state-causation of action. While the belief that we have this kind of libertarian free will can be explained away as erroneous, the claim that we are agent-causes is required by our ability to make torn decisions. Deterministic agent causation accords with these verdicts, and it is arguably a physicalistically respectable position. The view has both compatibilist and hard determinist versions. I prefer the hard determinist one (Pereboom 1995, 2001, 2014), but that's another issue.

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Chapter 18

Kierkegaard and the Problem of Ironic Agency

Hans Pedersen

At first it might seem strange to talk about ironic agency, since irony is often thought of as a purely linguistic phenomenon. However, it is relatively common to find people talking about, for example, ironically drinking cheap beer or ironically watching bad movies. Even more broadly, some people, often called “hipsters” in the current vernacular, seem to adopt a thoroughly ironic lifestyle, crafting an identity for themselves that makes it clear that they are too “hip” to take seriously their participation in any normal activities, and do so only with an ironic detachment from these activities. The aim of this paper is to analyze the structure of this broad sense of ironic agency, make the case that ironic agency is problematic, and then develop a solution to the problem of ironic agency. The main resource for accomplishing these tasks will be various works of Søren Kierkegaard, a thinker who wrote extensively about irony and who was also a quite adept practitioner of irony. That being said, this paper is not as much an exercise in Kierkegaard scholarship as it is an attempt to address the problem of ironic agency using Kierkegaard’s thought. As such, I do not claim to be working out Kierkegaard’s “true” account of ironic agency (in fact, there will be instances in which I disagree with some of the moves made by Kierkegaard), and as opposed to normal work on Kierkegaard, I am not paying much attention to the various pseudonyms he employs and the position of various works within the progression of his writings as a whole.

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What Is Ironic Agency?

For Kierkegaard, the defining characteristic of irony, whether in language or in action considered more broadly, is an opposition between phenomenon and essence, an opposition between the actions of the agent and what the agent truly thinks or feels (Kierkegaard 1989, 255, 257, 279). Andrew Cross, in his “Neither Either nor Or: The Perils of Reflexive Irony,” nicely describes Kierkegaardian ironic agency as always involving a “contradiction (or opposition) between the external and the internal, between the ironist’s inner state and his outward behavior” (1998, 127). This description fits the above examples reasonably well. The person ironically drinking cheap beer displays the outward behavior of enjoying the beer, which is at odds with her internal disdain for, or at least lack of desire for, the beer. Similarly, the person ironically watching bad movies displays an outward enjoyment of the movies, which is at odds with her internal belief that the movies are in fact bad.

In his later work, Kierkegaard situates ironic agency in the transitional stage between the aesthetic and ethical spheres of existence. In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard identifies ironic agency as a transitional stage between the aesthetic and ethical spheres of existence, stating that irony “follows next after immediacy; then comes the ethicist, then the humorist, then the religious person” (Kierkegaard 2000a, 233). For the purposes of this paper, there are two important ways that ironic agency can be thought of as a break from immediacy.¹ The first is that the ironist, unlike the aesthete, is able to distance herself from her own desires and impulses. In *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard states that the “aesthetic choice is . . . altogether immediate” and gives the following example to illustrate what this means: “[W]hen a young girl follows her heart’s choice, this choice, however beautiful it is otherwise, is no choice in the stricter sense, because it is altogether immediate” (Kierkegaard 1987, 167). When people give the advice to “follow your heart,” it seems to imply that there is some deepest, most immediate desire that is truly reflective of the agent and her innermost self. This desire would be immediate in the sense that there is no distance or mediation between the agent and the desire. The ironic agent, conversely, is able to separate herself from her desires and see them as things she could accept or reject, or as in the beer-drinking example, as things she could play at having without thereby implying that the desires and the actions that result from them are in any way reflective of who she is as a person.

In addition to this break from the immediacy of her desires, Kierkegaard also sees the ironic agent as breaking from the immediacy of the social norms of her time. In *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard says of Socrates, his exemplar of an ironist, that, “[he], in his relation to the established order of things, was entirely negative, that he is suspended in ironic satisfaction above all the qualifications of substantial life” (Kierkegaard 1989, 217). In the same way that some people are wrapped up

¹Cross (1998), again, does a nice job explaining what Kierkegaard seems to have in mind here when he talks about breaking from immediacy. See especially pages 136–37.

in the immediacy of their desires, others are so firmly enmeshed in the prevailing norms and attitudes of their social context that they immediately and unreflectively act according to them and identify themselves in relation to them. An ironic agent might, for example, play at being a teacher or a husband, meaning that he would follow the norms associated with such roles without taking the norms seriously and without ever identifying himself with the roles he has taken on.

Now we see the connection between characterizing ironic agency as an opposition between phenomenon and essence and characterizing ironic agency as a break from immediacy. An immediate person for Kierkegaard is someone who, without reflection, acts upon and identifies herself with whatever desires that present themselves or who acts according to and identifies herself with whatever social norms and mores are appropriate for someone in that position. There is no opposition between the agent's outward behavior and her internal attitude towards the desires or norms that guide her actions, or in other words, there is no sense that the agent's self is not completely identical to the various desires and practical identities that manifest themselves in her actions. Once someone has distanced herself from immediate desires and social norms, she has opened up the possibility of taking up these desires and identities and letting them seemingly manifest themselves in her actions without actually having any strong internal identification with these desires or social norms.

It is important to note that ironic agency is not just acting in ways with which one does not really identify. That is, acting ironically is not just pretending to be a certain type of person. Instead, acting ironically is *playfully* acting in ways with which one does not really identify. Kierkegaard contrasts ironic agency with "dissimulation" as follows: "[D]issimulation denotes more the objective act that carries out the discrepancy between essence and phenomenon; irony also denotes the subjective pleasure as the subject frees himself by means of irony" (1989, 255). In other words, a con man pretending to be a representative of a credit card company shares with the ironist the "discrepancy between essence and phenomenon," but unlike the ironist, the con man is not acting for any subjective pleasure that comes from the dissimulation. As Kierkegaard notes, the dissimulation "has a purpose, but this purpose is an external objective foreign to the dissimulation itself." Conversely, irony "has no purpose . . . the purpose is nothing other than the irony itself" (256). The con man dissimulates for the external purpose of acquiring money, while the ironist acts solely for the pleasure intrinsic to acting ironically.

To summarize then, and clearly define the key aspects of ironic agency going forward, we can say that ironic agency is characterized by a contradiction between an agent's internal state and external behavior, a break from the immediate motivational force of desires and social norms, and a playfulness or subjective pleasure found in acting in this way.

What Is the Impetus for Ironic Agency?

In order to understand the problem with ironic agency and arrive at a solution to this problem, it is perhaps pertinent to say something about what drives someone towards ironic agency. In his early work, *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard sees the impetus for the move from immediacy to irony in the agent's push for freedom. He states: "If, for example, the ironist appears as someone other than he actually is, his purpose might indeed seem to be to get others to believe this; but his actual purpose still is to feel free, but this he is precisely by means of irony . . ." (1989, 256). The ironic agent does not want to have her actions brought about through immediate responses to desires and social norms, but instead wants to feel free to choose the grounds of her action for herself.

As mentioned above, in his later work, Kierkegaard situates the ironic stage as a transitional one between the aesthetic and ethical, and in so doing presents a somewhat altered account of the motivation behind ironic agency. Assuming one can read the progression from the aesthetic to the ethical, and ultimately to the religious stage of existence, as a progression towards an ever sharper, more well-defined sense of selfhood, then it would be fair to say that the ironic agent is motivated by the impulse to develop a clearly defined sense of individuality, something which the immediate person lacks. Though not in specific reference to ironic agency, Kierkegaard (2000b) clearly articulates the motivation to achieve a sense of individuality in his review of the Danish novel, *Two Ages*, where he maintains that his age is characterized by a generic, impersonal public chatter regarding how to understand the world and how to live one's life. Any sense of individuality gets leveled and absorbed in the homogeneity of the public. In Kierkegaard's words:

Anyone can see that leveling has its profound importance in the ascendancy of the category 'generation' over the category of 'individuality.' . . . In antiquity the individual in the crowd had no significance whatsoever; the man of excellence stood for them all. The trend today is in the direction of mathematical equality, so that in all classes about so and so many uniformly make one individual. (2000b, 259)

He goes further to condemn the way most people are willing (and maybe even aspire) to be part of this undifferentiated mass of their generation, stating, "[i]n this state of indolent laxity, more and more individuals will aspire to be nobodies in order to become the public, that abstract aggregate ridiculously formed by the participant's becoming a third party" (264). To combat the tendency towards homogeneity and leveling, Kierkegaard recommends a renewed focus on individuality, particularly in the form of his conception of religious existence. He claims that, "rescue comes only through the essentiality of the religious in the particular individual" (260).

While I do not want to follow Kierkegaard's suggestion that a return to the "proper" sort of religious faith is required, I do want to suggest that the ironist reacts in a similar fashion to this tendency of public generality to level individuality by inwardly distancing herself from the public norms and codes of conduct in order

establish a sort of individuality in a perceived mass of homogeneity. If we again consider common examples like the person who ironically watches bad movies, it seems that the ironist is motivated not by a sense of freedom, but rather by a desire to be seen as different from and superior to the general public. The general public seems (judging by which movies often end up being the most profitable) to genuinely enjoy at least some bad movies. The ironic watcher of bad movies plays at enjoying them, thereby demonstrating that she is aware of the tendencies of the general public, can separate herself from these tendencies, and return to seemingly manifest them with an extra layer of self-consciousness that establishes her as an individual separate from the general public.

This is not entirely different from saying that the ironic agent is trying to achieve a sort of freedom, but it does change the focus of the ironist's motivation in what is, in my opinion, a helpful way. Freedom requires a strong sense of a self that can be free, but it also strikes me as more in line with the motivations of actual ironists to say that they are motivated more by a desire to cultivate a strong sense of themselves as discrete individuals than they are by a motivation for freedom. Watching bad movies ironically or drinking cheap beer ironically do not seem to have much to do with freedom, but rather with establishing oneself as an individual who exists with an inward distance from common norms and values even while one is enmeshed in seemingly ordinary behavior.

One might then very well ask why the ironist returns to these desires and norms, playing at acting in accordance with them, rather than finding some other basis for her actions. This is because the ironist is motivated to distance herself from immediacy, but does not see anything positive that can serve as a basis for her self-identity. She then defines herself as a pure negativity, always playfully manifesting desires or personas, while inwardly negating them. In Kierkegaard's words: "For the ironic subject, the given actuality has lost its validity entirely; it has become for him an imperfect form that is a hindrance everywhere. But on the other hand, he does not possess the new" (1989, 261). I will return to this point later when considering Kierkegaard's account of how the transition to the ethical stage of existence serves as a solution to the problem of ironic agency.

What Is Wrong with Ironic Agency?

It is not immediately clear that there is a problem with ironic agency. Richard Rorty (1989) argued that acting with an ironic detachment in which one does not take any values or self-identities as ultimate is in fact the best way of approaching one's life. More recently, Jonathan Lear (2011) has made the case that the ability to act ironically at the right time, in the right way is an important aspect of human flourishing. While I certainly do not want to argue that ironic agency in limited circumstances is always problematic, I do want to make the case, following Kierkegaard, that thoroughgoing ironic agency, i.e. always acting ironically, is self-defeating.

To see why thoroughgoing ironic agency is self-defeating, I will assume that some sort of hierarchical view of the self and agency is the most plausible one.² The general idea behind hierarchical conceptions of agency is that the self has different aspects or parts and that the truest sense of self and the truest sense of agency are only achieved when the various aspects of the self are aligned in the appropriate way. While this conception of the self and agency goes all the way back to Plato, Harry Frankfurt's work gave this view a more modern form and made it a popular and much-discussed position in contemporary philosophical discourse. On Frankfurt's (1988) view, the distinctive feature of personhood is that we have the ability to distance ourselves from our immediate, first-order desires and form second-order desires about which first-order desires we would want to move us to act. In order to achieve freedom and personhood in the strongest senses of the term, an agent must identify "decisively" with some particular first-order desire (Frankfurt 1988, 21). In Kierkegaardian terminology, Frankfurt is saying that our ability to achieve a separation between the external behavior we manifest and our internal attitude towards that behavior is what is distinctive for human agency. For Frankfurt, the agent who has free will, who is a person in the strongest sense of the term, is then able to bring the external behavior and internal attitude completely back together by fully identifying with the first-order desire that manifests itself in the behavior.

Christine Korsgaard provides a different hierarchical account of agency in her *Self-Constitution*. Korsgaard stresses the role of practical identities as the source of reasons for action (2009, 21). Practical identities are the various roles and identities we can assume as agents (e.g. being a teacher, being a wife, being a sports fan, etc.). All of these identities are defined by social norms that define what one must do to be a teacher, wife, sports fan, etc. In a manner that parallels Frankfurt, Korsgaard states that, "Our practical identities are, for the most part, contingent" (23). There are a few practical identities that we are stuck with (e.g. being a son or daughter or being a particular nationality), but for the most, we can achieve a reflective distance from our practical identities and then choose which identities we want to take on.³ In order to be a person or an agent in the strongest sense of the term, Korsgaard maintains that one must identify with one or more particular practical identities. In her words:

²Obviously, this assumption is debatable, and many prominent thinkers have criticized hierarchical accounts of the self. For instance, Gary Watson critiques Frankfurt's hierarchical conception of agency in his "Free Agency" (1975), and Robert Pippin criticizes Korsgaard's view that we ever can achieve a reflective distance from all of our practical identities in his *Hegel's Practical Philosophy* (2008).

³It might be argued that we can even achieve a reflective distance from practical identities like being a son or being a particular nationality and then choose to reject them by, for example, "divorcing" our parents or moving to and becoming a citizen of a different country. I do not think much hinges on this for my purposes, but I would suggest that these possibilities are still non-contingent in the sense that we must respond to them in some way, even if this response takes the form of rejection. These practical identities differ from those purely contingent ones like, for example, being someone's spouse. Being someone's spouse requires an initial choice on the part of the agent in a way that is fundamentally different from being someone's child.

We must act, and we need reasons in order to act. And unless there are *some* principles with which we *identify* we will have no reasons to act. Every human being must make himself into someone in particular, in order to have reasons to act and to live. (23–24; my emphasis)

In order to be an agent, one must have reasons and principles upon which to act, and identification with one or more practical identities is required to have these reasons and principles. Again, as with Frankfurt, we find this same dynamic of achieving reflective distance and then making the commitment to identify oneself with something that will provide the basis for action. And again, Korsgaard's position can be seen in the Kierkegaardian terminology developed above as advocating a break with the immediate, unreflective guidance of one's actions by the prevailing social norms, i.e. achieving a distance between external behavior and internal attitudes towards that behavior. In Frankfurt's case, the impetus for action is conceived more in terms of desires, while in Korsgaard's case, this impetus is thought of in terms of the reasons and principles provided by socially-defined practical identities.

The problem for the ironic agent is as follows. The ironic agent is able to achieve this reflective distance, but is not able to take the second step of fully identifying herself with any desires/identities. Instead, the ironic agent plays at being a certain type of person or having certain desires. The problem for the ironic agent, broadly speaking, is that she is not able to be an agent in the fullest sense of the term, something which requires that we have at least some desires or practical identities with which we have reflectively and fully identified. This makes ironic agency self-defeating, because, assuming that the main impetus of the ironic agent is achieving a strong sense of individual selfhood, the negating activity of irony destroys any basis upon which to become an agent or self in the fullest sense. This impetus, when coupled with the lack of awareness of any basis for action outside that found in the sphere of immediacy, forces the self into the ironic adoption of common attitudes and personas. However, in doing so, the ironic agent has given up the possibility of truly identifying herself with any of her desires or personas, and thereby gives up the possibility of being an agent in the fullest sense of the term. The ironic agent loses the possibility of fully committing herself to any action, leaving open to her only the possibility of half-committed actions from which she must inwardly distance herself.

Kierkegaard's Solution to the Problem of Ironic Agency

As is commonly known, one of the central themes of Kierkegaard's work is to show how one might progress through the aesthetic and ethical stages of existence to reach the properly religious stage, which Kierkegaard takes to be the highest stage of human existence. As mentioned above, he classifies ironic agency as a more sophisticated form of agency than that of the person at the aesthetic stage of existence and that ironic agency serves as a transitional stage between the aesthetic and ethical spheres of existence. This implies that the ironist is able to overcome the problems with this mode of agency by moving to the ethical stage of existence. The

task here is to show how Kierkegaard sees this transition to the ethical as a solution to the problem of ironic agency and to suggest some problems for this solution. In what follows, I will rely heavily on Cross reconstruction of Kierkegaard's account in his aforementioned "Neither Either nor Or: The Perils of Reflexive Irony" (1998).

Kierkegaard maintains that there is, at least on the surface, a great deal of similarity between an ironist and ethicist, referring to irony as the "incognito" of the ethicist (2000a, 232–33). The ethical person is similar to the ironist in that neither takes socially defined roles and norms or immediate desires seriously and no longer identifies themselves with them, meaning that both modes of existence involve an opposition between outward behavior and internal attitudes towards that behavior. For Kierkegaard, the ethicist uses the ironist as an incognito "because he comprehends the contradiction between the mode in which he exists in his inner being and his not expressing it in his outer appearance" (233).

Furthermore, "Irony is the unity of ethical passion, which in inwardness infinitely accentuates one's own *I* in relation to the ethical requirement—and culture, which in externality infinitely abstracts from the personal *I*" (232). Here Kierkegaard acknowledges that the ironist succeeds in developing a strong conception of "one's own *I*" as distinct from one's immediate desires and the culturally defined roles one might take on, and through the ironist's playing at being various personas, is able to bring together the generality of cultural norms with the extreme individuality of the 'I' (even if the position of the ironist ultimately is self-defeating for the reasons discussed above).

In his definition of the person at the ethical stage of existence, Kierkegaard makes clear both the similarities between the ethicist and the ironist and the differences. For Kierkegaard, "what makes the ethicist an ethicist is the movement by which he inwardly joins his outward life together with the infinite requirement of the ethical." He goes on to say, "In order not to be disturbed by the finite, by all the relativities in the world, the ethicist places the comic between himself and the world" (2000a, 233). Like the ironist, the ethicist can no longer take seriously the contingent norms of her cultural context and takes the same ironic stance towards these "relativities." However, the ethicist differs from the ironist because the ethicist has realized that there is an "infinite requirement" that renders all socially-defined and contingent requirements unserious and insubstantial by comparison. The ethicist realizes that she must make an absolute commitment to this infinite requirement, and in so doing, the ethicist has achieved a higher form of agency that is closed off to the ironist by having found and chosen a principle with which she can fully identify. The true ironist does not see any requirements that transcend the sphere of immediacy and are absolutely binding, and again, as mentioned, thereby fails to find any desire, practical identity, or transcendent principle with which she can fully identify.

This then raises the question of what exactly Kierkegaard has in mind when he talks about the infinite requirement of the ethical. Cross turns to *Either/Or* to better flesh out what Kierkegaard means and maintains that the infinite requirement under discussion here is the "realization of one's capacity for autonomous choice and willing" (Cross 1998, 148). On Cross reading:

The ironist, then, sees the contradiction in his nature; he holds that the contradictory elements can be reconciled if he, in his freedom, undertakes the shaping of his immediate, finite self—if he takes upon himself fulfillment of the ‘absolute requirement.’ (150)

In the move to the ethical, the ironist solves the contradiction of trying to achieve a sense of self through identifying with those aspects of immediacy that would negate the self by instead identifying with the formal requirement to shape those aspects of immediacy into a self without ever truly identifying with them. In other words, the ethicist acknowledges a meta-principle that mandates she choose to form her life into a coherent whole. The ethicist fully identifies with this meta-principle, and thus, moves past the ironic stage of existence and the ironist’s inability to identify with any concrete desire or practical identity.

As I see it, the problem with Kierkegaard’s move to ethical agency (at least as Cross reads it) as a solution to the problem of ironic agency is twofold. First, it is hard to see why a thoroughgoing ironist (especially one in the twenty-first century) would admit the existence of any absolute requirement with which she could identify herself. At this point, there have been many postmodern thinkers who have criticized the ideal of absolute autonomy and the willful, self-positing subject as a contingent construct of a particular historical period in Western thought. Of course, Kierkegaard himself, in his account of the religious stage of existence, will make the case that this sort of Kantian ideal of autonomy is an inadequate conception of the highest mode of human agency, and as such, cannot be the ultimate answer to problem of ironic agency.⁴ My criticism of Kierkegaard here, however, is that there is no reason to think that the ironist would be able to accept the infinite requirement suggested by Kierkegaard even as the path of transition from the ironic to the ethical. Assuming we are dealing with someone who is a thoroughgoing ironist, and as such, has distanced themselves from any concrete practical identity that might yield principles for action, why would such a person fully identify with this principle that requires her to choose the form of her self? What would make the ironist see this practical principle as something universally and necessarily binding when she has already presumably rejected other principles that claim to be universally and necessarily binding? Put more concretely, the ironist will have already rejected the sort of principles purported to be universal by the general public—often heard principles like, “Family comes first,” “Always support our troops,” “Do what you love,” etc. Why wouldn’t a thoroughgoing ironist see the principle that requires one to autonomously choose and create oneself as a slightly more sophisticated and formal version of these other culturally prescribed and contingent principles that also are supposed to be universally binding? The ironist could see this “infinite requirement” not as indicative of a higher, heretofore unknown mode of existence beyond the aesthetic, but rather as simply another culturally constructed practical identity within the realm of the aesthetic.

⁴In particular, I am thinking of “Problema 1: Is There a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical?” in *Fear and Trembling* (1983).

It might be argued that the ironist would accept the absolute commitment suggested by Kierkegaard if for no other reason than to eliminate psychological duress. Indeed, Judge William suggests that A can move beyond his psychological despair by actively choosing it, and thereby moving to an identification with the principle that mandates a realization of his own autonomy (Kierkegaard 1987, 213). However, it could equally be argued that the ironist would accept any other contingent commitment to eliminate this duress. If the motivation to move from the ironic stage is to eliminate the psychological stress of wanting to develop a clear sense of individuality and selfhood, but being unable to make the move to identify with any desires or practical identities that would make this possible, why wouldn't an ironist weary of this stress just pick any random concrete practical identity with which to identify?

The second problem with Kierkegaard's proposed solution is that even if the ironist were to fully identify with the requirement to be autonomous, the identification with this purely formal principle still makes for a somewhat watered-down sense of agency. By this I mean that the ethicist, still like the ironist, will not take fully seriously any concrete commitment or action. Like the questions that have been raised with regards to Kant's claim that only actions performed from duty have moral worth, there is the similar problem of Kierkegaard's ethical agent viewing true actions as those performed solely for the sake of exercising one's capacity for autonomy.⁵ This would seem to rule out being genuinely moved to act by one's first-order desires or by one's socially-defined commitments. The ironist-turned-ethicist will be better off in this scenario, but will still lack the ability to identify with any concrete desires or commitments that are required for a fully robust and engaged sense of agency.

A Different Kierkegaardian Solution to the Problem of Ironic Agency

At this point, I would like to propose a different, though still Kierkegaardian, solution to the problem of ironic agency. Kierkegaard concludes his earlier *Concept of Irony* by outlining a different solution to the problem, briefly describing a mode of agency that he calls "mastered" or "controlled" irony (1989, 324–29). What Kierkegaard gives us here very much seems to be a sketchy outline that requires some fleshing out to be of much use.

Brad Frazier provides such a fleshing out of mastered irony by relying (justifiably) on Kierkegaard's analogy between the master ironist and the artist.

⁵See Megan Altman's essay in this volume for further discussion of the way in which Kierkegaard's ethical stage of existence is characterized by this focus on self-creation.

Frazier explains the analogy as follows, using the fairly familiar Existentialist idea of seeing one's life as a work of art⁶:

In order to get the analogy off the ground, the key move is to think of human existence as a work of art. Furthermore, it is helpful to think of the given features of an individual person's identity as the raw materials out of which she constructs a character and personality (a 'self') through choice. (2006, 135–136)

Frazier adds substance to this analogy by referencing and interpreting Kierkegaard's claims that mastering irony makes one "positively free in the actuality to which [one] belongs" and that mastering irony "yields balance and consistency" (Kierkegaard 1989, 326). His interpretation of these two claims runs thusly:

This 'balance' is the mean between the radical disengagement of a pure ironist and the unreflective social conformity of a commonplace person. The person who strikes this balance in her life or hits this mean is said to be positively free in her actuality. Through her controlled use of irony, she embraces in a morally responsible way her social roles. She recognizes that she can resist those roles to an extent and that they are not above critique. (Frazier 2006, 136)

The key point for Frazier's view is that of balance, according to which mastered irony allows an agent to achieve a reflective distance from her social roles, while still being able to embrace these roles to an extent. This enables the master ironist to become a morally responsible agent, or, in other words, gives the ironist the freedom to (i.e. positive freedom) become a morally responsible agent.

Frazier's focus on balance seems to me to be a more fruitful path to the solution to the problem of ironic agency than that suggested by Cross. On Cross view, the solution to ironic agency was, in a sense, to retreat further from full commitment to any concrete values or ethical principle and move towards a full commitment to the meta-principle of autonomous self-creation. Frazier is proposing a way out of pure ironic agency that returns the agent to the realm of commitment to concrete values and principles. That said, I have a couple issues that prevent me from fully endorsing Frazier's view as a solution to the problem as I have laid it out. First, Frazier's main concern, as evidenced by the title of his book, *Rorty and Kierkegaard on Irony and Moral Commitment*, is the extent to which ironic agency might be incompatible with genuine moral commitment. Frazier is trying to show why worries about this incompatibility are overblown and how irony might even be helpful when it comes to moral commitment. My main concern is related, but somewhat different, in that I have been trying to work towards a way that the ironist can extricate herself from what seems to be a self-defeating position. Of course, the ironist being able to extricate herself from this position and become an agent in the stronger sense of the term would seem to be a prerequisite for genuine moral commitment, but is not necessarily connected to morality. On my account, for example, the thoroughgoing ironist is equally unable to fully identify herself as a football fan as she is unable to fully identify herself as an environmentalist, and either case is equally indicative of the problems with ironic agency.

⁶See Charles Guignon's *On Being Authentic* (2004), Chapter 7, for a general overview of this view in the Existentialist tradition.

The second issue with Frazier's account is that by talking about achieving this balance between reflective distance and complete embrace, he describes what mastered irony would look like, but he does not say how the thoroughgoing ironist is supposed to make the transition to mastered irony. Again, there is a slight difference in objectives, in that Frazier wants a description of ironic agency from an external perspective that shows how it can be compatible with moral commitment, while I am concerned with how one could make the transition out of thoroughgoing ironic agency from within that perspective. To put Frazier's account into the form of colloquial advice that could be given to the pure ironist, it would seemingly go something like, "Still act ironically, but don't overdo it."

What, then, would an acceptable solution to the problem of ironic agency, as I have developed it, look like? Prima facie, it seems like a complete contradiction to maintain that ironic agency is defined by the distancing of oneself from one's immediate desires and social roles and one's refusal to take them seriously, but then simultaneously say that there is a form of ironic agency in which the ironist finds these things to be genuine and meaningful. However, Kierkegaard himself, at the very end of his discussion of mastered irony, suggests something along these lines when he claims that in mastered irony, "essence must manifest itself as phenomenon" (1989, 329), a characterization that stands as a direct contradiction to the definition of ironic agency given at the beginning of this paper, and which occurs earlier in *The Concept of Irony*. Kierkegaard clearly is not suggesting a return to immediacy in which there is a simple and complete identity between the outward behavior of the agent and the agent's internal attitude. He seems to be advocating a full and committed return to engagement with the social world and one's desires, but a return that has been mediated by the passage through pure irony. In Kierkegaard's words:

Irony as a controlled element manifests itself in its truth precisely by teaching how to actualize actuality, by placing the appropriate emphasis on actuality. In no way can this be interpreted as wanting to deify actuality in good St. Simon style or as denying that there is, or at least ought to be, a longing for something higher and more perfect. But this longing must not hollow out actuality; on the contrary, life's content must become a genuine and meaningful element in the higher actuality whose fullness the soul craves. (328)

In contrast to the ethicist, who has to some extent "hollowed out" actuality by no longer taking particular, concrete commitments completely seriously, the master ironist seems to be able to see her socially-defined roles and desires to be "genuine and meaningful," while still maintaining a higher mode of existence than that of pure immediacy. I take the claim that the agent who masters irony "actualizes actuality" and makes "life's content genuine and meaningful" means that the master ironist is required to completely identify with and take fully seriously some of the immediate motivations for action.

This is where I think a helpful connection can be made between the conception of mastered irony and Kierkegaard's later depiction of faith. The main connection between faith and mastered irony that I want to make is the way in which both require the ability to act by virtue of the absurd, i.e. the ability to act while embracing an absolute contradiction. I do not mean to imply that mastered irony includes

the sort of religious conviction that characterizes the highest stage of existence for Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard clearly sees religious existence as being defined by living in this ultimate contradiction of the eternal having become temporal and the infinite having become finite.⁷ For my purposes here, I just want to focus on this idea of living with and acting upon a contradiction, something which can be, I think, safely transferred to the secular realm.

The contradiction that would have to arise for and be embraced by the master ironist would, I think, be the contradiction between the individual and universal (or least general). Recalling my initial characterization of ironic agency and the agent's motivation for irony, the ironist is motivated by the impulse to establish a self over and above the immediate desires and roles in which she finds herself enmeshed. The problem, again, is that this leaves the ironic agent without substantial "life content" (to use Kierkegaard's phrase) with which she can identify herself and achieve true agency or selfhood. For the ironist to achieve this selfhood and truly identify with various aspects of her immediate existence, the ironist needs to be able to fully identify with generic roles and immediate desires, while simultaneously holding onto her sense of absolute individuality. Kierkegaard describes something close to this in his characterization of faith in *Fear and Trembling*: "Faith is precisely this paradox, that the individual as the particular is higher than the universal, is justified over against it, is subordinate but superior . . ." (1983, 55–56). Here Kierkegaard is claiming that Abraham had faith insofar as he understood and saw himself as subordinate to the universal ethical requirement to not kill his son, Isaac, but simultaneously went ahead with the sacrifice of Isaac, confident that this particular act was justified. It is this special ability to always hold oneself in this contradiction that is characteristic of Kierkegaard's knight of faith. In the case of the master ironist, it is the ability to hold oneself in the contradiction of being completely committed to and subordinating oneself to some generic role or desire, while still holding one's individuality higher than that role or desire.

As is the case with much of Kierkegaard's thought, this solution to the problem of ironic agency is not a theoretical solution, meaning that it provides no neat, elegant explanation of how all (or most) apparent logical difficulties are resolved. As Kierkegaard says of Abraham's faith: "Abraham cannot be mediated, and the same thing can be expressed also by saying that he cannot talk. So soon as I talk I express the universal, and if I do not do so, no one can understand me" (1983, 60–61). Rather, the sort of faith I am advocating as a solution to the problem of ironic agency is a practical solution, a solution that cannot be captured in any sort of theoretical exposition, but a solution that can only be lived.

This, of course, raises the question of how one can justify a proposed solution that is unabashedly contradictory and maintains that there is no adequate way of explaining it through language. Kierkegaard was aware of this problem as well, repeatedly making statements in *Fear and Trembling* like, "If this be not faith,

⁷See, for instance, his concluding discussion of the transition from one stage of existence to another in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Kierkegaard 2000a, 241).

then Abraham is lost, then faith has never existed in this world . . .” (1983, 55). The implication is that Kierkegaard is sketching, as much as possible, what faith would be like, assuming such a state were possible. He takes the oft-heard designation of Abraham as the “father of faith” literally and thus treats Abraham as a presumed concrete example of faith, which can be used to provide at least some phenomenological evidence that the sort of faith Kierkegaard describes is possible.

Can the same strategy work for the conception of mastered irony developed here? That is, is there a concrete example of a the sort of internal movement that is required of the master ironist that can be pointed to as some sort of phenomenological evidence that existing in such a mode is possible? Let me conclude the paper by trying to give a concrete example that might provide some reason to think something like the conception of mastered irony that I have described could be possible. Instead of pursuing the analogy between the artist and the master ironist as Frazier does, I would suggest that a better example might be that of a good actor. When a very talented actor takes on role, we often have trouble disassociating the actor with the role. The actor is presumably able to become so immersed in the role that for the time period of the performance, she completely identifies herself with that character, while still being able to walk away at the end of the performance and pick up her normal life and identity. This can be contrasted with poor actors who clearly give the impression that they are merely playing a role. Like the ethicist, the poor actor might very well be completely committed to the more abstract identity of being an actor, but cannot identify herself completely with any concrete role. The talented actor can seemingly live with this contradiction of completely identifying herself with her role in a given performance, while simultaneously seeing herself as an individual who is separate from that role. Just as Kierkegaard points at Abraham and asks how his existence could be possible without the sort of faith described by Kierkegaard, I would point at the talented actor and ask how her existence could be possible without the sort of mastered irony I have attempted to describe here.⁸

The good actor also achieves a balance somewhat similar to that described by Frazier in his account of mastered irony. The balance Frazier has in mind seems to be one in which the agent is committed to a particular concrete social role, but also maintains a distance from it. The balance achieved by actors is one in which they can fully identify themselves with a certain role in the moment, but can step back from it and achieve a distance from it after the scene or production is over. I would propose this latter sort of balance as the appropriate aim for the master ironist. If the ironist is able to make that contradictory internal movement of completely identifying herself with a practical identity while maintaining a sense of individuality, she can become an agent in the strong sense of the term in those moments of complete identification

⁸This is not, perhaps, a perfect analogy, since the actor does not necessarily imbue her work with the playfulness characteristic of ironic agency. However, I would suggest that the example of the actor does provide some phenomenological support for the claim that it is possible to fully identify oneself with a practical identity or desire while maintaining a sense of oneself as a discrete individual and that the master ironist could be seen as a good actor with the added factor of playfulness.

and then re-emerge from them into her ironic detachment from any particular desires and roles. Mastered irony is not about balancing oneself in a perpetual state of half-commitment, but rather being able to balance the oscillation between complete commitment and complete detachment.

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Chapter 19

Phenomenology as Social Critique

William Koch

One of the defining characteristics of Charles Guignon as a thinker and teacher is his commitment to live the life of a philosopher rather than merely that of an academic. This does not mean seeking fame or to radically change the way most people approach the world and their lives, but rather means a commitment to addressing pressing problems within our time rather than focusing primarily on technical issues within the profession of philosophy. In other words, Guignon displays and teaches a faith in the power of philosophy to address real issues within our shared life world. In Guignon's work this is found married to a phenomenological focus upon the value of careful clarification in order to dissolve or at least ease seemingly inescapable intellectual and practical deadlocks. In honor of this valuable lesson found in Guignon's work, I would like to begin laying out how phenomenology as developed by Martin Heidegger might be brought to bear upon politics and social thought, that most pressing den of polarized deadlocks in which the wellbeing and lives of so many hang suspended.

The question of the political advantage or disadvantage of Heidegger's thought has rarely been more pressing within academic and intellectual spheres. The recent publication of translations of Heidegger's lecture courses from 1933 to 1934 (BAT/GA 36/37), dialogues written by Heidegger in 1944–1945 (CPC/GA 77), and the first public lectures Heidegger gave following World War II in 1949 (BFL/GA 79) have made more widely available a window into Heidegger's thought during and immediately following his Nazi involvement. This has occurred even as the suggestion that Heidegger's philosophy has direct, and fascist, political

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implications has become once more a hotly debated subject. Meanwhile, several books have attempted to use or modify Heidegger's philosophy to support Marxist or Communist projects. Two key examples are *Hermeneutic Communism: From Heidegger to Marx* by Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala (2011), and *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* by Slavoj Žižek (2012) whose thirteenth chapter is dedicated extensively to arguing that the Heidegger of the mid-1930s was on his way to communism and that the thought of this period can thus be rehabilitated for a communist project (see esp. 879). We also find less polarized examples of attempts to apply Heideggerian phenomenology to social thought, such as Axel Honneth's 2005 Tanner Lectures at Berkeley. In these lectures Honneth uses Heidegger's concept of care along with work from sociology and neuroscience to renovate George Lukacs' presentation of reification in light of the role recognition plays in both basic human cognition and social interaction (see Honneth 2008). These few examples, some of which I will deal with more extensively later, should make clear that the question of the political meaning and application of Heidegger's thought is both a pressing topic and one which many people are discussing.

As I will suggest, however, this spectrum of projects is missing those parts of Heidegger's thought that are most useful and unique when it comes to a practice of social analysis and critique. General attention has been paid more to either specific conclusions Heidegger draws in the course of works like *Being and Time* or his limited overt discussions of political philosophy which occurred primarily in the 1930s. A careful investigation of Heidegger's actual methodological reflections and their application to the study of social and political concerns has not, however, been adequately developed. It is this focus upon methodology I would like to present here, while also demonstrating why this very methodology sharply distinguishes Heideggerian phenomenology from the different methods and traditions of social analysis with which contemporary philosophers have been attempting to unite it.

The question of the political use of Heideggerian philosophy leads inevitably to a confrontation with Heidegger's time as a member of the Nazi party. We probably shouldn't be surprised that it has been fairly common for students of Heideggerian thought to attempt to disconnect Heidegger's work from his political life. This has often occurred through an insistence that phenomenology is a purely descriptive methodology free of prescriptive elements. At times it is suggested that phenomenology, as a method of grounding philosophical claims upon the way in which things show up within our lives, runs afoul of Hume's is/ought distinction if it draws from its descriptive investigation prescriptions for how one ought to live or act. Thus, while *Being and Time* might show that an authentic way of life is one in which a person is consciously aware of their embeddedness within a community and history, it doesn't presume to show that one should strive for authenticity. At most phenomenology might offer an epistemic or methodological prescription such that one is more likely to give credence to distortive philosophical theses without the clear-sighted realization of the dependence of meaningful experience upon community that goes along with authenticity. Beyond this, however, key works like *Being and Time* are not taken to have any direct ethical or political message. What

I would ultimately like to demonstrate is that, while phenomenology is descriptive, it provides the basis for an immanent critique in a way that is both similar and importantly different from Hegelian and Marxist forms of social critique.

I would like to take a moment to discuss Axel Honneth's use of Heidegger and his own orientation within the descriptive/prescriptive spectrum in order to prepare the ground for my own discussion of Heidegger's position upon that same spectrum. Honneth is overtly concerned with the descriptive/prescriptive tension and considers an unjustified prescriptive element as a weakness in both Heidegger and Lukacs. Honneth's project is to reinterpret Lukacs' conception of reification, i.e. treating human subjects as market objects, in terms of a philosophy of mutual recognition. In order to develop his philosophy of recognition, he turns to the role that practical coping within a world originally disclosed in terms of qualitative significance, called care, plays in Heidegger's philosophy. Using Heidegger along with the philosophy of John Dewey and the sociology of George Herbert Meade, Honneth claims that all human cognition is primarily based on empathetic mutual recognition between individuals before later becoming reified such that we lose sight of the fundamental role played by recognition. In the course of this argument Honneth suggests that both Lukacs and Heidegger use a descriptive methodology that attempts, nonetheless, to offer normative prescriptive judgments concerning how social life should be lived. Despite their own ambitions, Honneth suggests, neither philosopher is able to actually justify a criticism of the loss of an empathetic participant perspective through the dominance of a neutral subject/object perspective. As Honneth points out, for Lukacs "if reification constitutes neither a mere epistemic category mistake nor a form of moral misconduct, the only remaining possibility is that it be conceived as a form of praxis that is *structurally* false . . . [it] must form an ensemble of habits and attitudes that deviates from a more genuine or better form of human praxis" (2008, 26; emphasis in the original text). While Lukacs and Heidegger can't seem to make good this claim that certain practices are better than others, Honneth's own project also attempts to offer something other than an epistemic or moral critique of reification. What seems to be missing in either Lukacs or Heidegger is a fully developed conception of social health and sickness such as can be developed, Honneth hopes, through appeals to work done in areas such as neuroscience. Honneth is not entirely successful in this and the best he can do is show that objectifying or reifying practices are always already grounded in something like Heideggerian care or intersubjective empathy while gesturing to a breakdown in this empathy in cases like autism. In cases of such breakdown, Honneth suggests, we lose the ability to understand the meaning and purposes of the social practices within which we find ourselves. Despite Honneth's own attempt to arrive at a critique of reification as a "social pathology," he seems to only provide a factual claim concerning the importance of intersubjectivity for cognition without arriving at the required normative standards of social "health" that the purely descriptive claim that objectification relies on intersubjective recognition cannot furnish. In other words, even if my objectification of other humans relies upon an earlier sympathetic relation to them, this doesn't at all demonstrate that these later reifying practices are not entirely "healthy" (Honneth 2008, 84).

Our momentary detour through the work of Honneth helps to orient our own reflections upon Heidegger's phenomenology within what we might call the main axis of social thought. As Honneth points out, most social and political thought is explicitly prescriptive; "In the last three decades, social criticism has essentially limited itself to evaluating the normative order of societies according to whether they fulfill certain principles of justice" (2008, 84). We see here, of course, the entire tradition of liberal social philosophy from the original social contract theorists to John Rawls and Robert Nozick. Debates in these areas almost inevitably settle into wars of attrition waged around supposedly universal standards of rationality or self-evident values such as liberty, equality or rights. In contrast to these prescriptive practices we find purely descriptive disciplines generally free of any pretensions to normative evaluation or social critique. Sociology, admittedly with major important exceptions, fits this category. Honneth, as a representative of the fourth generation of Critical Theory, follows this tradition's attempts to find a middle road connecting the normative goals of many political philosophers with the descriptive practice of disciplines like sociology.¹ Honneth is, I suggest, not wrong in seeing Heidegger as similarly falling within this middle region but fails to appreciate Heidegger's difference from other projects that attempt to provide a normative bite to description.

The middle region between normative critique and neutral description is far from unpopulated. It is here, in fact, where most of what we might call continental political philosophy can be found and the region is dominated by the figures of Hegel, Marx and those whose thinking follows in their dialectical footsteps. If the practice of purely normative political philosophers might be characterized as using universal principles to critique social practice, the middle region we are now dealing with is made up of a variety of methods of immanent critique. Immanent critique includes any of several methods which attempt to show that various social practices or formations are inadequate according to their own, rather than universal, standards. The main form of immanent critique is dialectic, whether Hegel's idealist brand or Marx's materialist version, and it is from this tradition of dialectical immanent critique that the great works of Critical Theory, such as Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002), draw their foundation. The purely descriptive understanding of phenomenology misses the way in which phenomenology is a unique form of immanent critique oriented specifically in opposition to the, nonetheless similar, Hegelian and Marxist methodologies. It is likely that the location of phenomenology within the region of immanent critique dominated by dialectic has at least contributed to the push to connect phenomenology and communism.

As noted, engagements with the social or political applications of Heidegger's thought tend to follow one of two strategies. Either key conclusions from his main works, for example *Being and Time*, are mined for social or political applications

¹It is interesting that Habermas, with his more overtly normative practice, seems rather distinct from critical theory's more descriptive tendency.

as in Honneth's work or his overt discussions of political philosophy are focused upon. The period during which Heidegger most directly discussed politics proper was the time of his Nazi involvement, which is hardly a promising sign. During the period of the early 1930s, Heidegger's overt political thought displays two main characteristics. First, Heidegger adopts Carl Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction as the determination of the political and the state. This distinction is overtly understood in terms of the struggle against "... each and every person who poses an essential threat to the Dasein of the people and its individual members" (Heidegger BAT, 73/GA 36/37, 90–91). This aspect is usually discussed in terms of Heraclitus' fragment in which *polemos*, i.e. war or struggle, is described as the father of all. The second aspect is the idea that particular creative individuals such as leaders, thinkers or artists form the state or nation through leaps of creative power and, in so doing, open up a people's history for them:

... The German people as a whole is coming to itself, that is, it is finding its leadership. In this leadership, the people that has come to itself is creating its state. The people that is forming itself into its state, founding endurance and constancy, is growing into a nation. The nation is taking over the fate of its people. Such a people is gaining its own spiritual mission among peoples, and creating its own history. (Heidegger BAT, 3/GA 36/37, 3)

We can find a similar focus upon the history determining power of creative individuals in other works of the time such as *Introduction to Metaphysics* and the early versions of "The Origin of the Work of Art."² At the same time both of these elements of Heidegger's thought are in tension with the work that precedes and follows his thinking in the early 1930s. For example, other than the period of the early 1930s, most of Heidegger's discussion of Heraclitean *polemos* goes hand in hand with an insistence that it does not represent a struggle amongst people. For example, as soon as a year after the 1933–1934 discussion of *polemos* as struggle against human enemies, Heidegger insists in *Introduction to Metaphysics* that *polemos* "... is not war in the human sense ..." (IM, 65/GA 40, 66) and in the published version of "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1971) this same *polemos* becomes a struggle between world and earth, or disclosive practices and the undisclosed. By the end of the war Heidegger will be critical of both of his main political ideas from the early 1930s. He will indirectly characterize his early thoughts concerning the German nation as dangerous subjectivism in his dialogues from 1944 to 1945:

Older Man: Nationality is nothing other than the pure subjectivity of a people that purports to rely on its 'nature' as what is actual, from out of which and back to which all affecting is supposed to go.

²"This struggle is then sustained by the creators, by the poets, thinkers, and statesmen. Against the overwhelming sway, they throw the counterweight of their work and capture in this work the world that is thereby opened up" (Heidegger IM, 65/GA 40, 66). For a discussion of the early versions of "The Origin of the Work of Art" see Jacques Taminiaux's paper "The Origin of 'The Origin of the Work of Art'" (1993).

Younger Man: Subjectivity has its essence in that the human –the individual, groups, and the realms of humanity – rises up to base himself on himself and to assert himself as the ground and measure of what is actual. With this rebellious uprising into subjectivity emerges the uprising into work as that form of achieving by means of which the devastation of the earth is everywhere prepared for and ultimately established as unconditional. (CPC, 154/GA 77, 235–36)

What this, admittedly brief, discussion should have revealed is that Heidegger's most explicit discussions of political philosophy are far from representing Heideggerian phenomenology's political promise or lack thereof. Rather, for all its historical importance and interest, the thought of the early 1930s should be considered anomalous and, as I will discuss shortly, demonstrates a failure to apply the phenomenological method as it was developed early in Heidegger's career.

Heidegger's development of his own phenomenological methodology was centrally influenced by his commitment to escape from a philosophical tradition dominated by modern epistemology's ontological assumption that the problem of knowledge must be addressed in terms of the connection between an actively cognizing consciousness and an independent external reality. The key path out of this tradition was indicated to Heidegger in several philosophical developments, which their own creators seemed to underappreciate. Specifically, Emil Lask's principle of the material determination of form, Wilhelm Dilthey's principle of immanence and Husserl's categorial intuition were each interpreted by Heidegger in a realist sense foreign, in the case of Lask and Husserl, to the actual systems and intentions of their originators. For Heidegger, each principle states that the matters of concern to philosophy should be approached through a relationship determined by the matters themselves. Lask suggested that concepts, or formal elements of thought, should be understood ontologically as arising from the content they structured and that therefore, methodologically, we should avoid imposing concepts upon subjects of concern. Dilthey suggested that the historical development of human life gives rise to its own frameworks of understanding through concrete cultural expressions, or objectivations, that should guide the human sciences in understanding history. Finally, according to Heidegger's reading, Husserl offered the argument that we intuit categorial or conceptual forms rather than imposing them, which collapses Kant's distinction between active conceptualization and passive intuition. Each of these points forms the background of Heidegger's own concept of formal indication and the phenomenological destruction and adjudication such an indication makes possible.

The most robust early presentations of Heidegger's thoughts on formal indication show up in his 1920 summer lecture course *Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression: Theory of Philosophy Concept Formation* (PIE/GA 59) and the 1920–1921 lecture course *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (PRL/GA 60). In the religion lectures Heidegger states that any phenomenon which phenomenology addresses is made up of a sense-complex consisting of three types of meaning that make it possible (PRL, 43/GA 60, 63). For any phenomenon there is the "what" of the phenomenon, i.e. the content of the phenomenon that is discussed as matter in Lask's material determination of form, the "how" of the phenomenon

that corresponds to the relation we have towards the phenomenon that allows it to show up as a matter of concern and, finally, a second “how” sense corresponding to the way in which the relation is made actual in being united to the content which Heidegger calls the “enactment-sense” of the phenomenon. Heidegger’s critique of the theoretical standpoint he finds in most philosophy, including Husserlian phenomenology, is already well underway here when he stresses that the common understanding of the way in which philosophy is a general or formal science prejudices any investigation from the start by prescribing a purely theoretical relation-sense upon any subject it engages with rather than letting the subject matter determine its own relation as it does in everyday life:

One could say that a formal-ontological determinateness says nothing about the ‘what’ of that which it determines, and thus does not prejudice anything. But exactly because the formal determination is entirely indifferent as to content, it is fatal for the relation- and enactment-aspect of the phenomenon – because it prescribes, or at least contributes to prescribing, a theoretical relational meaning. It hides the *enactment*-character – which is possibly still more fatal – and turns one-sidedly to the *content*. A glance at the history of philosophy shows that formal determination of the objective entirely dominates philosophy. How can this prejudice, this pre-judgment, be prevented? This is just what the *formal indication* achieves. (PRL, 43/GA 60, 63)

In contrast to traditional conceptions of formal determination, Heidegger’s phenomenology holds this prejudice at bay by first asking what original relation-sense provides us access to any topic under discussion and whether this original relation-sense is understood as an indication arising from the matter of concern itself. This active investigation of the formal indication provided by the lived relation-senses which open a subject of investigation to us constitutes the earliest sense of phenomenological destruction and is followed by an attempt to clarify this relation-sense by seeking its enactment-sense within our lives. Heidegger at this point calls this clarification and assessment by means of enactment-sense “phenomenological adjudication,” but it will later be called phenomenological attestation. Heidegger insists that his new conception of the formal always concerns something relational, i.e. the how of our access to the matter that concerns us. As becomes even clearer in works such as *Being and Time*, the relational-sense of a phenomenon will generally be the lived practical context within which, and through which, any matter of study becomes a focus of our concern. We originally ask, for any philosophical problem, what practice and concern within our lives presents this problem to us.

The key point to remember is that this is developed as a theory of philosophical concept formation, and the take away lesson is that concepts are what our practices and daily concerns become when they are discussed from the distorting view of the theoretical perspective, especially when that theoretical perspective is particularly entrenched in modern epistemological conceptions of the mental. To ask about concept formation, then, is to ask about the origin of our practices, traditions and in general our ways of speaking and relating to ourselves, each other and the world. In his lecture course from the previous semester Heidegger had discussed this in terms of the way that meaning directs us to the context from which something shows up

as meaningful and, in doing so, brings with it various motives that really define the entire sense-complex formed through content, relation and enactment: “The peculiar thing is in fact that meanings point into contexts; phenomenologically, it is found how in them themselves motives are posited in such a way that these give a direction of the sense-complex” (PIE, 25/GA 59, 34). If we are attempting to clarify, then, the meaning of something like “freedom,” we refer ourselves to the ways in which we find ourselves in a relation to freedom. What are the traditions and projects in which freedom shows up as a matter of concern? We apply phenomenological adjudication next by asking about the ways we enact or live the relation that we have already clarified and what motivates these projects, what lived attestation and motivation we can provide for the meaning in question.

In the summer lecture course immediately before his religion course, Heidegger had already more fully presented the concept of adjudication presented above and addressed the problem that most philosophical topics have several different relational-senses and even more enactment-senses. During the lecture course, the topic at hand is the question of the meaning of “history,” to which Heidegger offers six different possible relational meanings. How are we to adjudicate between these possible meanings? Heidegger proposes that the plurality of meanings can be organized in terms of a genealogy insofar as some meanings will be parasitic upon others while certain meanings will be found to be basic or primordial. The adjudication, then, ties directly into the question of the historical lived origins of the practices in question. Where did they come from and how have they changed, developed or degenerated? Obviously, however, this adjudication requires a criterion both in order to determine primordially and in order to assess development or degeneration.

Any relation can be investigated in terms of the way it is lived and these enactments can be assessed such that the most basic ones will be those enactments that reveal the basic motivational concern, and thus the meaning, of the relation in question. The basic motivational concern of a relation will be its origin. What should be clear is that, though these origins will have a historical dimension such that the motivation they contain very likely came to appearance at given places and times, the investigation into origins is not a practice of traditional historiography but rather is uncovered phenomenologically through an investigation of the actual way that any relation in question is enacted in the life of those who relate to the matters of concern in this way. The assessment of primordially, then, won't be some sort of historical prejudicial preference for those relations which are temporally older but rather is directed at determining which relations ground the others in terms of providing the actual concerns and motivations which in turn motivate less primordial relations. It need not be the case, then, that the oldest relations are the most primordial since it might be the case that older relations have come to be lived-out in terms of newer motivations that are not themselves grounded in terms of the older practices. Heidegger offers his criterion of primordially in the following rather dense passage:

An enactment is primordial if, as an enactment of a relation that is at least co-directed in a genuinely self-worldly way, it requires, according to its sense, an always actual renewal in a self-worldly Dasein. It does so precisely in such a way that this renewal and the ‘necessity’ (requirement) of renewal inherent in it co-constitutes self-worldly existence. (PIE, 57/GA 59, 75)

In developing this criteria Heidegger depends upon a distinction between the envioning-world, the with-world, and the self-world. At this point in Heidegger's career the envioning-world is the world of meaningful entities and tasks taken unreflectively as given. Heidegger offers the example of his lecture in the context of the general life of the university or his work (PIE, 63/GA 59, 82). At the envioning level, we do not inquire as to the origin or nature of the meaningfulness of the items, roles, or tasks we find ourselves within, they simply are taken as the self-evident medium in which we exist. When we delve below the given environment to what makes it possible we discover the with-world, or those collective social practices out of which alone meaningful entities and personal projects arise. This is the level at which formal indication and relational-sense is uncovered. In order to assess the full meaning and origin of these relational-senses, however, we must turn to their enactment within the lived self-world of personal Dasein. The self-world is the sphere at which the tasks and practices of the with-world are taken up and lived by individual instances of Dasein.

With the distinctions between worldly levels in mind we can now return to Heidegger's criterion of primordality. The criterion contains two main requirements. First, to be primordial an enactment must require a renewal in a self-worldly Dasein rather than just existing at the level of the environment or collective practices. I could enact a relation to a coffee mug by drinking from it in a non-reflective way, and as such the enactment of the relation has occurred at the level of the envioning world. Similarly, I might note that I drink coffee as *we* collectively do. I frequent the popular coffee shop and behave as one normally does at that coffee shop. I drink from a cup, further, that has been made available through a practice whereby frequent customers can keep named mugs waiting for themselves so that even the use of this particular mug is overtly made meaningful and possible through a collective practice. I am also aware that this mug has arisen through the existence of various industrialized business practices in which mechanized mass production churns out mugs of this type and capitalist economics provides for their availability for purchase. As such I have enacted a relation to this mug in terms of the with-world. But the relation, that of "use for drinking coffee," has not been shown to be primordial as it does not need to be enacted at the level of self-worldly Dasein in order to be understood. In other words, coffee cups can be used, environmentally or socially, without our reflecting upon the way in which they co-constitute who and what we are as particular people. It is also possible, however, to enact the relationship of coffee-cup-use at the level of the self-worldly, perhaps by becoming aware that the frequency and location of my coffee consumption is part of what determines me as a scholar, intellectual, or typical American consumer, but such an enactment is not necessitated by the relation itself. A primordial enactment will show up then only when we are dealing with ways of relating to matters that themselves are so fundamental for personal identity that they can only be understood in the fullest sense in terms of the manner in which they constitute who and what we personally are. The first requirement for primordality is thus unavoidably connected to the second, namely that the enactment that necessarily occurs at the level of the self-worldly also co-constitutes the self-worldly sphere in contributing fundamentally to our sense of who we are.

We can return to my example of drinking coffee to clarify primordiality. As already mentioned, the practice of drinking coffee is not primordial, but from this view all practices are based eventually on a relation that can be primordially enacted. When searching for such a relation and enactment, it first strikes me that I don't just drink coffee alone in my home, perhaps purely for the caffeine or pleasure it provides, but rather frequently drink it in coffee shops and restaurants. Even when I drink it at home, I am not fully alone in the sense that I drink it with a vague awareness of its social meanings and traditions concerning how coffee consumption is generally enacted. Many, if not all, of my practices of drinking coffee are, then, based on the deeper relation of being together with others, often specifically during the action of sharing meals or lighter repasts. Indeed, most human practices of eating do not occur in their barest form. We very rarely if ever simply take nutrition into our biological system. Rather, we eat together in highly ritualized ways. Drinking coffee is no different. This suggests, then, that the primordial relation and enactments on which the relational practice of drinking coffee is based include, for example, sharing-pleasure. Sharing-pleasure, here specifically the pleasure of coffee consumption, can be seen as a primordial relation and, when actually performed, a primordial enactment because any habituation that invades it can only result in a loss of the extent to which the pleasure is shared. If I perform the act by rote, without thinking either about my own experience or about those around me, I am not in fact sharing anything though we may all be experiencing similar things. Sharing here is taken, then, as a specific practice and indeed a primordial one and not some biological fact about pleasure receptors. To share pleasure requires me to be aware of both my experience and the possibility of yours. It constitutes me as a being interconnected with other people and able to join together with them to experience the world collective in certain ways. Sharing-pleasure, then, only fully occurs when I am aware of what Heidegger will call *Mitsein*, or being-with, in *Being and Time*. This is one primordial motive for the common act of drinking coffee in a coffee shop. It is certainly not very common to engage in it fully at the level of the primordial and without the primordial level in view it is easy for the practice to become distorted in ways that would distance us from our awareness of sharing with others. Coffee consumption could occur in a context of reification as discussed by Honneth such that less primordial practice has come to work against the very goals it once served, the goal of sharing-pleasure and being-with one another in a particular way.

As should be clear, primordiality for Heidegger offers an assessment of the importance of a relation or practice for the people who engage in it, even though that importance may not be overtly apparent. Drinking coffee or even sharing meals may not seem particularly important, but they are part of one of the most basic ways we constitute ourselves at the level of self-worldly as members of a community of pleasures, joys and hardships. This aspect of the self-world provides the basis for the existence of the with-world. From this view we can imagine coffee disappearing without doing dramatic harm to our sense of self, but the loss of the practice of shared repast in general would likely do extensive damage. The immanent character of this phenomenological method should also be clear, as Heidegger is not proposing an external historiographical method for determining the primordiality of

our practices, but rather is attempting an assessment from within those practices of their basic motivations and their interrelation in terms of their own sense of importance. Those relations will show up as most important to us, at least after a careful phenomenological investigation, which contribute necessarily to our sense of our own identity and as such provide the ground for the meaning of other practices. Sharing-pleasure provides one ground for sharing-meals and sharing-meals provides one ground for sharing-coffee. For this reason phenomenology offers a method of analysis for social practices which, when successful, offers a form of critique that should be convincing to those engaged in the actual practices in question rather than offering assessments from universal principles external to those practices. A given enactment of a relation-sense allows an assessment of the meaning and motivation of the relation itself.

There is, at the very foundation of this vision of phenomenology, a methodological commitment to a guiding ontological-epistemological premise that, at the same time, achieves support through the successful application of the method. The premise is that all forms of relating to matters of concern, for our purposes, all social practices, at some level open up a particular vision of who we are and what the world is like. In other words, all practices are at some level disclosive of reality though they may indeed no longer be enacted in a way that connects with their original disclosive power. Most simply put, Heidegger demonstrates that practices only exist because they bring to appearance the way things are. This position follows directly from his realist commitment to understand our relations to things, whether practical or cognitive, as originating from outside the sphere of subjective imposition. For this reason Heidegger understands practices to be grounded in a basic experience, or primordial enactment, in which the world opens up as a meaningful space for action in which we are called forth into certain personal identities. No practice or relation is primordially deceptive or distortive. Distortion and deception arise through a process of losing sight of the original and foundational motives and experiences from which the practice derives its meaning. The phenomenological method works as a critical practice when distortive practices are shown to be in contradiction with their own internal meaning and motives.

We should be able to see from our considerations so far that phenomenology is a descriptive method that achieves a critical force. Through phenomenology's immanent critique, social practices are made to give voice to their own standards and can then be measured against those standards. It is worth stressing, however, that those standards may be found in more primordial motivations housed in more basic relationships such that non-primordial practices cannot be isolated from the larger context of motives and lived meanings from which these practices derive their impetus. What we see here is an analysis of a process that comes to occupy both Heidegger and the late Husserl. Practices can become merely habitual or traditional, a process of using words without considering their motivation or meaning for example, which Husserl understands in terms of sedimentation and the seduction of language in "The Origin of Geometry" (1970, 361–62). As Heidegger stresses, a primordial enactment that constitutes self-worldly Dasein can never be habitual but rather is a type of intensification in which one's personal identity is actively

reaffirmed such that habit is decisively cut off (PIE, 65/GA 59, 79). Once a practice becomes habitual, as indeed most of our practices are, it loses much of its disclosive power and also risks altering over time in such a way as to work against the motives from which it originally sprang both historically and within the life of a given person. One of the ironies of this type of historical drift is that people can continue behaving in certain ways because of the original motives from which the practice originated even when that practice has ceased to serve its original motive for decades or even centuries. If we take as a main element of social critique as it has been developed in Marxist and post-Marxist thought the uncovering of ideology, in which there is a sharp difference between what people do and what they think they do, we should now be able to see that phenomenology is perfectly capable of a robust critique of ideology in which certain behaviors are habitually followed for reasons that those behaviors have long since failed to serve. One important difference between phenomenology and Marxist dialectic will be, however, that phenomenology will reject the possibility of any practice having been ideological from the start.

There are a few other differences between phenomenology and dialectic generally conceived that we can now bring to light. It is first necessary to stress that Heidegger consistently oriented his own philosophy in a negative relation to that of Hegel, going so far as to suggest that Marxist philosophy remains within the framework of Hegelian dialectic and that dialectic was the most powerful manifestation of the philosophical and historical developments he was attempting to get beyond.³ In particular Heidegger associated Hegelian dialectic with the triumph of the theoretical attitude, the same attitude he opposed in Husserl, and generally equated Hegel with the Neo-Kantianism he criticized in thinkers such as Paul Natorp (Heidegger TDP, 91/GA 56/57, 108). If we recall Heidegger's criticism of abstract or formal philosophy generally, which he insisted formal indication worked against, we begin to get a clearer sense of his criticism of dialectic. In general dialectic relies upon the impossibility of unmediated access to the matters that concern us. The dialectic is always fueled by mediation, whether through language, cultural practice or conceptual thought, in which there is always an inadequacy between the medium and the content of the mediation either on the side of an inadequate expression of the content or an inadequate content for a more highly developed form of mediation. As Heidegger points out in 1919, this type of dialectic leads to a distortion of life such that any lived immediacy is always dissolved into a higher level of mediation and thus a higher level of generality or abstraction (TDP, 91/GA 56/57, 108). Here we see a clear example of the formalism that Heidegger identified as both dominating the history of philosophy and closing off any appreciation of the relation-sense and enactment-sense of phenomenon. The basic inadequacy of all lower levels of mediation in dialectic points towards the consistent sublation of the

³See, for example, his formulation of phenomenology as standing "on the front against Hegel" (TDP, 81/GA 56/57, 98) or his extensive discussion of Hegel in his 1949 Bremen lectures and 1957 Freiburg lectures (BFL/GA 79).

relation-sense into continually more general relations. As our previous discussion should make clear, Heidegger's own focus on arriving at primordial forms of enactment and relation that are understood to provide the meaning and motivation for less primordial relations works in the precise opposite direction from dialectic. Heidegger attempts to move ever nearer to the way in which life itself comes to appearance through its most basic enactments of relations. For this reason, thinking of the relation-sense of a phenomenon as mediation is already to take the wrong path. Relations are precisely the manner in which anything comes to appearance, and these relational disclosures, while admittedly never complete or exhaustive, are nonetheless not merely lenses through which reality is seen or mediated. For Heidegger, relations are direct engagements with what exists that arise from what exists, they are not ways in which active minds or collective spirit attempt to come to grips with a reality that always escapes their grasp. This view is at the heart of Heidegger's rejection of modern epistemology.

Within the realm of social thought, Hegel's dialectic has largely been eclipsed by its reformulation within Marxist and post-Marxist thought but the general points we have made remain pertinent. A materialist dialectic of history is powered primarily through contradictions between material practices and the purposes those practices are meant to fulfill. Again, as in the Hegelian content/mediation distinction, the contradiction can show up in two ways. Either the attempted means to achieve a goal are inadequate and the tension between the goal and the means of achieving it become too great, or the means of achieving a goal eventually demonstrate that the goal was inadequate such that new goals and purposes developed within the practice take precedence. In either case the assumption is always that there was a problem situation that future developments attempt to resolve and that eventually is either transcended or translated onto a higher level. The key difference between dialectic and phenomenology is whether the future or past is prioritized. For Heidegger the origin of practices and relations is not a problem situation destined to be worked out or escaped through development, but rather a basic grasp of a certain aspect of reality along with a basic motivation or response to that grasp. We are dealing here more with a conversation between the terms of a relation than with a challenge, and the meaningfulness of our lives depends upon our ability to hold our most basic motivations in view rather than developing beyond them through further mediation.

We can see a fair example of the use of the dialectic in social critique in the example of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002). There it is argued that the driving goal of the Enlightenment is to free humanity from myth by gaining power over nature. The original problem situation is that of the collective subjectivity of humanity finding itself confronted by an overpowering and threatening nature. Myth, magic and religion each arise as a response to this original problem situation and each is overcome through the progressive development of technological power over nature. But, as a means of escaping myth and gaining power over nature, Enlightenment and the modern science and technology it gives rise to are revealed to be inadequate. The dialectical formulation of this failure within the work is multiple but some main points can be made.

First, the problem situation was originally to achieve a power over nature for the sake of the individual subject. However, the very power in question is achieved by means of an instrumental self-control through which the nature within oneself must be dominated and overcome such that the very subjectivity one was originally concerned with protecting is itself deformed and crippled through the process. On the other hand, the more the mastery over nature progresses the clearer it becomes that it is simply the achievement of power for power's own sake. This sheer rule of power under the guise of politics, economics or social engineering is itself just the reappearance of nature, "In the mastery of nature, without which mind does not exist, enslavement to nature persists. By modestly confessing itself to be power and thus being taken back into nature, mind rids itself of the very claim to mastery which had enslaved it to nature" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 31). The more we dominate nature, both internally and externally, the more we reveal our social relations to be purely a play of domination and submission no different from the natural violence we sought to escape. In this way we see that the problem situation persists, and indeed is intensified, in the course of its address through the historical development of instrumental rationality. We see this same dialectic if we turn to the topic of Enlightenment and myth. Myth is developed as a way of escaping the fear of nature by presenting the nonliving as if it were living, for example appealing to the consciousness that lives in the heart of the storm and goes by the name of Zeus in order to gain some sense of power over the lightning. Enlightenment remains motivated by this basic fear but simply inverts the method, viewing the living in light of the non-living, for example through the conception of living humans as market commodities. In this sense, "Enlightenment is mythical fear radicalized . . ." and the problem situation consistently remains as the ongoing motivation of the dialectical process (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 11). This analysis offers a form of immanent social critique because each phase of the dialectic allows for criticism according to its own internal logic, specifically by asking to what extent it has solved the problem situation of subjectivity facing the overpowering force of nature.

We can see the contrast between this type of dialectical immanent critique and a phenomenological one if we compare *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to the surprisingly similar critique of instrumental rationality in Heidegger's "The Question Concerning Technology" (QCT, 3–35/GA 7, 5–36). This essay that grew out of the Bremen Lectures Heidegger gave following World War II in 1949 will also allow us to demonstrate that, while the terms used to describe his method have shifted since 1920, Heidegger's actual method remains primarily the same. If we read this essay in the light of Heidegger's earliest methodological dictates, the argument reveals a familiar structure. The matter of concern is technology. What relation-sense do we find in our engagement with technology? The most obvious relation-sense is that of use, much like our previous discussion of the coffee cup. Our first insight, then, is that we relate to technology in terms of our daily activities of getting things done during which technology shows up as a means for achieving an end. When, further, we inquire as to an enactment-sense of this relation we find that technology as a means is encountered in enactment as a human activity. We had previously shown that 'use' is not itself a primordial relation-sense, because it does not require an

enactment at the level of the self-worldly and because it does not, in being enacted, necessarily co-constitute our sense of who and what we are. Technology, understood in terms of a human means for achieving ends, must then be based upon a more primordial relation-sense and enactment-sense. The deeper relation-sense is that of cause, we understand what it means to use something in terms of the relation of bringing about an effect through the use of a cause. What enactment-sense can we find for the relation of causal-use? We might first note that causal-use does grow from a very specific enactment experience within the self-world, namely the experience of the self as a causal agent bringing about events and changes in the world. The concrete example of this enactment-sense Heidegger selects is that of the silver smith making a chalice, and what he reveals is that this enactment is not, in fact, experienced in terms of a causal agent bringing about an event in the world but rather in terms of a participation within a larger event that cannot itself occur through the power of the silver smith alone. The smith requires silver, the previous existence of chalices or something like them from which to draw a form, and social practices within which chalices feature in order to shape a chalice at all. Without the material, the form, or the social use of the chalice, it would be impossible to make one. For this reason the relational-sense of causal-use or causal-agent collapses into the more primordial relational-sense of indebtedness. Indebtedness itself is primordially enacted in that event in which we most fully experience ourselves as constituted entirely as indebted, namely the event of the world showing up as meaningful in the first place which alone allows for any meaningful action on our part. This phenomenological destruction and adjudication reveals the primordial meaning of 'use' and thus both means-end instrumental rationality and concepts of causality to be an openness to, and thus dependence upon, the disclosure of the world and ourselves within it. Technology, in turn, implicitly is an attempt to remain more fully open to the rise of a meaningful collective life world. However, through a process of historical drift it has become instead a process of dominating and forcing the world, others and ourselves to show up in terms of very specific standards of usefulness. The key here is that what one might have taken as the original problem-situation, namely an attempt to manipulate aspects of the world around us for the sake of subjective ends, is revealed in the course of analysis to be illusory rather than simply inadequately solved. The original motivational experience, or enactment, of the relation is not a problem that haunts us but an ongoing event that continues to call for a response from us through which our self-world is constituted.

The point of the above interpretation of "The Question Concerning Technology" is not to present strengths or weaknesses of either the dialectical or phenomenological method of analysis, but rather merely to demonstrate their differences. A much lengthier presentation would be necessary to draw any further conclusions. What should be clear, however, is that while the similarities between the two methods of immanent critique inevitably present a temptation to conjoin the two philosophical traditions, there are rich differences which we risk losing in too swiftly allying the traditions. Heideggerian phenomenology as it was methodologically developed early in Heidegger's career and practiced throughout his career remains a path for social critique that has been too little considered or practiced in its own right.

The final point to be made is that, while works such as “The Question Concerning Technology” can absolutely be read in light of Heidegger’s earliest methodological commitments despite the tendency of Heidegger scholars to discuss his “phenomenological years” as set off from his later thought, the period of his open support for National Socialism cannot be so read. As I have already suggested, the prescriptive/descriptive distinction has often been used to save Heidegger from his own political choices. This same distinction has often been used to explain Heidegger’s Nazi involvement through arguments that phenomenology did not provide any normative critical position from which National Socialism could be rejected.⁴ The understanding of phenomenology as immanent critique I have offered undermines both this standard defense of phenomenology and the standard criticism of it. Rather than appeal to these responses, we can confront Heidegger’s political philosophy of the early 1930s with his founding methodological reflections.

We have, of course, only dealt with Heidegger’s political thinking in the 1930s very briefly and so what we can say is also very limited. It was already suggested that Heidegger’s thought at the time is clearly divergent from what comes both before and after this period, but we can also say that Heidegger’s earliest methodology is inconsistent with the implicit subjectivism of the two main elements of his political and social thought at the time of his Nazi involvement. Heidegger’s methodology, as I have discussed it, is anti-subjectivist. It insists that ways of relating to things arise originally from events in which we come face to face with some aspect of reality. Relations are not created or imposed by minds or subjects, rather what we think of as mind arises as the echo of these primordial encounters with reality. The same point can be made, however, concerning social arrangements. These are not imposed through subjective creation but rather arise, at least at some point, from sincere encounters with reality and these encounters are to a large extent collective. Individuals or groups never find themselves meaningfully located within history by creating that history or through the creative force of some individual leader or thinker. Rather, the meaning of our place in history is arrived at through a process of recall, by rediscovering those personal and collective experiences in which a sense of reality and our place in it was uncovered, or through a new encounter with reality that cannot be forced and can certainly not be had by one member of a group, the leader, for the sake of the rest. Indeed, the very focus on the reduction to the self-worldly in Heidegger’s methodology makes clear how impossible the role of some particular leader or prophet is within Heidegger’s phenomenological methodology. In the same manner that habit fails to engage with a practice at the level of the self-worldly, it is impossible for anyone else to discover, create or impose primordial enactments upon us. We can share motivations and encounters, undoubtedly, but no one can bring it about that we do share them. Certainly conformity can be encouraged, taught and even enforced, but any occurrence of actual primordial enactment at the level of the self-worldly is as fatal to any such conformity as it is to habit.

⁴See, for example, Ernst Tugendhat’s “Heidegger’s Idea of Truth” (1994).

We can also see that the image of social life offered by Heidegger's phenomenology is dramatically different from one based on the friend/enemy distinction of Schmitt and, further, that an application of Heidegger's method to his views from the early 1930s would have revealed their distortive nature. Communities are constituted through overlapping layers of meaning and motivation that provide the basis for shared practices. The enemies of such a community are the dangers Heidegger often spoke against, primarily unthinking repetition of habitual or traditional practices without a grasp of their motivation and meaning. This perspective can only rather awkwardly be applied to actual people, in which case we would be concerned with people who somehow encourage thoughtless habitual behavior. But the deeper point is one that Heidegger would develop later in "The Question Concerning Technology," namely that the very domination or negative influence one might attempt to identify with individuals, groups or practices in society itself derives from a process of drifting from primordial motivations and meanings. In other words, none of our relations to each other are originally relations of sheer domination but rather aim at responding to encounters with the meaningfulness of the world. When cases of conflict arise, the philosophical response is one of phenomenological destruction and adjudication through which we clarify and reconnect with original shared meanings and motivations. Through this process we discover that the status of "enemy" is always a rather shallow one arising from a deeper level of shared meanings and concerns. This non-primordially of the enemy relation makes it impossible to affirm the struggle against an enemy as definitive for a people. Other than in the early 1930s, struggle for Heidegger is struggle against some form of forgetfulness and thoughtlessness.

The final, and likely the most important, point to be made is that the response of Heidegger to the events of the early 1930s should have been to inquire into the enactment-sense of the relations with the world and others National Socialism offered. To provide such an analysis is well beyond the scope of this work, but it would consist in looking closely at what enactments of National Socialist relations Heidegger would have had access to at the time of his decision to join the party. It seems very likely that, despite the horrors that were still to come, there was more than adequate enactment-sense to the Nazi phenomenon for a careful phenomenological analysis to have revealed its deeply distorted and destructive motivations. But this is, admittedly, something we can only suggest at this point. What should, however, be clear is that Heidegger's early methodology and its later manifestations provide adequate grounds for criticizing his political choices and elements of his overt political philosophy from the early 1930s. It is precisely through considerations like this that the promise of Heidegger's phenomenological method for social and political thought, and the extent of his own failure to apply this method when it mattered most, can be clarified amidst the exceptionally diverse attempts to engage with Heidegger's phenomenology politically.

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Chapter 20

Existential Socialization

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... since our own life stories are inseparable from the wider text of a shared we-world, authenticity can be nothing other than a fuller and richer form of participation in the public context.

—Charles Guignon (1993, 228)

... philosophizing that does not historicize appears to me like a metaphysical relic

—Graf Paul Yorck von Wartenburg (Dilthey 1923, 69)

Heidegger's *Being and Time* is not typically included on the list of twentieth century philosophical texts that would be considered fertile ground for social thought. This omission is perhaps not surprising, given the relatively scant attention paid in the text to the theme of authentic social existence. For many readers of *Being and Time* from early on, its emphasis on the individualizing character of existence, its insistence on the inauthenticity of everyday social identification, and its overriding ontological aims leave little, if any, room for an account of an authentic social existence.¹ To others, particularly those on the alert for the political ramifications of the analysis in *Being and Time*, Heidegger's remarks on the authenticity of a people's shared destiny exacerbate the questionableness of

¹The list of critics who interpret the existential analysis in *Being and Time* this way is legion. Georg Lukács: "The character of being-together (co-presence, *Mitsein*) introduced by Heidegger is a character of the isolated ego. Hence it does not lead beyond solipsism" (1966, 139). Karel Kosík: "[T]he existential modification is not a revolutionary transformation of the world but *the drama of an individual in the world*" (1976, 48). See, too, B. W. Ballard 1990, 121–41, esp. 135; and Daniel Burston 1998, 86. For less directly political but nonetheless influential criticisms of Heidegger's account of social existence, see Karl Löwith 1928, xiv; Émanuel Levinas 1947a, 165; 1947b, 127–34, 144; 1951, 88–98; 1961, 39; and Michael Theunissen 1977, 165–86.

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anything like an authentic socialization.² Curiously, this reception suggests that the existential analysis pushes at once in two diametrically opposing directions or, as we might say, two equally delusional alternatives, perhaps best formulated as the oxymorons: solipsistic authenticity and populist authenticity.³ In the following paper I hope to show that there are good reasons—textual and substantive—to resist both alternatives, albeit without presuming to demonstrate that Heidegger’s existential analysis entails anything more than broad generalities about an authentic social existence. I also leave aside the fraught question of whether it is incumbent on Heidegger, given the fundamental ontological aim of the existential analysis in *Being and Time*, to supply anything more (Theunissen 1977, 182–86).⁴ What I do propose to demonstrate is a more modest, but hopefully still significant thesis, namely, that authentic individualization entails, on Heidegger’s account, authentic socialization. His existential analysis commits him to the entirely plausible position that there is no authentic, existential individualization without an authentic, existential socialization. In Heidegger’s own words, “a specific, ontic construal of authentic existence, a factual ideal” underlies his analysis (SZ, 310). If that factual ideal, the defining historical possibility of Dasein, is its authenticity, then it is an authenticity that necessarily is at once individual and social. In addition to undermining both solipsistic and populist interpretations of being-with-one-another, demonstration of this position can contribute to clarifying the ambiguities and problems that continue to bedevil our understanding of the fully intertwined processes of individualization and socialization.⁵ The paper begins with a brief preparatory review of key existential phenomena that, in Heidegger’s view, signal the unmitigated individuality of being-here.

²Thus, Karl Löwith insists on “the specifically German meaning of Heidegger’s concepts of Dasein,” (1946; and 1984, 97f); see, too, Lacoue-Labarthe’s account of Heidegger’s “archi-faschism” (2007, 22, 84). Accepting this conclusion but also looking for the missteps in Heidegger’s otherwise path-breaking analysis, Jean-Luc Nancy argues that Heidegger, oscillating between the inauthenticity of the crowd and the authenticity of the people, fails to thematize the “with” in being-with (a phenomenon that he himself opens up); “As much as Heidegger felt with peculiar acuity the primordially of the *with* . . . , he himself has erased the possibility he openedNeither a herd, nor a subject. Neither anonymous, nor ‘mine’” (Nancy 2008, 11).

³In roughly parallel fashion, Lawrence Vogel contrasts equally unpalatable “existentialist” and “historicist” interpretations of Heidegger’s analysis, contending that it can be given a third, “dialogical” or “liberal cosmopolitan” interpretation. However, “reading Heidegger against Heidegger,” he also recognizes that this interpretation qualifies “not as a faithful exegesis of Heidegger’s text, but as a critical elaboration of some understated implications of Heidegger’s project” (1994, 71, 100, 105).

⁴The concerns of the following paper also do not coincide with a nonetheless related debate, initiated by Hubert Dreyfus and Taylor Carman over the possibility of authenticity at all, given Dasein’s immersion in inauthentic socialization (Dreyfus 1992, 329–34) and (Carman 2000, 13–28).

⁵See, too, Ricoeur 1990 and 2004; Nancy 1996, 3, 25; Raffoul 2010, 253–60; Weiss 2001; and Guignon 1993 and 2000.

Existential Individualization

There are two *prima facie* reasons for thinking that Heidegger's existential analysis has little to offer for social thought. The first reason is his sharp distinction of fundamental ontology, the aim of the existential analysis in *Being and Time*, from ontic investigations such as anthropology and psychology. Insofar as these sorts of investigations, including those of social anthropology, social psychology, sociology (and, for that matter, much of traditional ethics) take for granted the ontological make-up of human beings and human social interactions, they are impediments to a fundamental ontological investigation, as Heidegger conceives it, i.e., an investigation of the manner of being that is distinctively human. The presumption that human interactions—both with others and with the things in our surroundings—are merely natural occurrences, with a manner of being that is *at bottom* no different from that of the objects of natural sciences, forecloses the possibility that there is anything ontologically distinctive about human existence.⁶

Yet the fact that Heidegger brackets ontic inquiries, including those of a sociological nature, does not, by itself, rule out a social ontology or, more modestly, the social implications of his existential analysis. Nor is it sufficient to explain the impression, at least for one stripe of readers, that his existential analysis provides little if any traction for social thought. The deeper reason for this reticence lies in the way that existence itself, on his account, individualizes Dasein.

Heidegger's sure sense of the modes and measures of this existential individualization is evident from the outset of the existential analysis, with his opening juxtaposition of "existence" and "mineness." From the fact that being is in each case at stake for Dasein, Heidegger infers two characteristics, namely, that its essence is to be or, equivalently, "lies in its existence," and that the being that is at stake is in each case one that you or I call "mine." He accordingly elucidates the distinctiveness of the *respective mineness* (*Jemeinigkeit*) of existence by appealing to the fact that this existence can be addressed in the first or second person singular. "It [Dasein] has always already somehow decided in what way Dasein is in each case mine" (Heidegger SZ, 42). While this account does not necessarily exclude the possibility of the phenomenon of a *respective ourness* as perhaps a version of mineness in the plural (corresponding to the use of 'we' or even the German second person plural *ihr*), Heidegger does not formally elaborate any such possibility in *Being and Time*.

Nor is it readily apparent how he might do so, given the fact that he contrasts authenticity, understood in terms of the first person singular indexical, with

⁶Heidegger accordingly contrasts an "existential" analysis, i.e., the analysis of being-here (*Dasein*) insofar as its make-up—its being-in-the-world—enables it to encounter things within the world, with a "categorical" analysis, a traditional ontological analysis of beings insofar as they are encountered within the world. In contrast to an existential analysis, a categorical analysis is concerned with simply "being-on-hand [*Vorhandenheit*] in the widest sense" and thus with what—not who—a human being is (Heidegger SZ, 44f).

inauthenticity, understood in terms of the third person (the nominalization of the German *man*).⁷ In other words, to exist as who one is, as an individual, is to exist authentically. (Or, to make the same point in another key, even if I choose to conform, there must be something in me that enables me as an individual to choose to choose.)

In keeping with how authenticity turns on the individualizing phenomenon expressed by the corresponding indexical, Heidegger interprets existential phenomena that yield the possibility of authenticity—*angst*, thrownness, uncanniness—in terms of their individualizing character. Thus, Heidegger observes that *angst* individualizes being-here with respect to its “ownmost” being-in-the-world, disclosing it “*as being-possible*, and indeed as what, solely of its own accord, can be something individualized in the individualization” (SZ, 187f). That, on account of which Dasein is anxious, is nothing less and nothing more than that in the face of which it is anxious, i.e., its “individualized” being-in-the-world.

Heidegger further elaborates *angst*’s individualizing character in terms of the uncanniness of Dasein’s thrownness. What is uncanny (and cause for anxiety) is the fact that Dasein has been thrown into the world and yet, stripped down to its ontological individuality, it is in a sense not of this world.⁸ Tools and equipment within Dasein’s world are meaningful (albeit in principle redundant), i.e., they have a purpose as a part of system that is for the sake of Dasein. Yet the same cannot be said for Dasein itself. To the extent that meaning derives from utility, Dasein—what things are useful for—is meaningless. Moreover, to the extent that this utility determines how others normally are here with Dasein, *angst* also deprives Dasein of any possibility of understanding itself on the basis of “public ways of interpreting” (Heidegger SZ, 187). This anxiety-provoking uncanniness of being-in-the-world but not at home in it “determines at bottom the individualized being-in-the-world” (Heidegger SZ, 188, 276f, 295f).

Yet if anxiety uncovers (*enthüllt*) the impossibility of Dasein identifying its authentic capability-of-being with innerworldly concerns, anxiety also brings that possibility to light, i.e., “the possibility of an authentic capability-of-being.” “This individualization fetches Dasein back from its fallenness and makes authenticity

⁷Though formally a singular pronoun, the German *man* designates an anonymous collective. (Thus, “*man hat Christopher Columbus ausgelacht*” translates Gershwin’s line “They all laughed at Christopher Columbus (when he said the world was round)” from the song “They All Laughed.”) The commonplace “*man tut das nicht*” is perhaps best translated “one does not do that,” i.e., at least not in public, polite society, this culture, or that setting, etc., where ‘one’ is anyone of, or aspiring to be part of, the relevant group. Note, too, that, in keeping with the difference between indexicals (‘I,’ ‘you’) and demonstratives (‘this,’ ‘that’), Dasein’s “mineness” signifies an individualizing capability that is not to be conflated with an individuality conceived on the basis of demonstratives (e.g., *haecceitas*).

⁸Dasein’s sense of being at home derives from its familiarity with and dexterity in manipulating what is handy (ready-to-hand) within-the-world, since the entire complex of the significance of such implements is for the sake of Dasein. But this familiarity comes to a crashing halt when it comes to Dasein’s worldhood, since it is not for the sake of anything. Herein lies one source of the uncanny *angst* that we experience about being-in-the-world at all.

and inauthenticity apparent to it as possibilities of its being” (Heidegger SZ, 191). This authentic capability, uncovered in angst, is intrinsic to Dasein’s individual thrownness, i.e., to “the self thrown into individualization.”⁹ Thus, the experience of angst opens up to Dasein the possibility of being authentic or not, but it does so precisely as something not shared, as an experience that amounts to a kind of “existential solipsism,” to paraphrase Heidegger himself (SZ, 188). It would accordingly seem—at least *prima facie*—that angst forecloses any social dimension.¹⁰ “Anxiety is anxious about naked Dasein as thrown into the uncanniness, bringing it back to the pure ‘that’ [it is and, indeed, as] the individualized thrownness that is most its own.”¹¹

Heidegger’s account of authenticity further underscores the individualizing character of existence. Central to authenticity is the anticipation of death, precisely as the ownmost (*eigenste*) and unshared (*unbezügliche*), defining possibility of being-here. “Each Dasein must respectively take dying upon itself. Death is, insofar as it ‘is,’ in each case mine” (Heidegger SZ, 240). Not grounded in being-with others in any way, death stands before Dasein as the possibility that belongs to it alone, its ownmost capability: “the possible impossibility of its existence” (Heidegger SZ, 250). Anticipating this possibility “absolutely individualizes Dasein” (Heidegger SZ, 266; see, too, 310).

Dasein understands that it has to take over [this capability], solely of its own accord [*einzig von ihm selbst*], the capability-of-being where what is at stake is simply its ownmost being. Death does not indifferently ‘belong’ merely to one’s own Dasein but instead *lays claim* to the latter [Dasein] *as individual*. Death’s character of not being shared, a character understood in the anticipating, individualizes Dasein onto itself. (Heidegger SZ, 263)

The individualizing character of existence is no less pronounced in Heidegger’s account of the other marks of authenticity: the call of conscience and the resolute will to have a conscience. What distinguishes the resoluteness of authentic existence is that it understands the call by conscience to itself (or, more properly, a call coming from myself to me, not a call coming from *us* and to *us*). Heidegger attributes the dead certainty of the call getting through, to the fact “that Dasein, individualized onto itself in its uncanniness, is for itself absolutely unable to be exchanged [*unverwechselbar* with any other Dasein]” (SZ, 277). So, too, “understanding

⁹“*Das eigentliche Auf-sich-zukommen der vorlaufenden Entschlossenheit ist zumal ein Zurückkommen auf das eigenste, in seine Vereinzlung geworfene Selbst*” (Heidegger SZ, 339).

¹⁰Note that the individualizing character of angst retrieves Dasein from its fallenness, i.e., its absorption in the They, not a We (Heidegger SZ, 191). In the course of elaborating the strangeness of the call of conscience for those absorbed in the They, Heidegger rhetorically asks: “What could be stranger for the They, lost to the manifold ‘world’ of concerns, than the self individualized in its uncanniness onto itself, thrown into the nothingness?” (SZ, 277).

¹¹SZ, 343; see SZ, 276 f. In SZ Heidegger repeatedly links thrownness, uncanniness, and individualization with one another. He speaks of “the self individualized unto itself in the uncanniness” (SZ, 277), “the uncanniness of the thrown individualization” (SZ, 280), “one’s own Dasein in the uncanniness of its individualization” (SZ, 295f), “the self thrown into its individualization” (SZ, 339), “ownmost, individualized thrownness” (SZ, 343).

the call discloses one's own Dasein in the uncanniness of its individualization" (Heidegger SZ, 295f). The resolute, authentic existence that understands the call not only "reveals how it is lost to the They [*die Verlorenheit in das Man*]," but also anticipates its death as something that cannot be shared with anyone. "The unbroken sharpness of the essential individualization to the ownmost capability-of-being discloses the anticipating of death as the possibility *that is not shared* [*das Vorlaufen zum Tode als der unbezüglichen Möglichkeit*]" (Heidegger SZ, 307).

Dasein's ownmost capability of being is for the most part foreclosed (more precisely, closed off: *verschlossen*) by its lack of resoluteness. Heidegger underscores that "in each case it [Dasein] brings itself to this [i.e., into this capability] only in the individualization" (SZ, 336). In other words, in order for Dasein to be who it authentically is, it must be an individual or, better, become the individual it is.¹² Just as angst and death are not shared, so, too, it would seem that authenticity, as resoluteness in the face of death, is anything but a social phenomenon.

Existential Socialization

The case for the individualizing character of key existential phenomena is substantial, and the fact that Heidegger makes this case in his existential analysis is uncontested. As reviewed in the preceding paragraphs, existential individualization coincides with the disclosure of the potential for authenticity (angst, uncanniness) and with authenticity itself (conscience, resoluteness). Existence, authentic or not, is not a static state but a dynamic, ongoing projection of possibilities. It is a self-disclosive act, something Dasein does, such that, in the doing, Dasein discloses its being to itself (as well as that of others and entities other than Dasein). From Heidegger's analysis, it follows that only individuals exist authentically. Existing authentically entails owning up to one's mortal, timely, and thus individual existence. Being genuinely able to say to oneself: "this existence is mine," is the very antithesis of mindless conformity to practices and beliefs that spring from identification with the They.

Though there can be no gainsaying these conclusions, nothing in them forecloses the possibility of existential socialization. However, those conclusions do entail that an existential socialization, like existential individualization, must find its bearings from an account of authentic socialization.¹³ Moreover, while sustaining the other as

¹²Heidegger SZ, 322: "*Dasein ist eigentlich selbst in der ursprünglichen Vereinzelung der verschwiegenen, sich Angst zumutenden Entschlossenheit.*"

¹³Inauthentic and authentic projections of socialization can be distinguished temporally. The inauthentic projection is mindlessly retrospective in the sense that it simply replicates a given practice or belief into which Dasein is thrown. This mindless retrospectiveness is characteristic of the average everydayness into which Dasein inevitably and, indeed, necessarily lapses, albeit always more or less, forgetful of what is coming. The projection of authentic socialization, by

Dasein, any such socialization would have to be consistent with the individualizing character of conscience and resoluteness.

Heidegger provides several promising leads in this connection, albeit without offering anything like his concentrated emphasis on existential individualization. Four such leads together underscore that existential socialization is not merely possible but even necessary for, and integral to, an authentic existence.¹⁴

Dasein's Social Purpose: Being for Others' Sake

The first such lead is to be found, of course, in Heidegger's twin contentions that being-with (*Mitsein*) is inherent to Dasein, and that the distinctiveness of the being of others, their "being-here-with" (*Mitdasein*), is irreducible to anything merely handy or on hand (SZ, 118). Being-with is existentially constitutive of being-in-the-world (Heidegger SZ, 125, 146). Both being-with and being-here-with are "equiprimordial" with being-in-the-world, and others are disclosed as being-here-with Dasein—and can accordingly be "missed" and "feared for"—because Dasein is essentially being-with.¹⁵ "In each case, the world is always already the one that I share with others" (Heidegger SZ, 118). So, too, just as a mere self is not given without a world, there is no self without others (Heidegger SZ, 116).

To be sure, none of these phenomena is "given" or "self-evident" without further ado, Heidegger adds. In the opening chapters of SZ he looks to our everyday involvement with implements to challenge the notion that the manner of being of things within-the-world is self-evident.¹⁶ So, too, when he turns to the analysis of who Dasein is and who others are, he begins with the everyday conceptions of them. Herein lie aspects of Heidegger's presentation that have further contributed to giving the social dimension of his analysis the look of a secondary phenomenon. The analysis of *Mitsein* comes on the heels of the analysis of the work-world that

contrast, retrieves the past mindfully on the basis of forward-looking, unrealized possibilities, projected in light of what is coming.

¹⁴The qualifier 'together' is necessary since some of these leads, e.g., discourse, taken in isolation, can suggest that socialization is necessary only in a general sense (i.e., not specific to authentic or inauthentic existence). Additional leads, with the relevant social implications, include the analyses of fear, disposition, conscience, people, time, esp. world-time (Heidegger SZ, 141f, 384, 386, 410).

¹⁵Heidegger SZ, 114, 120, 141 f. When Dasein fears for others, she nonetheless fears for *herself* (*Genau besehen ist aber das Fürchten um . . . doch ein Sichfürchten*) in the sense that what is "thereby 'feared' is being-with the other who could be torn way from her." After making this point, Heidegger notes that, even though she knows that she is in a certain sense unthreatened in the course of fearing for others, it is "for that reason not an enfeebled manner of fearing for herself" (SZ, 142). In these passages, Heidegger thus construes being-with to be intrinsic to being oneself, to one's selfhood.

¹⁶Thus, he shows that they are not simply on hand (*vorhanden*) but handy (*zuhanden*), where being-handy entails absences of a distinctive sort; see Heidegger SZ, 71, 75.

serves as the site of the everyday, average encounter of others.¹⁷ Not coincidentally, perhaps, Heidegger thematizes the everyday, inauthentic *Mitsein* as the They, but without providing anything like a parallel thematization of authentic *Mitsein* or, perhaps more significantly, authentic *Mitdasein* or *Miteinandersein*.

Yet just as he endorses the claim that being-with others is inherent to being-here, so, too, he states in no uncertain terms the difference between being-with others authentically and inauthentically. ‘Solicitude,’ literally, ‘care for (others)’ (*Fürsorge*) is the general term for the way Dasein, insofar as it is being-with, relates to others. For the most part, in common, everyday ways of relating to one another, the modes of solicitude are indifferent and deficient, fertile ground for conceiving oneself and others merely as things on hand. It is also possible that, rather than being indifferent, Dasein is solicitous in the sense of leaping in and taking over the concerns of others, creating the conditions, in the process, for making them dependent upon it.

Nonetheless, the relationship to others is “irreducible, autonomous” and inherent in Dasein’s being. That is to say, among other things, that the relationship is not dependent upon Dasein’s projection of itself on others, its knowledge of others, or its sympathy with them.¹⁸ To be sure, the way we encounter one another often depends, Heidegger concedes, upon the extent to which each Dasein has respectively understood itself. “However, that only means,” he adds, “the extent to which it has made the essential being-with with others transparent to itself and not distorted it, something that is only possible if Dasein as being-in-the-world is in each case already with others” (SZ, 125).

Being-with-one-another (*Miteinandersein*) is mostly grounded in what is a common concern (*was . . . gemeinsam besorgt wird*).¹⁹ Where the concern—what needs to be taken care of, the work that needs to be done—alone determines our ways of being-with-one-another, that socialization is attenuated at best, often taking the form of distance and reserve. Heidegger contrasts this everyday way of

¹⁷Heidegger claims that this order of presentation served to distinguish the being of others from that of things handy or on hand. Nevertheless, the risk he runs is evident from his emphasis that others are encountered, not primarily by observing a difference between oneself and them, but “on the basis of the *world* in which Dasein, taking care of things and circumspective, essentially dwells” (Heidegger SZ, 119; see, too, 120, 125). Theunissen—who, despite protests to the contrary, appears to confuse the *ordo exhibitendi* (the order of presentation) with the *ordo essendi* (the order of being)—charges that “the *specific* sense of the encounter *between human beings* . . . is eliminated from the outset”; “the *immediacy* of the encounter with others is missing, because the *world as means* interposes itself between ‘me’ and others” (Theunissen 1977, 170f); see, too, “Das Mitdasein begegnet methodisch nur auf dem Wege zum Man” (178).

¹⁸This gloss challenges Theunissen’s contention that Heidegger is compelled to reduce *Mitdasein* to a structural component of Dasein: “*Die Ursprünglichkeit des Mitseins verstellt dergestalt die Ursprünglichkeit des Mitdaseins*” (1977, 169).

¹⁹Heidegger SZ, 125: “*Das eigene Dasein ebenso wie das Mitdasein Anderer begegnet zunächst und zumeist aus der umweltlich besorgten Mitwelt.*” Theunissen notes, however, that Heidegger commonly leaves off “*zunächst und zumeist,*” thereby suggesting that being-with others is intrinsically inauthentic (see Theunissen 1977, 178).

being-with-one-another with being *authentically* bound to, or bound up with, one another (*eigentliche Verbundenheit*). In the latter case, there is common commitment (not to be confused with *Besorgen*) to the same matter (*Sache*), as that bond makes possible what is rightly the matter (*die rechte Sachlichkeit*), namely, what “frees up the other for this freedom for herself” (Heidegger SZ, 122). With this reference to an authentic way of being-with-one-another, Heidegger explicitly broaches the theme of existential socialization.

Directly in the wake of this reference, Heidegger proceeds to make that theme even more explicit, i.e., to show how socialization, no less than individualization, is inherent in existence. He does so by iterating two common tropes in his existential analysis. The first such trope is the phrase “being matters to [or is at issue for] Dasein in its being itself” (*worum es ihm in seinem Sein selbst geht*). The second trope is the phrase “for-the-sake-of.” The relevance of things within-the-world as a whole and, ultimately, the totality of meaningfulness depend upon what they are for-the-sake-of, i.e., Dasein. They are for-the-sake of the being of Dasein or, equivalently, its worldhood, as is Dasein itself (Heidegger SZ, 84, 123, 181). Picking up on the first of these tropes, Heidegger notes that being-with others is inherent to the being of Dasein that matters to it. He immediately adds that “Dasein, as being-with, is essentially for the sake of others,” and, after placing “being existentially for the sake of others” in direct apposition to “being-with,” he observes that the corresponding pre-thematic disclosedness or understanding of others is part of what makes up the meaningfulness, i.e., worldhood in general (SZ, 123, 181).

The meaningfulness of the world, Dasein’s worldhood, i.e., the condition of the possibility of its projects, concerns, and uses of implements within-the-world, thus coincides with being for-the-sake-of others. In other words, if the world is for the sake of Dasein, it is so only because it is also for-the-sake-of others (more precisely, others who are here with Dasein). Heidegger outlines how Dasein is authentically for the sake of others by appeal to an authentic solicitude, one that, instead of leaping in for others and thereby dominating them, leaps ahead to provide for the conditions for them to be authentic, “helping [them] become transparent to themselves *in* their care and *free* for *it*” (SZ, 122). In certain important respects, these remarks are meager, to be sure; you’d hardly be able to build a public policy around them alone. Nevertheless, they illustrate that a distinctive sort of socialization is, as Heidegger puts it, “clamped together” (*verklammert*; which can also mean “interlocked in an embrace”) with authenticity (SZ, 122).

Discourse and the Primordial Socialization of Dasein

There is a further existential phenomenon that indicates how profoundly socialization reaches into the very fabric of existence on Heidegger’s account, though the interpretation of it is a matter of some controversy. That phenomenon is discourse or talk (*Rede*), an existential that is “equiprimordial” with the “fundamental existentials,” i.e., disposition (*Befindlichkeit*) and understanding, and, indeed, even

constitutive of them (Heidegger SZ, 161). Though it perhaps scarcely needs mentioning, Heidegger notes that discoursing or talking is inherent to being-with and, indeed, he characterizes discourse as “language in an existential sense.” In order to appreciate the significance of the equiprimordiality of discourse with disposition, we might consider the role that language plays in constituting, formulating, clarifying, intensifying, or alleviating feelings. So, too, we develop understanding and know-how by imitating others and, not least, imitating what they say in displaying or even teaching us a skill. The connection between discourse and understanding becomes clear, Heidegger submits, when we consider how frequently ‘hearing’ or ‘listening’ and ‘understanding’ serve as synonyms. We cannot hear what someone is saying in a language that we do not understand. “Listening to . . . is the existential openness of Dasein as being-with for others” (Heidegger SZ, 163).

When we hear what is said, we do not hear mere sounds but what the talk is about or, as Heidegger puts it, “we are already with the others in the midst of the entity that the talk is about” (*wir sind im vorhinein schon mit den Anderen bei dem Seienden, worüber die Rede ist*). Moreover, even if we pay attention to what is said as such, e.g., to someone’s diction as opposed to what she is talking about, we can do so only on the basis of a social phenomenon, “a foregoing co-understanding” (Heidegger SZ, 164). In other words, the referentiality inherent in language is a social phenomenon; there is no reference without the being-with.

As noted earlier, the status of discourse in the existential analysis is controversial. According to some commentators, Heidegger is committed to “a nonpropositional form of intentionality.” Leaving aside the highly questionable reference to a Heideggerian form of intentionality, these authors tend to differentiate sharply a non-linguistic from a linguistic experience of the world, as though “entities can only be manifest on the basis of a prelinguistic understanding of and affective disposedness to what makes something the being that it is” (Wrathall 2011, 14).²⁰ Thus, on this interpretation, the two fundamental existentials, disposition and understanding, are alike prelinguistic. The understanding in particular is said to be “a practical mastery of things,” a way of uncovering things that “it should be obvious . . . does not require the mediation of language” (Wrathall 2011, 23). Words themselves, we are told, “can only have meaning on the basis of a prelinguistic but meaningful disclosure of the world” (Wrathall 2011, 130f).

This interpretation of Heidegger’s existential analysis need not entail a dismissal of the role of socialization, since presumably dispositions and understanding, even on this interpretation, are fundamentally social. However, by construing language as derivative, it obscures not only the meaning of its equiprimordiality but, more

²⁰See, too, Wrathall’s references to a “prelinguistic disposition” (2011, 32, 54), “prepredicative experience of the world” (19f) and “prepropositional experience of things” (20f, 52). In a recent book Greg Shirley refers similarly to a “pre-predicative” structure and a “pre-verbal” intelligibility (2010, 53, 66).

importantly for our purposes, its social conditions. Not only communication, the third constitutive feature of assertions on Heidegger's analysis, but also reference and predication (their additional features) are social phenomena (SZ, 162f). Most human beings in fact develop language skills between the 9th and 12th month, and, according to the anthropologist Michael Tomasello, what makes language acquisition possible are distinctively social interactions, skills, and cognition, all unique to the human species.²¹ There is also ample reason to suppose that many, perhaps even most human skills are learned through the social mediation of language.

To be sure, Heidegger demonstrates the derivative character of assertions, i.e., how the apophantic as-structure derives from the hermeneutic as-structure, by way of considering theoretical assertions and logical analysis of them. When something handy becomes the object of an assertion and we have our sights from the outset on what is on hand in the handy (*die Vorsicht zielt auf ein Vorhandenes am Zuhandenen*), the primordial structure of circumspective interpretation, taking something as useful, devolves into the determination of its on-handness. But this devolving is the priority of theoretical assertions. Heidegger notes that between them and a silent interpretation absorbed in some concern, there are multiple intermediate stages. Not only, as he adds, can these sentences not be reduced to theoretical assertions without perverting their sense, but discourse and, thereby, socialization underlies a silent interpretation just as it does a soliloquy.

In *Being and Time* the analysis of discourse follows the analyses of dispositions and understanding. Yet just as the fact that the analysis of being-with follows the analysis of being at work (and the workworld) does not entail the latter's primacy over being-with, so, too, the order of presentation of the existentials by no means entails that discourse plays second fiddle to the other primordial existentials.²² By describing discourse as a "primordial existential of disclosedness" and as "existential language," Heidegger underscores that it is not a mere tool, something ready-to-hand for conveying meanings elsewhere disclosed, but is itself a way of disclosing meaning. In this connection, he contrasts discourse as language in an existential sense with language as a "totality of words," in which discourse appears like something ready-to-hand within-the-world (Heidegger SZ, 161). To sum up the point of this section, insofar as discourse is a fundamental existential, Dasein has a fundamentally social character, presenting it with authentic and inauthentic possibilities of speaking—and thus being—with others and with itself.

²¹Countering Chomsky, Tomasello contends that even grammar derives from developmental social phenomena (2003, 5–33, 282–322).

²²Similarly, the fact that Heidegger identified communication as the third of four constitutive components (*konstitutive Momente*) of discourse does not mean that it less essential than the first two (what the discourse is about and what is said as such).

Being with Others in Being unto Death

I have been arguing, on the basis of Heidegger's existential analyses of being-with and discourse, for the thesis that existential individualization entails existential socialization. Yet with the exception of references to his glosses on being-with others authentically and the authentic bonds it entails, I have not yet enlisted any passages from his account of authentic existence. It is now time to turn to that account in order to make the case for that thesis. In Heidegger's account of the individualizing character of death, reviewed earlier, he notes that "every being-with others fails, when it is a matter of one's ownmost possibility-of-being." Yet he immediately adds that this failure in no way signifies that being-with is cut off from authentically being-oneself, and the reason it does not is that being-with is part of the conditions of the possibility of existing at all. What authentically being-oneself does rule out is projecting oneself onto the possibility of the they-self, i.e., ways of being-with one another inauthentically (Heidegger SZ, 263, 271).

This interpretation is born out in Heidegger's subsequent gloss on the insuperable character of death or, as he also puts it, the fact that Dasein's death stands before it as its most extreme possibility, the possibility that cannot be overtaken. Anticipating this possibility frees Dasein from being-lost in the throng of contingent possibilities and previous, typically calcified commitments, enabling it to choose authentically among them. In this context, Heidegger then adds the following two sentences, highlighting the relations to others in each case:

Free for its ownmost possibilities, those determined by the *end*, that is to say, those understood as *finite*, Dasein averts the danger of failing to recognize [*verkennen*], on the basis of its own finite understanding of existence, the possibilities of existence of others that are overtaking it or, misinterpreting them, forcing them back to its own possibility – in order, in this way, to divest itself of its ownmost factual existence. As a possibility that is not shared, death individualizes but only in order, as the possibility that cannot be overtaken, to make Dasein understand that, as being-with, it is for the possibility-of-being of others. (SZ, 264)²³

These sentences are challenging syntactically, let alone hermeneutically. In the first sentence, Heidegger seems to be saying that anticipating death enables Dasein to avoid misconstruing others' existential possibilities, by failing to see that they overtake it or by submitting them to its own possibility in a delusional attempt to overtake its own death. We might further gloss the former alternative as follows. Precisely by way of projecting its death as its most extreme, i.e., individualizing possibility, one that it cannot overtake, Dasein exists in an authentically social way, i.e., with an appreciation of the fact not only that others respectively have this

²³Heidegger SZ, 264: "*Frei für die eigensten, vom Ende her bestimmten, das heißt als endliche verstandenen Möglichkeiten, bannt das Dasein die Gefahr, aus seinem endlichen Existenzverständnis her die es überholenden Existenzmöglichkeiten der Anderen zu verkennen oder aber sie mißdeutend auf die eigene zurückzuzwingen—um sich so der eigensten faktischen Existenz zu begeben. Als unbezügliche Möglichkeit vereinzelt der Tod aber nur, um als unüberholbare das Dasein als Mitsein verstehend zu machen für das Sinkönnen der Anderen.*"

same sort of possibility but also that their possibilities overtake Dasein itself. So construed, existing authentically by anticipating death entails not only solidarity but justice (indeed, intergenerational justice in particular, since the possibilities of subsequent generations overtake those of earlier ones).

This gloss of the first sentence quoted above is speculative, to be sure. Nonetheless, Heidegger's mention of the necessity of countenancing the possibilities of others that overtake Dasein runs counter to the contention that authentic being-with-one-another, by virtue of springing from Dasein's individualization, has the character of non-obligatoriness or a lack of bonds with others.²⁴ Authentic individualization does entail a differentiation of Dasein from others generally but that differentiation, while freeing Dasein from the crowd, neither diminishes the fact that Dasein exists for the sake of others nor removes the demand to recognize others' own possibilities. To the contrary, Dasein is individually authentic only by existing for others and countenancing their own possibilities, not least those that overtake Dasein's own possibilities.

As for the second sentence quoted above (indicating the other alternative avoided by anticipating death), its meaning is clearer, since it echoes the earlier remarks about dominating others and thus being-with them authentically. By citing how the anticipation of death avoids both alternatives, it is clear that the liberating and authentic character of that anticipation entails, in Heidegger's eyes, not only a proper understanding, consideration and indulgence, of others' possibilities but *being for them*. In the second sentence of the cited text, Heidegger locates the purpose of the individualizing character of death precisely in thus socializing Dasein, making it, as being-with, for others' possibilities.

This stress on the engagement of others' authentic possibilities that is entailed by being authentic is emphatically iterated in the account of resoluteness. Far from isolating the authentic selfhood of Dasein, resoluteness "pushes" Dasein into being solicitously with others. It first enables Dasein "to let others who are with it 'be' in their ownmost possibility-of-being and to co-disclose this [possibility] in the solicitude that liberates by leaping ahead" (Heidegger SZ, 298). Resolute Dasein, he adds, can become the conscience of others, and being with one another authentically springs from this resoluteness.

Being-Historical and Being a People

Heidegger also broaches the topic of authentic sociality in his account of the historicity of Dasein. In order to explicate that historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*),

²⁴Theunissen 1977, 179; "Das vom Tod geweckte Verständnis für das eigenste Seinkönnen der Anderen hat die Gestalt des Seinlassens (Heidegger SZ, 298). Das Seinlassen aber, das positive die Anerkennung des Eigensten der Anderen darstellt, ist negativ die Auflösung aller direkten Verbindungen zwischen den Anderen und mir."

Heidegger elaborates the sense in which an authentic happening (*Geschehen*) is inherent in existing authentically. To exist authentically is to anticipate death resolutely as one's most defining possibility and to project other possibilities for oneself accordingly, in the light of that resolute anticipation. In other words, we exist authentically by coming to terms with our thrown, finite condition. Resolutely taking over the thrownness of one's factual "here" (*Da*) entails at the same time a resolve with respect to one's situation, such that one retrieves and projects factual possibilities. While the existential analysis excludes any specific determination of factual possibilities to be projected, Heidegger adds, it cannot foreclose the question of the source from which possibilities can be gathered in general (or gathered at all, *überhaupt*).

Those possibilities cannot be gathered from death, the possibility that cannot be overtaken. The anticipation of this singular possibility secures the fullness and authenticity of the resoluteness only by throwing Dasein back into its factual situation with others. That situation is dominated by a heritage, an inherited set of interpretations of being-here. Far from retreating from that heritage, "authentic existentiell understanding in each case takes up the chosen possibility" from it (as well as against it and in turn for it) (Heidegger SZ, 383). Death continues to provide Dasein with the proper leverage ("bringing Dasein into the simplicity of its fate"), but it is the leverage needed to select authentic possibilities. The more authentically Dasein understands itself on the basis of the possibility that is most its own, the more "unequivocally and non-contingently" does it find the possibilities of its existence. "By this means we designate the primordial happening of Dasein, a happening which lies in authentic resoluteness and in which it *hands itself over* to itself, free for death, in an inherited but at the same time chosen possibility" (Heidegger SZ, 384).

Dasein's historicity consists accordingly in what happens when it chooses from its inherited possibilities in view of its authentic possibility, its anticipation of death. Against the backdrop of this account of Dasein's historicity, Heidegger notes that this happening is a "co-happening" (*Mitgeschehen*) and determined as *destiny*, a term that designates "the happening of the community, the people" (SZ, 384). Destiny is not a collection of individual fates, Heidegger notes and, presumably by way of explanation, he adds that the fates are already guided from the outset "in being-with-one-another in the same world and in the resoluteness for specific possibilities." The shift here from consideration of this happening (historicity) as something individual to something communal, from consideration of it as an individual fate to a people's destiny is patent. Yet, despite the populist or communitarian reading of these remarks, their meaning is far from transparent. How does being together in the same world combine with individual resoluteness and, indeed, do so to make up a destiny that has already guided individual fates from the outset?

Heidegger provides some clues by following up these remarks with the following lines: "In communication and in struggle, the power of destiny first becomes free. The fateful destiny of Dasein in and with its 'generation' makes up Dasein's full, authentic happening" (SZ, 384f). Here, in this first summary answer to the question

of “the basic constitution of historicity,” Heidegger declares in no uncertain terms that historicity—i.e., the happening that constitutes Dasein’s being—is communal in a quite specific sense. The key to Dasein’s historicity is its destiny, a destiny that unfolds in communication and in struggle, presumably as central ways that being together in the same world combines with resolutely taking up specific possibilities. In the basic constitution of Dasein’s historicity, its individual fate is wedded to a specific communal destiny—the destiny of its generation. “The fateful destiny of Dasein in and with its ‘generation’ makes up the full, genuine happening of Dasein” (Heidegger SZ, 384).

Heidegger does not spell out what he means by ‘generation’ in this connection. Instead he simply refers to Dilthey’s concept of generation, where it serves as a “natural, inner measure of the time of spiritual movements” (1957, 41–42n1). It designates contemporaries within a time-span (*Zeitraum*) of approximately 30 years, the typical time from birth to the onset of a new generation. The “same generation” designates for Dilthey the generation of those who have grown up alongside one another, from childhood to maturity. This common happenstance gives rise to a deeper relation, given receptivity to the same influences in their youth and given an ongoing dependency upon the same major facts and changes of their era. A generation thus forms a more closed-knit circle, where the individuals of that generation are “bound together into a homogeneous whole” (Dilthey 1957, 37).²⁵ While the extent to which Heidegger means to incorporate these details of Dilthey’s account of generation is unclear,²⁶ he plainly conceives Dasein to be authentically bound up with others in ways that are determined by its being of a generation. Its authenticity consists in retrieving those possibilities that it is already and, “thereby, in being in the moment for ‘its time’”—the time of its generation (Heidegger SZ, 385).²⁷

Once again, Heidegger sketches authentic socialization here only in broad strokes. Nevertheless, there is no ambiguity in his claim that Dasein’s happening is essentially a co-happening or, equivalently, the happening of a people as its destiny. That destiny, what a people is sent to be, and the fate (“the authentic historicity”) of Dasein are inseparable. Moreover, those fates themselves, while individual, are

²⁵Dilthey distinguishes two broad groups of conditions of “national competence” that affect a generation’s intellectual accomplishments and bring about “the formation of a sum of individuals homogeneously determined by them”: the state of the intellectual culture, encompassing previous achievements, at the time the generation is forming, on the one hand, and the conditions of the surrounding life, including social, political, cultural circumstances as well as newly emerging intellectual facts, on the other (1957, 38).

²⁶As Jeffrey Barash notes, Heidegger does not simply extrapolate Dilthey’s account, since the latter is primarily epistemological, not ontological. Whereas Dilthey conceives a generation as an “interrelation of appearances” (the phrase is Dilthey’s), Heidegger is bent on conceiving it as a source of the conditions of the possibility underlying the appearances in which individuals and community are interrelated (see Barash 2005, 175ff).

²⁷Heidegger cites, presumably with approval, Yorck’s remark that the pedagogical task of the state is “to enable, by way of shaping, the individuality of seeing and regarding” (SZ, 403).

themselves communally fashioned. “In being-with-one-another in the same world and in the resoluteness for specific possibilities, the fates are already guided from the outset” (Heidegger SZ, 384). While Heidegger’s sketch of the communal character of Dasein’s historicity raises far more questions than it answers, it demonstrates unmistakably that authentically becoming oneself demands, in his eyes, nothing less than full participation in a community’s struggle to become itself.

Conclusion

Our discursiveness, social conditions and relations—no less than our genetic make-up—shape our existence (our dispositions and understanding) in the most basic way. They constitute how (in carving out our personal and social histories together), we feel, act, and think. The social character of discursiveness (itself an historical phenomenon, glossed under the second subsection above), coupled with our natural condition, entails anything but a neutral condition of being together with others. To the contrary, each of us exists authentically or inauthentically with others, and we only exist authentically when we exist for their sakes in our concrete, historical situations (as noted under the first subsection above). Moreover, anticipating death entails existing for their sakes by coming to terms with their possibilities, not least possibilities potentially antagonistic to and overtaking our own (as the passage cited in full under the third subsection underscores). Finally, when Heidegger turns (as glossed under the fourth subsection above) to the happening that constitutes being authentically historical, he characterizes it as a matter of retrieving one’s heritage with others in a community, while emphasizing that this historicity is a co-happening that is the destiny of a people. In all these ways, being authentic—as elaborated in *Being and Time*—entails an existential socialization.

None of the conclusions summed up in the preceding paragraph is to be understood in ahistorical terms (hence, the opening epigraph from Graf Yorck). The conclusions represent, instead, a summary of Heidegger’s attempt to retrieve authentically the possibilities handed down to him—and to us. While not elucidating anything more than conditions of a “factual ideal,” they underscore the existential necessity of authentic socialization or, in other words, the existential imperative that existential individualization is a mutual affair, involving a mutual resolve to exist for one another. In a 1925 letter to Arendt, Heidegger provides an apt summation of this point:

And still one would like to ‘say’ something and to offer oneself to the other, but we could only say that the world is no longer mine and yours—but *ours*—only that what we do and achieve belongs not to you *and* me but to us. [...] And only that all kindness to others and every unforced, authentic act is *our* life. Only that joyful struggle—and the definitive commitment to something chosen—are ours. (*Letters: 1925–1975*, 19)²⁸

²⁸I am grateful to Megan Altman for reminding me of this telling passage.

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Chapter 21

“Demanding Authenticity of Ourselves”: Heidegger on Authenticity as an Extra-Moral Ideal

Mark A. Wrathall

Introduction: Authenticity’s Challenge to Morality

The idea of authenticity exerts a powerful influence on the modern imagination. It is not hard to say in a loose sense what authenticity is. Authenticity is living life in your own way, rather than submitting yourself to the expectations and desires of others.

This paper was written as a companion piece to “Autonomy, Authenticity, and the Self” (Wrathall [forthcoming](#)), and in some instances presupposes arguments I made in that article. I have had the chance to work through different elements in my interpretation of Heidegger’s account of selfhood, guilt and authenticity in a variety of settings, including presentations at the annual meeting of the American Society for Existential Phenomenology, the *Seminar on Selfhood, Authenticity and Method in Heidegger’s Being and Time, Division 2* sponsored by the British Academy, the *History of Philosophy Workshop* held at the Humanities Research Center at Rice University, the University of New Mexico, Claremont Graduate University, the annual meeting of the *Southwest Seminar in Continental Philosophy*, and at *Ungründe: Perspektiven Prekärer Fundierung*, a conference sponsored by the Freie Universität Berlin, at the 2013 meeting of the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association, at the Philosophy Forum at Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia, at the Philosophy Department Colloquium at California State University Northridge, at the Post-Kantian Seminar in Philosophy at the University of Warwick, at the Institutskolloquium at the University of Potsdam, the 2014 meeting of the Heidegger Circle, and the Griffith Lecture at George Washington University. I’ve benefitted from numerous discussions, questions, and challenges posed to the interpretation on offer here, and I’m grateful to all those people who participated in these events. Among the many who have helped me think through these issues, several are deserving of special acknowledgment, including Daniel Dahlstrom, Wayne Martin, Taylor Carman, Samantha Matherne, Justin White, Beatrice Han-Pile, Iain Thomson, David Cerbone, Charles Siewert, Denis McManus, Julian Young, Megan Flocken, Kaity Creasy,

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In popular philosophy, popular culture, literature, and the arts alike, the virtues of ‘being yourself,’ of ‘being true to yourself,’ of ‘finding yourself,’ of ‘expressing your own values/opinions/taste,’ and so on, are thought to lead to a ‘better,’ ‘truer,’ or ‘higher’ form of life. Or, at the very least, the authentic life is considered more interesting and aesthetically pleasing than a life lived in submission to social expectations or conventional norms. But authenticity’s hostility toward conformity naturally raises concerns about the moral and ethical status of an authentic life. It suggests that being true to oneself requires a willingness to place in question or suspend the hold that conventional morality and ethical norms have over us. And so some see authenticity, for better or worse, as an ideal that stands as an alternative to and often in competition with traditional moral and ethical ideals. But others have argued that the authentic life is morally praiseworthy (or at least can be, within certain moral communities), or even that authenticity is an essential component of a moral existence. Charles Guignon points out that “the ideal of authenticity first emerged as part of an attempt to lay a foundation for a moral stance that is more authoritative and better grounded than the tendency to follow the crowd and be a team player that dominates so much of everyday existence” (2008, 279). Guignon nicely sums up the ambiguous moral status of authenticity:

On the one hand, the character ideal of authenticity is seen as offering a replacement for the now-lost access to a timeless, objective, universally binding source of guidance in dealing with moral questions. Being authentic was supposed to provide us with dependable insights into how we should act as moral agents in situations that pose difficult ethical challenges. It counsels you to ‘be yourself’, to ‘do what feels right’, or to ‘follow your conscience’, and it assumes that our inner feelings and inclinations will provide us with guidance in a godless world. On the other hand, there is the growing recognition that the inner self, far from being a totally loving and altruistic being, is endowed with a capacity for cruelty, hostility, and aggression that is as much a part of our original nature as are the morally acceptable inclinations we commend. Given this truth about our nature, genuine authenticity comes to be seen as a matter of giving uninhibited expression to these tendencies, and this means rejecting the sorts of ‘making nice’ and common courtesy of so-called ‘polite society.’ (2008, 280–81)

The ambiguous status of authenticity is clearly on display in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, perhaps the most influential and detailed philosophical account of authenticity. It is notoriously difficult to pin down Heidegger’s ultimate assessment of the moral or ethical import of authenticity. This becomes evident when, for instance, Heidegger sets out to offer “a more precise definition” of inauthenticity (SZ, 175–76) through an analysis of falling (167 ff.). “Falling” is Heidegger’s name for our tendency to let ourselves be completely absorbed in standardized and conventional ways of interacting with each other and the surrounding world. Falling is thus an important impetus toward inauthentic forms of life. In introducing the notion of falling, Heidegger muses that “it might not be superfluous to remark that the interpretation [of falling] has a purely ontological aim, and *doesn’t have the*

slightest intention of offering a moralizing critique of everyday human existence [Dasein]” (SZ 167, emphasis supplied).¹ Similar claims are made when discussing other elements of an inauthentic existence. “Falling, disintegration (*der Zerfall*), and all these structures” of an inauthentic existence, Heidegger explains, “have nothing immediately to do with morals (*Moral*) and moral obligation (*Sittlichkeit*) or the like” (GA 20, 391).² Heidegger continues to repeat such claims in subsequent retrospective comments: “the terms ‘authenticity’ and ‘inauthenticity,’” he wrote in “The Letter on Humanism,” “do not imply a moral-existential . . . distinction” (GA 9, 332–33).³ Such remarks have led a few commentators to deny that authenticity has any evaluative content at all. It should be taken, they argue, as a purely structural notion.⁴ Yet Heidegger’s treatment of authenticity in evaluative terms is undeniable. He speaks dismissively of inauthenticity’s tendency to “obscure everything” through its “insensitivity to every difference of level and genuineness,” while praising the “sober understanding” of authenticity, an understanding that is accompanied by an “unshakeable joy” when it “brings one without illusions into the resoluteness of ‘taking action’.” So it should come as no surprise when Heidegger declares openly that his “ontological interpretation” of human existence is grounded in authenticity understood as “a factual ideal” (SZ, 310). Authenticity, moreover, is something that human existence “does not merely make manifest as an *existentiell* possibility, but rather it *demand*s it of itself” (SZ, 267, emphasis in original).

On the whole, then, it seems clear that Heidegger considers authenticity to be an extra-moral ideal—one to which we are subject, but an ideal that is not subservient to the demands of morality. But how are we to understand this relative independence of authenticity from other moral or ethical ideals? John Richardson sums up well the views of most commentators when he notes: “I think it is clear that *Being*

¹ Parenthetical page references in the text refer to the page numbers of the seventh German edition of *Sein und Zeit* (1953). These page numbers are found in the margins of both English-language translations of *Being and Time*, as well as in the margins of the *Gesamtausgabe* edition of *Sein und Zeit* (1977). I’ve translated “Dasein” as “human existence.” In ordinary English, anything that *is* “has” existence (the same holds true of “Dasein” in colloquial German). Heidegger uses the term, however, to refer to the kind of existence that we humans have as distinct from, for instance, equipment, other animals, physical objects, and so on. While “Dasein” is not co-extensive with “human existence”—for Heidegger it is an open question what else might be Dasein, and whether every human being is a Dasein—human existence is surely the paradigm case of Dasein. The reader thus will not go far wrong in hearing “Dasein” as “human existence.”

² He also expressly emphasizes: *Was hier vorliegt, ist eine reine Strukturbetrachtung.*

³ See also GA 65, 302: “authenticity should not be understood in a moral-existential way.” If authenticity/inauthenticity were a “moral-existential” distinction, it would mark out different classes of people within a particular moral outlook on the world. In denying that it is such a distinction, Heidegger maintains that the difference between authenticity and inauthenticity cannot be understood in terms of moral goodness or badness. Put differently, the point is that I can’t determine whether I am acting authentically by figuring out the moral significance of my act.

⁴ It is implausible to deny that authenticity is at least sometimes used in an evaluative sense. Taylor Carman suggests, more reasonably, that Heidegger actually has two distinct notions running side by side—a descriptive and a normative sense of “authentic.” See, for example, Carman 2003, 271.

and Time offers authenticity as a ‘value,’ indeed as *the highest or ultimate value*. And I think nearly all of his readers take the idea so” (2012, 167). But what does it mean to say that authenticity is the “highest” or “ultimate” value?

Probably the largest contingent of interpreters who take authenticity as the “highest” value conclude that authenticity is for Heidegger an ideal that overthrows the authority of shared moral norms or ethical rules. Amongst these interpreters, there is a division between those who celebrate this move, and those who bemoan it. Twentieth century existentialists like Sartre and de Beauvoir belong to the former camp, embracing authenticity as a source of value for an age that has seen the decline of traditional moral and ethical obligations. For instance, de Beauvoir argued that “the genuine man will not agree to any foreign absolutes. . . . He will understand that it is not a matter of being right in the eyes of a God, but of being right in his own eyes” (1976, 14). Even though this means giving up the thought that ethics is grounded in an absolute duty to ethical norms, the result, de Beauvoir declared, would *not* be “to repudiate all ethics”: “far from God’s absence authorizing all license, the contrary is the case, because man is abandoned on the earth, because his acts are definitive, absolute engagements. He bears the responsibility for a world which is not the work of a strange power, but of himself” (1976, 14–16). These existentialist thinkers, then, argued that being true to oneself means the demise of the authority of ethical norms or moral laws. But they considered this to be a salutary development in human history, because without rules or laws licensing behavior, we have to act in such a way that we can of our own accord stand behind and affirm our actions. Camus calls this “living without appeal”—that is, only doing what one could *own*, without appealing to anything outside of oneself for justification.

But many other commentators have seen in Heideggerian authenticity the seeds of a profoundly amoral or immoral stance on the world. Perhaps not surprisingly, Heidegger’s embrace of National Socialism is often advanced as a cautionary illustration of the dangers of taking authenticity as the highest ideal. Philipse sums up the judgment of a long line of critics, arguing that “by relegating moral and political norms to the domain of inauthenticity (*das Man*), Heidegger destroyed all possible moral obstacles to a totalitarian choice” (1998, 265).⁵

But there are other ways to think about what it would mean for authenticity to be a “highest” or “ultimate” value. In his own rare comments on morality Heidegger himself indicated that, far from undermining or destroying the authority of moral norms, he thought of his existential analytic of authenticity as uncovering “the existential condition for the possibility of the ‘morally’ good and for that of the ‘morally’ evil – that is, for morality in general and for the possible forms which this may take factually” (SZ, 286). Such transcendental-sounding claims lead some interpreters

⁵Indeed, Philipse himself believes that the concept of authenticity does more than deprive us of obstacles for resisting totalitarianism; he thinks it actually provides the psychological motivation that compels one toward totalitarianism: “Once Dasein has become authentic by liberating itself from Standard morality, life becomes unbearable, and the liberated individual will seek to shake off the burden of radical individuation (*vereinzelnung*) by joining a collectivist mob” (1998, 265).

to see authenticity as a kind of “second order value” (to quote John Richardson)—a value that has only “indirect authority over other values” (2012, 168). In this vein, William Blattner rejects the idea that there is in Heidegger “an imperative to override morality in the name of some existentialist conception of ‘authenticity,’” seeing instead in Heidegger a “*transcendental gesture*,” (forthcoming) according to which Heidegger’s real concern with authenticity is to uncover “the condition of the possibility of agency” (2013, 322).⁶ For transcendental readers of Heidegger, then, authenticity is not necessarily at odds with moral norms. Blattner observes: “Heidegger’s conception of resoluteness does not *require* . . . that one break ranks with the public and go one’s own direction” (2013, 332). Along similar lines, Richardson explains: “because Heidegger wants to change us at the ‘transcendental’ level, and not by specifying a different aim for our projects, he denies that he is offering us a value. Authenticity is a different relation to all our projects and values, and need not give us *different* such projects [B]ecoming authentic is . . . itself a meta-project” (2012, 167–68). But if authenticity doesn’t inevitably lead to a break with conventional moral norms, it is nevertheless taken as licensing us (and perhaps requiring us) to jettison those norms when they are inconsistent with our “different” meta-project. According to Steven Crowell, for instance, the analysis of authenticity yields the following transcendental insight: it is only our “concrete practical identities” that can “provide the necessary ‘ends’ or standards of success or failure. And on Heidegger’s view, morally practical reasoning is also tied to such identities, since moral responsibility cannot be defined in terms of reason or law as the criterion for a concrete, but identity-transcending, universal good. Because Dasein is always an issue for itself, such goods are also always at issue” (2013, 303). I think there is something importantly correct about the transcendental focus on the conditions of agency when reading of *Being and Time*. But the transcendental approach can’t account for the immediate relevance of authenticity to morality. That is, I think there is more to be said about the relationship between authenticity and morality than observing that the conditions of the possibility of authenticity are also the conditions of the possibility of our being moral agents. I also disagree that authenticity is ever taken by Heidegger to justify or license us in suspending moral obligations. I think that is the wrong way to conceive of authenticity’s extra-moral status.

Yet another possibility, suggested by commentators like Béatrice Han-Pile and Charles Guignon, is that Heidegger offers authenticity, not as the highest or ultimate value, but as just one value among many others. In certain historically contingent circumstances, authenticity can become a central value. Thus, Han-Pile suggests that we moderns naturally come to regard authenticity as an ideal, given the “demand for responsibility” that “is predominant in our culture,” (2013, 303). Along similar lines, Guignon argues that “valuing authenticity makes sense only in a social context in which freedom is valued by most members of the community” (2008, 287). Once we acknowledge that a preference for authenticity is based in such historically

⁶See also Chap. 13 (“Heidegger on Practical Reasoning, Morality, and Agency”) in Steven Crowell 2013, 282–303.

contingent factors, then we also have to acknowledge that there is nothing inherently desirable about an authentic form of life. This would allow one to decide the conflict between authenticity and moral values in the favor of morality. But grounding authenticity in such historical factors clearly runs afoul of Heidegger's claim to have uncovered something essential about us as beings called to authenticity: "Dasein," the kind of being that we are, "becomes 'essentially' Dasein in authentic existence" (SZ, 323).

* * *

We have seen that Heidegger clearly considers authenticity to be some sort of ideal, although the relationship between authenticity as an ideal and other ideals is less than clear. And we have identified three general approaches to dealing with the conflict between authenticity and moral or ethical ideals. "Existentialist" interpreters take authenticity as directly superseding moral ideals. "Transcendental" approaches see our capacity for authenticity as a condition of the possibility of our being subject to other norms (such as moral norms), but also potentially overriding those other norms. "Historicist" interpreters see authenticity as a historically contingent value that can, but need not be, a component of morality under particular historical and cultural conditions. (And, it goes without saying, commentators vary widely on what precisely they take authenticity itself to be.)

All these views struggle, in other words, to reconcile three features of Heidegger's account of authenticity as an extra moral ideal. First is the claim that authenticity is independent of, and not subservient to, moral ideals. Second is the claim that we become essentially human only when we are authentic (see Heidegger SZ, 323). And third is the claim that existential guilt (which we take up resolutely in authenticity) grounds the possibility of being morally good or morally evil (Heidegger SZ, 286).

The conjunction of the first and second theses leads the existentialist and transcendental interpreters to elevate authenticity to the highest value while differing, of course, on what role authenticity plays in helping us become what we essentially are. For the existentialist, the thought is that we become essentially human only when we take over responsibility for deciding our own values. For the transcendental interpreters, by contrast, the second thesis points to authenticity's role in constituting us as agents.

The historicist interpreters rightly recognize that, precisely because authenticity is independent of moral ideals, its status as a value is neither derivative of nor necessarily incompatible with moral values. But they tend to purchase this gain at too high a cost when they jettison the second claim.

I shall argue that none of these views correctly captures the immediate relevance authenticity bears to moral praiseworthiness or blameworthiness. For transcendental interpreters, the connection between authenticity and morality is too thin. Being authentic does not directly contribute to the moral quality of our acts. For the historicists, the connection is potentially direct but entirely contingent. And for the existentialists, the connection is direct but destructive—it collapses all moral distinctions into the question of authenticity.

In this paper, I want to show how we can do justice to all three theses. I’ll start by offering a more detailed analysis of the fundamental distinctions that tacitly structure Heidegger’s account of authenticity as an ideal (section “[Authenticity as an Ideal](#)”). The structural account of authenticity that emerges will allow us to say more clearly how authenticity relates to other human ideals (section “[Authenticity and Morality: Conflicts and Hierarchies](#)”).

Authenticity as an Ideal

Implicit in Heidegger’s account of authenticity is a distinction between morality and what, in his later writings, Heidegger calls “originary ethics” (*die ursprüngliche Ethik*) or “ethics in a wholly broad and essential sense” (*in einem ganz weiten und wesentlichen Sinne*).⁷ Although Heidegger never offers a general definition of morality, he seems to think of it as focused primarily on the rights and duties we incur in virtue of the particular form of life we share with other human beings. Originary ethics, by contrast, is concerned with human flourishing taken more broadly.⁸ It includes all the distinctively human ways that we comport ourselves. So in addition to a concern with living in a morally upright way, it might also include living in a beautiful or aesthetically pleasing way, living in an environmentally responsible way (“saving the earth” [*das Retten der Erde*] in Heidegger’s vernacular), living in a pious way, pursuing knowledge, and so on. Within ethics in this broadest sense, then, there are many different normative orders to which an agent can be subject (the aesthetic, the ecological, the religious, the epistemological domain, to name a few). A key to understanding Heidegger’s account of authenticity is to recognize that it, like all other ideals, is at home within a specific normative domain. Before considering in section “[Authenticity and Morality: Conflicts and Hierarchies](#)” the relationship between authenticity as an ideal and morality, I want to specify in some detail the normative domain within which authenticity properly belongs. In section “[Ideals and Virtues](#)”, I’ll offer an initial and schematic characterization of authenticity as an ideal. In section “[Normative Domains](#)”, I’ll further define the kind of ideal that authenticity is by determining its domain of application. In section “[Normative Orientations](#)”, I’ll review Heidegger’s argument for the claim that we are subject to authenticity as an ideal.

Ideals and Virtues

Each normative order has its own ideals and virtues. An ideal presents the fullest or completest form of achievement within a normative domain. What counts as good

⁷See, for example, GA 55, 205–06.

⁸See GA 9, 356.

or bad, better or worse, is determined in relation to this ideal. A virtue is a trait that helps us achieve the ideal. In the moral domain, for example, the ideal is moral goodness. The moral virtues might include temperance, patience, kindness, love, and so on.

Heidegger follows Aristotle in treating virtues as dispositions to act appropriately in appropriate circumstances:

Virtue (*Tugend*) belongs to being suitable or useful for something (*taugen*) and, like the Greek “*aretê*”, means fitness (*Tauglichkeit*). *Aretê* is originally also the fitness of a thing in the sense of being good for something. This signification then was narrowed to mean the fitness of human comportment. (GA 19, 169)

Heidegger also follows Aristotle in treating an ideal as an “activity of the soul” (*psuchês energeia*). An ideal, understood as an “activity,” is not merely a disposition or suitability to do something.⁹ It is, as Heidegger puts it, “a determinate possibility of concerned dealing (*Besorgens*), of *praxis*,” or in other words, “a possibility that has been put to work” (GA 18, 100). Heidegger thinks of an ideal as a kind of poise, an engaged readiness for action that discloses what the current situation requires in order to bring out the best in it. Heidegger’s analysis of authenticity as an ideal follows closely Aristotle’s analysis of *eudaimonia* (or happiness) as the ideal or perfection of our being as rational agents. Aristotle argued that the human ideal, the end or goal and happiness of human existence, is a *psuchês energeia kat’ aretên*—an activity of the soul that expresses virtue.¹⁰ The virtues are just those dispositions that allow someone to achieve that active stance which is ideal because it is the completion or fulfillment of his or her nature. As Heidegger puts it in his gloss of Aristotelean *aretê*, virtue “is that which brings some entity in itself into the authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) of its being” (GA 19, 169). While developing his account of authenticity in the 1920s, Heidegger explicitly aligned his notion of authenticity with Aristotle’s account of *eudaimonia* or “happiness.” He insisted that Aristotle understood *eudaimonia* in a “strictly ontological” sense, and repeatedly drew a parallel between Aristotle’s account of *eudaimonia* and his own account of what “makes up the authenticity of the being of human Dasein” (GA 19, 172).¹¹ The connection to Aristotle suggests that Heidegger intends for *Eigentlichkeit* to have a different range of semantic values than its usual English translation, “authenticity.” We should hear in it not just connotations of “originality” but also “actuality,”

⁹This is not to say that a virtue is a mere capacity. It provides me with a real, standing possibility of acting well should the situation arise.

¹⁰It is no accident that, in his lectures on Aristotelian philosophy in the 1920s, Heidegger describes *eudaimonia* as “that which makes up the authenticity of Dasein, of the human being” (GA 18, 75; see also GA 18, 382). While Heidegger does not explicitly call *eudaimonia* an “ideal” in his Aristotle lectures, it is not a stretch to view *eudaimonia* as an Aristotelean ideal.

¹¹See also GA 19, 179 (“Human life in the authenticity of its being consists in . . . *eudaimonia*.”) and GA 22, 188. In the latter passage, Heidegger cites Aristotle’s definition of happiness as “a certain sort of activity of the soul in accord with complete virtue” (1999, 1105a5 ff.; *psuchês energeia tis kat’ aretên teleian*), and glosses it this way: “with regard to the possibility of being which is the highest one according to the meaning of its being,” therein lies the *authenticity* of being.”

Aristotelean “activity.” The *energeia* of the soul is the soul’s ideal state—the one in which it comes properly into its ownmost being. And it is an active state—the active actuality of the soul. The expert of practical wisdom or *phronimos* is constantly perceiving what is required and responding in such a way as to bring out the best in any given situation.

We should understand the “authenticity of the being of Dasein” in a similarly Aristotelian fashion as an ideal state or activity—a way of being poised and ready to act that lets the situation show up in a particular light. Thus, Heidegger explains that authenticity

discloses the particular situation of the ‘there’ in such a way that existence, in taking action, is circumspectively concerned with what is factually available in the environment. Disclosive being amidst what is available in the situation—this means an active letting the environmentally present things encounter one. (SZ, 326)

Authenticity is an active “way of existence”—a poise of “anticipatory resoluteness” which discloses the situation in which we are “already taking action” (SZ, 300). What distinguishes Heideggerian authenticity from other ideals, other active poises, is a matter of how in particular authenticity discloses the current situation—what, in other words, the authentic person perceives the current situation to require. To explain the content of the solicitations that an authentic stance discloses, we need to consider next the domain within which authenticity is at home.

Normative Domains

We get a clearer sense for the ideal of authenticity by specifying its “domain”—that is, the class of activities for which authenticity serves as the standard. Ideals apply to a limited domain—to specific types of actions. When I am a guest at a garden party, for instance, I act within the domain of etiquette. Consequently, if I deliberately knock an object out of the hands of someone else, the significance of my action is informed by the rules of etiquette, and I show up as rude. On the basketball court, by contrast, my actions are not subject to or informed by the rules of party etiquette, and I am encouraged to deliberately knock the basketball out of the hands of my opponents. The understanding of a normative order thus involves an understanding of the domain within which the normative distinctions of that order are operative. An agent is subject to a normative order when the significance of his or her actions is informed by the meaningful distinctions that structure the order. One could say that belonging to a normative domain is a condition of the disclosure of the meaning of certain actions. And conversely all those actions whose significance is determined in relation to the virtues and ideals of the order belong in some sense to the domain.

What, then, is the domain of authenticity? Heidegger’s name for this domain is “existence” (*Existenz*).¹² To “exist,” in Heidegger’s idiosyncratic use of the term, is

¹²Indeed, one might suspect that “authenticity” is shorthand for the frequently-invoked formulation “*die Eigentlichkeit der Existenz*,” “the authenticity of existence.”

to be capable of taking a stand on how one wants to live, of expressing oneself in one's activities in the world. In short, existence is the domain of actions in which we define ourselves as who we are: "because Dasein exists," Heidegger explains, "it determines its own character as the kind of entity it is" (SZ, 259). Another way to put this is to say: the domain of authenticity is the domain of my actions insofar as they determine and express me as a *self*. Authenticity is "the authenticity of the ability-to-be-a-self" (*die Eigentlichkeit des Selbstseinkönnens*; see for example Heidegger SZ, 316). A few years after the publication of *Being and Time*, Heidegger defined it concisely in this way: "we understand by 'authenticity' that mode of human existence wherein man (actually) appropriates himself, that is, coming to himself he becomes *his self* and is able to be his self" (GA 34, 213).

Authenticity is thus an ideal stance or poise that brings out and responds to those features of a situation which are relevant to making me my own self. The authentic person will be the one most tuned in to the ways in which she can determine and reinforce her own character, and will be best at resisting the temptation to surrender her authority over herself to others.

The thought that being a self is a kind of achievement, or that some people are better than others at being themselves, might seem paradoxical. Am I not always myself? To make sense of this paradoxical thought, let's start by considering the elements of the self. Who I am is in part a function of what Heidegger calls "disposedness" (*Befindlichkeit*). My disposedness is the rich texture of character traits, preferences, desires, skills, dispositions, etc., with which I (like everyone else) find myself saddled. Because I always already have a disposedness, I am inclined toward some possibilities and away from others.

In addition, who I am is in part a function of my understanding of the world and my place in it. Heidegger argues that this understanding consists in an ability to "project onto possibilities"—to see, in other words, the significance of any particular object or event in terms of the opportunities for action that it affords me. I understand myself in terms of my "practical identity," where this involves not just a particular social role, but also the rich (and not necessarily coherent) set of possibilities that shape the activities I pursue. The possibilities that help define me always exceed the possibilities I am pursuing at any given time. In my own case, for example, who I am involves all that I do and hope for and wish for in virtue of being a father and professor. It also involves the fact that I could be a screenwriter or finish carpenter. It even involves *not* projecting the meaning of the situations I encounter onto other possibilities on the horizon of my world—being an attorney, a plumber, a chef, and so on. That is, part of what is involved in my understanding the world is my recognition that I am *not* projecting situations onto certain possibilities upon which, counterfactually, I might project them.

Of course, which possibilities are genuinely open to me is in part a function of my traits, my dispositions, my desires, and the world I live in. But since it is underdetermined for each of us which possibilities to pursue, given the possibilities the world affords us and our disposedness, who I am is in some sense always an open question. Heidegger dubs this the "question of existence." And, Heidegger insists, "existence is only decided by the actual Dasein itself [i.e., the particular individual],

in the way it seizes or neglects its possibilities. The question of existence is always only settled through existing itself” (SZ, 12).

It is one thing to argue that the self I am is in some sense open to change or reinvention or reinterpretation. But it is quite another to say that I can be more or less my own self. On what grounds can we distinguish meaningfully between being a self that is my self, and being a self that is not myself?

One way one might try to draw this distinction is to identify the *true* self with some particular feature of my disposedness (a particular desire or preference I happen to have—the real me is the desire to eat donuts or to act in accordance with reasons), or perhaps with some particular project (the real me is my role of being a father). One problem with such an approach, however, is that I can come to be alienated from any desire, preference, goal or project. And that suggests that the real “me” or self is independent of any occurrent property or goal I happen to possess.

As I’ve explored elsewhere ([forthcoming](#)), Heidegger argues that we should think of the self in structural rather than substantive terms. A self, according to Heidegger, is not an occurrent thing, but a particular way or style of inhabiting possibilities. To be a self is (a) to be an ineliminable contributor to events in the world (that is, events would not have unfolded in the way that they did were it not for the involvement of the self), and (b) to be capable of determining for oneself the contribution one will make to events in the world (that is, a self can alter, in ways not reducible to the causes that act upon it, the contribution it makes to events in the world). The contribution that human selves make to the unfolding of events in the world, Heidegger argues, is a result of the particular way in which they integrate their disposedness and projection. And it is in virtue of their ability to alter the particular way in which they have integrated their disposedness and projection that allows them to determine for themselves the contribution they will make to the unfolding of events in the world.

On this model, then, I am “true to myself” when (a) I act in a way that’s expressive of my particular integration of disposedness and projection, and (b) I take responsibility for determining the way I’ve integrated my disposedness and projection. My disposedness and projection are integrated to the degree that my skills, preferences, and traits fit the kind of activities I am involved in pursuing.

That I can fail to be true to myself is a result of the fact that, to a considerable degree, we act in response to the affordances built into the world. Each human setting is organized so as to facilitate or invite particular actions, performed in particular ways. A university lecture hall, for instance, affords certain projects: sitting, listening, taking notes, as well as lecturing, but it is poorly suited for others (dancing, holding multiple private conversations). It is set up to be most easily usable to people who have fostered certain skills, desires, traits (patience, silence, attentiveness). When we’ve acquired the skills for dealing with lecture halls, upon entering the lecture hall one is drawn to act in very specific ways. A different setting—perhaps a basketball arena—is set up to foster different projects and reward different dispositions.

Now, we can become very skillful at navigating each of the different familiar settings we encounter in our everyday world. But as we do that, we tend to surrender our capacity for determining for ourselves how we will integrate our disposedness and projection. We become less our own self, because there is no stability to our integration, and the contours of the ever-changing integration are determined by the anonymous way in which our everyday world is organized and constructed.

If I am an authentic self, by contrast, I will (insofar as possible), take up those projects for which I am disposed (rather than those which my setting imposes on me). Being my own self also involves pursuing my projects in a way that suits me given my particular disposedness (rather than doing them in the way others would have me do them). And being my own self involves altering and refining my disposedness to better suit the projects I take up (rather than being disposed in the way that others would have me be disposed). But integration admits of greater and lesser degrees, and is constantly being limited and constrained by the possibilities the world affords me. This is why being a self is a kind of achievement. In acknowledgment of such constraints, Heidegger argues that authenticity is not a matter of absolute self-determination, but of relative self-determination: authenticity is being the ownmost self (*das eigenste Selbst*). As I achieve an ever more stable and seamless integration of disposedness and projection, my way of opening up the world becomes more and more expressive of me, and less and less an expression of others. (My actions are an expression of others as they are solicited by the various situations I encounter in the world, each of which is organized by what one does in the situation.) I thus become more of an individual, because more of my actions are expressive of me rather than being an expression of what others think I should do. Inauthenticity, by contrast, is being a “they-self” (*das Man-selbst*). A “they-self” acts in a way that is disruptive of its own particularity, because it responds to solicitations that gear it into a generic, public understanding of what is salient and important in each of the different situations it faces, without a concern for how it can remain stably integrated across different situations.

So the domain of existence includes those actions that are relevant to being a self—that is, to playing an ineliminable role in establishing the solicitations of a situation. Not everything we do is equally implicated in this task. Many of the everyday things we do are largely inconsequential for an overall goal of being a self-determining discloser of solicitations. But, depending on what I’ve taken to be at the core of my way of taking a stand on existence, some actions will undermine the integrity that I’m striving to achieve. The authentic person is capable of recognizing when his- or her integrity is at stake, and will act accordingly. I am disclosed as an authentic self when my *particular* desires, dispositions and traits mesh with my particular way of projecting onto possibilities, resulting in each situation lighting up and soliciting me to act in a way that is coherent across my different involvements, and specific to me as an individual. The virtues of authenticity will be those traits that allow me to recognize whether a particular activity will reinforce or undermine my integration.

Normative Orientations

With a clearer sense of the domain within which authenticity belongs and the kind of poise that authenticity is, we can return to the question: why should we regard authenticity as an ideal? Ideals give us an orientation within a normative domain. In saying that a domain has an "orientation," I mean that agents within a domain are directed toward the achievement of ends or at least have the meaning of their actions structured by a sense of "higher" and "lower," "better" or "worse." Agents within a normative domain have a sense, in other words, for what constitutes improvement or deterioration in one's standing within that domain. Of course, one can be subject to a normative order without being motivated to conform oneself to the ideal or ideals of the domain. But whether or not I am so motivated, and whether or not I recognize it in any particular instance, if the meaningful distinctions of a domain inform the meaning of my actions, there is a sense in which I am oriented toward the ideal. For instance, I might not happen to have as a personal end or goal the aim of being a paragon of manners. And yet when I act in a domain structured by the rules of etiquette, the meaning of my actions is informed in part by the degree to which I successfully navigate social expectations regarding polite, well-mannered behavior.

We need to distinguish, then, between being *motivated* by an ideal, and *being subject to a demand*. Someone is subject to a demand so long as the significance of his or her actions is shaped by his or her relationship to the ideal. This demand can be recognized in many different ways. It might be manifest as a desire to improve one's performance. It might be manifest as a sense of embarrassment or shame or disappointment at a failure, or a feeling of pride at a success. It might be manifest as an acknowledgment of the appropriateness of reactions that others have to us. It might take the form of a feeling of tension as one diverges from the ideal, and a feeling of satisfaction or ease as one approaches the ideal. And it can also take the form of a belief that the ideal is the standard to which one ought to conform. One can also become aware of the demand through the actions of others, even if one does not experience oneself as directly subject to that ideal in any of these ways—for instance, when they impose sanctions for violations of a norm or deviations from it. Recognizing a demand, however, is not the same thing as being motivated by the ideal. The latter requires not just a recognition, but an aspiration to live up to the ideal, a desire or inclination to bring my existence into conformity with it.

In claiming that authenticity is an ideal, Heidegger is primarily interested in the *demand* authenticity makes on us, whether we are motivated by it or not. Indeed, he thinks that we are normally motivated to be *inauthentic*. Nevertheless, within the domain of existence, being an ownmost self (that is, an integrated self) is purported to be the ideal in terms of which improvement and deterioration are judged, and in terms of which virtues are defined as virtues. But why should we regard being an ownmost or integrated self as an ideal, as a good toward which we are directed or an end that is demanded of us? What is the evidence for the claim that, within the domain of self-expressive actions, those actions are judged in light of this ideal?

Heidegger makes few direct and explicit comments about the issue of orientation toward authenticity. The first careful working through of the phenomenon of authenticity is found in Division 2, Chap. I of *Being and Time*. The chapter concludes with Heidegger observing that in his preceding discussion, authenticity has emerged “*merely as an ontological possibility*” (266). But Heidegger signals his dissatisfaction with this—it is not enough to show that authenticity is merely a possibility. He also wants to demonstrate that it is a “*factical idea*.” Heidegger notes, however, that he’s not looking for “*a ‘contentful’ ideal of existence that is held before Dasein and forced upon it ‘from the outside’*” (SZ, 266). The scare quotes provide an important interpretive clue, by indicating two features of the kind of ideal Heidegger takes authenticity to be.

First, authenticity is not “*contentful*” or, as I put it above “*substantive*.” Authenticity has no content that is present in each case of authentic existence because there are many ways to achieve an integration between our projects and our disposedness. There is no attitude, activity, or end that all authentic people need to have in common.¹³ Thus, if I am authentic, it is not because I am beholden to any particular substantive vision of how I ought to exist.

Second, in saying that authenticity is an “*ideal of existence*” (*Existenzideal*) that can’t be “*forced on us ‘from the outside,’*” Heidegger suggests that the normative domain of existence must itself provide the orientation toward authenticity. That means that the justification for regarding authenticity as an ideal cannot be grounded in the normative structures of other domains. Heidegger, for instance, consistently refuses to justify authenticity as an ideal by appealing to any moral or practical advantages that might flow from an authentic existence. He’s not directly interested in the question whether authenticity contributes to the quality of our “*being with others*.” This would make authenticity a merely hypothetical or contingent ideal. Heidegger wants instead, as I noted in the introductory section, to show that it is essential to us as human beings.

Thus, Heidegger’s argument for treating authenticity as an ideal is meant to be “*internal*,” to follow simply in virtue of our being the kind of beings that we are (that is, to our belonging to the domain of existence). How should we understand this purportedly self-imposed orientation toward authenticity? Where does it come from? At the very end of Division 2, Chap. I, Heidegger poses directly the question of the source of this orientation: “*Does [human existence] also demand, merely by reason of its ownmost being, an authentic ability to be which is determined by anticipation?*” (266; emphasis in original). The following chapter—Division 2, Chap. II—is offered as a positive answer to that question. It is in an experience of the call of conscience, Heidegger explains, that we recognize that we are subject to a demand to be authentic.

¹³Even integration itself need not be an end. That is, an authentic person will achieve an integration, but they need not have as their aim or goal integration. Indeed, aiming for authenticity as one’s goal is like what Heidegger has in mind when he speaks dismissively of “*ungenuine*” forms of authenticity.

The correct hearing of the call [of conscience] thus amounts to an understanding of oneself in one’s ownmost ability-to-be – that is, to the self-projection onto one’s ownmost authentic ability-to-become-guilty. . . . In understanding the call, Dasein is *subject to* [hörig] its ownmost possibility of existence. (SZ, 287)

This is, as Heidegger recognizes, a counter-intuitive claim. Most people experience a guilty conscience as motivating us to be more like others, to conform to shared moral norms. Without disputing this fact, Heidegger argues that conscience in fact alerts us to two dimensions of guilt—what one might call “ordinary guilt” and “existential guilt” respectively. Ordinary guilt is a condition in which (a) I am the reason for a lack in the existence of another, and (b) the reason is not a good reason—it doesn’t satisfy the norms that govern our interactions with one another. Existential guilt is structurally similar to ordinary guilt, but the concern is with the legitimacy of, or rational justification for, my own existence rather than my impact on the lives of others. In existential guilt, I lack a good reason for my existence—for being who I am. I am “a being determined by a nothing” (*ein durch ein Nicht bestimmtes Sein*), and that makes me “a null reason” (*einer nichtige Grund*).

The call of conscience, then, is capable of simultaneously alerting me to my guilt with respect to other people, and to my lack of justification for being the person that I am.¹⁴ When I perform some act—perhaps, stealing a donut—and I experience the call of conscience, Heidegger would analyze this experience in the following way. Facet (a): I am conscious that I am the reason for a lack in the donut merchant, and that my reason for being such a lack is inadequate—I have no moral or legal justification for taking the donut. Facet (b): I am conscious that my act of stealing the donut is an expression of who I am—my current set of dispositions and projects have contributed to the situation showing up as one in which I was moved to take the donut—and I have no good reason for being the kind of person who would take a donut.

The ontological implications of the call are found in facet (b). When I experience a guilty conscience, I experience myself as answerable for my actions because my actions express who I am. The call of conscience, in a sense, focuses my attention on the possibility of existential freedom—it shows me that I could take up a different form of existence, and in doing so that I could not only still be who I am, but be who I am more clearly, consistently, enduringly—provided, that is, I could integrate more fully my disposedness and my projects. If I experience my guilt as burdensome, then I become conscious of myself as a self I don’t wish to be. This is precisely an experience that manifests a certain dis-integration of the self, a certain conflict between my disposedness and my projects. There are a couple of different ways of responding to the experience of dis-integration. One is to engage in a cover-up: rather than redressing the conflict in oneself, one tries to avoid situations where it might manifest itself. One does what one can, in other words, to avoid any actions

¹⁴“This understanding of the caller” as a null reason, however, “may be more or less awake in the factual hearing of the call” (Heidegger SZ, 275). That is, in any particular instance I may not be attending to the second facet. Or I might be only vaguely aware of it.

that might uniquely express the self. Alternatively, I might strive for a heightened integration. The “authentic hearing” of the call takes it as showing not that I am too autonomous—too much of my own self, and thus in need of returning to the conformity of the anyone—but rather that I am not yet autonomous enough. The remedy for a guilty conscience on this approach is to be more of my own self, better integrated, less prone to let situations draw on impulses or motivations or drives or projects that I would disown.

Whether I react to the call of conscience authentically or inauthentically, I see that I am answerable for my actions because they express who I am. They are expressions of the self. But this insight is applicable to all actions for which I am answerable, whether they are accompanied by the pangs of a guilty conscience. So when we hear the call of conscience in a facet (b) way, we are brought to a recognition of a constitutive fact about action. To act is to be answerable for what I do, that is, to perform bodily movements that are attributable to the self rather than the product of forces independent of me. And I am more answerable for what I do to the degree that my action is an expression of the way my projects are grounded in my disposedness. If this is right, then being a self is an end or demand internal to acting itself. Insofar as I act, I am committed to being a self, and the more of an ownmost self I am, the more my actions are attributable to me (and thus, the more clearly they count as actions). But I am most my own self when I am authentic. Therefore, it follows that insofar as I act, I am oriented toward being authentic as an ideal of agency.¹⁵ Authenticity is the ideal for agents *qua* agents. I am a “good” agent when my bodily movements express who I am, rather than being produced by features of the world or myself that I experience as alien to me. I am faulty as an agent when I don’t assert myself, when I surrender to a “haphazard ‘being taken along’ by nobody, through which Dasein entangles itself in inauthenticity” (Heidegger SZ, 268).

Heidegger calls the authentic response to the call of conscience *Entschlossenheit*. *Entschlossenheit* or “resoluteness” is a stance of having decided or determined to be who you are and, Heidegger insists, once you are resolute, it changes the way situations show themselves to you. When “the self is resolved upon the there, as which the self has to be in existing”—that is, when I have determined my own self—then the situation “first discloses itself to the self” in such a way that it has a “particular factual affordance-character” (Heidegger SZ, 300). In other words, in resoluteness, certain situations will show up as affording and soliciting actions that are specific to me. As a result, the situation becomes for a resolute being what Joseph Schear has coined an “existential situation,” (2013, 360) that is, a setting for action in which the individual’s form of life is at stake. Put differently, when the circumstances are disclosed to me in terms of what they afford me in particular,

¹⁵To reemphasize, this does not mean that being myself is necessarily an end of action in the sense of being an aim or goal intended in the action. In fact, I am not genuinely a self if I’m doing things in order to be a self. The claim is rather that an ideal can implicitly mark an action, affect its significance, without directly serving as an end or goal of the action itself. Indeed, an ideal can govern an action even when the action aims at an end or goal directly incompatible with that ideal.

because they are polarized by myself, then my actions are maximally self-expressive actions, and who I am is maximally implicated in what I do.

That authenticity is an ideal of action follows, then, from what we might call a self-expressive or self-disclosive view of action.¹⁶ In particular, Heidegger argues that actions are constituted as actions when my bodily movements are a response to a solicitation that I receive because of the particular individual that I am. When I play a role in organizing the affordances and solicitations of the environment, then the movements of my body count as an expression of the self. The greater the role I play in organizing the affordances and solicitations of the environment, the more my bodily movements are actions expressing me, and the less they are products of the environment for which I am not answerable. So for me to undertake to act is for me to subject myself to a demand to be as much of a self as possible—to play as much a role as possible in polarizing the world into solicitations to action. I do that to the degree that my disposedness and projections are integrated in a way that is peculiar to me.

* * *

With these background considerations in mind, we can specify the nature of authenticity with considerably more precision. While authenticity *is* an ethical ideal in the broad sense, the contrast between authenticity and inauthenticity is not a moral distinction. Morality is just one of the normative orders that belong to ordinary ethics, and is concerned with the ‘demands that are issued to our existing being with others’ (see Heidegger SZ, 282). Other normative orders include, for instance, aesthetics and etiquette. One can treat each craft—carpentry, football, rock music—as an independent normative order, with its own ideals and virtues. The order to which authenticity belongs is the domain of existence, that is, the domain of self-expressive actions. Within that domain, we stand under a demand to be a maximally integrated self. The demand to be authentic does not come from an external source. It comes from the individual him- or herself. It does not present me with any specific content. Instead, it discloses me as a success or failure to the degree that my particular integration of disposedness and projection interacts with the situation to produce solicitations to action that are indexed to me in my particularity. Consequently, authentic actions are more expressive of me and, to the degree they reinforce the integration between my disposedness and projection, make me more of my own self.

Authenticity and Morality: Conflicts and Hierarchies

Let’s return, then, to the question of the relation of authenticity to other orders, especially the moral order. Are they essentially in conflict? Is there a hierarchical relationship?

¹⁶See my “Autonomy, Authenticity, and the Self” ([forthcoming](#)).

We can start by observing that normative orders are bounded—that is, they obtain within a limited domain. In other words, it is not the case that all actions are informed by the same normative distinctions. For instance, the rules of etiquette are not always in force, and we are not always expected to be polite. An individual or an action can also be (and ordinarily is) simultaneously subject to many different normative orders. We can all think of people who are smart but tasteless, comments that are honest but rude, and so on. When an action or individual is simultaneously subject to two different domains, the governing ideals of these different normative orders can potentially come into conflict with one another. It is not at all obvious that there is always a clear hierarchy of obligations—that one ideal necessarily and always “trumps” another ideal. So, for instance, one person might consider it more important to be polite than to be honest, more important to be morally good than law-abiding, and so on. I should add that, in practice, the relationship between the different normative domains is somewhat messier than I’ve suggested thus far. Because one and the same individual belongs to a multiplicity of orders, there is, perhaps inevitably, considerable leakage from one domain to another. Some domains or ideals are also imperialistic, and try to appropriate the others. Moreover, the virtues of one domain might well be virtues of another domain as well—that is, one character trait or disposition might serve a number of different active stances on the world. It is no surprise, then, that the ideal of one domain often influences the ideal of another domain.

But one ideal can only be directly incompatible with another if they share the same domain. Those who argue that authenticity is essentially incompatible with morality, it seems to me, take it for granted that authenticity is an ideal at home in the domain of morality, in which case it makes sense to ask whether authenticity or moral goodness is a higher ideal. There’s no reason to suppose, and plenty of reasons to doubt, that Heidegger thinks that authenticity is an ideal that belongs to the same domain as morality (see thesis 1 above).

As far as I can tell, the primary textual basis for thinking that there is an inherent conflict between authenticity and morality is this passage from *Being and Time*:

On what basis, does Dasein disclose itself in resoluteness? What should it decide to be? *Only* the resolution itself can give the answer. It would be a complete misunderstanding of the phenomenon of resoluteness if one should want to suppose that this consists simply in taking up and helping yourself to possibilities which have been laid out in front of you and recommended to you. *The resolution is precisely the disclosive projection and determination of what is factually possible at the time.* To resoluteness, the indefiniteness characteristic of every ability-to-be into which Dasein has been factually thrown, is something that necessarily belongs. Only in a resolution is resoluteness sure of itself. The existentiell indefiniteness of resoluteness never makes itself definite except in a resolution. (298)

Since, on the face of it, this passage decidedly does *not* rule out the possibility of resolving on a morally good life, it is not immediately obvious to me why it should be thought to prove the existence of a conflict between authenticity and morality. Perhaps the thought is that a moral action is only moral if it is done *because* it is the

moral thing to do. Since Heidegger seems to deny here that moral norms can give a resolute person a reason to decide to be anything, the conclusion is that an authentic person can't be moral.

But this passage isn't about reasons for performing actions. It is rather about resolving to integrate a certain set of dispositions into one's character. Heidegger's specific aim in this passage is to disabuse us of the thought that in deciding who to be, we can step outside of ourselves to decide objectively from among well-defined, pre-existing possibilities. For the reasons we outlined in section “[Authenticity as an Ideal](#)”, such a view is incoherent. The authentic possibilities for me are not specifiable independently for me. What does it mean for *me* to be a professor? Can I tell what it would be for *me*, given my disposedness, to authentically take up this possibility prior to actually taking it up? Heidegger's answer is a definitive “no.” Moreover, I am myself the basis or ground for my deciding anything. Thus, this passage argues only that we can't, as it were, objectively specify what it means to be authentic, because to be authentic is to achieve an integration of my disposedness and my projects that is particular to me—specific to my preferences, desires, and traits as these are taken up in the life projects I choose to pursue.

Correctly understood, then, the passage in question suggests the precise opposite conclusion from the one that Philippe and other such critics attribute to Heidegger. That is, because one cannot say in advance, outside or an immersion in a concrete world, what we will resolve upon in authenticity, we *a fortiori* cannot exclude the possibility that someone might authentically embrace moral norms or ideals. One might even be persuaded to embrace those moral norms *because* one is persuaded that they are right. If the mark of authenticity is an “ownmost” integration of disposedness and understanding, then a moral life could also be an authentic life, provided that I have integrated the moral norms and standards into my existence. Thus we can conclude that authenticity is not essentially incompatible with other ideals, such as moral goodness.

But I think we can go further, to suggest that authenticity in fact *contributes to*, and is relevant to, moral distinctions. For this claim to be true, we need to find a tighter relationship between being an “ownmost” self and the conditions that contributes to rendering actions morally good or evil. But we've already identified a basis for finding a tighter relationship. Whenever it matters to a domain that the actions performed in that domain express the self, then the authenticity or inauthenticity of the agent will be relevant to that domain. And morality is arguably just such a domain.¹⁷ Gary Watson for one has defended, for instance, a “self-disclosure view” of moral responsibility—that is, the view that we are morally responsible for those actions that express or disclose the self. Watson quotes Dewey in support of this view: “*We are responsible for our conduct because that conduct is ourselves objectified in actions*” (2004, 260; Dewey [1891] 1957, 160–61). If one accepts a self-disclosure account of moral responsibility, then it follows that, all else being equal, *the degree to which an agent is morally praiseworthy or*

¹⁷Even consequentialist theories distinguish between actions, the consequences of which are morally imputable to the agent, and mere happenings.

blameworthy is proportional to the degree to which her conduct is an expression of the self. A principle of this sort would predict, for example, that we are not morally responsible for muscle spasms, accidents, etc.—movements that are not an expression of the self. It also would predict that we hold a leader to be more responsible than a follower—that is, on the assumption that to the degree that someone is following orders, his or her conduct is less an expression of his or her own self than of the one giving the orders. And it also obviously would predict that we would consider someone to be morally superior who performs good actions out of, as Aristotle puts it, “a firm and unchanging state.” This is a central component of Aristotle’s ethics: “for actions in accord with the virtues to be done temperately or justly,” Aristotle notes, “it does not suffice that they themselves have the right qualities. Rather, the agent must also be in the right state when he does them” (1999, 1105a28ff.). The right state, on Aristotle’s account, is an “activity,” a stable poise or active readiness for the situation. This Aristotelian argument is, I take it, the immediate inspiration for Heidegger’s thought that a condition of being maximally morally responsible is that one be maximally authentic, so that one’s conduct is maximally an expression of one’s own self.

Such considerations show, then, that there is no reason to suppose that authenticity trumps morality. At the same time, they also suggest that an authentically moral person will stand in a different relationship to moral norms than an inauthentic person. An authentically moral person will have integrated the rules and standards and norms of morality into their active stance or poise, rather than needing to deliberately follow them or submit to them. For the authentically moral person, the situation will light up in terms of morally salient features, which will solicit automatically a morally appropriate response. For the authentically good or the authentically evil person, the moral significance of every situation will show up, not just as an impersonal reason to act in such and such a way, but as presenting me with that which I must do in order to express and realize the person I am. The inauthentically moral person, by contrast, will do the right thing because ‘that’s what you’re supposed to do’ or out of a concern to behave as others do. Conversely, an authentically immoral person will violate moral norms because their self is so constituted as to make immoral possibilities solicit them to action. The inauthentically immoral person will violate moral norms, not as an expression of their self, but because they are driven to do so by whatever transient urges, desires, beliefs, social pressures, conventional attitudes, etc., are moving them to act at the moment. It thus seems right to me to say that authenticity is a morally relevant category, and might be an essential feature of both the morally good and the morally evil person.¹⁸

¹⁸Of course, much else goes into the determination of praiseworthiness or blameworthiness. What counts as praiseworthy or blameworthy is determined relative to the ideal and within a particular domain. I’m suggesting simply that, in the moral domain, one factor that enters into considerations of praise and blame is whether the action expresses the self. It seems to be a particularly salient factor when we are considering either extremely good or extremely bad actors.

In conclusion, then, authenticity is an ideal of selfhood/agenthood. One is most oneself when one is authentic, and thus authentic actions are more of an expression of the individual than inauthentic actions are. So, as against the historicist reading of Guignon and Han-Pile, I agree with the existentialist and transcendental interpreters: authenticity as an ideal to which we are always subject insofar as we are agents. But it is a mistake to conclude, as the existentialists do, that authenticity necessarily trumps morality. It is equally mistaken to conclude, as the transcendental interpreters do, that authenticity is relevant to morality as a mere transcendental constraint. Instead, I have argued that even though authenticity can be overridden by other concerns, authenticity nevertheless contributes directly to morality—and not merely as a transcendental condition of morality. Because morality is a domain within which it (often) matters whether one is an agent (i.e., responsible for one’s actions), authenticity will be directly morally relevant, and not just with moral orders that contingently value freedom and self-determination.

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