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Estrangement and Responsibility: Heidegger’s Account of Selfhood

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Dissertation Abstract:

My dissertation develops Heidegger's contribution to moral psychology by examining his phenomenology of estrangement and responsibility. I argue that one of the central issues of *Being and Time* is the possibility of an estranged individual's transformation into a responsible self. For Heidegger, each agent's original condition is one of estrangement – or a failure to be oneself – because socialization, although a necessary condition of agency, often encourages integration at the expense of self-determination. Estrangement thus involves being held at a distance from one's autonomy, and one can overcome this condition and become a self only by making the inward movement to 'be-responsible' or 'resolute'. Pace Heidegger's critics, then, I show that resoluteness does not represent a bare valorization of the will but rather a way of life that involves, at the very least, satisfying the following four criteria: 1) delimiting the sphere of action for which I can be held accountable, 2) taking responsibility for my decisions and the standards in light of which I make them, 3) sustaining the commitments that are definitive of my identity and thereby preserving my integrity, and 4) carrying out my existence with an ethical regard towards the freedom of those upon whom my own capacity to act depends.
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Heidegger’s Account of Selfhood
Matthew I. Burch

"The biggest danger, that of losing oneself, can pass off in the world as quietly as if it were nothing; every other loss, an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife, etc. is bound to be noticed."
—Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*
Introduction

Responsibility as the Matter of *Being and Time*

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger claims that the self, which in each case “has its being to be, and has it as its own,” must face a fundamental decision: “to be itself or not itself.”¹ I shall argue that this decision marks a choice between being-responsible and failing to be responsible and that this choice is one of the central issues of *Being and Time*. Heidegger argues that built into human existence there is both a propensity to evade responsibility, a propensity he calls ‘fallenness,’ and an appeal to take up the task of being-responsible, and he calls this responsible mode of existence ‘resoluteness.’ Moreover, for Heidegger, responding autonomously to this appeal to be responsible is the condition for the possibility of becoming who one is. This is the meaning of his claim that the primary issue for a self characterized by care – “an entity for which, in its Being, that Being is an issue” (*BT* 191, 236) – is the following: “To be its own thrown basis [i.e., to be responsible] is that potentiality-for-Being which is the issue for care” (*BT* 287, 333).² For Heidegger, I shall argue, the deep meaning of care, i.e. what it means to be a self, is responsibility.

This fundamental decision is a response to a basic existential question that each individual faces, i.e., Will I succeed or fail at being myself? This question, Heidegger contends, “never gets straightened out except through existing itself” (*BT* 12, 33). His treatment of this question takes its place in a tradition of major figures – most notably, for

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² “To be responsible” is my gloss on the meaning of being one’s ‘own thrown basis’. The arguments for this claim are given in later chapters.
our purposes, St. Paul, Kant and Kierkegaard – who have tried to distinguish between estranged and self-possessed modes of agency. Heidegger joins these thinkers, then, in the endeavor to understand what makes the loss and restoration of oneself possible. In other words, he joins them in trying to answer the following questions: How can a self be divided against itself such that it can fail to be itself? What kind of entity am I such that I can fail to be who I am?

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger accounts for the possibility of such failure by isolating a division in the self between a fallen or irresponsible mode of existence and a resolute or responsible mode. In this context, then, the problem of the divided self emerges in the form of the following question: How can I carry out an existence that is constantly haunted by an anxiety associated with the fact that I am ‘guilty’ – i.e., responsible for my own existence – and yet consistently evade this fact and thereby fail to *be responsible*? How can I allow myself to be divested of responsible self-ownership when my being is undeniably mine? Since the self of *Being and Time* is divided between a fallen – or irresponsible – mode of existence and the recognition of its capacity to be resolute – or responsible – the goal of the work is to show how this division can be overcome in a decision to transform one’s existence. Heidegger, in an allusion to St. Paul’s famous claim that a sinner can be changed in the mere ‘twinkling of an eye’, calls this ‘the moment of decision’\(^3\) – it is a moment of ‘conversion’ in which the self transforms its existence from an irresponsible to a responsible mode and thereby takes up its capacity for practical self-ownership.

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\(^3\) There is a terminological consistency here that is covered over by translation: in the original German text of *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger uses the term *Augenblick*, which is Luther's translation of St. Paul’s phrase that is rendered in the King James translation as “the twinkling of an eye.”
By interpreting *Being and Time* in this light, we will see that division I constitutes Heidegger’s account of how and why the everyday self evades the fact of responsibility by falling into the world and its readymade normative structure, and division II constitutes his account of the experience that attests to the possibility of overcoming that evasion – existential death – and the mode of being in which it is overcome – resoluteness. Existential death makes the implicit anxiety associated with responsibility explicit by clarifying precisely what the self is anxious about – the fact that it is ‘guilty’ or responsible for its own existence and that it can live in light of this fact or dissemble it. In fallenness, the self chooses the latter – in resoluteness, the former.

My claims that responsibility is one of the central issues of *Being and Time* and that Heidegger provides a viable concept of responsibility in his account of resoluteness go against the grain of a significant amount of Heidegger scholarship. For much of this scholarship argues that Heidegger either rejects the notion that responsibility is a fundamental aspect of our practical life or offers a hollow and ultimately untenable account of responsibility. Interpreters who appropriate elements of Heidegger’s position and his critics seem to agree that resoluteness has little to do with responsibility in its ordinary normative sense, as a concept that involves obligations to others and consistently sustaining the commitments associated with one’s everyday identity. Instead, Heidegger is either criticized or praised for what is viewed as his valorization of the will and his rejection of any traditional concept of responsibility. The choice to be myself, according to this interpretation, is an anarchic act of self-choice that serves as its own warrant and therefore offers no justification for itself.
The dominant group of critics who reject Heidegger’s concepts of ‘authenticity’ and ‘resoluteness’ as spurious and his gestures towards responsibility as empty can be classed under the rubric of the ‘decisionism critique.’ This critique is designed to undermine the claim that Heidegger has anything to offer regarding the question of ethics by showing that his concept of responsibility, so central to the project of grounding ethics, is a sham concept.\footnote{In other words, these critics recognize that Heidegger gestures towards a concept of responsibility with his discussion of ‘authenticity’ and ‘resoluteness,’ but, as representations of human responsibility, they find these concepts inadequate.} In other words, these critics not only argue that responsibility is not a central concern of *Being and Time* but that the work is allergic to and devoid of any worthwhile discussion of it.

The central claim of the decisionism critique is that what Heidegger calls the ‘moment of decision’ represents an irrational and anarchic decision without any material criteria or formal standard. This decision, then, is nothing but a decision for decision’s sake, i.e., an empty ‘decisionism.’ It is, as Tugendhat puts it in his influential formulation of the critique, “an irrational choice in the strict sense of the word”;\footnote{Tugendhat, Ernst. (SCSD, 217). Tugendhat, in my view, offers the most trenchant critique along these lines and therefore my chapter six is designed to respond specifically to his ‘internal’ criticism — i.e., a criticism based on a close reading of the central concepts of *Being and Time* — of Heidegger’s position.} because the choice makes no appeal — and rejects the relevance of any appeal — to reasons. Since it is irrational and ultimately hostile to any appeal to reasons, the decision is unmotivated and has nothing to do with making oneself answerable to others. As such, it is, at best, an empty gesture towards the notion of responsibility. For, as the original meaning of the concept suggests, responsibility must at the very least involve situating myself to be a ‘correspondent’; it must involve taking a stance towards my existence that allows me to give a response to others for my actions and standards — i.e., a stance that delimits those
deeds and standards for which I can be held accountable. Since resoluteness, according to
the decisionism critique, rules out any such stance, it fails to satisfy the most basic
criteria as a concept of responsibility.

Karl Löwith⁶ and Herbert Marcuse⁷, former students of Heidegger, formed a first
wave in interpreting his position as the philosophical handmaiden to the ‘irrationalism’ of
fascism. Although they initially found Heidegger’s work compelling, they came to reject
it as a form of nihilism characteristic of Nazi Germany. For example, in 1929 Marcuse
hoped that Heideggerian phenomenology would revitalize the Marxist project.⁸ By 1933,
however, he had concluded that the Fascism of Nazi Germany was essentially the
political embodiment of Heidegger’s basic philosophical categories, and he derided the
notions of ‘authentic existence’ and ‘resoluteness’ as separated “from all relations to the
rational aims of society” (Marcuse 2004, 69). For Marcuse, resoluteness was not a
responsible stance towards existence but a self-serving, irrational and nihilistic ideal.

Ernst Tugendhat picked up and deepened this line of criticism in his Self-
Consciousness and Self-Determination, which will be discussed at length in chapter six.
He argues that the deflationary and relativist concept of truth in Being and Time is what
leads to Heidegger’s endorsement of an empty decisionism as the ideal of practical life.
Having no respect for objective truth as such, Tugendhat contends, Heidegger shows
equally little concern for the objective criteria of practical deliberation, and ultimately

⁸ Being and Time, he claimed, “seemed to mark a turning point in the history of philosophy: the point
where the internal tendencies of bourgeois philosophy leads to its own dissolution and clears the way for a
determines that such matters are irrelevant to making a decision about one’s life as whole. This line of criticism has been very influential over the second and third generations of critical theorists in the Frankfurt School tradition. A representative of the third generation, Richard Wolin, summarizes this interpretation of Heidegger’s account of ‘the moment of decision’ in the following manner:

“...when it is devoid of any and every normative orientation, ‘decision’ can only be blind and uninformed—ultimately, it becomes a leap into the void. Without any material criteria for decision, it becomes impossible to distinguish an authentic from an inauthentic decision, responsible from irresponsible action—let alone on what grounds an individual would even prefer one course of action to another...[D]ecision takes on an entirely arbitrary character; it becomes something particularistic and discrete, unnamenable to evaluation according to more general, publicly accessible standards.”

Other notable figures that interpret Heidegger’s discussion of resoluteness along these lines are Pierre Bourdieu, Reiner Schürman, and Jürgen Habermas. Bourdieu offers a socio-historical argument that there is a basic affinity between the fundamental concepts of Being and Time and the rhetoric of other ‘German Mandarins’ and ‘conservative revolutionaries’ of the period, whose political ideology, Bourdieu contends, Heidegger shared. Through an analysis of these rhetorical parallels, Bourdieu associates Heidegger’s position with Carl Schmitt’s legal decisionism and the irrationalism of Nazi fascism. Schürman also argues that Heidegger’s discussion of resoluteness represents a radical anarchism – a decision and act without principle – and therefore nothing like the traditional normative concept of responsibility. Finally, Habermas concurs with the existing line of criticism from Marcuse to Tugendhat that the philosophical project of

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Being and Time is best viewed as “a decisionism of empty resoluteness.” He claims that Heidegger’s “existentialism” offers an account of human life in which the individual is submerged in the ‘inauthentic’ ‘everydayness’ of ‘das Man’ from which he must win himself by enacting a radically groundless decision without recourse to any material criteria or formal standard.

This by no means exhausts the list of critics who maintain that Heidegger’s ‘rhetoric’ of resoluteness represents an empty decisionism that has nothing to do with the nature and possibility of responsible practical deliberation, i.e., deliberation about who one wants to be and how one ought to live. Many philosophers who develop Heidegger’s work share this criticism. To take just one example, before I proceed with an outline of my argument that Heidegger, in fact, offers a worthwhile account of responsibility, consider Paul Ricoeur’s claim in Memory, History and Forgetting that Heidegger’s concept of authenticity “lacks any criterion of intelligibility,” the term is completely “self-referential”, and its “impreciseness” is only outdone by “resoluteness, a term singularly associated with ‘being ahead of oneself’ and which contains no determination, no preferential mark concerning any project of accomplishment whatsoever…”

My thesis is designed to undermine this line of criticism; it is an argument that responsibility is one of the primary issues of Being and Time, and, furthermore, that resoluteness is not a self-serving and nihilistic ideal but a concept of responsibility that involves, at the very least, satisfying the following four criteria: to be resolute I must 1) delimit my ownmost domain, i.e., the sphere of action for which I can be held

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accountable, 2) take responsibility for my decisions and the standards in light of which I make them, 3) sustain the commitments that are definitive of my identity and thereby preserve my integrity, and 4) carry out my existence with an ethical regard towards the Other’s freedom. To clarify how I argue for this interpretation and how my account differs from that of other interpreters, especially those mentioned above, I shall offer a brief outline of the thesis and indicate how the chapters elaborate and defend Heidegger’s account of responsibility.

In the first chapter I discuss Heidegger’s phenomenological method of ‘formal indication.’ My interpretation of formal indication places more weight on Heidegger’s early discussion of this method for his approach to existential phenomena in *Being and Time* than most interpreters, who regard the method as an approach to emptily intended phenomena (Charles Guignon) or an account of merely occasional statements (John Van Buren). Following Steven Crowell, I argue that formal indication can be understood as Heidegger’s phenomenological approach not just to empty intentions or occasional expressions but to the nature of pretheoretical life and the conditions for its possibility. This discussion is important to my main argument for three reasons.

First, by comparing Heidegger’s method of formal indication to Kierkegaard’s discussion of ‘indirect communication,’ I establish an inner connection between Heidegger’s account of resoluteness and Kierkegaard’s discussion of ‘inwardness’ – as both philosophers argue that responsibility and the independent appropriation one’s subject matter is an essential ingredient to their methods and the task of communicating their claims to the reader. This connection is an important theme in my thesis, as I place

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13 All philosophers that are mentioned in this brief outline of the chapters but not here cited are discussed and cited in the corresponding chapters of the thesis. For example, Guignon, Van Buren and Crowell are all discussed and their work is referenced in chapter one.
more emphasis on the relationship between Kierkegaard and Heidegger than many
interpreters and I make it a special focus of my arguments not only in chapter one but
also chapters five and six, where I offer a detailed account of Heidegger’s concept of
resoluteness as a development of Kierkegaard’s account of inwardness.

Second, by establishing this connection, I begin to address the main theme of my
argument. The inner connection established between Kierkegaard and Heidegger in this
chapter is threefold: 1) both of their methods strive to characterize existence as it is
experienced from within the sphere of immanence, 2) both strive to achieve an
independent first-person access to the existential stratum of experience, an access that
each philosopher must ground for himself (i.e., must take complete responsibility for),
and 3) both try to convey the significance of this encounter to the reader by indirectly
appealing to her to repeat this first-person and independently grounded access to the
phenomenon in question for herself. Thus, in this discussion, I begin to address my main
argument by showing that Heidegger’s method demands a responsible stance towards
existence to be accomplished. A responsible stance towards his subject matter is a
condition the for possibility of his method, because it calls for first-person access to
pretheoretical life and the philosopher can appeal to nothing but his own experience to
ground the validity of his claim to have achieved such access. Furthermore, in
communicating to the reader, the method appeals to her own capacity to take up this kind
of responsibility for herself without interfering with her autonomy. For to grasp what is
given to understand in formal indication, the reader, like the philosopher, can make
recourse to nothing but her own experience to see if the claims presented ‘hold water.’ To
judge the validity of a formally indicative claim, she must repeat the mode of access achieved by the philosopher and judge its validity for herself.¹⁴

The third reason this discussion of formal indication is vital to my overall argument is that many of my most important claims involve interpreting Heidegger's fundamental concepts as formally indicative concepts, i.e., concepts that provide a way of access to a dimension of the immanent sphere of human experience that the reader can only come to a judgment about for herself. In other words, it is important for many of my arguments to see that Heidegger's basic concepts indicate possible ways for the self to be. I will offer a brief example to show why this is important.

In my discussion of existential death in chapter three, I argue that when Heidegger speaks of death is he is not referring to the event that is still outstanding for me, i.e., the moment I will become a corpse. The fact that death is a formally indicative concept is one of the many reasons we know that it cannot refer to this outstanding event, since formally indicative concepts always refer to dimensions of my being that I can experience from the first-person perspective, and the event in which I become a corpse can never be experienced from this perspective. A corpse is not something that I can be—it is something that I can try to imagine becoming. Since we know that death is a formally indicative concept, then, we can be certain that the concept does not refer to the moment one becomes a corpse. Bearing in mind the formally indicative nature of Heidegger's concepts will help us achieve a more precise understanding of his position.

¹⁴ They do not interfere with her autonomy in the sense that she is not coerced by argument or rhetoric to make a particular judgment; the philosopher, rather, strives to put her in a position to make this judgment for and by herself. The principle of non-interference, then, is not an attempt to have no impact on the reader; rather, it is an attempt to provide her with a context in which she can make her own autonomous judgments. To use an analogy to clarify the point, when I place food before a hungry person, I have an impact on his situation, but I do not coerce him to eat. If I make no conditions on the offer, the decision to take it or leave it is his.
The second chapter lays out the claim that the divided self – divided between a fallen evasion of responsibility and a tacit recognition of the fact of responsibility in the form of anxiety – is one of the fundamental questions of Being and Time. In this chapter, I briefly trace the origins of this problem to St. Paul and then I dwell, in more detail, on Kant’s treatment of the problem in his Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone, which, unlike most interpreters, I take to be a significant precursor to Heidegger’s position.

This chapter focuses on the experience of irresponsibility and the conditions for the possibility of that experience and offers a comparative analysis of Kant’s account of ‘radical evil’ and Heidegger’s discussion of ‘fallenness.’ The central point of the comparison is this: Kant argues that the perversity of the heart that he calls ‘radical evil’ is a condition in which the agent takes himself to be justified before the law without taking the responsible stance that would allow him to make such a judgment legitimately. And, likewise, Heidegger shows that fallenness is a mode of existence in which the individual takes the standards in terms of which he lives his life to be ‘full, genuine, and secure’ without taking the responsible stance that would allow him to make this judgment legitimately.

The ‘radically evil’ or ‘fallen’ agent, then, deceives himself by taking for granted the validity and fullness of the standards in terms of which he lives his life without having access to a standpoint that would allow him to make such a judgment. What would make such a judgment possible is responsibility: the individual would have to take it upon himself to assess his actions and to choose the standards in light of which he chooses and assesses his actions for himself. By doing so, he would delimit his ownmost sphere, i.e., that domain of action and those standards for which he can be held
accountable. Only by doing so can he become his own measure, rather than simply striving to ‘measure up’ to the readymade normative structure of the social world, by evaluating and choosing his actions and standards autonomously. This chapter, then, sets the main argument of the thesis in motion by showing that fallenness is a matter of existing irresponsibly and that the only way to emerge from such an existence is to make a decision to take responsibility for oneself. The next chapter deals with the experience in which one faces this decision.

This experience is existential death. My approach to this topic in chapter three breaks significantly with traditional interpretations, since I argue, against almost every reader of Being and Time – from Jean-Paul Sartre\(^\text{15}\) to Jean-Luc Marion\(^\text{16}\) – that Heidegger’s discussion of death has nothing to do with the ordinary meaning of the term. Instead of referring to the ordinary meaning of the term, existential death, I contend, formally indicates a confrontation of the self – understood as Existenz – with its own limit or finitude. To put the point briefly, Heidegger argues that the being of the self is not best understood as a ‘what’ but rather a ‘who’, and who I am is determined by what I do – my identity consists of the constellation of roles that I take up in the world. The being of the self, then, is its practical identity, and the death of such a self is a moment in which this identity collapses. In this ‘crisis’ of identity, Heidegger claims, my everyday life fails to matter and I experience that which ordinarily sustains its mattering, i.e. my own free endorsement or care. Existential death, then, is a positive intuition of my freedom and the fact of responsibility. Thus, being-towards-death is a moment when the


everyday self collapses and encounters the limit of its projection into possibilities for
being a self – its own free anxious concern.

What this experience gives me to understand, Heidegger contends, is the fact that
I am ‘guilty in my very basis.’ This is a claim about the structure of human autonomy – at
the very basis of our being we are responsible for ourselves and in existential death we
have a first-person encounter with this structure. This encounter, then, reveals that
responsibility has both a structural and a practical meaning. From a structural point of
view, responsibility is a fact of human agency: I am responsible for what I do in the sense
that it undeniably emanates from my own freedom. From a practical point of view,
however, responsible is something I can be or fail to be. To be responsible is to act in
light of the fact of responsibility by taking ownership of my identity, which is what
Heidegger calls resoluteness. It is a form of self-ownership that involves taking charge of
my practical identity by consistently sustaining my commitments and thereby preserving
the integrity of that identity.

The parsing of Being and Time, then, in Divisions I and II mirrors the division in
the self between an irresponsible and a responsible mode of existence. Division I is an
account of the everyday self in its mundane experience and the conditions for the
possibility of this experience. It is here that Heidegger defines the self as ‘care’ and
describes it in its fallen modality. In this mode, I have an everyday practical identity in
terms of the things I care about. But, as long as I do not take responsibility for this
existence, I carry out my life in such a way that I am divested of my self-ownership and
so experience my existence as some ‘one’s’ life. My existence can only be lived and
experienced as my own, then, when I take responsibility for it and thereby appropriate it
as my own. This responsible mode of existence is what Heidegger characterizes in Division II.

Chapter four is entitled “Existential Birth,” because I interpret the ‘moment of decision’ in which the self takes a resolute stance towards its existence as the birth of the responsible self – a moment in which the self ‘recovers’ from the death of its everyday identity and returns to the familiar world. In this chapter I argue that resoluteness, the responsible mode of existence in which I overcome the temptations of fallenness, is a matter of integrity in two senses. First, it is a mode of existence in which I integrate my factual particularity (thrownness) with my capacity for freedom and responsibility (project) and thereby become capable of being-a-whole (thrown-project). I achieve wholeness by integrating my thrown and existential dimensions. The self’s incompleteness, then, has nothing to do with the fact that it is not yet dead or that it is directed towards an unsettled future; it is incomplete because it is divided against itself, covering over its existential dimension, and it becomes a whole or an integral unity when it overcomes this division by taking responsibility for itself. Secondly, resoluteness is a matter of integrity in the sense that living in light of the fact of responsibility involves transparent self-constancy. In other words, when I choose myself, I choose my practical identity, and I take charge of that identity and preserve its integrity by transparently and consistently sustaining the commitments associated with it.

Resoluteness, then, makes me an individual self in a twofold sense: 1) I constitute myself in a formal sense as a respondent with an ownmost sphere for which I am accountable and 2) I constitute a particular practical identity by passionately sustaining my commitments. I thereby give birth to myself in action not only as one who has
‘converted’ from a fallen to a responsible mode of life but also as a particular individual with his own style of being-in-the-world.

My emphasis on the significance of the self’s factual particularity also runs counter to much Heidegger scholarship. First of all, the decisionism critique maintains that, for Heidegger, all material criteria are of no significance whatsoever for the ‘anarchic’ and ‘groundless’ decision in which I choose myself. Second, many positive interpretations of Heidegger’s position suggest that the self’s factual particularity plays no role in this decision; in fact, they claim that Heidegger’s position is designed to show that the self’s factual particularity ultimately does not matter. Dreyfus and Rubin, for example, take this devaluation of the particularity of the self to be part of Heidegger’s secularization of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard claims that each individual must have a world or identity of its own to be self, and, they, contend, Heidegger undermines this claim by showing that ‘Dasein’ can have no identity unique to itself – for all available identities are intersubjectively shared generic possibilities – and Dasein has no essence – no identity can be specified in advance as essential to its being. Since existential death reveals that all possibilities are generic and contingent, Dreyfus and Rubin argue, it reveals them to be equally meaningful and therefore equally meaningless.¹⁷ The self’s ownmost possibility, they claim, is ‘nothingness’; it is nothing but an ‘open emptiness’ upon which no specific way of life stakes a unique claim. In other words, death reveals that a resolute individual ought to regard his factual particularity as insignificant; it therefore plays no role whatsoever in motivating the choice to be resolute. This insignificance of my factual particularity, its meaninglessness, they suggest, is “an

exciting manifestation of Dasein’s finitude”, and it is the realization in light of which one chooses to be resolute and fearless (Dreyfus 1991, 333).

I argue against this interpretation, however, because it seems equally plausible that, rather than resoluteness, such ‘an exciting manifestation’ would motivate despair and the sense that what I do does not matter because nothing really matters; in fact, a stoic, epicurean, or nihilist response seems equally appropriate to the realization that my factual particularity means nothing. This is a problem in general for interpreters who try to show that resoluteness is motivated from within the experience of existential death. Since no factual motives are in play in this experience, there is nothing at work that I might feel compelled to take up responsibly; thus, interpreters end up suggesting either that there are no such motives – that one chooses resoluteness merely because one can – or they suggest, like Dreyfus and Rubin, that an experience of ‘nothingness’ would somehow inspire a fearless stoicism.

To solve this problem, and thereby to fill a significant hole in the secondary literature, i.e., an inadequate understanding what motivates resoluteness, I argue that the self’s factual particularity must be taken into consideration as a crucial element of the decision to be responsible. This is the argument of chapter five, which is vital to my main argument, because, I contend, we cannot content ourselves merely with illustrating that responsibility is a possibility for the self. Rather, we must also understand what motivates the self to be itself and why the failure to be itself, as it is in St. Paul’s formulation of the problem, results in suffering. In other words, we must show that a certain kind of existential satisfaction is at stake in the decision to be myself.
Although death reveals that I have no essence, then, the decision to be responsible is made upon my return to the familiar world, and in this return my factual determinations make it such that I am claimed in manifold ways by particular forms of life and particular people that deeply matter to me. I desire this vocation and shrink from the disagreeableness of that one. I love this woman and I can’t stand that one. In this way, my factual particularity parses the world in terms of the appealing and the repellent, and the claims of that which appeals to me demand satisfaction. The desire to satisfy them plays an important role in the decision to be responsible, I contend, by working in concert with the insight garnered in the experience of existential death.

Existential death reveals that I can exist as a divided self, divested of self-ownership, or I can be responsible and thereby take practical self-ownership of my existence. And built into this insight is the following realization: only a life lived responsibly can be experienced as my own, and only a life experienced as mine can yield genuine satisfaction. When I am divided against myself I experience my existence as some ‘one’s’ life, as if it belongs to someone else; and just as it is impossible to take satisfaction in another’s deeds, it is impossible to experience satisfaction in a life that I do not experience as my own. This insight, won in existential death, works in concert with the self’s factual particularity to motivate resoluteness. My abiding desire to satisfy the factual claims that the world and others make on me motivates me to pursue a particular form of life, and the insight that only a responsible existence can yield satisfaction motivates me to do so responsibly. These factual claims and the insight won in existential death, then, are considerations that count in favor of – motivating reasons for – a responsible existence. This is a brief summary of my attempt to deal with an
important and contentious issue regarding resoluteness: whether it is motivated by life itself or merely one possible way of being for which there is no reason, aside from the sheer valorization of the will, for the individual to take up.

This brings us to the final chapter in which I attempt to complete my response to the decisionism critique by offering a positive answer to a question that the majority of Heidegger's interpreters, critics and defenders alike, have answered in the negative: Does Heidegger provide us any resources to understand the ground of ethics? Representatives of the decisionism critique straightforwardly answer this question in the negative; and the majority of significant figures in the phenomenological tradition – among them, Lévinas, Sartre, Ricoeur, Jonas, and Janicaud – reply, with minor reservations in some cases, in the negative as well. With the exception of some recent attempts to offer a positive answer to this question among American Heidegger scholars such as Frederick Olafson, Johanna Hodge, Steven Crowell and Sonia Sikka, for the most part, such a response has been considered impossible to justify – for Heidegger's work, interpreters seem to agree, either shows no interest in the question of ethics or, in a 'Nietzschean' spirit, represents a wholesale rejection of ethics.

To make good on my main argument that one of the central issues of Being and Time is responsibility and that resoluteness is viable concept of responsibility, then, I must provide an account of the concept's ethical implications. I attempt to do so in chapter six. The chapter begins with a critical analysis of Tugendhat's criticism of Heidegger's practical philosophy, which I take to be the strongest formulation of the decisionism critique. I argue that Tugendhat's criticism, although in many respects cogent, ultimately trades on some fundamental interpretive errors regarding the central
concepts of *Being and Time*. After this attempt to disarm the decisionism critique, I move to offer my own positive account of the resources in *Being and Time* to account for the ground of ethics.

My argument begins by interpreting Heidegger’s account of the ‘call of conscience’ in light of his claim that *Mitsein* – the self’s constant being-with others – is a fundamental constituent of the self. This claim implies, I contend, that existential death, contrary to those who claim that this experience constitutes a solipsistic moment in *Being and Time*, must have a social dimension. I then offer five reasons, rooted in the logic of Heidegger’s argument, for this claim. By highlighting this ineliminable social aspect of the experience in which I come face to face with my own autonomy, I attempt to show that being-responsible is only a possibility for the self because of its relation to others.

On the basis of this argument, I then try to show that being-responsible must involve an ethical regard towards the Other’s freedom. This regard is essential to responsibility, I claim, because the social dimension of the call indicates that without the Other the meaningful exercise of my own freedom would be impossible. In sum, I argue that existential death reveals an additional criterion of responsibility: to be responsible I must not only 1) delimit my ownmost sphere, 2) make my own decisions and choose the standards in light of which I make them, 3) sustain the commitments associated with my practical identity to preserve its integrity but I must also 4) respect the Other’s freedom upon which my own freedom depends.

After this argument, I move to the following question: What *motivates* this ethical regard towards the Other’s freedom? I argue that these motives have already been discerned, because an ethical regard towards the Other is merely revealed as an additional
criterion of responsibility, and chapter five has already isolated the motives for a responsible existence: a desire for existential satisfaction considered in light of the fact that only a responsible existence can yield such satisfaction. I then consider what I take to be the natural objection to this claim: moral motivation seems to be contingent on my own desire for satisfaction, which seems to yield something like a hypothetical egoism. I respond to this objection and I conclude this final chapter with a brief account of how a Heideggerian ethic would be carried out in the everyday life of the self.

The main argument of this thesis, then, is that responsibility is one of the central issues of Being and Time and that Heidegger's account of resoluteness represents a viable concept of responsibility. Chapter one illustrates that Heidegger's philosophical method itself calls for a responsible appropriation of its matter. The second chapter argues that the primary problem for the fallen self is its estrangement from its capacity to be responsible. Chapter three argues that existential death is the moment in which the self comes to an explicit awareness of this capacity, and chapter four offers a phenomenological account of resoluteness. Chapter five attempts to uncover the motives for this responsible mode of existence, and, finally, chapter six argues that an essential criterion of a Heideggerian concept of responsibility is an ethical regard towards the Other's freedom.
Chapter 1

Heidegger's Method of Formal Indication

A concern for method pervades Heidegger's early work. This emphasis on method is motivated by the worry that objects approached with the wrong attitude can be "lost for good by being forced to conform to a particular type of apprehension that is alien to them."[18] The goal of method, then, is to render one's theme perspicuous as the very kind of thing that it is. Heidegger's theme is "the full concreteness of the 'I'," and because "this 'I'" has its own particular kind of being, he contends, it must be approached "by way of a particular kind of 'how'" ('CKJ, 27). This 'how' or approach to the 'I am' is Heidegger's development of the phenomenological method, which, in his early writings, he refers to as "formal indication" (formale Anzeige).

In this chapter I shall lay out the main contours of this method. This analysis is vital to my overall argument because without an understanding of Heidegger's method one cannot fully appreciate the nature of his 'existential' concepts nor the manner in which he intends them to be appropriated. As part of this preparatory analysis I shall endeavor to show that formal indication is a product of Heidegger's synthesis of Husserlian phenomenology and Kierkegaard's method of indirect communication.[19]

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[18] Heidegger, Martin. "Comments on Karl Jaspers's Psychology of Worldviews," in Pathmarks. William McNeill, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 1-38, p 9. Henceforth referenced as 'CKJ' followed by the pagination from Pathmarks. If one does not have a heightened consciousness of method, "one becomes blind to the fact that one's own way of proceeding is loaded down with this particular approach" ('CKJ', 8); that is, all approaches have presuppositions and if one does not attend to method one ignores their weight and influence and runs the risk of "a kind of surrogate will" being "inserted into one's intuition and concepts" ('CKJ', 9).

[19] Much more attention has been devoted to the influence of Husserl's phenomenology on Heidegger's method for obvious reasons: Heidegger was not only Husserl's student but he is a defender and developer of his teacher's method. Kierkegaard's influence, however, is also significant and Heidegger points this out himself at various places in his early writings. For example, in his discussion of formal indication in his
Husserl’s Phenomenology and Heidegger’s Formal Indication

For Husserl, phenomenology is the science of disclosure concerned with recovering the pretheoretical *as it is experienced* and articulating the conditions that make this experience and its retrieval in language possible. Heidegger shares Husserl’s commitment to the idea that philosophy is not a theory that tests hypotheses about reality or an attempt to construct a conceptual schema adequate to account for possible experience. Philosophy, rather, is best understood as life, in a sense, repeating or returning to itself. It is an attempt to let ‘the things themselves’ show up *as* they are and to bring this experience to language. The “true philosophical attitude,” then, “is never that of a logical tyrant,” but rather “love,” “surrender”, “letting-be-open,” and “letting-oneself-go”.

Like Husserl, Heidegger contrasts this attitude sharply with the attitude of the sciences that emphasize objectivity and the features of the world that can be reckoned or subjected to a pre-established metric and conception of being. In “What is Metaphysics?” he characterizes this ‘objectivist’ attitude – the “relation to the world, stance, and

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*essay on Jaspers’s Psychology of Worldviews* he refers directly to Kierkegaard’s methodological prowess: “Concerning Kierkegaard, we should point out that such a heightened consciousness of methodological rigor as his has rarely been achieved in philosophy or theology” (‘CKJ’, 27). Van Buren explores this connection in his “The Ethics of Formale *Anzeige* in Heidegger,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (1995) p. 157-170. Of course, numerous authors – Walter Kaufman, Hubert Dreyfus and Jane Rubin, Allistair Hannay, to name just a few – have explored the relationship between Kierkegaard and Heidegger. But no one, to my knowledge, has explored – in much detail – the connection between their respective methodological approaches to the matter of the philosophy.

20 This discussion of Heidegger’s formal indication as a development of Husserl’s work is deeply indebted to Steven Crowell’s illuminating and more in depth discussion of this connection in “Question, Reflection, and Philosophical Method in Heidegger’s Early Freiburg Lectures” in his *Husserl, Heidegger, and the Space of Meaning*, Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2001, pp. 129-151. If I say anything novel in this chapter, it has to do with the Heidegger-Kierkegaard connection; my discussion of Husserl relies on Crowell’s account, whose work and teaching opened up my appreciation and understanding of Heidegger’s method in general.

21 This is an expression Heidegger uses in his writings on ‘formal indication’ and is a central theme in Crowell’s analysis of these writings.

irruption” within a domain of entities – of Wissenschaften in general as interested in “beings-themselves – and nothing besides.”23 Because these sciences concern themselves solely with entities and their existence, they overlook what makes their encounter with such entities possible, i.e., meaning.24 Heidegger does not declare the attitude of these sciences illegitimate; rather, he uses the objectivist attitude as a point of contrast to the stance required to access the self’s pretheoretical sphere of meaning. The attitude of lived experience, he claims, is not characterized by an emphasis on object-hood nor an explicit concern regarding the existence (or “thatness”) of entities. And it is something more akin to this attitude of lived experience – a ‘non-objectifying’ attitude – that formal indication, as a method designed to access everyday lived meaning, requires.

Such a stance is necessary because formal indication strives to characterize an experience that is not suited to objectification: “this experience is the experience of the ‘I’ as a self. When we keep purely to this enactment of our experience, it becomes clear that the notion of a region or an objective realm is quite foreign to the ‘I’” (‘CKJ’, 26). An objective realm is foreign to the ‘I’ because the way we have ourselves in experience is not as an object or a what; rather, we understand ourselves in terms of who we are and what we care about.

Furthermore, we do not, for the most part, experience the things of the world as impersonal objects splayed before us; rather, they have their primary significance in light of our practical dealings with them – they are cared for, dealt with, avoided, manipulated, worried about, etc. Thus, phenomenology seeks to approach life from the perspective of a

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24 Crowell 2001, 136. Phenomenology’s emphasis on the primacy of meaning in rigorous philosophical inquiry is another point that Crowell’s work illuminates.
“nonthetical ‘objectivity’ that belongs to what is of significance to us in our experience of the environing world, the social world we share with each other, and also the world of the self” (‘CKJ,’ 26). The task of phenomenology is to capture this experience on its own terms – in a manner proper to its own being – and to clarify the meaning structures that make such experience possible. The point of departure for such inquiry is the phenomenologist’s concern for his own existence:

“The sense of human existence is to be obtained...from its own basic experience of having itself in an anxiously concerned manner. This having is enacted prior to whatever knowledge about it we might later acquire by objectifying it with the ‘is,’ and such knowledge is in fact inconsequential for this enactment” (‘CKJ’, 26).

In lived experience there is not a primacy of the kind of object-hood homed in on by the natural sciences. There is, rather, a primacy of meaning or mattering – things weigh with me in terms of my projects and my concern for my existence. The objectivist stance, then, is inappropriate to this sphere and if I take it up, “the attitude of observation will become central for me. All my explications will then have an objectifying nature, but they will put me at a remove from existence and from a genuine having of it (anxious concern)” (‘CKJ’, 26).

Philosophy is not a theoretical endeavor that operates with posits and presuppositions like the sciences concerned with particular object domains. It is rather an attempt to offer a faithful repetition of life’s own having of itself; it is “the primordial intention of a truthful life in general, the primordial orientation of experiencing and living as such” (GA 56/57:110). As Crowell writes, “Phenomenology stakes its claim on the philosophical dimension concealed in the very living of a truthful life” (Crowell 2001,

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What phenomenology strives to clarify are the categories endemic to experience and it strives to do so from within that experience:

“The categories are not inventions or a group of logical schemata as such, ‘lattices’; on the contrary, they are alive in life itself in an original way: alive in order to ‘form’ life on themselves. They have their own modes of access, which are not foreign to life itself, as if they pounced down upon life from the outside, but instead are precisely the preeminent way in which life comes to itself.”

The categories are transcendental conditions for the possibility of experience, but they are also part of that experience – they are alive in it. They do not constitute a hypothetical conceptual framework that reason deems ‘adequate’ to account for experience. They are structures of meaning embedded in that experience and thus have their own mode of access. Formal indication, like the Husserlian phenomenology it develops, is a method designed to gain access to these categories in their unique mode of evidential fulfillment.

Heidegger does not explicate formal indication in Being and Time. The method, rather, is more or less terminologically absorbed into his hermeneutic transformation of phenomenology. But what he calls phenomenology remains consistent with formal indication – a method designed to let “that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself” (BT 34, 58). It is a method in which life ‘returns to’ or ‘repeats’ itself.

That Heidegger’s intention in Being and Time is to recover the pretheoretical – to bring existence to language as it is experienced in a way that compels to reader to see it in this light – is clear in his re-interpretation of the traditional philosophical category of the understanding:

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27 Heidegger’s consistent references to his concepts as ‘formally indicative’ speak to the continuity of his early discussions of method and his fully developed phenomenological method in *Being and Time.*
"With the term ‘understanding’ we have in mind a fundamental existential, which is neither a definite species of cognition distinguished, let us say, from explaining and conceiving, nor any cognition at all in the sense of grasping something thematically...If the term ‘understanding’ is taken in a way which is primordially existential, it means to be projecting towards a potentiality-for-Being for the sake of which any Dasein exists. In understanding, one’s own potentiality-for-Being is disclosed in such a way that one’s Dasein always knows understandingly what it is capable of" (BT 336, 385).28

Phenomenology recovers the self’s fundamental pretheoretical experiences in language in order to bring the reader not just to grasp them thematically but actually to take them up – “understanding oneself in that potentiality-for-Being which reveals itself in projection” (BT 263, 307). Following and developing the Husserlian break with the natural attitude and the reduction to the sphere of meaning, Heidegger argues that the primary question regarding the being of the self is not what it is but who it is, and who it is, he claims, is determined by the kind of activities it engages in – “existing is action.”29 The self always understands who it is in terms of its ‘existence’ – and existence denotes the forms of activity into which it projects itself,30 what Heidegger calls the self’s ‘possibilities’ or “possible ways for it to be” (BT 42, 67).

Thus, to understand an aspect of my existence is always to be that which I understand – to grasp it from the first-person perspective as an element of my own being. Understanding conceived ‘existentially’, then, is not a “species of cognition” at all; rather, it “means to be projecting towards a potentiality-for-Being for the sake of which

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28 Heidegger makes this claim consistently throughout Being and Time: “Understanding is the Being of such potentiality-for-Being, which is never something which is not yet present-at-hand, but which, as something which is essentially never present-at-hand, ‘is’ with the Being of Dasein, in the sense of existence...As such understanding it knows what it is capable of—that is, what its potentiality-for-Being is capable of. This ‘knowing’ does not first arise from an immanent self-perception, but belongs to the Being of the ‘there’, which is essentially understanding” (BT 144, 183-184).


30 “This term ‘existence’ formally indicates that Dasein is an understanding potentiality-for-being, which, in its being, makes an issue of that Being itself” (BT 231, 274).
any Dasein exists" (BT 336, 385). The cognition or knowledge that the term
‘understanding’ ordinarily designates, Heidegger claims, is founded on – or is a
refinement of – the pretheoretical commerce with the world that the existential concept of
understanding indicates. In Heidegger’s sense, then, to understand a formally indicated
concept is to see that it points to what one always already is prior to any explicit
philosophical reflection.

This applies not only to the activities in terms of which I, in my everyday life,
understand myself but also to the existential structures of my being that make these forms
of activity possible. Everyday practices such as being-a-teacher or being-a-father are
possible objects of formal indication inasmuch as each is something that I can be and so
something whose meaning structures I can grasp from the first-person perspective.
Heidegger is primarily interested, however, in formally indicating the structures of
human existence that make these everyday practices possible. These structures too are
something that I am and so they can only be understood when I take them up or project
myself into them. To ‘understand’ a formally indicated claim is to be revealed to oneself
in it as one projects oneself into it. The existential categories that formal indication brings
to light make the kind of being that I have possible and are accessible to me from within
that being:

“And we have this (I) ‘am’ in a genuine sense, not through thinking about
it in a theoretical manner, but rather by enacting the ‘am,’ which is a way
of being that belongs to the being of the ‘I’…What turns out to be
important here is accordingly the fact that I have myself, i.e., the basic
experience in which I encounter myself as a self. Living in this kind of
experience, and gearing myself to its very sense, I am able to question
after the sense of my ‘I am’” (‘CKJ’, 25).
In case this point is not immediately clear, we should look at an example of Heidegger’s method in action.

Consider his well-known discussion of the workshop. He claims that the elements of such a context get their significance only in relation to each other, that this system of significance – or referential totality – is held together by my project and purposive activity in it, and that this project itself is grounded in – gets its ultimate significance from – the project of my existence, which is an issue for me. These claims are not meant to be hypotheses that can be tested empirically or conceptual constructs adequate to account for the experience of working in such a context. The account, rather, is meant to reflect back to the reader his own experience of being engaged in such a context.

The only way to test the validity of such claims is to reflect on one’s own engagement in such a context – to return to the experience itself. The claims are valid only if it squares with or is appropriate to the person’s experience of *being in* or *projecting himself into* such work. The method, then, moves in a clarificatory hermeneutic circle from pretheoretical experience to language only to point the reader back to the original experience. It “springs from” and “goes back to” “one’s own concrete life.”

Thus, to understand a formally indicative concept in Heidegger’s sense is to be able to reveal it to oneself as appropriate to one’s experience in projecting oneself into it – to see oneself existing in it.

In “The Ethics of *Formale Anzeige* in Heidegger,” Van Buren also argues that Heidegger’s method of formal indication derives from his appropriation of Husserlian themes, but his characterization of this relationship is misleading in a way that raises an important issue about the validity of formally indicative claims. According to Van Buren,

Heidegger takes the term *Anzeige* from Husserl’s theory of signs in the First Investigation, “Expression and Meaning.” In this text Husserl discusses “objective expressions” and “essentially subjective and occasional expressions” of “ordinary life,” contrasting objective expressions in science, logic, or mathematics, such as “there are regular solids” with occasional everyday expressions such as “there are cakes.” The main difference between these forms of expression is that the first can be grasped without reference to the speaker, while the second is bound up with the speaker’s situation and fluctuates according to who is uttering the phrase. Van Buren claims that,

> “Likewise, Heidegger’s talk about ‘the something,’ the ‘it,’ the ‘here-being’ of Dasein, ‘mineness,’ ‘facticity,’ ‘whileness’ (*Jeweiligkeit*), etc., consists not of objective, but rather of occasional expressions whose indicative function is simply being held in unfulfilled suspension” (Van Buren 1995, 168).

But this interpretation of the analogy between occasional expressions and Heidegger’s formally indicative concepts does not hold, because it underestimates the kind of validity that formal indication attains. This validity of a formally indicative claim does not fluctuate according to who utters it. They are not subjective in the sense of being contingent and personal reports relevant to the speaker alone; they are subjective in the sense that they reveal necessary aspects of what it means to be a subject and to grasp fully the meaning of such a concept the individual must experience what it intends for himself. Further, because it purports to be a universal feature of subjectivity, each individual ought in principle to be able to grasp this meaning.

Thus, formally indicative concepts do not have the kind of validity that occasional expressions have but rather they have kind of validity that Husserl’s *analysis of* occasional expressions has. His analysis articulates the *necessary* conditions for the
possibility for an expression to be regarded as occasional, and these conditions purport to hold for any utterance of such an expression. For example, the claim that the objective expressions can be grasped without reference to the speaker and occasional expressions cannot is an essential claim that holds regardless of circumstances and has its evidential fulfillment in the experience of such expressions. It is an essential and unchanging feature of human subjectivity that an occasional expression can only be understood in relation to some subject who utters it. Like Husserlian phenomenology, then, formal indication, strives to attain a validity that holds for subjectivity in general – it does not content itself with claims that are valid only for the occasion.

This is accomplished by presenting evidence and a way towards accessing this evidence through the recursive hermeneutic process of clarification whereby an account of what and how the object under discussion is becomes transparent – a process which, if done properly, should make the account binding for the reader:

"Insofar as an object is possessed concretely, the possession is related to the object in such a way that it grasps the determinations of the object fully and in their full jointure and compaction, i.e., properly grasps the (ultimate) structural sense of the full object in the richness that determines what and how it is" (PIA, 23).

For Heidegger, then, these claims are not ‘situational’; rather, they gain “access to the original evidence-situation” (PIA, 29) and this situation is a not a play of subjective impressions but a set of categories that are constitutive of subjectivity in general and accessible within the experience of subjectivity. Claims such as ‘the meaningful relations of a significance contexture are held together by the self’s project in it’ or ‘the self is characterized by ‘mineness’” are not at all like the claim that “there are cakes.”

Heidegger’s formally indicative claims hold no matter who the speaker is, whether this
person grasps the point first-personally or not. But to make the statement authentically I have to recognize myself in it and only in this sense is such a claim occasional. It can only be appropriated in the occasion in which I grasp it from the first-person perspective but it holds of experience in general.

Husserl’s method for accessing the pretheoretical stratum of existence furnished Heidegger with a powerful tool to approach the self’s experience and a model for understanding the kind of validity that claims about the self can attain. In addition to this methodological debt to Husserlian phenomenology, Heidegger also appropriates aspects of Kierkegaard’s method for two main reasons. First, Kierkegaard targets many of the ‘existential phenomena’ that Heidegger attempts to characterize in his own work. Second, Kierkegaard pays special attention to the problems involved in communicating one’s own experience to the Other in a way that brings her to experience the same thing from her own perspective.

**Formal Indication and Indirect Communication**

Kierkegaard’s work, as is well known, represents an indictment of speculative Christian writing. Speculation in this context refers to writing that helps itself to claims regarding phenomena that transcend the bounds of possible experience. Such speculation, he claims, is of little use to the Christian reader because “Christianity pertains to existence, to existing, but existence and existing are the very opposite of speculation.”

Existence and speculation are opposites because the former is essentially a first-person and the latter a third-person affair. And the third-person perspective cannot get a purchase on the issue of Christian life, i.e., how to be a Christian. To be a Christian one must

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appropriate – for and by oneself – a set of beliefs not by understanding them as the consequence of a speculative enterprise but by being them in action. Furthermore, this appropriation requires a commitment that cannot be justified from the third-person perspective – for the claims of faith are not subject to evidential fulfillment or external proof. Attempts to attain such proof are, in fact, inimical to faith – for they foster the false belief that faith can be achieved through knowledge or approximation, when the objects of faith are constituted by ‘inwardness’ alone, i.e. a subjective commitment to a set of beliefs and a way of life for which the individual himself is responsible.

The task of Christian writing, then, is to call the reader not to understand Christianity but to become a Christian: “The listeners must be enlightened by the discourse and be encouraged to become that of which it speaks…” (CUP, 419). One cannot become a Christian “by reading books or by world-historical surveys, but by immersing oneself in existing,” (CUP, 560) because being a Christian “declines the understanding” (CUP, 560) when ‘understanding’ is conceived as cognition. To become a Christian one must ‘think’ “what is thought by actualizing it” (CUP, 196) – the individual must “understand himself in existence” (CUP, 351).

These claims are very much in line with Heidegger’s redefinition of understanding as “projecting towards a potentiality-for-Being for the sake of which any Dasein exists” (BT 336, 385). Existence declines the understanding when it is conceived as a cognitive grasping but not when it is conceived as the activity of projecting oneself into the very thing that is understood. Kierkegaard attempts to convey this point without reformulating the concept of understanding itself – existence declines the understanding because it remains a cognitive affair that cannot gain access to the sphere of existence.
Since his contemporaries fail to recognize this task, Kierkegaard finds their work—regard to the reader’s spiritual edification—in effectual: “Just as the old man who has lost his teeth now munches with the help of the stumps, so the modern Christian language about Christianity has lost the power of the energetic terminology to bite—and the whole thing is toothless ‘maundering’” (CUP, 363).

To restore the efficacy of Christian writing, Kierkegaard develops the method of “indirect communication”—a way of writing that strives to meet the reader on the level of existence, to invite her to think about faith strictly from within the constraints of that existence, and to show her that the task of faith is not to understand Christianity but to become a Christian. The ‘teachings’ of indirect communication, then, are not propositions about the objects of faith that purport to be true. To learn something from this method, rather, is to move beyond the mere repetition of third-personal descriptions to a repetition of a first-person appropriation of the matter at hand. Thus, the method demands the very thing that faith requires—inwardness—the subjective and independent appropriation of the matter under discussion.

One’s method, then, must bring the reader face to face with “what it means to exist” taking her “as close to existence as possible” (CUP, 289). This method is embodied in the writer’s style: “The subjective thinker’s form, the form of his communication, is his style” (CUP, 357). This style must capture the writer’s own way to the phenomenon of faith and thereby present the reader with the opportunity to repeat this way for herself. We can understand the task of this method, in part, through an analogy with the task involved in the vivid evocation of images in literature. For example, when Dickens
writes, "the sun shone through the clouds, making silvery pools in the dark sea," he has an image in mind that his style evokes for the reader. He attempts not only to get the reader to see these "silvery pools in the dark sea" but to see them as he does. He attempts to share his eyes with the reader and his only tool to accomplish this is his style. Kierkegaard endeavors to accomplish something similar; his task, however, is to relate his reader not to an image but a mode of existence:

"The speaker must not relate himself to his subject only through the imagination but must himself be that of which he speaks or, striving toward it, must have the 'how' of his own experience ..." (CUP, 419)

The mode of existence that Kierkegaard targets presents special difficulties. First, faith, especially in a wholehearted modality, is a notoriously difficult attitude to achieve. Second, when the author achieves it, his task is not just to describe it; rather, he must describe it in a way that brings the reader to her own achievement of it. This process, then, presupposes that the author has already experienced – or has traveled a stretch of the way toward experiencing and therefore caught a glimpse of – this mode of existence. He must already be – and his style of communication must compel the reader to become – faithful. Kierkegaard attempts to do this by indirectly circling around the matter, gradually providing the reader with a sense of what it would be like to be faithful, in part, by showing the many ways of being that do not constitute a faithful mode of existence. The method presents faith to the reader as a possibility she could be and attempts to face her with a decision regarding whether she will strive to take it up.

33 Dickens, Charles. *Bleak House*. New York: Bantam Books, 1992, p. xv. This passage is quoted in Nabokov’s lectures on *Bleak House*, which are excerpted in the introduction to the Bantam Books edition. In these lectures, Nabokov discusses the manner in which Dickens evokes his own experience in his reader: "without the words there would have been no vision; and if one follows the soft, swishing, slightly blurred sound of the sibilants in the description, one will find that the image has to have a voice too in order to live" (xv).
When Heidegger discusses ‘formal indication’ he too claims that one must be or be on the way towards what one hopes to communicate: “One can call something to the attention of others, and compel them to engage in reflection, only by traveling a stretch of the way oneself” (‘CKJ’, 36). The theme of Heidegger’s reflection is the experience of the ‘I am.’ Since the reader must be able to see the matter from the first-person perspective as that which she herself is, Heidegger cannot simply ‘report his findings.’

He must, rather, show the reader his own mode of access to the experience so that she can achieve this access for herself. Thus, like Kierkegaard, Heidegger claims that the “essential characteristic” of the proper method “is expressed precisely in the ‘how’ of our persisting in it” (‘CKJ’, 4).

This way is an indirect circling around the phenomenon to get the reader to come to see it for herself; this “detour and type of roundabout understanding enacted in it”, Heidegger claims, “make up the path to the things themselves” that the philosopher and reader must traverse independently (‘CKJ’, 5).

This respect for the Other’s independence is a core aspect of Kierkegaard’s method. Indirect communication is designed to draw the reader out of herself such that she takes a responsible stance towards her own self-understanding and the content of her beliefs rather than simply parroting what one says about these things:

“The observer does not glide directly to the result but on his own must concern himself with finding it and thereby break the direct relation [to the teacher]....[This] break is the actual breakthrough of inwardsness, as an act of self-activity” (CUP, 244).

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34 This is not to say that Kierkegaard did not open up this sphere in general and that he did not apply his analyses of ‘inwardsness’ to phenomena other than faith. It is only to say that he primary concern is always faith.
35 Please note how this passage not only resonates with but repeats Kierkegaard’s language.
36 This method strives to help the other preserve her independence. Thus, Kierkegaard writes, “no one is as resigned as God, because he communicates creatively in such a way that in creating he gives independence vis-à-vis himself. The most resigned a human being can be is to acknowledge the given independence in every human being and to the best of one’s ability do everything in order to truly help someone retain it” (CUP, 260).

37
“[The] learner personally appropriates what is taught, distancing himself from the teacher because he turns inward into himself—precisely that is inwardness” (CUP, 242).
“It could not be done by direct communication, since this always pertains to a recipient only in terms of knowledge, not essentially to an existing person” (CUP, 274).

Kierkegaard communicates indirectly, then, through pseudonyms, parables, metaphors, and repetitive argumentation in order to coax, prod, and guide his reader towards a repetition of his own appropriation of the matter. This is the only way, he contends, to approach the stratum of existence. Anything else is the ‘comical thoughtlessness’ of a ‘parroter’ (CUP, 22) – for a parrot does not appropriate what he says for himself but merely passes it along verbatim. To learn something through indirect communication is to move beyond the mere repetition of words to a repetition of the appropriation: “[The] inwardness of truth is not the chummy inwardness with which two bosom friends walk arm in arm with each other but is the separation in which each person for himself is existing in what is true” (CUP, 249).

Heidegger too strives to open up the fundamental experiences he characterizes in a manner that allows the reader to undergo or experience them for herself: the Other must be “in a certain way relentlessly compelled to engage in reflection, and thereby…[see] that one’s appropriation of the objects treated in philosophy is inseparably bound up with a certain rigor in the enactment of method” (‘CKJ’, 36). This approach, he claims, strives for “the highest measure of non-interference in personal decision-making and…set[s] the individual free for self-reflection.”37 Authentic communication, then, consists in “calling something to the attention of others. This is ultimately the predicament of all

37 (G9 42) Quoted in Van Buren 1995, 168.
philosophizing regarding its intention of having an effect in the world of others” (‘CKJ’, 5).

Like Kierkegaard, Heidegger recognizes that with regard to the structures of meaning that make pretheoretical experience possible such communication must be indirect – “it should be obvious that we are not of the opinion that one can approach the problem of existence directly” (‘CKJ’, 24)\(^{38}\) – because these structures are ordinarily invisible. And they must, for the most part, remain invisible because the smooth functioning of our existence depends on these structures being inconspicuously at work in the background. Thus, such communication does not bring the other into some theoretical attitude vis-à-vis her existence but holds her in existence in order to see it for what it is.

Kierkegaard captures the essence of this method beautifully with the following metaphor:

“To stop a man in the street and to stand still in order to speak with him is not as difficult as having to say something to a passerby in passing, without standing still oneself or delaying the other, without wanting to induce him to go the same way, but just urging him to go his own way—and such is the relation between an existing person and an existing person…” (CUP, 277).

In a like manner, formal indication strives to remain in the immanent sphere of existence and to reach the reader in this sphere. Its task is to grasp the structure of experience “in its ‘what’ and in its ‘how,’ in a way appropriate to the situation and to the preconception of it, in a way, furthermore, that grasps the object out of the basic experience that is to be acquired, and in a way that claims the object in speech” (PIA, 16). One must offer an interpretation that, as Heidegger puts it, “arises out of the respective level of the appropriation of life itself” and returns to it to repeat it in language (PIA, 66).

\(^{38}\)“This problem is characterized precisely by the fact that it is lost sight of when approached in this way” (i.e., when one attempts to avoid all detours in a purportedly superior fashion” (‘CKJ’, 24).
The process begins only with a sketch of a definition of the matter under discussion rather than attempting a complete definition from the start, in order to avoid taking a prejudice laden or dogmatic starting point as decisive. The initial definition or setting of the norm for the experience to be clarified is always tentative; it is a sketch and "the grasping comprehension has to follow the indicated direction of sense" (PIA, 25). The definition offers nothing but a way of access to the mode of experience under discussion. It is in this sense that "what is said in the definition, the definitive content, must be comprehended 'as indicative'" (PIA, 25).

The concept 'indicates' in the sense that it offers a point of orientation that is then developed and filled out from within the hermeneutic circle of phenomenology.

"'Formal', Heidegger claims, 'refers to the way of 'approach' toward actualizing the maturation of an original fulfillment of what was indicated' (PIA, 26). The formal aspect of the definition refers to "the direction" of the inquiry, that is, it "predelineates the way" (PIA, 27) towards an encounter with the experience. 39 This way prescribes how one

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39 It is important to note that formal indication, in Heidegger's sense, does not stop with the mere indication of a sense and direction towards the appropriation of the experience but entails the entire process from this initial indication to the full grasping of the phenomenon. Thus, it is a mistake when interpreters of Being and Time suggest that Heidegger's conception of formal indication is simply a repetition of traditional phenomenological terminology. Guignon, for example, makes this suggestion: "Formal indicators are, in the terminology of traditional phenomenology 'empty intentions,' for they anticipate concrete forms of experience but do not yet contain that experience" (Guignon, Charles. "Becoming a Self: The Role of Authenticity in Being and Time" in The Existentialists: Critical Essays on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., p. 121). For Heidegger, formal indication begins with such an intention, but it is an intention that points the way to fully grasping the phenomenon in question and includes this grasping as the conclusion to the process that the initial indication begins.

Interpreting formal indication in terms of its traditional meaning, Guignon goes on to suggest that the concepts of Division I are formal indications and that "the primary role of authenticity in Division II is to provide phenomenological content for what is initially projected only in 'formal indications' earlier in Being and Time... It seems, then, that the primary role of the concept of authenticity in Being and Time is epistemological: It provides concrete evidence for what was initially intended only in a formal indication. It follows that the only way to fully grasp the account of human existence presented in Being and Time is to actually become authentic" (129). The first problem with Guignon's claim is that he understands concepts presented in Division I as formally indicative, and he argues that the concepts of Division II gives phenomenological content to the mere formal indications of Division I. But all of Heidegger's concepts -

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enters into the analysis of the phenomenon or experience under discussion. From this initial entry the method proceeds to clarify that experience – from within that experience – by relating parts or facets of the situation or context to the whole and vice versa, recursively. This process is fluid and anti-foundational, adapting to new elements of the situation as they emerge in the analysis: "phenomenology is never closed off, it is always provisional in the absolute immersion in [the flowing stream of] life as such." The formally indicative concept points the reader on her way through the hermeneutic analysis to a fulfilled intention of the concept – to an experience in which she sees what is intended from the first-person point of view and therefore grasps it authentically.

This tentative aspect of the method fends off traditional dogmatic assumptions about the experience under consideration:

"The formal indication prevents every drifting off into autonomous, blind, dogmatic attempts to fix the categorical sense, attempts which would be detached from the presupposition of the interpretation, from its preconceptions, its nexus, and its time, and which would then purport to determine an objectivity in itself, apart from a thorough discussion of its ontological sense" (PIA, 105).

This anti-foundational method calls each element of the matter into question as much as possible, never assuming the appropriateness of any evidence. All evidence is regarded as "absolutely questionable" (PIA, 27), which fends off premature satisfaction in the validity of the initial definition – or any element that emerges in the course of the process – by submitting it to thorough scrutiny.

including those of Division II such as ‘guilt’ and ‘death’ – are formally indicative, and, thus, all of his concepts follow the full course from an initial starting point to a fulfilled intention. That is, they all are presented initially in the form of a tentative definition or sketch that is gradually filled out through the circular analysis of parts and wholes from within the hermeneutic circle. This entire process is what Heidegger calls formal indication – not simply the initial indication of sense.

With a tentative definition in hand, the analysis proceeds to a confrontation with the everyday preconceptions of one’s social-historical milieu regarding the aspect of existence under discussion. These prejudices are interrogated not simply to rid the analysis of them but to uncover insights that will aid the investigation. The tentative norm proposed at the outset is tested against and rounded out through this encounter, and the formal indicator is thus “deformalized and distinguished from the ordinary conception” (BT 34, 58). Crowell explains the goal or endpoint of this deformalization with great clarity: the formal definition “becomes deformalized when the one who understands it returns explicitly to an implicit accomplishment of evidence, possession in factic life, such that the accomplishment gets ‘repeated’ in a methodologically perspicuous or self-conscious way” (Crowell 2001, 144). Formal indication points to one’s pretheoretical involvement in a fundamental experience that is then clarified through further analysis.

This confrontation with our preconceptions is necessary, according to Heidegger, because of what he calls “fallenness”, which will be the subject of the next chapter – a tendency resident in factical life to exist irresponsibly in a conventional interpretation of ourselves:

“All ontological investigations of such phenomena as guilt, conscience, and death, must start with what the everyday interpretation of Dasein ‘says’ about them. Because Dasein has falling as its kind of Being, the way Dasein gets interpreted is for the most part inauthentically ‘oriented’ and does not reach the ‘essence’; for to Dasein the primordially appropriate ontological way of formulating questions remains alien” (BT 281, 326).

The claim that the self gets interpreted for the most part inauthentically indicates, as I will discuss in greater detail in the next chapter, that we tend to interpret ourselves in light of predominant modes of description that are not grounded in a first-personal confrontation
with the matter the interpretation purports to represent. Instead, one defers responsibility for one's self-interpretation by taking for granted the validity and normative authority of the understanding of being with which one finds oneself in virtue of being socialized into the practices of a particular social-historical milieu.

We begin with these habitual modes of self-understanding, however, not only to combat our fallen tendencies and to shed inappropriate self-conceptions that infect the very way in which we experience ourselves, obscuring our attempts at a transparent self-relation. These prejudices and everyday habitual modes of self-understanding are also vital to the inquiry because they emerge from the life we live and so, though 'perverted' by sedimented and conventional modes of interpretation, they stem from the very root system we hope to unearth. Embedded within our prejudices about experience are the grounds of that experience – what makes that experience possible no matter how distorted our interpretation has become. These prejudices give us the necessary materials to test our tentative norm in the hermeneutic process of clarification that will trim away the obfuscations of everydayness to reveal the categorical structure that makes our everyday lives possible.\(^41\)

In this process we break with the irresponsible mode of self-interpretation by taking responsibility for our prejudices and testing them against experience itself, and we thereby determine for ourselves which aspects of our self-understanding are legitimate. By taking this responsibility we put ourselves in a position to shed the habits of self-interpretation that leave us feeling estranged from our own being because they are alien

\(^41\) Along these lines, Heidegger claims, "all intuition... is enacted in the context of a definite orientation and an anticipatory preconception of the respective region of experience" ('CKJ', 4). Similarly, he claims, inquiry must begin "from particular contexts of phenomena and allowing ourselves to be guided by them" ('CKJ', 21).
to the kind of entity we are. In other words, we put ourselves in a position to enjoy a
certain integrity vis-à-vis our self-interpretation. We enable ourselves to experience the
unity between our self-understanding and who we are and thereby make it possible for
ourselves to live clairvoyantly in terms of the commitments associated with the kind of
entity we are, rather than blindly towing the line in accordance with what one says we
are.

The analysis, then, becomes a way of refining our preconceptions — not just
annihilating them but learning from them — so that in tracing the process of the analysis
independently the reader too can test her own and come to see herself without them. As
Kierkegaard puts it, “…the art of being able to communicate eventually becomes the art
of being able to take away or to trick something away from someone” (CUP, 275n). He
describes this ‘taking away’ as a kind of defamiliarization of ‘knowledge’:

“…when a man is very knowledgeable but his knowledge is meaningless
or virtually meaningless to him, does sensible communication consist in
giving him more to know, even if he loudly proclaims that this is what he
needs, or does it consist, instead, in taking something way from him?
When a communicator takes a portion of the copious knowledge that the
very knowledgeable man knows and communicates it to him in a form that
makes it strange to him, the communicator is, as it were, taking away his
knowledge, at least until the knower manages to assimilate the knowledge
by overcoming the resistance of the form” (CUP, 275n).42

Heidegger strives to defamiliarize the ordinary and take it away from his reader as well;
formal indication, he claims, serves “to guide as well as to deter in various ways” (PLA,
105). He begins with the everyday meaning of a term and then takes it away, presenting
the concept in the new light of his existential analytic. The fallen interpretation is
trimmed away, and the preconception in general is defamiliarized, so that it can be
grasped anew and grounded in a first-personal encounter with the matter at hand.

42 The emphasis here, intended to highlight the point about defamiliarization, is mine.
Indirect communication and formal indication are unique in that any account one offers via either method is not just a conceptual clarification but also a task. As Kierkegaard puts it, one must ‘think’ “what is thought by actualizing it” (CUP, 196). Or, in Heidegger’s terms,

“It is characteristic of an indicative definition that it precisely does not present fully and properly the object which is to be determined...An indicative definition includes the sense that concretion is not to be possessed there without further ado but that the concrete instead presents a task of its own kind and a peculiarly constituted task of actualization” (PIA, 26).

Every definition, for Heidegger, involves a decision because it must in each case, at the end of the analysis, be appropriated by an individual.43 After the analysis there remains an independent decision to reject the conclusion or to take it as binding and to hold oneself to it. The author makes this decision for himself and presents his judgment in a way that compels the reader to repeat or make the same decision, while recognizing that this decision is a task the reader must take up independently. The evidence is presented in language,

“so that it [the reader or the individual Dasein in this text] may decide of its own accord whether, as the entity which it is, it has that state of Being for which it has been disclosed in the projection with regard to its formal aspects” (BT 315, 362).

There is no other way, according to Heidegger, that “an entity can put itself into words with regard to its Being,” (BT 315, 363) because the only way to make a decision about one’s existence is to face it. We have already seen that the same holds for Kierkegaard. Formal indication, like indirect communication, targets existence as such

43 Heidegger points out the etymological connection here: “Definitio: decisio, determination alicuius dicitur quod tenendum et credendum declaratur, manifestatur et indicator. [“Definition is said to be a decision about or a determination of something, which determination is declared, manifested, and indicated as having to be held and believed” (PIA, 15).
and so always presents a possible way for the self to be, a way that the reader must be if she is to make a decision regarding the bindingness of the analysis. To truly understand what is at issue in the discussion – a way in which the self is – we need to take up this way of being. I need to understand myself in this possibility as a ‘potentiality-for-Being’ which is revealed to me in my own ‘projection.’

Authentic philosophical discourse, then, is the antithesis of the deracinated gossip or ‘idle talk’ of ‘fallenness’, which “does not communicate in such a way as to let this entity be appropriated in a primordial manner, but communicates rather by following the route of gossiping and passing the word along,” (BT 168, 212) understanding “everything without previously making the thing one’s own” (BT 169, 213). In fact, the young Heidegger, who first refers to ‘fallenness’ as ‘ruinance’, defines philosophy in terms of this opposition: “Philosophy is “the constant struggle of factual, philosophical interpretation against its own factual ruinance, a struggle that always accompanies the process of the actualization of philosophizing” (PIA, 114). Formal indication opposes ‘idle talk’ by demanding that the author make the matter under discussion ‘his own’ and bidding the reader repeat this act. Philosophy does not give a result – direct communication – but strives to give the condition to appropriate this result – indirect communication.

There is at least one obvious objection to the notion that philosophy can access the fundamental categories embedded in pretheoretical experience: If they are so embedded, always already functioning on a prethematic level, how does one make them thematic or available as objects of reflection in the first place? Is the notion that
pretheoretical existence can be submitted to phenomenological intuition not sheer pretension? Should we not rather aim at rational inference and reconstruction?

Heidegger has a response to this problem. He claims that inquiry into the categories of pretheoretical experience “arises from motives that have been clarified in the respective factual situation and that receive direction from factual life” (PIA, 114). Thus, formal indication is life returning to itself and life itself is what motivates this return. How does life make possible and motivate me to come to terms with the pretheoretical dimension of my situation? This happens, according to Heidegger, “only insofar as factual life is itself compelled to interpretation” (PIA, 66). And factual life is compelled to interpretation – to explicitly grasp what is always implicitly at work in one’s quotidian existence – when it breaks down. A breakdown occurs when my pretheoretical understanding of the world fails, i.e. when I fail to understand some aspect of the world and myself in it. Such a breakdown or failure ranges from the momentary disruption of a project to the complete failure of one’s practical identity. And such failure, according to Heidegger, brings to light what is always already at work sustaining the smooth functioning of what in this case fails. Since my existence matters to me, in the face of such failure I am compelled to explicitly come to terms with and in some way rectify what has broken down.

We can return to the workshop example from Being and Time, the locus classicus of Heidegger’s discussion of an everyday breakdown, to illustrate this point. For the failure of an element of the workshop context reveals the meaning structures that are ordinarily at work in making such a context intelligible and makes these structures available as objects of reflection. In Heidegger’s example, the meaning context of a
workshop becomes salient or manifest when a hammer breaks down. And my factual existence compels my reflection on this meaning structure, because my project in the workshop matters to me, and a certain understanding of what makes my work in this context possible is essential to continuing the project when it breaks down. Thus, when a hammer breaks and, in Heidegger’s terms, becomes ‘conspicuous,’ it must be dealt with for my work to continue. And what is required for me to deal with it is an understanding of how it relates to the other elements of the context and the kind of being it must have to function with these other elements. The failure of the hammer, then, attests to and compels me to come to terms with what was always already at work in making my participation in such a context possible – the ‘significance contexture’ or the system of meaningful relations that obtains between nails, hammers, boards, saws, etc:

“When equipment cannot be used, this implies that the constitutive assignment of the ‘in-order-to’ to a ‘towards-this’ has been disturbed. The assignments themselves are not observed; they are rather ‘there’ when we concernfully submit ourselves to them. But when an assignment has been disturbed – when something is unusable for some purpose – then the assignment becomes explicit...When an assignment to some particular ‘towards-this’ has been thus circumspectively aroused, we catch sight of the ‘towards-this’ itself, and along with it everything connected with the work – the whole ‘workshop’ – as that wherein concern always dwells. The context of equipment is lit up, not as something never seen before, but as a totality constantly sighted beforehand in circumspection” (BT 74-75, 105).

This passage shows how formal indication relies on attestation. When some aspect of our experience fails, what becomes salient – what is ‘lit up’ or ‘attested to’ – are the very meaning structures that ordinarily make that experience possible. Formal indication depends on the philosopher’s ability to reflect on what is already implicitly at work in pretheoretical life before a breakdown forces him to come to terms with it.
explicitly. The motives for formal indication, then, emerge from the factual situation in a breakdown that compels reflection on that situation.

If the reflection of formal indication requires such a breakdown on the part of the writer, how can he compel the reader to engage in such reflection? His writing must somehow evoke such a break with everyday experience in her. And this is why Kierkegaard, claims that the subjective thinker must be his style. He must not only ‘travel a stretch of the way’ with his reader – he must not only experience what he hopes to communicate – but he must evoke that experience in the other via language that simultaneously distances the reader from and brings her closer to existence. The reader is distanced from existence in the sense that she breaks with her everyday preconceptions and undergoes the jarring experience of being torn from her absorption in the world. Yet she is brought closer to existence because elements of her experience that are ordinarily invisible – that ordinarily make her absorption in the world possible – become visible and perspicuous. And the author must accomplish this without interfering with the reader’s autonomy – for the experience can only be authentically appropriated by the other if she comes to it herself.

In other words, since this reflection is only possible in the face of a breakdown, the author who strives to engage his reader in such reflection must somehow evoke such a breakdown in his reader. This need to break the reader out of her absorption in the everyday world accounts for the terminological and stylistic difficulties that one encounters in Kierkegaard and Heidegger.\textsuperscript{44} They are difficult to read not out of some

\textsuperscript{44} One might object that Heidegger is far more difficult to read than Kierkegaard and invested a great deal more in the use of special jargon. I would disagree. Admittedly, Kierkegaard, as he lacks the machinery of a more explicitly and traditionally elaborated philosophical method like phenomenology, is more likely to be read by the average reader. It does not follow, however, that he is in fact easier to read or, for that
perverse ‘Continental’ desire to make everyday life obscure or a regrettable inability to think clearly. They are difficult to read primarily because they employ ordinary terms in unconventional ways, and they do this because their task is to deal with the familiar in a way that defamiliarizes it for the reader so that she can grasp it in light of a new perspective.

Both philosophers, then, must proceed from the everyday understanding and language of the experience they hope to describe, break with its presuppositions, evoke this break in the reader by defamiliarizing her experience without interfering with her autonomy, indirectly invite her to repeat their encounter with this experience, and compel her to make a decision regarding the validity of their analysis.

Kierkegaard wants to present faith in all of its difficulty to the happy-go-lucky ‘Christian’ who takes an ‘eternal happiness’ to be a right conferred by baptism. He wants to reveal the difficult task that faith presents – the task of appropriation or taking responsibility for one’s faith – and to accomplish this he must first break the reader from a mechanical and thoughtless complacency. Similarly, Heidegger wants to break us from the pretheoretical life in which we are completely absorbed in order to call our attention to another matter, more often understood. For example, Kierkegaard’s forays into Hegelian dialectics and his claims such as the self is ‘a relation that relates to itself, or that in the relation which is its relating to itself’ in The Sickness Unto Death present difficulties comparable, I contend, to any passage in Being and Time. Moreover, it is unclear that Kierkegaard’s consistent use of irony, paradox and pseudonyms makes his work much easier to digest than Heidegger’s early writings. And it would seem unfair to say that Heidegger, as a matter of fact, uses significantly more jargon. After all, he intentionally takes his fundamental terms from everyday life – existence, care, death, guilt, conscience, and so on – and it seems that the greatest difficulties for readers emerge precisely in the face of his novel use of these familiar terms. It might be fair to say that reading Heidegger is more difficult and that his use of jargon is more substantial than what one encounters in Kierkegaard’s writing, but this disparity in the level of difficulty involved in reading these authors can certainly not be quantified precisely or universally – for example, a scholar whose area of specialty is 19th Century European Philosophy will likely find reading Kierkegaard easier than reading Heidegger, but a scholar who specializes in the phenomenological tradition will find the opposite to be the case. None of these considerations, however, undermine the claim that Kierkegaard and Heidegger intentionally make their texts difficult in order to break their readers with familiar prejudices – nor does it detract from the fact that Heidegger explicitly develops elements of Kierkegaard’s method.
to the task of making a responsible decision regarding our self-interpretation and the manner in which we carry out our lives. To accomplish this he needs to disrupt our everyday sense that this task has already been accomplished. And, to return to the analogy from the beginning of the chapter, like Dickens when he saw ‘silvery pools in the dark sea’ and wanted to evoke them in the mind’s eye of his reader, the only tool they have to accomplish this is their style. Thus, their method is their style.

One might object that the two goals of formal indication seem to be at odds. That is, if the method is designed to bring the reader to a first-person encounter with her own experience as it is experienced and yet it can only do this by at the same time changing the reader’s perspective on that experience, how can the process avoid interfering with the her autonomy? Does breaking the reader out of her everyday prejudicial encounter with her experience not constitute such interference?

The principle of non-interference inherent in the method is not a promise to simply leave the reader alone. If we were to understand any argumentation whatsoever as interference with the reader’s autonomy, then we would have to admit that formal indication constitutes interference with the Other’s autonomy. The principle of non-interference at work in the method, however, is not a promise to leave the reader alone; it is a promise not to coerce or manipulate the reader to accept any conclusions that she does not legitimate for herself from the first-person perspective. The method does not interfere with the reader’s autonomy because it appeals to her freedom rather than attempting to control or manipulate it. To clarify the point by analogy: does it constitute interference with the Other’s autonomy when, if he is hungry, I offer him bread? It might take the form of a certain kind of manipulation or coercion if I make this offer by placing
conditions on the Other's acceptance of the bread – that is, if I attempt to bring him under my influence or make him feel indebted to my act of 'charity.' If, however, I merely offer the bread without conditions on his taking it, my act is not interference with but rather an appeal to his freedom: "Here's something to eat. Take it or leave it. It's up to you." I thereby make an impact on the conditions of the Other's life, but I do not interfere with his freedom. The decision regarding what to do remains fully his own.

The same is true of what formal indication gives the reader to understand. The author experiences an aspect of his own existence from the first-person point of view and he appeals to the reader's freedom, via argumentation but not coercion or manipulation, to see for herself whether that description squares with her own experience. Indirect communication and formal indication do not attempt to exercise any control over the Other's free appropriation of the matter at hand. The appropriation and judgment of the account's validity is left to her.

This task, to bring the reader to an appreciation for her responsibility for her own existence, in a sense, will be the subject of the remaining chapters. This will become transparent in the next chapter, when the main theme of the thesis – the evasion of responsibility in everyday life and the overcoming of this evasion – is introduced. These methodological considerations have prepared us to appreciate Heidegger's approach to carrying out this task.
Chapter 2

Estrangement and the Evasion of Responsibility

"Now if [I] do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me."
—St. Paul (Rom 7:20)

2.1 Estrangement

One of the most paradoxical statements of Being and Time is Heidegger’s claim that the self “proximally and for the most part… is not itself” (BT 116, 151). What is a self such that, more often than not, it can fail to be what it is? And if I can fail to be myself, what kind of an achievement is it when I succeed at being myself? The failure to be myself involves a certain kind of estrangement – the experience of a gap between the self I identify with and the self that I in fact am. When I act in a way that is incongruent with my sense of who I want to be, it is “as if” some alien principle dwells within me, governing my actions, while the self I want to be remains a bystander, bemused by the actual goings on of my everyday life. Such estrangement marks a division in the self: I carry out my life in one manner while I simultaneously endorse, feel drawn by, and (tacitly or explicitly) register a preference for a different mode of existence that I feel is more consistent with who I truly want to be. And the only way to overcome this

46 The estrangement problem is not identical with the problem of akrasia; rather, akrasia is possible because of the kind of estrangement that interests me here. Weakness of will occurs when an agent deliberates and determines that he has most reason to do x, he then fails to do x, and, instead, he does the less reasonable y. The akratic agent fails in this way not because further deliberation proved that y was a better option given the circumstances but because his will was somehow too weak – he somehow failed to carry out x, which continued to represent his considered practical judgment. How does estrangement make this experience possible? Consider an example. Let’s say that our akratic agent doesn’t want to smoke and yet he gives in to the urge because his will is too weak to carry out his considered practical judgment. Our agent can only be in this predicament, he can only see his act of smoking as a failure, because a) he endorses the identity of ‘non-smoker’ or ‘healthy person’ such that smoking constitutes a failure to be who he wants to be and b) he is already caught up in the factual claims of being-a-smoker. In other words, the conflict between practical judgments and desires (or practical intentions and factual claims) that the agent faces in akrasia is only possible because there is a way of life that he endorses – in
estrangement, it seems, would be to somehow translate one’s endorsement of the true self into action.

In the Christian tradition, which is influential for Heidegger’s development of the problem, estrangement can be seen as a product of the original division of the self between soul and body. St. Paul frames the problem in these terms in his Epistle to the Romans:

“We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold into slavery to sin. What I do, I do not understand. For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I concur that the law is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh...Now if [I] do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me” (Rom 7:14-18, 20).

The sinner, then, is estranged from his actions because it is unclear why and uncanny that he would do that which he hates; thus, it seems as if some other principle, an alien force even, must determine his actions. His soul acknowledges that God’s law is the Truth, that his True self would be realized in fulfilling that law, but, it seems, the sin that dwells in his flesh somehow thwarts his capacity to fulfill the law.47 His true desire is to determine terms of which he makes his considered practical judgments – and a way of life that he is already caught up in and the factual claims of that life have a strong hold on him. Smoking only constitutes a failure for our agent – it is only an urge that he wants to combat – because it is incompatible with his sense of who he wants to be.

47 Again, this is not just the problem of akrasia. Specific instances of akrasia are possible for the Christian, understood in these terms, because he identifies himself with and endorses a Christian existence while he consistently fails to live his life on those terms. Such failure could not always be a matter of akrasia because akrasia involves deliberating, arriving at a considered practical judgment, and then failing to act on that judgment. But the failure at stake in this context is the failure to carry out a Christian existence, and we would need an extremely artificial action theory to claim that the consistent failure to carry out one’s existence in a Christian manner was a matter of akrasia. To make such a claim, we would need to say that in every case such an agent acted, he held before his mind his considered practical judgment regarding what a Christian would do and then failed to do it. An agent who deliberated in each case about what to do – and failed every time – would be in a pathological condition. But what Paul is talking about is a normal everyday phenomenon – one looks at one’s life and realizes that one is not living how one wants to live, one is failing to be who one wants to be, because one consistently fails to translate one’s endorsement of the Christian mode of life into action. To make this point clear it is important to note that we are often not even conscious of our failure until after the fact when we take a retrospective look at how we have lived and recognize that we have failed to be who we wanted to be. Such failure cannot be a matter of akrasia,
his actions in accordance with the law and yet he consistently fails to do so because of the powerful role sin plays in his life.\textsuperscript{48} This predicament highlights the essential division between oneself as created in the divine image and oneself as corruptible flesh in which the latter guides the former away from the divine and towards the profane. This predicament becomes explicit when I grasp the fact that I was created to take God's law as my own, and I experience my failure to fulfill the law as a failure. Once this realization is made life becomes a struggle to overcome the gap between these selves through conversion and faith, while salvation offers the promise of overcoming this division completely. The end of human striving, then, is to appropriate God's law as one's own and thereby to become a law unto oneself.

There is something analogous at work in Heidegger's position: the everyday self is for the most part divided against itself and this estrangement is something that must be

\textsuperscript{48} If acting in accordance with the law is what he truly desires, and he is free and capable of self-control, why doesn't he act in accordance with the law? Does the idea that one can act against one's true desires really make sense? Such questions often come up in arguments against the possibility of \textit{akrasia}. There are two basic versions of such arguments: 1) if we are driven by our strongest desire, we always do what we want, because our strongest desire is what we most desire and it simply determines our action or 2) if we are free to determine our actions, then there is no reason to think that one would ever act against one's true desires. Thus, it must be the case that we always act on what we truly desire. Both of these pictures, however, write off too quickly the possibility that we are capable of self-determination. First of all, there are good reasons to doubt the deterministic picture of desires as forces that drive us to act rather than claims to which we respond. Consider, for example, the recovered crack addict: it makes little sense to say that his recovery was not up to him, that the tide of an ongoing battle suddenly changed and his desire to recover thwarted his desire for crack, as if his free endorsement and power for decision had no role to play. Second, genuine self-determination is also ruled out by the claim that if we are truly free there is no conceivable reason why we would not \textit{always} act on our true desires – what we consider it best for us to do. As Wallace points out in \textit{Normativity and Will}, this argument casts doubt on our capacity for self-determination because it suggests that we \textit{must} act on our true desires or that we \textit{cannot} act against our true desires. But if I cannot act against my true desires, then I cannot really consider myself \textit{free} to determine my own actions. The capacity for self-determination presupposes that it is up to me whether I succeed \textit{or fail} to be who we want to be.
overcome if it is to become who it is and attain satisfaction in its existence. The remaining chapters of this thesis will be dedicated to explaining precisely how this claim plays out in *Being and Time*; for now, however, we must content ourselves with a brief synopsis.

For Heidegger, the self is originally divided because, although it would be, for reasons this thesis will try to make clear, a full integrated self if it chose to be responsible, its original condition is one in which it is estranged from and even evades this responsibility in a mode of being that he calls ‘fallenness.’ The opposite of fallenness, the existence of an integrated and complete self, is what Heidegger calls ‘resoluteness,’ the meaning of which he formally indicates with the expression ‘being-guilty’ or ‘being-responsible.’ Only when one acknowledges that being-responsible is the truth of his existence’ can he see his failure to be responsible – the fact that he has ‘fallen’ – as a failure. As it is in the Christian tradition, then, the division between the fallen and resolute self is an original condition that we, in a sense, suffer from prior to any explicit awareness of its nature. In *Being and Time*, this condition constitutes a form of estrangement primarily because in the mode of ‘fallenness’ the individual does not determine who he is for himself but rather allows himself to be determined by passively going along with the anonymous authority of the normative structure of his social historical milieu. He lives a life that is not experienced as his own but rather as some ‘one’s’ life. And this is because he is estranged from his own capacity for self-determination and the responsibility that it implies.

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49 One might object that Heidegger’s position does not allow for the kind of division in the self that I have described so far, because Heidegger seems to suggest that the self is either authentic or inauthentic and so cannot be both at once and undergo this kind of conflict. This is a common misunderstanding. According to Heidegger, the self is rarely one or the other, authentic or inauthentic, but rather exists in a mixed mode on a continuum between the poles of authenticity and inauthenticity.
In terms of both the Christian narrative and Heidegger’s account of the self in *Being and Time*, the individual who fails to be who he wants to be suffers as a result of his failure. The Christian suffers from the division between body and soul before he even comes to know God’s law, which renders the nature of his predicament transparent. St. Paul makes this clear when he writes that the Gentiles who do not even know the law but are nevertheless good “show that the demands of the law are written in their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even defend them” (Rom 2:15). In other words, a tacit recognition of the law is always already at work in those created in God’s image and therefore any failure to fulfill it – even prior to an explicit awareness of it – results in a kind of suffering and remorse. Likewise, Heidegger indicates that the self is always already implicitly aware of its failure to live in light of the fact that it is ‘guilty’ (or responsible), because this fact makes itself known in the ‘call of conscience’, a mode of awareness he associates with the mood of anxiety, which troubles the everyday self’s worldly tranquility even when its full meaning is not explicitly grasped. In analogy to the Christian’s confrontation with the law, the self, as it is characterized in *Being and Time*, comes to a transparent awareness of its predicament when it fully grasps the meaning of the call of conscience and it is confronted by the fact of its own autonomy in ‘being-towards-death.’

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50 Heidegger points out that the Christian narrative regarding ‘Original Sin’ tracks the same phenomenon that he is interested in clarifying. How are we to account for the fact that we have a sense of responsibility for elements of our being that we did not, in any obvious sense, choose for ourselves? The narrative of ‘the Fall,’ as Kant suggests in the *Religion*, could itself be seen as an allegory designed to capture our sense that we are responsible for our existence – for who we have been, are, and will be. Heidegger makes the same point when he claims that something like ‘ruinance’ or ‘fallenness’ is an element of existence that went unseen until it was isolated by Christianity, but nonetheless was always an aspect of our being: “The temptative – not in a religious sense; for the experience of it to be alive, there is not required a basis in religious experience. To be sure, the temptative, as a character of movedness, first becomes visible through Christianity; visible: experienceable in factual life, able for me to experience it” (*Philosophy and Christianity, 114*). Christianity,

57
In this chapter, I focus on Heidegger’s treatment of the problem of estrangement, a mode of existence that he calls ‘fallenness’, and I attempt to read it in light of Kant’s discussion of ‘radical evil’ in Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, which I take to be an important conceptual precursor to Heidegger’s account. I have introduced the problem with this brief discussion of St. Paul because it seems to me that Kant and Heidegger are both wrestling with the problem of estrangement formulated by St. Paul. What follows, then, is a comparative analysis of Kant and Heidegger’s approach to what I have called the problem of estrangement.

2.2 Kant on Radical Evil

In the Religion Kant sets out to overcome several difficulties at the heart of his practical philosophy. These difficulties revolve around the matter of self-love, the propensity to take my inclinations as grounds for action. In his other writings on moral philosophy, Kant seems to frame our moral lives as a conflict between self-love and the principle of pure practical reason (the categorical imperative). This representation of the human predicament, however, leads to two consequences that he finds unpalatable.

First, it gives the impression that our natural inclinations drive us towards evil acts. This is problematic because, for Kant, our sensuous nature is morally neutral — it provides incentives that motivate us towards both good and evil ends depending on the situation. Furthermore, if it were true that our natural inclinations drive us to commit evil acts, then we could not understand ourselves as totally responsible for evil. We could diminish our responsibility for evil acts via a reduction to causal stories about natural forces that are out of our control. Kant, then, rejects the Pauline claim that the division of the self can be

Heidegger seems to be saying, has already set its sights on and brought to our attention an aspect of human life that calls for phenomenological clarification.
explained by locating the source of evil in the flesh, because such an explanation fails to explain how we could be considered responsible for evil. The "source of evil," he claims, "cannot lie in an object determining the will through inclination...If this ground itself were not ultimately a maxim, but a mere natural impulse, it would be possible to trace the use of our freedom wholly to determination by natural causes; this, however, is contradictory to the very notion of freedom." The second unpalatable consequence for Kant is that this 'combat' view of moral motivation renders mysterious how the incentives of self-love can trump the incentive of respect associated with the moral law. How is it that a rational being – a being with a will whose law is the categorical imperative and for whom this law is intrinsically motivating – can consistently incorporate sensuous incentives over moral incentives to govern its will?

Kant attempts to solve these difficulties with his discussion of 'radical evil.' Radical evil is the propensity to subordinate the incentives of the moral law to the incentives of self-love. This 'propensity,' he claims, must be understood as the product of a free choice wherein all of an agent's maxims are grounded in a 'supreme maxim' to "neglect the incentives springing from the moral law in favor of others which are not moral" (RWL, 25). This reversal of "the ethical order among the incentives of a free will" (RWL, 25) allows one to incorporate the sensuous incentives of self-love into one's will in spite of the binding force that the moral law exercises on pure practical reason. This evil is 'radical' because, as the 'subjective ground of choice,' it determines the agent's stance towards choice from the ground up and is the root of moral evil in general, i.e., it makes particular acts of evil possible.

This supreme maxim can be understood as a kind of meta-maxim – a maxim in which we take a stance towards maxim-making in general. ‘Radical evil,’ then, is a stance or disposition to incorporate incentives of self-love rather than the incentive of respect for the moral law into our maxim. With this stance I evade the responsibility associated with the moral law by allowing myself to be carried along by – and so to falsely understand myself as ‘driven by’ – the sensuous incentives of self-love. I am estranged from my true self, my self that is capable of self-determination and responsibility, then, because I do not determine my own actions but allow myself to be determined by my sensuous nature. It is as if I can choose to live my life in the world of nature (the space of causes) or the practical world of freedom (the space of reasons). If I choose the former I act ‘as if’ I am simply part of a system of causes in which my strongest desire determines my actions; if I choose the latter, then I choose to determine myself in accordance with practical reason. In the first case, I am estranged from my true nature as a rational being and in the second I fulfill that nature.

Kant’s argument, then, solves the difficulties mentioned above. First of all, it does away with the ‘combat’ picture of moral motivation and rules out exonerating an agent via naturalistic stories about his ‘animal’ nature. Because I freely choose whether I act on the incentives of self-love or the moral law, I cannot understand myself as driven by but rather as abnegating self-government to my natural inclinations. Secondly, since I choose this propensity, I must understand myself as fully responsible for my evil actions. Since I act “under the idea of freedom,” I choose whether to be governed by the moral law or to evade responsibility by subordinating moral incentives to sensuous ones.
This solution, however, generates its own problems. On the one hand, Kant's argument depends on the premise that radical evil is the product of free choice. On the other hand, he maintains that this wicked propensity is "entwined with and...rooted in humanity itself...Hence we can call this a natural propensity to evil...a radical innate evil in human nature" (RWL, 28). In other words, Kant seems to undermine his solution by claiming that radical evil is at once a product of freedom and a natural propensity.

Propensities are features of human nature. Therefore, we can freely respond to them but we cannot choose them. But Kant claims that radical evil is both a natural propensity and a stance that we are responsible for — and therefore can be blamed for — because we choose it. And this claim generates an antinomial thicket at the heart of his account:

"...this very propensity must in the end be sought in a will which is free, and can therefore be imputed, it is morally evil. This evil is radical, because it corrupts the ground of all maxims; it is, moreover, as a natural propensity, inextirpable by human powers, since extirpation could occur only through good maxims, and cannot take place when the ultimate subjective ground of all maxims is postulated as corrupt; yet at the same time it must be possible to overcome it, since it is found in man, a being whose actions are free" (RWL, 32).  

52 "Simply put, the problem is that in order to count as a moral propensity, it must somehow be viewed as freely chosen by an agent; but a propensity (Kant cites as an example the alleged propensity of savages for intoxicants) does not seem to be the sort of thing that can be chosen" (Allison, Henry. "Ethics, Evil, and Anthropology in Kant: Remarks on Allen Wood's Kant's Ethical Thought," Ethics, Vol. 111, No. 3. (Apr., 2001), p. 607).

53 For a discussion of Kant's 'Reciprocity Thesis' and his attempts to justify it see Allison, Henry E. "Morality and Freedom: Kant's Reciprocity Thesis," The Philosophical Review, Vol. 95, No. 3. (Jul., 1986), pp. 393-425. In this article Allison explains that this thesis amounts to "the claim that freedom of the will and the moral law are reciprocal concepts" (Ibid. p. 394). For my purposes it is not important that this thesis is valid but only that Kant maintains that it is. As I will argue, Heidegger's development of Kant's position does not preserve the reciprocity of freedom and morality. Freedom determines the possible domain of that which can be attributed to me and for which I am, in an existential sense, responsible. Moral responsibility, however, is a more complicated matter that involves more than simply determining which actions emanate from my freedom. For Heidegger, it is not the case that all free actions are moral and all immoral actions are in some sense un-free. Rather, moral or immoral, one acts freely. Thus, determining which actions are imputable to an agent is a necessary starting point for moral reasoning but it is not sufficient to arrive at a moral judgment regarding his action.

54 Although taking responsibility for radical evil is rooted in the intuitive notion that I am responsible for what emanates from my own freedom, Kant seems to be loading us with a burden without adducing evidence that such responsibility is properly ours. I will discuss this problem in more detail in the next chapter and attempt to show how Heidegger overcomes it. In Kant, the imperative to take responsibility for
A generous interpretation of Kant’s position, however, will take ‘natural’ in this context as a term of art designed to capture our sense that ‘radical evil’ seems to be a deep fact about humanity: “this propensity is so deeply rooted in the will that we are forced to say that it is to be found in man by nature;” (RWL, 29) it is ‘as if’ “it is woven into the fabric of human nature” (RWL, 25). This propensity, then, is like our other natural propensities, such as our propensity to seek nourishment, in that we find ourselves with it as always already part of our ‘endowment.’ However, it is not really a natural propensity but a disposition or stance that we choose. It is only natural in the sense that it seems to be the starting point for human life – it is the disposition with which we find ourselves acting in the world and out of which we must emerge to become autonomous – but it is a starting point that we choose.

Kant’s position, then, targets a fundamental division between the irresponsible self driven by self-love and the responsible self that takes the moral law as the legitimate sovereign of its will. Furthermore, he clearly articulates a condition for the possibility of moral agency: I must recognize the validity of the moral law and take responsibility for the stance that allows me to deviate from it in order to recognize those deviations as a
matter of moral failure. Thus, as Allison points out, we do not need to interpret Kant’s position in “dauntingly metaphysical terms” that suggest “timeless noumenal agency”:

“The point is merely that in order to give coherence to an agent’s moral life, we must view that agent’s actions as expressions of an underlying maxim, which determines the moral orientation of the will. Unlike ordinary maxims, however, this dispositional-maxim or propensity cannot be thought as self-consciously adopted at a particular point in time. On the contrary, it is found to be already at work when moral deliberation begins and must be presupposed in order to conceive the possibility of immoral actions in beings for whom the moral law provides an incentive.”

Allison takes the right tack here by homing in on what is most important about Kant’s argument: he casts a bright light on an essential decision that each of us must face because it is embedded in the very structure of agency: we must decide to be responsible or fail to do so. And this decision marks the difference between being estranged from one’s true nature and fulfilling that nature. In *Being and Time*, this essential decision becomes Dasein’s choice “to be itself or not itself” (*BT* 12, 33). It is because Kant brings this question to light that we can see his account of ‘radical evil’ in the *Religion* as a conceptual predecessor to Heidegger’s account of ‘fallenness.’ We are now in a position to make this comparison.

### 2.3 Evasion

According to Kant, human agents, for the most part, evade the responsibility associated with the moral law in order ‘to go along’ with the incentives of self-love—they shun the burden of self-determination in favor of being determined. Similarly, ‘fallenness,’ for Heidegger, is a way of being in which the agent does not choose his stance towards choice but rather makes his choices the way ‘one does.’ ‘Fallenness,’

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55 Here, again, we see the analogy with Paul’s point: “Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good” (*Romans* 7:17 *ESV*).
then, as we shall see, serves the same function for Heidegger that radical evil does for Kant: it makes possible the distinction between a responsible self-determining agent and the agent estranged from his own freedom who allows himself to be determined. To see this clearly, we need to take a closer look at some of Heidegger’s formally indicative concepts.

2.3.1 Discourse

To understand the role ‘fallenness’ plays in Heidegger’s account of the self we need to explain why this irresponsible way of being – even though it is only a possible mode of being to which responsibility is a constant alternative – is the manner in which *most of us, most of the time*, carry out our existence. This will require a deeper understanding of his concept of ‘discourse,’ which, he claims, articulates the intelligibility of experience, and we will need to take a close look at the concept of ‘*das Man*’ (the one), which he claims articulates the intelligibility of *everyday* experience. Discourse formally indicates the intelligible structure of human experience and ‘*das Man*’ determines the discourse – or intelligible structure – of everyday life. When we appreciate what this means, it will become clear why the self for the most part tends towards fallenness (or inauthenticity) rather than resoluteness (authenticity or being-responsible).

Heidegger’s account of Dasein’s ‘disclosedness’ articulates the transcendental conditions for the possibility of the intelligibility of our experience. These transcendental conditions are the basic categories or meaning structures embedded in our experience that also make that experience possible, which, as I explained in the first chapter, are what Heidegger’s text ‘formally indicates’ by pointing the reader towards a fulfilled intuition.
in which he projects himself into being these categories. We must bear in mind that these
categories are not just the rational conditions for the possibility of life as we know it; they
are part of life itself and everyday experience forms itself on them. Like the concrete
foundation and the house built upon it, the meaning structures targeted by formal
indication are the foundation of everyday experience and at the same time inseparable
from it. In Being and Time, Heidegger calls these structures ‘existentials’ or
‘existentialia.’

The “fundamental existentialia which constitute the Being of the ‘there’, the
disclosedness of Being-in-the-world, are,” according to Heidegger, “states-of-mind
[mood] and understanding” (BT 160, 203). Understanding formally indicates my practical
involvement in worldly significance contexts, an involvement that makes it such that
all of my action can be interpreted. The concept points to a fundamental consanguinity
between existence and understanding – I always understand myself in light of my
existence because who I am is determined by what I am up to.57

As such an agent, Heidegger argues, my point of view in terms of which I frame
my responses and govern my actions is rooted in a tacit pretheoretical grasp of myself in
my practical roles and the activities associated with them. I am a teacher, a friend, a
brother, a liberal democrat, etc. and it is in these roles that I find myself “attending to
something and looking after it, making use of something, giving something up and letting

57 My understanding of Heidegger’s concept of ‘understanding’ is much indebted to John Haugeland’s
Press, 1998; “Truth and Finitude: Heidegger’s Transcendental Existentialism,” Heidegger, Authenticity,
it go, undertaking, accomplishing”, etc. And “All these ways of Being-in have concern as their kind of Being” (BT 56-57, 83). This is the basic meaning of Heidegger’s claim that the self, “when understood ontologically, is care...Being towards the world [Sein zur Welt] is essentially concern” (BT 57, 84). I always understand myself in terms of some role and the practical abilities associated with it, and the projects I carry out in these roles give my life meaning. My life matters – I care about it – in terms of these activities:

“Living, in its verbal meaning, is to be interpreted according to its relational sense as caring: to care for and about something; to live from [on the basis of] something, caring for it...‘to live’ means to care. What we care for and about, what caring adheres to, is equivalent to what is meaningful. Meaningfulness is a categorical determination of the world; the objects of a world, worldly, world-some objects, are lived inasmuch as they embody the character of meaningfulness...caring is an experience of objects in their respective encoutnerability” (PIA, 68).

The way my life matters to me is always bound to the contexts of socially shared practices in which I take up a role. A practice is understood here in a broad sense, as a set of norms that guide me and are constitutive of a particular set of activities in which I, when properly socialized, can participate. For the most part, I can glide through the world on ‘auto-pilot’ because I have mastered a set of abilities-to-be or skills required for me to participate in these social practices. By engaging in these roles I disclose who I am and at the same time disclose the entities and others relevant to my activity as particular kinds of entities and others. And they return the favor by disclosing me as someone in particular.

The skills that enable me to engage in these social practices are what Heidegger calls ‘potentialities-to-be.’ These are the ‘possibilities’ of the self when we interpret it ‘existentially’ – they are, for the most part, the modes of being that I take up in the world by projecting myself into some practical role and it is in terms of the activities associated
with these possibilities that I, in my everyday life, understand who I am.\textsuperscript{58} They furnish the content of my identity. This is the central tenet of Heidegger’s existentialism – the self must be understood as its \textit{Existenz}, i.e. its capacity for self-projection into different abilities-to-be. The question regarding the being of the self, then, is not what it is but who it is, and who we are is determined by the kind of activities we engage in. The self is not a special biological organism (rational animal) or a rational observer (\textit{ego cogito}) but rather what it does – “existing is action” (‘PT’, 48). I experience who I am in a communal world “in a very specific, factual characterization: as a student, a lecturer, as a relative, superior, etc., and \textit{not} as specimen of the natural-scientific species \textit{homo sapiens}, and the like.”\textsuperscript{59} The “formally indicated meaning” of ‘\textit{Existenz},’ Heidegger contends, “is intended to point to the phenomenon of the ‘I am,’ i.e., to the sense of being in this ‘I am’ that forms the starting point of an approach to a context of fundamental phenomena and the problems involved there” (‘CKJ’, 9). We \textit{are} our ‘existence’\textsuperscript{60} – the forms of activity into which we project ourselves\textsuperscript{61}.

\textit{“The ‘essence’ of Dasein lies in its existence [\textit{Existenz}]. Accordingly those characteristics which can be exhibited in this entity are not ‘properties’ present-at-hand of some entity which ‘looks’ so and so and is itself present-at-hand; they are in each case possible ways for it to be, and not more than that… The ‘essence’ [‘\textit{Wesen}’] of this entity lies in its ‘to be’ [\textit{Zu-sein}]” (\textit{BT} 42, 67).}

\textsuperscript{58} ‘For the most part’ here indicates that Heidegger also understands the existential categories of experience that make that experience possible as possibilities that I can project myself into. This, in fact, is what makes ontological knowledge possible and it is what allows Heidegger to claim that his concepts are not just an artificial ‘latticework’ that is adequate to account for reality but rather these ‘concepts’ are endemic to pretheoretical life itself – life forms itself on them. This footnote is only meant to foreshadow a point will be developed in the next chapter on method.


\textsuperscript{60} “But if the self is conceived ‘only’ as a way of Being of this entity, this seems tantamount to volatilizing the real ‘core’ of Dasein… Yet man’s ‘\textit{substance}’ is not spirit as a synthesis of soul and body; it is rather \textit{existence}” (\textit{BT} 117, 153).

\textsuperscript{61} “This term ‘existence’ formally indicates that Dasein is an understanding potentiality-for-being, which, in its being, makes an issue of that Being itself” (\textit{BT} 231, 274).
These possibilities do not adhere to me like qualities; they are determinate forms of activity that I engage in and in terms of which I understand who I am. To be is not be occurrent but to transcend – to always already be ‘out there’ ‘in-the-world.’

This sense of possibility must be “sharply distinguished from empty logical possibility and from the contingency of something present-at-hand” (BT 143, 183). These possibilities are not particular actions that I could possibly carry out. They are the abilities that make carrying out particular actions possible. For example, it is not a possibility for me teach a class tomorrow. The relevant possibility in this case is ‘being-a-teacher’ – the ability that makes the particular action of teaching a class possible. Because I understand myself as a teacher, I can teach this or that particular class.

The second a priori structure that constitutes human experience is “Mood” (Befindlichkeit), and it is the existentiale that allows the world and my projects in it to make an affective claim on me. According to Heidegger, I always find myself in some mood, and this means I find myself in the world always already claimed by certain aspects of my environment. This is an essential element in the self’s constitution of meaning, as it determines which aspects of an action context are salient. For example, if I

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62 Heidegger clarifies this point in his comments on Jasper’s Psychology of Worldviews: “‘he is’ can be taken in the sense of a being present and occurring in nature as it is represented objectively (a multiplicity of objects and relations). Or ‘he is’ can have the sense that he plays a role in the social world he shares with others around him. This sense is expressed, for example, in the trivial question, ‘What does X do in Y?’” (‘CKJ’, 27).

63 Overlooking this point leads to great confusion. Teaching a particular class is a discrete action that I can make ‘actual’ by doing it, or the time of which could pass making it no longer ‘available.’ In either case, the action in question is not something that remains a possibility for me, i.e. an activity in terms of which I can understand myself. A particular action can never provide such an understanding. I cannot understand myself as a teacher simply by teaching one class, unless being-a-teacher is a practice into which I have been socialized. For instance, if a friend lets me teach his class, and I fail miserably because I lack the requisite ability, unless I am delusional, I will in no way understand myself as a teacher because I ‘taught’ a class. Possibilities, then, are not particular actions that we actualize. They are the abilities in terms of which we understand ourselves that enable us to carry out particular actions. Thus, the ability-to-be a teacher is a possibility, because it cannot be ‘used up’ – even when I project myself into it, it remains a possibility for me, an aspect of my being in terms of which I understand myself.
find myself in a joyful mood on a lovely day, my attention at one moment might be drawn to the green leaves of the tree against the backdrop of the blue sky, and then to a cardinal on a branch, and so on. As my attention shifts from one object to the next, I take joy in each one. On the same day, however, if I find myself depressed, these features of my environment – the leaves, sky, and cardinal – remain in the background, as I sift through recriminations about the past.

Mood determines which features of the world and which people stake a claim on or matter to me along with determining the extent to which they do. Without mood, my existence would fail to matter to me – I could not experience it as meaningful. The world is an interrelational structure of significant ends – ‘in order to’s’ – set up by my projects. And the meaning of this structure of ends is anchored in an ultimate ‘for the sake of which’, i.e., my care for my own existence, which matters to me, in part, because the world and others make a claim on my pathetic dimension.

According to Heidegger, the structures of understanding and mood are fundamentally interpretive. My understanding of the world, my meaningful and purposive comportment within it, is interpretive because things show up and are meaningful to me as this or that kind of being in light of the constitutive norms of the social practices in which I participate; I take things as this or that in light of a pretheoretical hermeneutic framework. Mood is equiprimordial with this understanding and this means that my mood too can always be interpreted (or has “a certain capacity for getting interpreted” (BT 160, 203)). My moods are taken as tokens of the possible kinds of mood available in my overall hermeneutic framework or social world.
Understanding and mood, which make this intelligible space of meaning
(‘disclosedness’, ‘the open’, ‘the there’, ‘the clearing’) possible by enabling us to
interpret aspects of our experience as this or that, Heidegger claims, must be understood
as ‘always already’ articulated in advance of any particular interpretation or ‘taking as.’
That is, the meaning of this open region has a structure prior to any particular experience
and this structure is set up by the co-constituting categories of understanding and mood.
The fact that the world is articulated in this way makes our experience intelligible; it
gives the world a reliable structure that allows us to cope in a variety of meaningful contexts. Because this articulated dimension also makes meaning possible it too is an
‘existential category’ that is “equiprimordial with state-of-mind and understanding” (BT
161, 203); Heidegger formally indicates and so points us to an encounter with this
existential with the term ‘discourse.’

Discourse, then, refers to the fact that I find myself in a world – prior to any
explicit interpretive effort on my part – that has an intelligible structure: “The
intelligibility of something has always been articulated, even before there is any
appropriative interpretation of it” (BT 161, 203). This “articulation of intelligibility” (BT
161, 203-204) makes it such that meaning, most of the time, is not something that needs
to be wrested from experience. Rather, it is immediate; I am always already immersed in
it. This ‘pre’-articulated meaning is established, for the most part, by the average way of
doing and feeling about things that belong to the familial and cultural tradition in which I
learned what it means to be or acquired my ‘understanding of being.’
Thus, it is a mistake, as I shall argue in more detail in the section on ‘idle talk,’ to equate discourse with language.\(^{64}\) Language does not constitute the structure of the space of meaning in which we exist but rather interprets it in a way that can ‘disclose’ or ‘cover over’ this structure to varying degrees. Thus, discourse makes language in its ‘primordial,’ ‘deracinated’ and other mixed forms possible. It accounts for the fact that my experience is almost always immediately intelligible and always in principle admits, to a greater and lesser extent, of linguistic articulation. But, aside from the broad claim that this structure is rooted in our shared social practices and mood, what sets up this pre-articulated structure of the world? Furthermore, what accounts for the fact that we are always already in a position for this intelligibility to be immediately appropriated?

2.3.2 Das Man

Heidegger claims that this pre-articulated structure is ‘always already’ there due to another existentiale that he formally indicates with the expression ‘das Man’ [translated: ‘the They’, ‘the one’]. According to Heidegger, das Man “itself Articulates the referential context of significance,” (BT 129, 167) and therefore makes the kind of intelligibility we have and the immediacy of its appropriation possible. Das Man is Heidegger’s term of art that formally indicates the structure of the social practices in terms of which we interpret entities and others as tokens of particular kinds. It is the structure of the shared set of practices into which I can project and in terms of which I can understand myself as having a particular identity.

To illustrate this point with an example, it is only due to the fact that ‘dining at a restaurant’ is an intersubjectively shared practice that I can walk into a restaurant where I

\(^{64}\) "That which can be Articulated in interpretation, and thus even more primordially in discourse, is what we have called 'meaning'. That which gets articulated as such in discursive Articulation, we call the 'totality-of-significations' [Bedeutungsganze]" (BT 161, 204).
have never been and without interruption or confusion take my seat, separate the staff from the clientele, order a meal, and carry on dining without disrupting any accepted norms. This transaction transpires seamlessly because I know what I am up to in that context, and I know this because I have been socialized into the practice. In these intersubjectively shared practices inhere the norms according to which I can comport myself in a ‘new’ context by simply doing what one does in such a place.

The majority of my world, then, is set up and my comportment within it enabled by the fact that I have been socialized into it. This social intelligibility is *das Man*, the structure of the shared social practices the norms of which govern what ‘one does’ in different contexts within the horizon of significance that Heidegger calls the world. It is important to note that Heidegger’s concept of *das Man* is not the particular set of practices that happen to exist in my particular social world; rather, it is a formally indicative concept that points to the fact that in any social world intelligible action is governed by the norms built into the intersubjectively shared practices. This set of practices with its norms and standards is what furnishes the bulk of my identity as a practical agent; I find and define who I am as I am socialized into and take up various roles in these pre-established practices.

*Das Man*, then, sets up the pre-articulated structure of the world and I experience things as immediately intelligible within these practices because from the very beginning of my existence I am socialized into them:

“This everyday way in which things have been interpreted is one into which Dasein has grown in the first instance, with never a possibility of extrication. In it, out of it, and against it, all genuine understanding, interpreting, and communicating, all re-discovering and appropriating anew, are performed” (*BT* 169, 213).
We always already share a sense of the structure of the world because this structure is established and maintained by *das Man*. In *das Man* "the tasks, rules, and standards, the urgency and extent, of concerned and solicitous Being-in-the-world...has already been decided upon" (*BT* 268, 312). This taken for granted way of doing things does the work of making everything intelligible such that no phenomenon falls completely outside the margins of sense. Everything shows up as something in particular even if it is only appropriated as ‘the new’ or as ‘the strange or alien’ or even as ‘that which I cannot understand (the unintelligible).’

Heidegger’s use of the concept of ‘das Man’ to clarify the connection between the self’s sense of what is meaningful and the social milieu in which it finds itself has been subject to a significant amount of criticism.\(^6^5\) Interpreters argue that Heidegger disparages

\(^{65}\) Even philosophers who develop aspects of Heidegger’s social or ethical thought in a positive direction refer to his denigration of social life as if it is a matter of fact: “In any case, I have no wish to defend Heidegger’s contempt for ordinary social relations in *Being and Time*, nor to support his implication that these are mainly competitive, involving joint projects only of distraction and irresponsibility” (Sikka, Sonia. “Kantian Ethics In Being and Time” in *Journal of Philosophical Research*. Volume 31, 2006, p. 313). Heidegger certainly employs negative terminology in his discussion of everyday sociality but he sets up a distinction between inauthentic and authentic being-with-others that is underappreciated. Furthermore, his negative view of inauthentic social relations does not make him uniquely cynical but places him squarely in the tradition of Modern philosophers mentioned above. In what follows I cannot address this entire tradition but will focus on comparing Heidegger’s position to Kant’s view of everyday sociality. We will see that Kant determines our original starting point in what he calls an ‘ethical state of nature’ to be one that is ‘radically evil’ in which we ‘mutually corrupt’ and drag one another away from the moral law. It is more useful, I contend, to place Heidegger in this tradition than to simply view him as a ‘product of his times’ who indulges in cultural critique that poses as philosophical analysis.

The truth is that those who claim that Heidegger’s account of sociality is little more than the product of the all too human tendency to intellectualize one’s political prejudices are the ones who seem to be grinding a political axe in a situation that calls for philosophical analysis. One of the goals of this chapter is to clarify and show the validity of Heidegger’s claim that his position makes “no ontical assertion about the ‘corruption of human Nature’... because the problematic of this Interpretation is prior to any assertion about corruption or incorruption” (*BT* 179-189, 224). Heidegger’s critics seem to take it as a foregone conclusion that this claim cannot be taken seriously, but an interpretation of ‘fallenness’ will show that he makes good on the claim and that his insistence that his “Interpretation is purely ontological in its aims, and is far removed from any moralizing critique of everyday Dasein’’ (BT 167, 211) is legitimate. My interpretation will show that the terms ‘fallenness’ and ‘the ‘they’” do not carry a “‘disparaging’ signification” (*BT* 167, 211). ‘Fallenness’ is not a “bad and deplorable ontical property of which, perhaps, more advanced stages of human culture might be able to rid themselves” (*BT* 176, 220). Heidegger maintains his discussion of everyday social relations in an ontological register, and this analysis is the condition for the possibility of this other type of normative claim: “But in so far as any faith or ‘world
the everyday self for this social dependence and degrades everyday social relations in
general. His discussion of sociality in §27 and §35-38 of *Being and Time*, critics claim, is
little more than social commentary or cultural criticism thinly veiled as
phenomenological analysis. Furthermore, the critics continue, Heidegger’s attempt at
social commentary is one-sided and displays a cynicism typical of his class and the
generation of ‘German mandarins’ — “a social and cultural elite” which owed “its status
primarily to its educational qualifications”\(^6\) to which he belonged.

Heidegger’s real interest in these sections, however, is to articulate how the
intersubjective constitution of reality and socialization into this reality provide the
necessary starting point for the project of becoming a self. And understanding this
starting point involves not only analyzing how it makes that project possible but how it
poses difficulties for it as well. Heidegger does not degrade social life nor does he
endorse a definitive break with one’s historical milieu; the concept of *das Man* is
primarily an account of what makes the intelligibility of experience possible and
therefore, as he frequently claims, does not operate in the register of cultural criticism or
moral philosophy.

\(^\text{66}\) Ringer, Fritz. *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890-1933*.
Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1990, p. 5. Placing Heidegger among these Mandarins forms the
basis of a political critique of his work, which argues that ‘authenticity’ amounts to little more than a
vacuous concept, “a characteristic term in the jargon which Heidegger shared with many politicians,
thelionists and conservative ideologues, [which] abstracts from the social causes of discontent by giving
contemporary feelings of meaninglessness an ahistorical formulation” (Gerry Stahl, “Review: The Jargon
of Authenticity: An Introduction to a Marxist Critique of Heidegger” by Theodor W. Adorno; Knut
Das Man is not some ‘conservative revolutionary’s’ critique of a particular manifestation of the bovine and conventional bourgeoisie; “the ‘they’ is an existentiale; and as a primordial phenomenon, it belongs to Dasein’s positive constitution.” (BT 129, 167). The ‘best,’ the most ‘morally upright’, and even the most revolutionary and creative society would rely on the practices of das Man to establish the intelligibility of its world. In any society, the individual is “…proximally and for the most part…absorbed in the ‘they’ and…mastered by it” (BT 167, 210). I am mastered by das Man in part because these practices provide the only sites of significance in which I can have an identity. Thus, for the most part, I am constantly,

“delivered over to this interpretedness, which controls and distributes the possibilities of average understanding and of the state-of-mind belonging to it. The way things have been expressed or spoken out is such that in the totality of contexts of signification into which it has been articulated, it preserves an understanding of the disclosed world and therewith, equiprimordially, an understanding of the Dasein-with of Others and of one’s own Being-in” (BT 167-168, 211).

These practices are all there is with regard to who I can be. For example, given the time and place of my birth, my possibilities are limited to a range of ways to be that do not happen to include being-a-knight. Quixotic delusions aside, this is not a particularly worrisome fact. Heidegger’s ideal of independence, then, does not run the risk of alienating the self from the desire set, activities, and tastes of its ethical community. Fallenness is not a degenerate mode of being because it represents a kind of conformism – my behavior must conform to the norms of everyday practices if it is to make sense to me and to my associates. It is a degenerate mode of being because in it I act as if the necessity of such conformity relieves me of the burden of responsibility.
Fallenness is the irresponsible appropriation of the necessary and value-neutral practices of *das Man*.

2.3.3.1 Heidegger on 'Fallenness'

Although *das Man* is not Heidegger's attempt to denigrate the social sphere, this structure of social intelligibility does contribute to a tendency in everyday existence towards 'fallenness' or 'inauthenticity,' which, unlike Kant's 'radical evil,' is not intrinsically evil but renders us vulnerable to moral evil. Fallenness is a tendency to be entirely absorbed in the de facto authority of social practices to the point that I become deeply estranged from my responsibility for my own life. This tendency, like Kant's radical evil, is experienced as "always 'there' already" or 'having Been,' as if it is woven into our very nature; Heidegger, however, understands it as an abnegation of self-government not so much to the dictates of self-love but to the dictatorship of 'what one does'.

2.3.3.2 Idle Talk

Heidegger formally indicates the manner in which the fallen self relates to the structure of the world with the concept of 'idle talk.' Precisely what this concept indicates is a complicated matter because the status of language in *Being and Time* is a contested issue. Some interpreters, notably Lafont, equate the term discourse with language. This leads to the claim that our understanding of being, which determines the way things show up in our experience, is linguistic or symbolically structured. This implies, Lafont claims, that Heidegger's position represents a kind of "linguistic idealism" in which meaning

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67 In German Heidegger employs the term *der Hang* [tendency, propensity] to describe 'fallenness'. This is the same term Kant uses to describe what 'radical evil' is, which is interesting with respect to our comparison.

determines reference. Reference, then, becomes an ironic practice: although we take ourselves to be in touch with reality ‘as such,’ we are in fact prisoners of language, condemned to see what we say rather than being free to say what we see. With this conception of language, Lafont argues, Heidegger confuses the fact that our descriptions of the world imply our de facto beliefs about entities with the idea that these entities are completely determined by our descriptions. On the face of things, Heidegger’s terminology seems to cut in Lafont’s favor. For if ‘discourse’ and ‘idle talk,’ as I shall argue, refer to a structure and a way of relating to that structure – rather than language and a way of using language – one wonders why he relies on linguistic terms (discourse and talk) to convey his point.

Lafont’s equation of Heidegger’s concept of discourse with language, however, fails to appreciate that ‘discourse’ is a formally indicative concept that points to the structure of experience upon which language is founded. Her critique, then, is an example of what happens when we fail to appreciate the nature of Heidegger’s method and concepts. These terms are designed to indicate hitherto unseen and un-clarified aspects of our Existenz – they are not meant to designate precisely what they designate in our everyday way of understanding things. If discourse is a formally indicative concept, then we can be certain that what it indicates is not identical with what the term traditionally designates. Lafont’s critique, then, remains an interesting indictment of linguistic idealism, but it is not a critique of Heidegger’s position.

My claim that idle talk is a fallen way of relating to the structure of the world is rooted in an interpretation of discourse that takes it to be the structure of our experience on which language in founded: “The existential-ontological foundation of language is
discourse or talk” [Rede] (BT 160, 203). Furthermore, idle talk does not solely indicate a mode of using language; rather, it is the mode of discourse associated with fallenness. Thus, it formally indicates a fallen mode of relating to discourse understood as the structure of experience, which entails but is not identical to a fallen appropriation of the language that is founded on discourse.

The intelligible structure that Heidegger calls discourse is co-constituted by our affective and pragmatic dimensions. Our affective dimension determines the features of our environment that are salient in a given experience and our practices demarcate the possible kinds of entities available to take on such salience. Language strives to represent this structure symbolically. With regard to our pragmatic dimension, language represents or points to its elements – the context in which the practice is carried out, the innerworldly entities relevant to the practice, and the others with whom the practice is shared are all picked out linguistically. And we strive to represent moods linguistically as well, although they are not as neatly structured and specific as the elements of our practices. Language, then, is a system of signs used to intend the various aspects of discourse (the structure of our experience), which is set up by our pragmatic and affective dimensions.

Idle talk formally indicates a fallen mode of relating to the structure of my experience, which entails a fallen use of language. In idle talk the individual does not take responsibility for grounding his relationship to this structure; rather he conveys the semblance of such grounding without embodying it. Idle talk is a pretension that allows one to act and speak authoritatively in a context without bringing oneself “into such a kind of Being towards what the discourse is about as to have a primordial understanding.
of it” (BT 168, 212). Idle talk, then, points to another dimension of estrangement in fallenness – in my relation to the world I am not the one understands things but rather one understands things for me and obviates the need for me to understand them for myself. I can pass myself off as ‘in charge’ and ‘on top of things’ by relating to the structure of the world and myself as ‘one does’ and parroting what ‘one says’ with an air of authority. This parroting allows me to communicate how ‘one sees these things’ without seeing or understanding anything for myself from the first-person perspective:

“And because this discoursing has lost its primary relationship-of-Being towards the entity talked about, or else has never achieved such a relationship, it does not communicate in such a way as to let this entity be appropriated in a primordial manner, but communicates rather by following the route of gossiping and passing the word along. What is said-in-the-talk as such, spreads in wider circles and takes on an authoritative character. Things are so because one says so” (BT 168, 212).

One might object that Heidegger is clearly talking about a way of speaking here. But this must be understood as a product of Heidegger’s practice of formal indication. ‘Idle talk’, ‘gossiping’, and ‘passing the word along’ in their everyday meaning are simply a matter of how we use language. But formal indication only takes the everyday meaning of a term as a point of orientation that indicates a way to an encounter with a fundamental aspect of existence. Thus, the fact that these terms, in their everyday use, refer strictly to linguistic phenomena should not be decisive for our interpretation of them. These terms point towards a manner of relating to discourse, which itself formally indicates not language but the fact that my experience of the world is articulated or structured.

To clarify how idle talk is a fallen mode of relating to the structure of experience, I shall jump ahead briefly to division II where Heidegger discusses ‘reticence’ – the mode
of discourse associated with the opposite stance of fallenness, ‘resoluteness,’ as it is more readily transparent that reticence is not a way of talking but rather a way of relating to the structure of my experience. Since reticence is the resolute analogue to idle talk, if we see that it is not a matter of talking but a way of relating to the structure of my experience, then we ought to interpret idle talk – at the very least for the sake of systematic conceptual coherence – in this manner as well.

If we took discourse to refer to language, then Heidegger’s claim that the mode of discourse associated with resoluteness is ‘reticence’ would suggest that the resolute individual is particularly laconic, as if the ideal could be reduced to some cliché about ‘the man of few words.’ But Heidegger gives us no reason to think one could not resolutely engage in a practice that involves a good deal of speech. Reticence, rather, points to the fact that the responsible individual does not suffer from the kind of self-conscious doubt and indecisive maulering associated with irresolution. Such indecision plagues those who cannot trust themselves, who cannot count on themselves to carry through their intentions, and so do not achieve a first-personal sense of certainty with regard to being an effective basis of their own action. Reticence points to a form of action in which the individual is not estranged from his own capacity for self-determination. The resolute individual is not caught up in inner deliberation trying to convince himself – or self-conscious maundering trying to convince others – that he is going to take action. He is already taking action. The term, then, trades on a connotation of reticence, the fact that it is associated with the self-confident, deliberate character of an individual who knows what he is up to. The term formally indicates a way of relating to the structure of one’s
existence, a way of being-certain in which one takes responsibility for grounding his relation to that structure for himself.

If it is obvious that ‘reticence’ is not simply a way of using language, then it should also be possible to interpret its systematically related conceptual opposite – idle talk – in this manner. The fallen individual does not need to be a gossip to embody idle talk; rather, it is the groundless and meaningless quality of gossip that Heidegger wants us to associate with idle talk. One simply does not take a gossip seriously – one does not count on what he says – because the relation between what he says and what he talks about is tenuous and uncertain. Likewise, the fallen individual cannot be counted on – he cannot be taken seriously in word or deed – because he does not really know ‘what he is up to’ in a theoretical or practical sense. He is estranged from and does not ground what he says and does because he fails to take responsibility for the relationship that his words and deeds bear to the structure of his world. Instead, he speaks and acts as if this task of grounding has already been accomplished for him by das Man.

There is a certain danger embedded in idle talk, then, because even if my action and words are totally ungrounded, I can pass myself off as if ‘I know what I am up to.’ What I do and say – like the story of a true gossip – is characterized by a sheer “groundlessness [Bodenlosigkeit]” (BT 168, 212). It is groundless in the double sense that it has no basis in what is the case and no one grounds it by taking responsibility for it. And neither form of ground is required because I can simply slide by on the authority of what ‘one does and says’ regarding these matters:

"Idle talk is the possibility of understanding everything without previously making the thing one’s own…it not only relieves one from the task of genuinely understanding, but develops an undifferentiated kind of intelligibility, for which nothing is closed off any longer” (BT 169, 213).
This closes me off from the world because it does not require that I return to an original source – a state of affairs, event, existential structure, etc. – but allows me to take such an original experience for granted.\textsuperscript{69} This, of course, has a certain utility in the social world. It keeps things running smoothly because it puts off the hard work that returning to an original source might entail. This ‘utility’ notwithstanding, idle talk is not a necessary way of being. ‘Das Man’ is an essential ingredient to the intelligibility of experience – it contributes to making this experience possible – but these practices and the moods associated with them do not have to be appropriated in a fallen manner to function smoothly.

2.3.3.3 The Tendency Towards Falleness

The nature of human sociality itself generates a tendency towards falleness. The average way of understanding that we share ‘levels’ down and simplifies the meaning of things, thereby making the smooth and immediate appropriation of meaning in a variety of contexts more facile and more readily available for all. This leveling and simplification of meaning makes it possible to take for granted that one can understand and do what is appropriate and say the right thing in any context, which creates the impression that everything one can be, understand or say is accessible to everyone, and this makes it,

\begin{quote}
“impossible to decide what is disclosed in a genuine understanding, and what is not...Everything looks as if it were genuinely understood, genuinely taken hold of, genuinely spoken, though at bottom it is not; or else it does not look so, and yet at bottom it is...Already everyone has surmised and scented out in advance what Others have also surmised and scented out (\textit{BT} 173, 217).”
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{69} It should be obvious why Heidegger maintains that philosophy presupposes a sense of what would count for authenticity. As we discussed in chapter one, indirect communication and formal indication both require the individual to take responsibility for his claims by taking appropriating the experiences indicated in the account by and for himself. The fallen individual cannot engage in philosophy because he does not take it upon himself to return to the original source that is the theme of his work.
[This ambiguity gives idle talk] "the semblance of having everything decided in it" (*BT* 174, 219).

When things are decided in advance, everyone is an authority, which means no one is. There is no need to take a stance that is one's own and there is no need to take action; these things are already taken care of.

When I have thrown off the task of responsibility I can simply take conventional wisdom as the rule for my thought and action — "...because the 'they' presents every judgment and decision as its own, it deprives the particular Dasein of its answerability" (*BT* 127, 165). But this does not prevent one from acting as if he or she is taking it upon himself to be answerable in each case:

"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 these modes one's way of Being is that of inauthenticity and failure to stand by one's Self" (*BT* 127, 165).

These features of social life, then, generate a tendency towards fallenness. They make it easy for me to evade the burdensome character of the anxiety associated with my autonomy. As I shall spell out in greater detail in the next chapter, the anxiety associated with the fact that my being is mine and up to me exerts a constant pressure that motivates a flight from the self-ownership of authenticity and these features of social life make this much easier to do.⁷⁰ They alleviate the pressure of anxiety and make it seem as if such flight is justified.

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⁷⁰ Heidegger claims that our flight from responsibility "for the most part remains concealed with latent anxiety, since the publicness of the 'they' suppresses everything unfamiliar" (Ibid. pp. 236-237). Anxiety, then, exerts a constant pressure in human life even if its source goes unnoticed or unspecified. This claim does not, as Taylor Carman argues, indicate a fundamental contradiction at the heart of Heidegger's position wherein a psychological fact — anxiety — accounts for an ontological feature of our existence — 'fallenness' (“Must We Be Inauthentic?,” *Heidegger, Authenticity, and Modernity: Essays in Honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus, Vol. 1*). Mark Wrathall and Jeff Malpas, eds. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000. p. 13-28). 'The 'they' is an 'existentialia' that enables us to fall away from ourselves (inauthenticity) or to take
In addition to this benefit, the fact that my identity derives the majority of its content from the worldly roles I occupy also contributes to the tendency towards fallenness. Primarily, who I am just is the constellation of activities I take up in worldly roles:

"the ‘subject character’ of one’s own Dasein and that of Others is to be defined existentially—that is, in terms of certain ways in which one may be...Others are encountered as what they are; they are what they do" (BT 126, 163).

This everyday identity between myself and a worldly role contributes to the tendency to be absorbed in the world and to think of myself strictly in its terms – for it is in the world that I find myself in what I care about. "The ‘absorption in’...has mostly the character of Being-lost in the publicness of the ‘they’. Dasein has, in the first instance, fallen away from itself as an authentic potentiality for Being itself, and has fallen into the ‘world’" (BT 175, 220). We are “completely fascinated by the ‘world’ and by the Dasein-with of Others in the ‘they’” (BT 176, 220). My fascination with the world leads to a self-interpretation in which I take myself to be nothing but my worldly roles, which covers over the existential remainder of my being, my freedom. This pretension that I am nothing but my worldly roles contributes to the tendency towards fallenness.

**Footnote:**

up responsibility (authenticity): “The ‘they’ is an existentiale; and as a primordial phenomenon, it belongs to Dasein’s positive constitution” (Ibid. p. 167). ‘Fallenness’ is a tendency motivated by the constant pressure that anxiety exerts on us, a way of appropriating das Man. If we want to claim that ‘fallenness’ is an ‘existentiale’ – qua tendency, calling fallenness an existentiale is strange but Heidegger does make this claim – we still do not have to say that this existentiale is motivated by something psychological. Anxiety – the psychological factor in question – is motivated by the fact that we are guilty, which is itself an existentiale. Although fallenness is motivated by anxiety, the buck, so to speak, does not stop there – guilt as an existentiale – a structure that is both affective and practical – is the ultimate motivating force behind fallenness. Thus, it is actually the case that two ‘existentialies’ (the fact that we are ‘guilty’ and ‘the ‘they’’) that make fallenness possible. Moreover, I would claim that a more coherent interpretation of this problem would argue that these two existentiales make possible the movement between two ‘existentiell’ modalizations (authenticity and inauthenticity/fallenness), which is perfectly compatible with Heidegger’s claim that the ontic is constituted by the ontological.
Finally, an overall push towards intelligibility in life contributes to this tendency as well. The need for intelligibility creates a constant pressure towards conformity, which does not necessitate but lends itself to relinquishing one's own freedom to the anonymous authority of the world. The easiest way to be understood is to do what one does the way one does it, and this gives social norms a de facto quality that covers over the task of making them one's own.

These aspects of being-in-the-world help generate the tendency towards fallenness, a condition in which agents operate under the aegis of the undifferentiated anonymous way of doing things, failing to take any individual responsibility for their actions: "The authentic 'for-the-sake-of-which' has not been taken hold of; the projection of one's own potentiality-for-Being has been abandoned to the disposal of the 'they'" (BT 193, 238).

2.4 Mutual Corruption

2.4.1 Kant on the Corrupting Influence of Sociality

As mentioned in section 2.3.2, there is a widespread interpretive claim that Heidegger's account of sociality denigrates the social sphere and fails to appreciate the positive and liberating forms of social interaction. But – although Heidegger does not always clearly distinguish between das Man as a value neutral necessity of social intelligibility and fallenness as an irresponsible appropriation of it – a more adequate interpretation of Being and Time, I contend, must take into account his consistent claim that both resolute and fallen modes of social life are possible. Bearing this in mind, it becomes clear that Heidegger should not be read as disparaging social interaction in general but rather as accounting for the problematic aspects of its fallen mode. A fallen
and degraded mode of social interaction is only one manner of taking up *das Man* to which the authentic being-with of resolute individuals is always an alternative. Once again, I will try to show how Heidegger’s approach to this issue can be seen as a phenomenological treatment of a problem Kant isolates in the *Religion*.

Towards the end of his discussion of radical evil, Kant argues that the condition entails a “certain insidiousness of the human heart (*dolus malus*)” (*RWL*, 33). This insidiousness is a form of self-deception regarding one’s “own good and evil dispositions” (*RWL*, 33) — a tendency to believe that one is *justified* before the law so long as one does not violate it. A human heart, according to Kant, is insidious and perverse if it takes itself to be justified before the law without having taken up the responsible stance towards the law that such justification presupposes. If I have not taken responsibility for the manner in which I make my choices — whether to take my incentive from the moral law or my sensuous nature — then I am not in a position to distinguish between justified or unjustified action. And such a heart must *deceive* itself because, as it belongs to a free rational being, it must in some sense be aware of its lack of justification before the law and therefore must strive to hide this awareness from itself, if it is to be successful in taking itself to be justified. To fool itself and others in this regard, it must strive to make its actions conform (or appear to conform) with the law as it stands, so that it can avoid being called to account by others or (by its own conscience).

We have already explored this aspect of Kant’s account. We have not, however, considered two of his important claims regarding the relation between ‘radical evil’ and sociality. The first claim is that the self-deception inherent to ‘radical evil’ renders the individual incapable not just of moral judgment regarding his own actions but also that
regarding the actions of others. The second claim is that this self-deception extends itself outward to the deception of others, which exacerbates and reinforces the evasion of responsibility in oneself and others. To establish the first claim, Kant points out the way in which a stance towards choice that is radically evil renders one incapable of deciphering and attributing responsibility in general:

"This dishonesty [our assumption that we are justified before the law without taking a standpoint that would make such justification possible], by which we humbug ourselves and which thwarts the establishing of a true moral disposition in us, extends itself outwardly also to falsehood and deception to others. If this is not to be termed wickedness, it at least deserves the name of worthlessness, and is an element in the radical evil of human nature, which (inasmuch as it puts out of tune the moral capacity to judge what a man is to be taken for, and renders wholly uncertain both internal and external attribution of responsibility) constitutes the foul taint in our race" (RWL, 33).

My failure to decide to determine my actions according to the moral law makes it impossible for me to distinguish between what is my responsibility and what can be attributed to others. If I act not in light of the moral law but merely in accordance with the common law, then I never make certain for myself that I am meeting my moral obligations. Instead, I presume that they are met – or deceive myself into thinking that they must be met – because my action conforms (or at least seems to conform) with the common law. My moral obligations as such, however, can only be determined by generating maxims for action with the categorical imperative.

If I fail to determine my moral obligations as such, then the domain of action for which I can properly be considered responsible remains indeterminate, and determining this domain is the most basic prerequisite for praising or blaming others: if I cannot say what is my responsibility, then I cannot determine what is not, and what, therefore, could possibly be attributed to others. It is for this reason that the failure to choose the moral
law “puts out of tune the moral capacity to judge what a man is to be taken for [moral or immoral], and renders wholly uncertain both internal and external attribution of responsibility” (RWL, 33, my emphasis).

This hypocrisy – presuming that my actions are justified without engaging a standard in light of which this judgment could be made – represents the ultimate evil for Kant. It not only blurs all distinctions regarding the attribution of responsibility but – even worse – it makes it difficult for the evil individual to face his own guilt or responsibility. If I deceive myself that I am justified before the law there is nothing to motivate me to take up the hard work of responsibility and moral self-assessment in the first place. I keep the voice of my conscience at bay with self-deception by taking myself to have already answered its call.

We can now interpret Kant’s second claim that the self-deception of ‘radical evil’, extends “itself outwardly also to falsehood and deception to others” (RWL, 33) and that this exacerbates and reinforces the evasion of responsibility in oneself and others. This claim shows up in his discussion of what he calls the ‘ethical state of nature,’ a condition in which the individual possesses the moral law, while a principle that binds mankind to mankind is lacking. In this ‘ethical state of nature,’

“the good principle [the moral law], which resides in each man, is continually attacked by the evil which is found in him and also in everyone else. Men (as was noted above) mutually corrupt one another’s moral predispositions…because they lack a principle which unites them, they recede, through their dissensions, from the common goal of goodness and, just as though they were instruments of evil, expose one another to the risk of falling once again under the sovereignty of the evil principle” (RWL, 88-89, my emphasis).

Kant’s allusion to the way men mutually corrupt each other that ‘was mentioned above’ refers to his discussion of the ‘diabolical vices.’ He defines these vices, such as ‘jealousy’
and ‘rivalry,’ as “inclinations aroused in us by the anxious endeavors of others to attain a hated superiority over us, to attain for ourselves as a measure of precaution and for the sake of safety such a position over others” (RWL, 22). How, exactly, is our false self-image, which is the essence of an insidious heart, intimately connected to the social power plays that engender and are engendered by jealousy and rivalry?

When drawing this connection between self-deception and the diabolical vices, Kant seems to have in mind the kind of impositions and requirements we place on others in order to successfully lie to ourselves – in this case, to preserve the presumption that we are justified before the law. To maintain a deceptive self-image in the social world one must not only sustain it for oneself but one must also – at least in the field of social appearances – engender and sustain this image in the minds of others. For the incredulity of others threatens to undermine one’s own capacity for self-deception and the standing one occupies in virtue of one’s image. It takes little more than a look, a disparaging gesture, or a faint sarcastic laugh to show someone – and others – that he is not what he takes himself to be.

This begins to clarify Kant’s claim that one’s own hypocrisy and moral corruption will lead to the corruption of others. The need for others to at least appear to take seriously one’s false self-image – one’s so-called goodness that has not been established by transparent moral stance – leads to relationships that thrive on tacit agreements to bolster each other’s self-imaginings. These relationships engender insidious social forms in which others are coerced or manipulated into treating us in a way that conforms to our own false self-image from fear that we might undermine their self-image or inflict some other harm upon them. When one’s way of life depends on maintaining a self-image that
one does not genuinely embody, preventing others from violating the integrity of one’s envelope of delusion requires a certain power over them – one needs to give them reasons to maintain the illusion. The need to maintain a false self-image, then, leads to a double proliferation of lies: within the individual more and more lies are required to maintain one’s self-deception, to cover over experiences that run counter to his false self-image. And this proliferates more lies and coercive tactics directed towards others who must be used to bolster or preserve this false self-image.

Further, in the social world we are never talking about one hypocritical individual but a plurality contributing to a web of deceit. These power machinations move in many directions and form an internecine latticework of coercion and manipulation. In this way, the failure to demarcate the proper domain of one’s responsibility entangles one in ever deepening circles of deception and power plays that, as if they were inexorable forces of nature, drag others into the struggle. At the same time, others continually drag one into these struggles as well – and this mutual corruption engenders a downward spiral of deception. It is in this way that sociality contributes to our ‘mutual corruption’ and increased self-deception.

This, I contend, is one way to interpret the discussion of ‘mutual corruption’ in the Religion that Kant himself does very little to develop. Further, I shall argue that Heidegger’s discussion of sociality can be read as a phenomenological treatment of Kant’s distinction between a form of social life that leads to mutual corruption and a productive mode of social interaction.\footnote{In conjunction with the claim that this argument can be seen as a precursor to Heidegger’s position we should also note the relevance of Nietzsche’s position. As I will discuss in chapter six, when I deal with the ethical implications of the concept of resoluteness, Heidegger’s view of social relations is often referred to as Nietzschean; for example, consider Richard Wolin’s claim that Heidegger “embraced a quasi-} Heidegger, like Kant, sees that human sociality is
marked by a tendency towards fallenness and that this tendency also "spreads in wider circles" (BT 168, 212) affecting one's associates. But, again like Kant, Heidegger recognizes that such a state in not inevitable.

2.4.2 Heidegger on Mutual Corruption

Heidegger is in agreement with Kant's claim that without a responsible stance towards choice one cannot "judge what a man is to be taken for" or engage in the "internal and external attribution of responsibility" (RWL, 33). Only once I recognize that I am responsible for the manner in which I choose — and therefore responsible for my being from the ground up — can I identify what emanates from my freedom as mine and disavow what is not properly imputable to me. Taking responsibility is what allows me to give a response for what I have done and what I have failed to do; it opens up the field in which praise, blame, and denial can occur. In fallenness, however, all such distinctions are meaningless because each agent's responsibility is diffused into an anonymous realm wherein 'no one' in particular is responsible or answerable for anything. If my action is grounded in an established consensus regarding what 'one does' rather than in my own

\[\text{Nietzschean approach to ethics} \] (Wolin, Richard. *The Politics of Being: The Political Thought of Martin Heidegger*. Columbia University Press: New York, 1990). There are good reasons to see Heidegger as Nietzsche's heir. Nietzsche offered an intricately developed account of the sort of claim that I attribute to Kant here, which could certainly be seen as influential of Heidegger's discussion of everyday social relations. But there is an important difference between Nietzsche's position and those of Kant and Heidegger. For Nietzsche, there is no real alternative form of sociality (except perhaps for the very few): this endless struggle for power and the recognition of one's image is the nature of everyday social relations as such. I must coerce others to frame the world in my terms or be coerced to live on their terms. All forms of life, all collective and individual actions, are governed by the will to preserve or enhance the power of the group or individual that takes them up: "To will at all is the same thing as to will to become stronger, to will to grow..." (\textit{WP}, 675). At its roots, then, life is an expression of what Nietzsche calls the 'will to power.' All social relations, properly understood, are power relations; there is no alternative. For Kant and Heidegger, however, mutual corruption is only one mode of sociality. Social relations need not be understood as power relations; rather, 'radical evil' and 'fallenness' characterize a corrupt and irresponsible mode of social life to which there is a satisfying and productive alternative. Thus, it is better to see Heidegger as an heir to Kant rather than Nietzsche. Nietzsche's proper heir is more likely Sartre, who, as is well known, represents human relationships as a constant and irreconcilable struggle for the power to be the subject and not the object in the relationship.
responsible appropriation of my reasons and decisions, when I am called upon to answer for my deeds I will be ill equipped to marshal an autonomous response.

In fallenness, Heidegger claims, I act as if nothing is up to me because everything is decided in advance by a tacit consensus. No self-evaluation is necessary because my possibilities are ‘guaranteed’ to be “secure, genuine, and full” (BT 177, 222). Thus, there “is no need of authentic understanding or the state-of-mind that goes with it” (BT 177, 222). In fact, when I fall, authentic individuals are precisely what I want to avoid or suppress – for their unwillingness to fall performatively faces me with issues that I do not want to deal with: ‘Is my life in fact what I take it to be? Is it secure, genuine and full? Is this the life I want and the life I ought to be living?’ To successfully evade responsibility I have to numb myself to the force of such questions. I can still raise them as ‘one does’ and remain numb to their force, because anxiety does not inhere to the questions themselves but rather to the manner in which they are posed. That is, I can, for example, raise the question of my responsibility strictly as an intellectual matter, while stifling the mood of anxiety that accompanies a genuine attunement to my responsibility.

72 One might object that there is no room for the Other to pose such a challenge in Heidegger’s account. If the possibilities for being a self are all determined by das Man and one cannot be unique with regard to one’s practices, what could someone do to pose such a challenge? If we are all geared in to doing essentially the same things, how would an authentic Other pose a challenge to my fallen ‘tranquility’? An authentic Other does not necessarily pose such a challenge, as authenticity is a first-person affair and so can be utterly ‘invisible’ or ‘indiscernible’ from the third-person perspective. However, if the authentic individual is to pose such a challenge it will not be a matter of what she does but rather how she does it. For example, consider a conversation between philosophers in which one practices the discipline authentically and the other does not. It is not hard to imagine how an argument might lead to a situation in which the one who has not grasped the matter authentically would be exposed to the Other (and possibly others) and himself as merely parroting what he ought to be – if he took an authentic relation to the matter under discussion – grounding for himself. Being ‘called out’ in this way by the Other’s authentic performance of what the fallen ‘character’ in our scenario carries out irresponsibly might wake the individual to his own pretension and self-deception. More often than not, however, the response to such a confrontation is coercion or manipulation. The individual who has an interest in preserving his public identity as a philosopher without taking responsibility for what that entails must conceive of ways to discourage others – for example, by coercion or perhaps self-effacing charm (“I didn’t think anyone would notice that I was fabricating that description of Achilles’ shield”) – from performatively confronting him with his own lack of integrity.
Heidegger formally indicates this numbing of oneself to anxiety with the claim that the fallen self ‘tranquilizes’ itself.\textsuperscript{73}

The pursuit of tranquility, however, is condemned to failure. Genuine tranquility is unattainable precisely because attaining it would require the complete stifling of the anxiety associated with being free, responsible and affectively attuned to one’s existence. But the will cannot completely stifle a mood – moods are not actively taken up but undergone. Thus, anxiety, qua mood, cannot be controlled. It manifests regardless of one’s attempts to stifle it.\textsuperscript{74} No matter how close I come to approximating a tranquilized state, then, my responsibility for my own existence will always make itself known to me in anxiety. Since anxiety is a constant feature of existence, tranquility is unattainable; and yet, because anxiety is a constant feature of existence, the tranquilization of fallenness is a constant temptation (\textit{BT} 178, 222) – for the discomfort of anxiety is something I always want to evade.

Tranquilization creates a distance between the fact of responsibility and my awareness of it, which leads to a form of self-alienation\textsuperscript{75} in which my "ownmost potentiality-for-Being [self-determination] is hidden" from me (\textit{BT} 178, 222). This "alienation closes off" a possible awakening to the fact that my life is up to me and "forces" me into "fallenneness" (\textit{BT} 178, 222-223). It estranges me from my capacity for self-determination because what I evade is precisely the anxiety associated with the fact

\textsuperscript{73} The supposition "that one is leading and sustaining a full and genuine ‘life’,” Heidegger claims, “brings Dasein a tranquility…” (\textit{BT} 177, 222).

\textsuperscript{74} One might object that a mega-dose of tranquilizers does, in fact, bring such tranquility about. But artificial anesthetization, if it really eradicates all anxiety, would take one out of the world. Becoming a corpse will also put an end to anxiety, but it does not undermine the claim that being-in-the-world always entails an element of anxiety.

\textsuperscript{75} "When Dasein, tranquilized, and ‘understanding’ everything, thus compares itself with everything, it drifts along towards an towards an alienation [Entfremdung] in which its ownmost potentiality-for-Being is hidden from it. Falling Being-in-the-world is not only tempting and tranquilizing; it is at the same time alienating” (\textit{BT} 178, 222).
that my life is up to me and I do so by acting as if it is not, by acting 'as if' I am determined by what one does. I write my anxiety off as nothing, seek distraction and forms of tranquilization, and allow myself to become 'entangled [verfängt]' (BT 178, 223) in self-deception – the assumption that my possibilities are secure, genuine and full without taking a stance that would make such a judgment possible – such that I approach a veritable blindness with respect to my own capacity for self-determination. Heidegger claims that this constellation of the aspects of ‘fallenness’ – tranquility, temptation, estrangement, self-entanglement – constitute the general movement of the tendency towards fallenness, which he formally indicates as a “downward plunge” (BT 178, 223).

Radical evil and fallenness, then, both involve self-deception. The ‘radically evil’ agent takes himself to be justified before the law without taking the stance that would make such self-justification possible. And the ‘fallen’ self carries out his existence under the aegis of a bogus certainty regarding the security, genuineness and fullness of his way of life without ever taking the standpoint that would allow him to measure the certainty of these things for himself. Furthermore, as is the case with Kant’s ‘radical evil’, the self-deception involved in the downward plunge of fallenness extends “itself outwardly...to falsehood and deception to others” (RWL, 33). One individual’s downward plunge evokes and reinforces the same trend in others and vice versa. There are two main reasons for this.

The first reason I have already discussed. If I exist in a fallen mode then I take it to be certain that my possibilities are secure, genuine and full without establishing that certainty for myself. And anyone who would challenge that pretense or undermine my quest for tranquility must be ignored or controlled. If I can avoid such people, then they
cannot pose a threat to my dishonesty; however, if such evasion is impossible, then these individuals must be coerced or manipulated into sharing my dishonesty. Thus, all fallen individuals have motivations to encourage others to fall along with them.

The second reason is built into the project of trying to measure up to an established and alien (to oneself) set of norms or values. Even as fallenness allows one to evade the burden of responsibility, then, it exacts its own kind of burden. For if I live in the false certainty conferred by social consensus, I must go on ‘as one goes on’ in light of what are established as the ‘highest standards.’ In other words, if I do not determine the value of the standards that govern my life for myself in light of who I am,76 if I do not assess and choose the standards in terms of which I live, then I accord them a de facto normativity that determines the value of my existence.77 If I do not establish my own measure – and this does not mean that I establish a unique set of standards but rather that whatever set of standards I live by is up to me – then I submit myself to be measured in terms of what one says and does, what one accords value and disparages, in my particular social milieu. If it is taken for granted that these standards are secure, genuine, and full, and that the way they are deployed is valid, then any lack of accordance between my being and what they designate as the highest values is registered as a failure or a lack of being on my part. Thus, when I cannot – for whatever reason – meet the ‘highest

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76 Precisely what I mean by determining my values in terms of ‘who I am’ will be addressed in chapter 6 where I discuss the notion in Kierkegaard and Heidegger of ‘the truth of my existence.’
77 The idea of choosing my own standards is not meant to deal with the problem of relativism or decisionism. The question of whether Heidegger’s position can be used to develop a context-transcendent norm that governs all responsible action will not be dealt with in chapter six. Thus, the reader should not be concerned that choosing my own standards does not save me from the problem of relativism. This choice only refers to the necessity of recognizing the fact that the way one lives one’s own life is always up to oneself – that one is always responsible for it. The issue, for Heidegger, is not choosing a set of standards that is unique to myself but rather recognizing that whichever set of standards I choose is up to me. If I fail to do this, I am estranged from my own power for self-determination and therefore cover over the fact that I am responsible for the way I live.
standards,' there is, nevertheless, a built-in pressure to keep up the appearance that there
is no gap between who I am and what ‘they’ say I am supposed to be:

“...there is constant care as to the way one differs from them, whether that
difference is merely one that is to be evened out, whether one’s own
Dasein has lagged behind the Others and wants to catch up in relationship
to them, or whether one’s Dasein already has some priority over them and
sets out to keep them suppressed” (BT 126, 164).

Heidegger formally indicates this feature of a fallen existence, which looks very
much like what Kant terms the ‘diabolical vices,’ with the term ‘distantiality.’ This term
points towards two kinds of ‘distance.’ There is 1) the gap between my being and the
established values, which I perceive as a lack of being on my part, and there is 2) the ratio
of this first ‘distance’ in relation to the analogous distance between the being of my
associates and the established values. Since my existence matters to me, any distance of
the first kind or the second in which I occupy the position of the ‘loser’ is experienced as
a kind of dissatisfaction. And, unless I establish an autonomous stance on my values, the
only way to alleviate this dissatisfaction is to make up (or appear to make up) for any
perceived negative distance of either kind.

This state of affairs generates a constant pressure to at least give the appearance
that I have made such distance up, am on my way to making it up, or that I could make it
up in the event that I needed to. And this pressure, unless I choose to break with the
anonymous established values by grounding my standards for myself, pushes me deeper
into a downward plunge. For if I have to maintain the appearance of living up to the
highest standards without actually embodying them, my only hope of doing so will be in
exercising power over others with whatever manipulation or coercive tactics I can
muster:
"Being for, against, or without one another, passing one another by, not 'mattering' to one another – these are possible ways of solicitude. And it is precisely those last-named deficient and Indifferent modes that characterize the everyday, average way of Being-with-one-another" (BT 121, 158).

When it is not going well, then, keeping up with 'the others' is not a palatable alternative to the burden of autonomy. For it generates a latticework of power plays in which each attempts to appear to the others or to force the others to see him as meeting the 'highest standards' even when he falls short of doing so. And he, in turn, is subject to the same sort of coercive and manipulative tactics.

Thus, the fallen individual pressures others to fall along with him – for if the Other does not 'fall' with me, he might pose a challenge to my standing in the social field of appearances as living a life characterized by genuine, secure and full possibilities (BT 178, 222). Further, the fallen individual exacerbates and reinforces his own downward plunge and that of others by losing himself entirely in worries about 'distantiality' and the quest to enhance his own social power and to diminish that of others. My own self-deception, then, generates a need to force others to engage in the same self-deception and a drive to prevent them from passing me up in the pursuit of the secure, genuine and full possibilities. I want the Other to be a slave to the de facto 'highest values' just as I am, but, at the same time, I do not want him to be as successful in his pursuit of these values as I am. The fallen individual, then, does not crave the company of an Other; he craves the company of a lesser version of himself. And, of course, the Other's self-deception generates the same needs on his part and so fallenness leads to a social condition characterized by coercion, manipulation, and mutual corruption.
We must bear in mind, however, that for Heidegger, like Kant, this degraded form of life wherein social relations reduce to power relations is not the form of sociality but only its fallen mode, which human life has a certain tendency towards. Underlying this degraded form of social life is an anxiety that attests to the possibility of responsibility and an alternative way of being-with-others. I will discuss productive mode of social life in the final section of the last chapter, after we have a full account of resolute existence.

This chapter has set the stage for all that follows. In the next chapter, we shall address precisely how the mood of anxiety – in its extreme form – attests to the fact of responsibility in the experience that Heidegger calls ‘being-towards-death’ or ‘existential death.’ This experience, I shall argue, faces us with the opportunity to break with the fallen mode of existence described in this chapter and to take up an autonomous and responsible existence. Chapter four complements the current chapter’s discussion of fallenness by taking a closer look at what a resolute mode of existence looks like. In chapter five we shall endeavor to explain what motivates this responsible mode of existence, and, finally, in chapter six, we analyze the norm that places ethical constraints on resoluteness.
Chapter 3

Existential Death

“For I realized that dying was not something new, but on the contrary, since my childhood, I had died many times...These successive deaths, so feared by the self which they were destined to annihilate, so painless, so unimportant once they were accomplished and the self that feared them was no longer there to feel them, had taught me by now that it would be the merest folly to be frightened of death.”

—Proust, (III, 1094-5)

In the last chapter we saw that Heidegger, like Kant, argues that the typical stance towards existence is characterized by a way of being that conceals and evades the self’s capacity for responsibility. This stance is typical not only because taking responsibility for my existence is burdensome and provokes anxiety. The world also consumes my sense of my own freedom by dispersing it into a concern for things and solicitude towards others – relations set up by the constellation of roles that constitute my practical identity. I ‘get lost’ in everyday worldly activities and the norms, standards, and conventions that govern them: “Dasein exists as a potentiality-for-Being which has, in each case, already abandoned itself to definite possibilities...Losing itself in the publicness and the idle talk of the ‘they’, it fails to hear [überhört] its own Self in listening to the they-self” (BT 271, 315).

In this chapter, we will discuss the experience that makes it possible to break with this ‘lost’ mode of existence – an experience that enables the individual to ‘find’ himself by ‘hearing his own Self’ rather than ‘listening to the they-self.’ This experience is

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78 Robert Pippin quotes this passage in his “On ‘Becoming Who One Is’ (and Failing): Proust’s Problematic Selves,” in The Persistence of Subjectivity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 334. I will argue that when Heidegger speaks of ‘death’, he is targeting a phenomenon similar to what Proust has in his sights here, which Pippin glosses in the following manner: “It seems to be saying, when all is said and done, that you will be several (contested, provisional) ‘selves’ in your life...and that most of these will not care very much about the past others and the ones to come, and the best thing to be said about all that is that at least you will be well prepared for your actual death” (ibid, p. 334). The important part of this claim is that versions of oneself die to be replaced by others – whether one cares about these past selves is a matter contingent to the individual’s life history.
‘existential death’ – a confrontation with my autonomy in which my practical identity collapses and I come “face to face with the fact” (BT 276, 321) that I am, that I have to be, and that who I will be is up to me. It is an experience of the fact that this self could ‘die’ and I could be ‘reborn,’ and in this rebirth, the life I choose – who I become – is a product of my own self-determination.

3.1 Kant on Putting on the New Man

Before clarifying existential death, I shall briefly return to Kant’s position in the Religion to see how Heidegger’s account of breaking with a fallen mode of existence can be viewed as a phenomenological treatment of Kant’s solution to the problem of radical evil. As we saw in the last chapter, Kant argues because I act under the idea of freedom, a coherent view of myself as a moral agent requires that I understand myself as responsible for and capable of overcoming radical evil (RWL, 32). I choose whether I abnegate self-government to the sensuous incentives of self-love or I act on the incentive of respect associated with the moral law. Thus, the only path to emerge from the evasive stance of radical evil is a decision to enact a radical change in the subjective ground of my choices by choosing to take a responsible stance towards choice.

Kant explicitly relates this change to the Christian theme of conversion by reference to Paul’s writings and to these verses from the Gospel of John: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’” (John 6-7 (KJV)). This decision is so radical that it merits comparison to the Christian notion of rebirth. It makes one’s life qualitatively different to the extent that it could be considered a new life. For this reason, Kant refers to the choice as “putting on the new man.”
This change, Kant contends, must be set in motion by a single act (RWL, 43). It cannot be gradual because, on Kant’s view, the agent makes individual choices on the basis of a principle that determines which motives are incorporated into the will. Thus, to be good the subjective ground of my choices must be firmly established; otherwise, good behavior is mere chance. The break with radical evil, then, “must be effected through a revolution in the man’s disposition (a going over to the maxim of holiness of the disposition). He can become a new man only by a kind of rebirth, as it were a new creation…and a change of heart” (RWL, 43). This revolution in one’s cast of mind is not a matter of finding a missing or lost incentive. The incentive of the moral law was always there, which is why radical evil calls for self-deception, but in the revolution of one’s mind it is “adopted, in its entire purity, as an incentive adequate in itself for the determination of the will” (RWL, 43). Kant could have called ‘putting on the new man’, to parallel ‘radical evil’, radical responsibility – for it is a matter of taking complete responsibility for oneself from the roots up.

Heidegger shares the claim that genuine autonomy, acting with a coherent view of myself as a free agent, requires that I understand myself as responsible for the principles that determine my action. To be responsible, I must not only make my own decisions but I must take an autonomous stance towards the standards in light of which I make these choices.

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79 Again, Kant characterizes this choice in, as Allison puts it, dauntingly metaphysical terms. The agent’s choice to take up a revolution in his cast of mind, like the original choice to reverse the order of moral incentives, is a noumenal matter that must be understood as an intelligible act “for the deeps of the heart (the subjective first ground of his maxims) are inscrutable” (RWL, 46). He can only “hope through his own efforts to reach the road that leads thither” (46). This revolution, once made, is final: “as this new ground (the new heart) is now itself unchangeable” (46). But underlying this is a sensible claim about a coherent view of oneself as a moral agent. To have such a view, I have to understand myself as responsible for my stance towards choice – as choosing the incentives upon which I act. We should also note that on the phenomenal level Kant characterizes the transition from radical evil to ‘putting on the new man’ in quite sensible terms, arguing that the process of becoming good is “an ever-enduring struggle toward the better, hence…a gradual reformation of the propensity of evil, the perverted cast of mind” (RWL, 43). To be good we have to win ascendancy over a recalcitrant sensuous nature and this is a long-term project for us. But to be engaged in such a project presupposes that we have made a decision to change our cast of mind.
decisions. For even if I recognize that I alone can make my decisions, if I do not acknowledge that it is up to me to choose and endorse the standards in light of which I make them, then I am in a sense estranged from that which governs my existence.

Thus, there are at least two levels on which I can be estranged from my own actions. There is a first-order level of choice on which I can experience particular decisions as not up to me but rather as the product of some other power. I can, for example, be physically or psychologically coerced to perform a particular action, and in such cases I am estranged from the action because I do not experience it as something that emanates from my own power for self-determination. The action is determined by the freedom of the Other who has me under his control. There is also a second-order level on which I can be estranged from my actions – I can experience the standards in light of which I make my particular decisions as not up to me. In this case, even if I determine each individual action, the standards that govern them are not experienced as mine. To be autonomous and fully responsible, then, I also have to determine the standards in light of which I make particular decisions, so that I can experience the life I live as a product of my own freedom. Thus, for Heidegger, these two forms of estrangement are only possible when I am estranged from what he calls my ownmost possibility for being a self, i.e., my capacity for self-determination and self-ownership. When my deeds and standards are not experienced as up to me, they cannot be experienced as mine.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{80} These two forms of estrangement are also possible when I fail to be who I want to be. Particular actions strike me as alien if I am forced to do them or if performing them is incongruent with my sense of who I am and the person I am striving to become. Likewise, certain standards strike me as alien because they are not the standards that govern the life I want to have – or the self I want to be. As we will see in chapter five, it will be equally necessary to take up the task of responsibility and to pursue the life that one takes to be congruent with the sense of who one wants to be to overcome estrangement and to attain satisfaction in one’s existence.
One might find the analogy between Kant and Heidegger misleading, however, as, according to their respective positions, the standards one must choose are quite different in kind. For Kant, to be autonomous one must choose to determine one’s actions in terms of the universal moral law to be autonomous, whereas Heidegger is talking about choosing a way of life that has particular standards built into it – they are embedded in particular historical cultural practices. Thus, for Kant, autonomy presupposes choosing to live in light of a universal law of practical reason and Heidegger seems to endorse a certain kind of relativism as long as one chooses for oneself. Is it really meaningful to call choosing one’s own standards autonomous self-choice when the choice is contingent and historical and does not seem to be governed by a universal rational principle or is it just a blind and aesthetic pseudo-choice?

There are two ways to respond to this objection. First, in this chapter we are not concerned with the problem of relativism but the problem of estrangement. I cannot take myself to be a self-determining agent if I do not act in a manner that acknowledges that the standards in light of which I make particular choices are up to me. If I were determined by some alien force to make all of my decisions in light of a particular norm, then I could not properly consider myself an autonomous agent. This is the main point of the analogy that I wanted to draw between Kant and Heidegger. Second, the fact that the standards I choose are not universal laws of practical reason does not necessarily imply that the choice is relativistic or decisionistic. I will argue in the chapter six that choosing myself responsibly presupposes regard towards the Other’s freedom that operates as a
context-transcendent constraint on self-choice. Therefore, the issue of relativism and decisionism is not on the table at this point but will be discussed in the last chapter.

One might still object, however, that the claim that I must choose my own standards to be autonomous leads to a regress. Is there not a third-order level on which I must avoid estrangement in order to be truly autonomous? And would this choice too not need to be governed by a separate standard? There is no such regress. Choosing one's standards does not require a standard of a higher order, because my second-order standards of action are endemic to the modes of existence that I choose to take up, and the choice of a particular mode of existence is a first-order choice. The world claims me in a particular way and I feel called to choose this way of life rather than that one, and this is a first-order choice in which I 'buy into' certain second-order standards that will govern my existence. Furthermore, being-responsible is also a way of life that I choose on the basis of certain first-order appeals. Thus, there is no higher order standard that needs to govern my choice of standards — they are all chosen on the basis of choosing a mode of existence, which is always a first-order choice. I experience the standards that govern my actions as alien, then, when I do not choose the mode of existence in terms of

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81 And an ethical regard towards others is condition for the possibility of taking up a responsible way of being. Thus, in this chapter I am arguing that part of being a responsible agent is choosing one's own standards — if one fails to do this, then one cannot understand oneself as a self-determining agent and therefore as responsible for what one does. In the final chapter I argue that one cannot be responsible unless one acts with an ethical regard towards others. In other words, choosing one's own standards and respecting the freedom of others are both criteria of living a responsible life. This chapter offers an argument that the former is essential to responsibility and the final chapter argues that the same is true of the latter. Thus, the latter does not govern the former but rather both are necessary ingredients that must be in place at once for an agent to be considered responsible or autonomous.

82 But can I choose to be responsible responsibly? Does this make any sense? I believe the answer to these questions is yes. Heidegger's position seems to suggest that there are reason candidates — certain pretheoretical inclinations or pulls — towards responsibility. That is, there are considerations that count in favor of being responsible built into the structure of agency. One can respond to these reason candidates by choosing to be responsible and thereby determining one's actions in light of them or one can fail to do so. In other words, one can choose responsibility responsibly. This does not put one in the paradoxical condition of being responsible before one has chosen to be responsible; rather, one becomes responsible in the very making of the choice. The two things are inseparable.
which I have appropriated these standards for myself. When I do not experience who I am as up to me, then the standards that govern my actions and my actions themselves will be strange to me, as if they belong to someone else.

We can now turn to the experience that, according to Heidegger, attests to the self’s responsibility for itself and the possibility of overcoming the estrangement of fallenness and becoming a whole, integrated individual.

3.2 Death

Although there is a broad consensus that ‘being-towards-death’ represents a confrontation of the self with its own finitude, the nature of this confrontation is heavily contested and accounts of its implications radically disparate. My interpretation develops Blattner’s\(^{83}\) approach to the concept of death in *Being and Time* and places special emphasis on Heidegger’s claim that death is “a phenomenon to be understood existentially; and it is to be understood in a distinctive sense” (*BT* 240, 284). In other words, to understand death properly we must avoid its ordinary connotations and interpret it as a formally indicative concept strictly within the boundaries of Heidegger’s account of the self as *Existenz*. This approach allows the concept to emerge in its distinctness as ‘existential death,’ which has little to do with our ordinary understanding of death but rather captures a fundamental experience of the self’s own limits. I will begin by laying out the essential elements of such an interpretation, which I shall then test against other ‘existential’ interpretations of Heidegger’s concept of death.

3.2.2 An Existential Interpretation of Death

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\(^{83}\) Blattner, William. “The concept of death in *Being and Time,*” *Man and World.* 27: 49-70, 1994. My account of death as an existential phenomenon adds to Blattner’s account by exploring its implications for concepts such as guilt, the call of conscience and resoluteness, but what I have to say about death itself is deeply indebted to Blattner’s account.
"Death, in the widest sense, is a phenomenon of life."
-Heidegger, \(BT\ 246, 290\)

In the famous discussion of ‘being-towards-death’ in \textit{Being and Time}, Heidegger claims that the self is revealed to itself as ‘guilty’ by what he refers to as the ‘call of conscience.’ It is important to bear in mind that the terms ‘death’, ‘guilt’, and ‘conscience’ do not have their everyday meanings in this context; rather, they are formally indicative concepts that point to an experience of a structure of the self that the reader is meant to encounter for himself from the first-person perspective. These structures of the self that ordinarily operate on a tacit pretheoretical level, as I indicated in my discussion of formal indication, come to the fore as possible objects of explicit reflection in a moment of breakdown. ‘Being-towards-death’, according to Heidegger, is a unique instance of such a breakdown because it is total. That is, it is a moment in which my identity completely fails to matter to me and I therefore experience what is always already at work sustaining that identity. It is a mistake, then, to interpret ‘being-towards-death’ as a matter of coming to terms with the fact that I will one day be ‘food for worms’; instead, it must be understood as a concept that points the reader towards an encounter with the structure of his own autonomy.

The idea that ‘being-towards-death’ has little to do with the ordinary meaning of the term is hard to swallow, because it is difficult to stop thinking of terms, especially those like death, which carry so much psychological weight, in the way we are accustomed. But this is what Heidegger asks of us. To interpret death existentially, he claims, we must not “give a new \textit{explanation} for it to accord with the common sense of the ‘they’” \(BT\ 260, 305\). We must rather understand our end anew in light of the claim
that "man's 'substance'" is not what common sense or the history of metaphysics takes it to be — "it is rather existence" (BT 260, 153).

As I have already discussed, for Heidegger, the primary question regarding the being of the self is not what it is but who it is, and who we are is determined by the kind of activities we engage in. In light of this claim, in Being and Time Heidegger rejects a number of conceptions of the self that he finds phenomenologically deficient, e.g. the human being as a biological organism, the ens creatum, the Cartesian subject, and so on. He argues that none of these conceptions adequately captures what a human being is, and, as an alternative, he proposes that the self is its Existenz — the constellation of activities that it takes up in the world, what I have referred to consistently as its practical identity.84 With this claim Heidegger rejects all alternative conceptions of the self, and each conception he rejects has a corresponding conception of death, e.g., the systematic cessation of organ function, the departure of the immortal soul from the body, the subject becomes a mere object, and so on. In rejecting each conception of human life Heidegger rejects the corresponding conception of death. He thus needs a concept of death that complements his account of the self as a constellation of possible ways to be, which means that death "must be understood as a possibility" (BT 261, 306).

For Heidegger, 'to be' — 'life' — means to act in the world and thus 'not to be' — 'death' — means to be incapable of such action. Existential death is an experience in which the self undergoes a total breakdown. If existential death is a possibility that gives us something to understand in Heidegger's sense — something for us to take up in self-

84 As Heidegger points out, "'he is' can be taken in the sense of a being present and occurring in nature as it is represented objectively... Or 'he is' can have the sense that he plays a role in the social world he shares with others around him. This sense is expressed, for example, in the trivial question, 'What does X do in Y?'" ('CKJ', 27). For Heidegger, the self is in this latter sense.
projection – then in accordance with his interpretation of the self as *Existenz* we are
“enjoined to take” death as a possibility “back into the disclosedness of Dasein” (*BT* 269,
314). And this is because disclosedness is the “basic state of that entity which we
ourselves are” (*BT* 269, 314).

As an experience, then, existential death is characterized by the three constituent
elements of Heidegger’s account of ‘disclosedness’, viz., mood, understanding, and
discourse. The mood that accompanies the experience is anxiety, which, as Heidegger
describes it, is a peculiar mood. Most moods either draw my attention to or repel me from
certain features of the world, thus determining which aspects of my situation take on
significance for me. Unlike most moods, anxiety, according to Heidegger, has a
nullifying effect on my relation to worldly things: the experience “tells us that entities
within-the-world are of so little importance in themselves that on the basis of this
insignificance of what is within-the-world, the world in its worldhood is all that still
obtrudes itself” (*BT* 187, 231). In joy or depression, certain features of my experience
stake a claim on me affectively and so draw my attention, whereas in anxiety worldly
objects fail to make this affective claim, and so I experience the world as devoid of
significance. The world lies before me as an inert blanket of meaningless objects to
which I am indifferent. What comes to the fore, then, is my anxious concern for my
existence as such and the world as world, the nexus of meaning in which I ordinarily
carry out my life.

The mode of understanding that accompanies existential death is ‘being-towards-
death’ and this, like anxiety, is a peculiar mode of this aspect of my being. According to
Heidegger, ‘being-towards-death’ is my most extreme and ownmost possibility, because
in it I experience the limit of my possibilities—the impossibility of taking up any way of being. As Blattner puts it, "Since being-there is Dasein’s way of being, death is the possibility of no longer being able to be in the way which Dasein is." Due to the nullifying effect of anxiety, worldly entities no longer solicit my concern, and this thwarts my ability to take up any of the activities or abilities-to-be, which normally provide the content of my self-understanding. Because ‘being-towards-death’ is the inability to project myself into any roles and anxiety neutralizes the claim of inner-worldly entities, “death is the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there” (BT 250, 294). I cannot be ‘there’ because I cannot transcend, i.e. freely project myself into some way of being. I cannot be any of my everyday possibilities but rather experience myself as the sheer freedom that my self-projection into these possibilities depends upon. The world stands before me inert—a field of practices in which I cannot participate. Heidegger employs the word ‘death’ for this experience because my self, which is constituted through my projection of possibilities, is at stake and can no longer be. In ‘being-towards-death’, my being, as determined by particular possibilities, is suspended in a state of total dislocation from the world.

Finally, discourse, which articulates the intelligibility of Dasein’s experience, in this case turns up the predicate of ‘guilty.’ The word ‘guilty’ or ‘responsible’ is the appropriate term to formally indicate this experience because in it I encounter myself as a sheer freedom for self-projection, and if my own freedom is the basis of my self-projection no one but me can be responsible for the possibilities into which I choose to

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86 Also relevant is Note 2 at bottom of same page: "‘*Nicht-mehr-dasein-können.*’ Notice that the expressions ‘Seinkönnen’ (our potentiality-for-Being) and ‘Nichtmehrdasein’ (our ‘no-longer-Dasein’) are here fused." Cf. H. 237-242)
project myself. The word ‘guilty’ formally indicates – points in the direction of – a moment of an articulated insight into the *structure* of my being. This structure is figured or disclosed by the possibility of ‘being-towards-death’ and the mood of anxiety. Anxiety draws me away from the world so that I can grasp its structure; and ‘being-towards-death’ allows me to grasp myself as a totality – the roles that I have been and the capacity for free self-projection that makes these possible – and the term ‘guilty’ is meant to be an articulation of the meaning or structure of this entire experience. Precisely what this means is complicated. To put it briefly for now, the experience of existential death shows me that qua free capacity for self-projection I *am* the basis of my action and therefore am ‘guilty’ (or responsible) for everything that I have been and will be. This is something I can evade or for which I can take responsibility, but ‘guilty’ is fundamentally what I *am*.

In this moment I fail to care about my everyday identity and undergo an anxious concern about my existence as such. In ‘being-towards-death’, then, my everyday self *dies* because I can no longer project myself into the activities that define it. My practical identity is at stake and I have a sense of what it would be like to no longer be *this* self. Thus, “Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein” (*BT* 250, 294): it is momentarily *impossible* for me to take up any of my possibilities. I am lost to the world and what usually matters to me lacks significance. In this moment, I am no ‘one’ in particular. There is no answer to the question, ‘Who am I?’, which gives a special urgency to the question, ‘Who shall I be?’

This experience, Heidegger claims, reveals me to myself as a self-determining agent. For when the identity in terms of which I had formerly understood myself fails to matter, I realize that what ordinarily sustains it is nothing but an anxious concern for my
existence as such. Thus, existential death attests to the fact that what is always already at work sustaining my identity is my own free endorsement – the fact that I care about it.\textsuperscript{87}

[The self] "on the basis of being-in-the-world, is always already in its very possibility already beyond all beings... in this very being-beyond Dasein holds before itself the binding commitment as world and in this counter-hold first can and even must hold itself to beings."\textsuperscript{88}

Existential death reveals that in order to occupy a meaningful world, the self must sustain this space of significance by holding itself to the world and its sense of who it is in that world. In other words, it attests to the existential commitment that is always already at work holding together the meaning of my existence – what it means for me to be.

Because his account of autonomy is not just a concept for one to grasp cognitively but the formal indication of an experience to undergo\textsuperscript{89}, Heidegger needs to account for the mode of \textit{first-person awareness} that accompanies the experience. He claims that this awareness of my autonomy, which remains largely hidden from me in my everyday life, emerges in the form of something like a ‘call’ in which I call myself ‘back’ from the anonymity of everyday life to my own freedom. He formally indicates this mode of awareness with the expression ‘the call of conscience.’ The ‘call’ formally indicates that

\textsuperscript{87} In case the notion of existential death seems a bit far-fetched, consider an example of an occurrence from everyday life that might trigger such an experience: the loss of a child. When one is deeply committed to the project of being a parent to that child, a large part of oneself is lost or destroyed along with the loss of the child. Further, if being this child’s parent was integral to the constitution of one’s identity, it is probable that losing it could evoke the kind of global collapse of the self that Heidegger calls existential death. When the self breaks down in response to losing the keystone of its identity, the once significant world can show up in an uncanny and alien form. In the face of such loss, the life that one has been living can utterly fail to matter. That is, this catastrophic loss can also trigger an uncanny response to one’s life as a whole – what Heidegger calls existential death. The loss of a central aspect of my identity can alienate me from other things I have hitherto loved and cared for, and this experience of estrangement brings with it the realization that what remains of my life is \textit{up to me}.


\textsuperscript{89} Autonomy must be ‘understood’ in Heidegger’s sense of the term understanding: “It must be noted that understanding does not primarily mean just gazing at a meaning, but rather understanding oneself in that potentiality-for-Being which reveals itself in projection” (\textit{BT} 263, 307).
the experience brings to my awareness something that – although I may have been tacitly in touch with it in my anxious concern for my existence – I was not explicitly aware of; and ‘conscience’ indicates that what comes to my awareness is something I am responsible for. The call, as I said above, is the mode of discourse associated with existential death, which means that it articulates the intelligibility of my first-person awareness of the structure of my autonomy.

Unlike the ‘idle talk’ of das Man, the call is not something into which I am gradually socialized or to which I tacitly – or without noticing – surrender myself. The call irrupts within my existence in a moment; it comes over me without my bidding and forces its appeal upon me:

"In conscience Dasein calls itself... Indeed the call is precisely something which we ourselves have neither planned nor prepared for nor voluntarily performed, nor have we ever done so. 'It' calls, against our expectations and even against our will. On the other hand, the call undoubtedly does not come from someone else who is with me in the world. The call comes from me and yet from beyond me and over me" (BT 275, 320).

As it is with all appeals, I can choose how I respond to the call but I cannot choose whether I encounter it. It is unbidden, unintentional and unexpected. At first blush, this seems like a contradiction – for Heidegger claims that I am the one behind the call. I call to myself. How can a call to myself be something unintentional and unbidden?

This apparent contradiction is resolved when we consider the manner in which the everyday self, as we discussed in the second chapter, is divided against itself. For the most part, I exist in a fallen mode in which I take myself to just be this practical identity and I thereby cover over the dimension of myself that sustains that identity. The call brings this division to the fore and shows that it is an issue for the self. The self that calls is the self as project – the free capacity for self-projection – and it calls to the factual,
everyday self that is lost or thrown into the world. The everyday self is always ‘ahead of itself’ in the sense that it is always already caught up in some everyday, factual identity. And this self that is caught up in the flow of factual life has a tendency towards ‘fallenness,’ which engenders the divide in the self between thrownness and projection. When I hide my freedom from myself, I cannot exist as an integrated whole, because I am estranged from that which determines my own life, as if my deeds are not mine – as if who I am is not up to me. This estrangement, however, haunts me in the form of an undercurrent of anxiety that troubles the tranquilized self without, for the most part, revealing its source. ‘The call of conscience’ reveals this source and raises the fact of this division to an explicit awareness that – if only for a moment – breaks me out of ‘fallenness’ and opens me to the possibility of being-a-whole. With this awareness of my freedom I see that I am both a factual self and the capacity for self-projection. I see that it is possible, then, to unify myself as an agent – as thrown-project – to exist as the factual self caught up in the world and the free projection that makes my participation in these factual roles possible.

According to Heidegger, the call discourses *silently* and comes without specific imperatives. Of course, the ‘voice’ of conscience never literally ‘speaks’ to us – this is a metaphor we use to capture the fact that the practical injunctions of our conscience seem to have an authority that demands a response from us in the form of action. These everyday injunctions, however, come with a specific sense of what I *ought* to do, whereas the ‘call of conscience’, which, as an awareness of my responsibility in general, is the condition for the possibility of these everyday practical injunctions, comes with no such specification regarding what to do. Such specificity is appropriate to the everyday
injunctions of conscience because they come to me as I am engaged in a particular social practice with a contextually based sense of how one goes on in that practice. But this is not the case in existential death. Thus,

"The call dispenses with any kind of utterance. It does not put itself into words at all...Conscience discourses solely and constantly in the mode of keeping silent...The call does not report events; it calls without uttering anything...[It] does not call him into the public idle talk of the ‘they’, but calls him back from this into the reticence of his existent potentiality-for-Being" (BT 277, 322).

There is nothing ‘informative’ for the call ‘to say’ because in existential death I am aware of myself as ‘being-possible’ – an un-projected potential for projection and the world as a structure into which I could project myself. The call does nothing but confront me with my own autonomy. The only utterance appropriate to this experience, Heidegger claims, is the word ‘guilty’ as a predicate of the self: entities such as ourselves, the call informs us, “are guilty in the very basis of their Being” (BT 286, 332).

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90 In his “Human Mortality: Heidegger on How to Portray the Impossible Possibility of Dasein,” in Dreyfus, Hubert and Wrathall, Mark A. eds. A Companion to Heidegger. Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005, Mulhall makes an argument along these lines but he does so in light of an understanding of ‘death’ as, essentially, the possibility of being a corpse. There he argues that Heidegger characterizes “the voice in which Dasein demands authenticity of itself – the voice of conscience – as saying nothing...A demand that activates objectless angst concerning an existential impossibility cannot specify any particular thrown projection as capable of satisfying it; it demands simply that Dasein regard its existence as making demands on it at any and every moment, as being inherently demanding beyond the satisfaction of any specific demands we choose to address in and through that existence” (Ibid. p. 309). Mulhall is essentially correct regarding the silence of the call, but he is wrong to think that the call itself motivates a response – it only raises the possibility of authenticity as ‘an issue’ and he fails to show that the issue in question is precisely a responsible stance towards my existence in general. And this is because Mulhall does not interpret death as a possibility that I am and that reveals the structure of my existence – the fact that my freedom is the basis of all my projections. Thus, one can make the same point about the silence of the call with such an interpretation, but one loses important dimensions of its content.

91 Philosophers such as Kisiel claim that authenticity is an empty and extraneous ideal of existence precisely because the call itself is ‘empty’ and ‘formal’ and provides no concrete directives; it is merely a presupposition of any way of life that is taken up authentically that it be done so in light of the call. As Kisiel puts it, “Does the existentiell attestation of the authentic can-be which the call of conscience is to provide—more specifically, the resolute and resolving response that this call evokes—give rise to a worldview of worldviews, or instead, as it by way of formality intends, merely the obligatory condition of possibility for any and every worldview?...It would seem that forerunning my death as my outermost possibility, with its potentiality for being-a-whole, gives me such a concrete attitude toward life as a whole. But this is a mere ontological possibility, an empty and extraneous ideal of existence, without ontic fundament.” Kisiel, Theodore. The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being & Time. Berkeley: University of
Guilt here does not indicate an ‘indebtedness’ for a particular wrong that I have committed. It points to my responsibility: I am guilty in the sense that my actions are imputable to me alone and so I am responsible for them. I am responsible not in the sense that I take responsibility but in the sense that I alone sustain my identity by holding myself to it. Heidegger’s clarifies a fundamental ambiguity in the term responsibility by relying on the term ‘guilty’ rather than responsible. ‘Guilty’ is something that I in fact am – what we can call the fact of responsibility – and ‘responsible’ is something that I can be or fail to be. The fact of responsibility is a necessary ingredient to the concept of a free agent: I am responsible for what I do in the sense that it emanates from my own freedom. But there is another sense in which I can be responsible: I can take responsibility for the fact that I am the author of my actions. It is the fact of responsibility – the fact that I am guilty – that makes being-responsible possible. For this reason, Heidegger emphasizes the difference between Schuld (guilt, indebtedness) and schuldigsein (being-responsible), which, as we shall see, is his formally indicative definition of resoluteness. The call of conscience, then, wakes me to the fact of responsibility: whether I take ownership of my existence or not it is mine. It constitutes an appeal in the sense that it brings to my awareness my capacity for self-determination.

California Press, 1993, p. 432. As trivial as Kisiel makes this owning up to ‘the facts of life’ (Kisiel, Ibid.) out to be, I will show that what Heidegger articulates in the call is nothing less than the possibility in experience my particular ontic life in a way that is satisfying. In other words, the call itself has no ‘ontic fundament’ but a resolute response to the call is motivated by this very fundament. And a life that is not lived in light of the call will not be experienced – except for those virtuosos of self-transquилization – as worth living. The call reveals that the meaning of existence is responsibility, which marks the difference between merely living a life and living my life. The call may not furnish specific ‘ontic’ directives – these, rather, derive from who we are factically – but it will determine much about how I carry on ontically, including ethical matters. The call issues a ‘formal’ demand but it is not empty; it is filled out by my own factual being.

92 This sense of responsibility is a fact not in an empirical or metaphysical sense; rather, it is a fact in the sense that it is essential to the first-person standpoint.
To shed more light on these matters, Heidegger argues that the claim that the self is ‘guilty’ in its very basis can also be expressed by defining the self as “Being-the-basis of a nullity” that is itself “null” (BT 283, 329) or, in other words, ‘the null basis of a nullity.’ This definition is more helpful than it may initially appear. I will only briefly reconstruct its meaning here and save a deeper analysis for the following chapter. The first term of the definition, the ‘null basis’, refers to the self’s freedom. My freedom is a kind of nullity or nothingness in the sense that it is no-thing. It has no determinate content of its own; rather, it is nothing but the power for self-determination.93 And this power sustains but is not identical with my practical identity. Being-towards-death, then, breaks me from the tendency to cover over my freedom with a worldly interpretation of myself, e.g. as a brother, a philosopher, a teacher, etc. and ‘nothing besides.’ This way of understanding myself as nothing but this practical identity represents the pretension that I can achieve a certain permanence of identity. The momentary collapse of this identity, however, reveals that this ‘nothing’ has a positive meaning – it is the power for self-determination that is the basis of my projection into my other possibilities for being a self. Thus, “anxiety”, Heidegger claims, “discloses Dasein as Being-possible, indeed as the only kind of thing which it can be of its own accord as something individualized in individualization” (BT 187-188/232). When death tears me away from the world and my practical identity, what remains is my capacity for self-projection – my sheer ‘being-possible’ that is no-thing but the power to project myself into a possibility.

This ‘being-possible’ is not at all about comprehending what it might be like to be a corpse “through our capacity to acknowledge it as repellent, as pushing us away – to

93 “Not only is the projection, as one that has been thrown, determined by the nullity of Being-a-basis; as projection it is itself essentially null...The nullity we have in mind belongs to Dasein’s Being-free for its existentiell possibilities” (Ibid. p. 331).
regard its repulsiveness as our mode of access to it” (Mulhall 2005, 300). It is not something that I contemplate – it is something that I am. I experience it as a possibility because I exist as a sheer ‘being-possible’. That is, rather than simply projecting into a particular possibility, I experience myself as being the kind of entity with the capacity for such self-projection, i.e. as a free self-determining agent. Thus, in the ‘possibility of impossibility’, which is also a sheer ‘being-possible’, I recognize my freedom as a contentless possibility for self-projection – the capacity to take up different worldly possibilities.

Death is my ‘ownmost’ possibility because in it I am ‘something individualized in individualization’; it “lays claim to…[me] as an individual” (BT 263, 308) by compelling me to experience myself as the freedom that is the basis of my projection into any other possibility. My freedom determines which possibilities I take up and which I pass up or leave behind. I can become who I am and be responsible for this process of becoming – i.e. I can be an individual – only because I am ‘being-possible’. This is the meaning behind Heidegger’s claim regarding the distinctive character of the self’s transcendence:

“Being and the structure of Being lie beyond every entity and every possible character which an entity may possess. Being is the transcendent pure and simple. And the transcendence of Dasein’s Being is distinctive in that it implies the possibility and the necessity of the most radical individuation” (BT 38, 62).

The self’s transcendence – its freedom or its capacity to project itself into a role and to sustain the meaning of its being-in-the-world – implies the possibility and necessity of

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94 In this essay Mulhall offers one of the best interpretations of death understood as the permanent end of a life – the point at which I become a corpse. The problem with his reading, like all interpretations that understand death this way, is that ‘being-toward-death’ can’t be a possibility in Heidegger’s sense – it is rather some imaginative exercise of thought. This is interesting but it is not a way that I can die – it is a way that I can think about dying. I can project myself into thinking about death, but this is not the same thing as ‘dying’. Furthermore, I can ‘die’ in Heidegger’s sense without the thought of being a corpse ever crossing my mind. This might be a haunting thought – a thought that repels me even – but it is not the possibility that haunts my being as a permanent possibility.
the most radical individuation because it marks the self’s capacity to determine itself. It
allows the self to determine the domain of its own being – who it is and what it is
responsible for. The kind of being or transcendence that I have makes individuation
possible and necessary – my efforts to cover over this necessity notwithstanding. This
nullity at the heart of self-projection is not something to be overcome. To be null in this
sense is what it means to be self-determining. The content of my practical identity can
never be defined in advance or with finality. Who I will be is always up to me. It is the
essence of a free being to never have an essence – the meaning of my being is always
suspended, it is always ‘to be determined’ by my own free projection.

But what is the ‘nullity’ of which my freedom is a ‘null basis’? This second term
of the definition refers to the fact that I find myself having taken up – and already having
been claimed by – a variety of roles that I did not explicitly choose. And my being is
properly described as guilty – as ‘the null basis of a nullity’ – because my freedom,
which is itself ‘null’ (or nothing), is the basis of this thrown nullity. I am ‘guilty’ or
responsible for the possibilities into which I have been thrown, because even if it seems
that I have only found myself in them, ‘being-towards-death’ attests to the fact that my
freedom was always already at work as the basis of my projection into any possibility
whatsoever. That is, whatever I have chosen or failed to choose must be understood as a
product of my own self-determination. My identity is my responsibility.

The call of conscience, then, wakes me to a twofold realization: First, I have
already determined aspects of my being without an autonomous stance towards the self-
determining activity that sustained them. In other words, my original stance towards my
existence – ‘fallenness’ – is characterized by an evasion of and alienation from the
responsibility that my freedom entails. In the mode of fallenness I have simply gone along with the ‘nobody’ — a worldly interpretation of myself and others — and I have failed to grasp myself as what I truly am — the capacity to make a free decision about who I am and will be: “The call of conscience passes over in its appeal all Dasein’s ‘worldly’ prestige and potentialities. Relentlessly it individualizes Dasein down to its potentiality-for-Being-guilty, and exacts of it that it should be this potentiality authentically (BT 307, 354).

Secondly, although I cannot get behind my thrown dimension — I cannot re-make these choices in an autonomous way — I can ‘make up for not choosing’ by taking an autonomous stance towards self-determination — a condition Heidegger calls resoluteness. And this means acting in light of the fact that I am always ‘guilty’ — that who I have been, who I am now, and who I will be is rooted in my own freedom.

3.3.3 Other Attempts to Interpret Death Existentially

The existential approach to death developed here is by no means new. It is, rather, an attempt to elaborate an already existing approach to the concept of death in

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95 “This must be accomplished by making up for not choosing [Nachholen einer Wahl]. But ‘making up’ for not choosing signifies choosing to make this choice — deciding for a potentiality-for-being, and making this decision from one’s own Self. In choosing to make this choice, Dasein makes possible, first and foremost, its authentic potentiality-for-Being” (BT 268, 313).

96 This final paragraph is my interpretation of the following passage from Being and Time: “as the entity to which it has been thus delivered over, it is, in its existing, the basis of its potentiality-for-Being. Although it has not laid that basis itself, it reposes in the weight of it… The Self, which as such has to lay the basis for itself, can never get that basis into its power; and yet, as existing, it must take over Being-a-basis. To be its own thrown basis is that potentiality-for-Being which is the issue for care… in being its Self, Dasein is as a Self, the entity that has been thrown. It has been released from its basis, not through itself but to itself, so as to be as this basis. Dasein is not itself the basis of its Being, inasmuch as this basis first arises from its own projection; rather, as Being-its-Self, it is the Being of its basis” (BT 284, 330).

97 In addition to the two I address in this text, there are several other excellent attempts to interpret Heidegger’s account of death ‘existentially’ that I will not address directly in this chapter. Anyone interested in such an interpretation, however, will want to read the following: Blattner, William. “The concept of death in Being and Time,” Man and World, 27: 49-70, 1994; Hauge, John. “Truth and Finitude: Heidegger’s Transcendental Existentialism,” Heidegger, Authenticity, and Modernity: Essays in Honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus Volume I. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000; Crowell, Steven Galt. “Authentic
*Being and Time* and to avoid the problems I have found in other interpretations of its kind. In this section I highlight some of these problems in two otherwise very promising attempts to interpret death existentially. These are problems that my account avoids and that must be avoided for an existential interpretation of death to be successful.

In the “Appendix to *Being-in-the-World,*” Hubert Dreyfus and Jane Rubin attempt to move beyond ‘the usual way of reading Heidegger on death’ by interpreting the concept existentially. Against the ordinary interpretation, they emphasize the ‘ontological character’ of the account, insisting that, although he seems to be talking about “the possibility of just plain dying,” any interpretation of his concept of death “must do justice to Heidegger’s assertion that death is an existential structure that defines what Dasein is; it cannot be some event that is possible but not yet actual, or even the possibility of that event” (Dreyfus 1991, 311). Although they move in the right direction, however, their interpretation is ultimately defective because it fails to show how existential death is the experience of a possibility that is immanent to existence. Instead, they claim that Heidegger employs the concept of death analogically:

“The only way dying, or the possibility of dying, could have existential meaning would be as what Kant calls an *analogon.* An analogon is a concrete example that stands for something else that cannot be represented. Death shows us in a specific case that Dasein can have no possibilities that define it and its world... Thus the anxiety at the moment of dying when I have no possibilities left, the world recedes, and everything is seen to be meaningless, can be an analog for living lucidly in such a way that the world is constantly seen to be meaningless...” (Dreyfus 1991, 311).\(^8\)

\(^8\)*Much like the narrativists, Dreyfus and Rubin draw many of the important consequences of Heidegger’s view from this interpretation. For example, Heidegger’s discussion of death does entail the claim that the self’s identity has no intrinsic content – that none of the roles I occupy, the things that furnish the content of my identity, can be specified in advance as essential or necessary constituents of who I am.*

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One problem with the claim that death is best understood as an ‘analgon’ is that it overlooks the phenomenological character of Heidegger’s account. Phenomenology characterizes the sphere of immanence and so makes no recourse to analogical thinking or hypothetical posits. Death cannot refer to the ordinary experience of death at all – for the concept would then designate something beyond representation and ipso facto beyond the reach of phenomenological reflection. Qua phenomenological concept, death must characterize a moment within life.

In addition to the fact that existential death, as a possibility, must be immanent to experience, there is little reason to think that what Heidegger’s concept of death represents is in any significant way beyond representation. And it is puzzling that Dreyfus and Rubin claim that Heidegger relies on an analogn – a concrete example of what cannot be represented – when they find it possible to represent what the concept intends with the following formulation: “the formal truth that Dasein has no possibilities of its own and that it can never have any” (Dreyfus 1991, 312). Why would Heidegger lean on the crutch of analogical thinking to express this thought? Alternatively, if it is not beyond representation, why would a phenomenologist turn to the conceptual surrogate of analogy to represent the self’s experience of its own limits? The only plausible reason to understand death as an analogn is the claim that Heidegger relies “heavily on the similarity between Dasein’s structural lack of possibilities of its own and the annihilation of all possibilities at life’s end” (Dreyfus 1991, 311). But this claim brings Dreyfus and Rubin perilously close to ‘the usual way of reading Heidegger on death,’ which they set out to break with, rightly, in order to do justice to the ontological character of the
Moreover, from the phenomenological point of view, their account perverts the order of explanation between existential and natural meaning. Natural events do not account for or make sense of existence; if there is a priority to be given in the order of explanation, it is existential death that makes natural death intelligible and not the other way around.

Like Dreyfus and Rubin, in Heidegger’s Analytic Carman focuses on the ontological character of the concept of death, noting the “enormous amount of confusion” that results when we take Heidegger’s use of death to refer to “what is commonly meant by the word.” He argues cogently that Heidegger’s concept of death cannot refer to “the collapse of the biological infrastructure of our existence,” (Carman 2003, 279) for Heidegger insists that human being cannot be understood in biological terms. Nor, he argues, can it be a reference to the end of our biography for as long as we live our story is incomplete — and “no Dasein can enjoy any settled or stable biographical perspective on itself” (Carman 2003, 280). Moreover, death, Carman claims, must be

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99 It is true that there is an analogy between not having any possibilities to take up after my demise and the experience of not being able to project myself in existential death. It is similar because it represents another way of thinking about how a human being can come to its end. The biological concept of perishing – the systematic cessation of organ function – is ‘analogous’ to the Christian idea that death is the moment when one sheds a mortal shell, because any way of being dead will bear striking similarities to other ways of being dead. The differences, however, between the biological concept of perishing and the Christian conception of death are rooted in the differences in how these viewpoints conceptualize life. From the point of view of biology, life is systematic organ function. Thus, death is the coming to an end of organ function. In the Christian worldview, life is the temporary embodiment of an immortal soul. Thus, death is the soul leaving the body behind. For Heidegger, life is Existenz – the projection of oneself into possibilities. Thus, death is a moment in which such projection is no longer possible. All conceptions of death are similar – that does not, however, make them the same.

100 This theme will be taken up in more depth in chapter five when we discuss resoluteness as an account of existential birth.


102 Biological death, of course, also puts all of our worldly comportments out of commission. If I perish, I can no longer be the kind of being that I am. But biological death cannot be understood as a possibility in Heidegger’s sense and it is not a death that is specific to the kind of being that I am – all animals undergo biological death but ‘existential death’ is specific to us. In ‘existential death’ I only die qua Existenz – it is a death of the self that is “codetermined by its primordial kind of Being” (BT 247, 291).
“phenomenologically accessible to oneself” and this means “immanent” to one’s experience (2003, 280). Finally, he brings home Heidegger’s consistent claim that death has the “ontological status of an existential possibility” (2003, 280) and an existential possibility “is something into which I project” (2003, 281).

This last point makes Carman’s interpretation genuinely existential. To understand death as a possibility is to take seriously the claim that it is a ‘way to be.’ For all its strengths, however, Carman’s account fails to make sense of what it would mean to understand death as a possibility. This failure results from the manner in which he conceives the relation between death and projection.103 He attempts to figure this relation with the claim that death, as “the impossibility of existence,” defines the self negatively:

“Impossibility, like possibility, must be an existential notion, and if possibilities are what define me, then impossibilities must be what define me negatively. They are what or who I am not, or more precisely cannot be. And indeed, all projecting into possibility is at once a projecting into impossibility, that is, negative determinations of what or who I am...Every possibility open to Dasein leaves in its wake other possibilities that have been shut down, rendered null and void. All possibility is bounded and conditioned by impossibility” (Carman 2003, 281).

There are some serious problems with interpreting death as the manner in which possibility is ‘bounded and conditioned by impossibility.’ The finite projection of one possibility, indeed, rules out others, but is it proper to call these possibilities that I thus ‘shut down’ ‘impossibilities’ or, more importantly, ‘the impossibility of possibility’? If I take up being-a-teacher, I might rule out being-a-musician for the time being, but do I thereby render the latter impossible? It remains a possibility for me even if I shut it down

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103 Recall that my own interpretation does not claim that the self projects itself into the possibility of death. Rather, death is understood as a special possibility, as the limit of all possibilities, in which I experience an uncanny inability to project myself into any possibility. It is an experience of passivity in which I grasp the sheer ‘being-possible’ that underlies my capacity to project at all — my freedom. I take Carman to be on the right track here because he is correct that, as a possibility, death must be relevant to projection. But his approach, I argue, fails to understand this relevance properly.
temporarily. Am I, then, only projecting myself into an impossibility when the one I choose renders another impossible in a definitive way? And does this impossibility have to be one that matters to me for it to constitute existential death? This cannot be Carman’s intention, for if it were I could not ‘constantly project myself’ into death – no one *constantly* opts for possibilities that render others impossible in a significant way.

But then are all the possibilities that I do not take up somehow my negative determinations? Have I somehow projected myself into the impossibility of being a pirate even if I have never taken the slightest interest in such a possibility? This cannot be Carman’s claim either. He must simply mean that projection has limits – I can only stand in so many possibilities at once. By taking up some I shut others down. But this is just one ‘null’ aspect of my being that Heidegger mentions in his discussion of guilt.104 Nowhere does he equate this finite aspect of projection with death itself.

The deeper problem with Carman’s interpretation is the very idea of ‘projecting’ myself into an impossibility. What I project myself into are the possibilities that define me. The fact that this projection is finite is a characteristic of the projection but not something that I in any comprehensible sense *project myself into*. If I become a philosophy professor, I teach philosophy and understand myself in terms of this role. But

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104 “Dasein is its basis existentially – that is, in such a manner that it understands itself in terms of possibilities, and, as so understanding itself, is that entity which has been thrown. But this implies that in having a potentiality-for-Being it always stands in one possibility or another: it constantly is not other possibilities, and it has waived these in its existentiell projection... Freedom, however, is only in the choice of one possibility – that is, in tolerating ones not having chosen the others and one’s not being able to choose them” (BT 285, 331). If I choose one possibility in terms of which to define myself, I rule out others and, by Heidegger’s lights, I must be able to tolerate this to truly be free. With this claim, he highlights the tendency to lament the finite aspect of existence, a tendency that compromises our freedom by breeding the kind of ‘resentment’ and ‘ill will against the past’ that Nietzsche rails against. This is an important point but it only represents one null aspect of the self and is not equivalent to death.
there is no sense in which I simultaneously project myself into not-being-a-Marine.\textsuperscript{105} There are many roles into which I do not project myself, and some of these matter to me. My inability to take these up might, indeed, constitute a kind of bereavement or death, but this finite aspect of projection is not the existential concept of death itself. If death is a distinct possibility, it cannot be a \textit{structural aspect} of taking up any possibility whatsoever. Carman conflates death with one of the ways in which our being is ‘permeated with nullity.’\textsuperscript{106}

As a corollary of this conflation, Carman reads Heidegger’s claim that “Dasein is factically dying as long as it exists” (\textit{BT} 251, 295) to mean that “our possibilities are constantly dropping away into nullity” and “constantly closing down around us” (Carman 2003, 282). But this sells Heidegger’s account of existential death short by metonymy – it reduces the whole of existential death to one of its parts. Existential death is a face to face encounter with my autonomy and the claim that “Dasein is factically dying as long as it

\textsuperscript{105} There is an endless list of possibilities I am not when I project myself into a particular possibility and it is unclear how I am simultaneously projecting myself into \textit{not being them}. The fact is that I am not projecting myself into them at all because what I project myself into are possibilities. Another point worth considering is that most of the ‘impossibilities’ relevant to who I am – the one’s that really bring about bereavement and existential death – are not something I project myself into at all. When someone close to me dies and I am left bereft, I have lost the possibility of being-with-that-person, but this loss – this impossibility – has nothing to do with \textit{my} projection.

\textsuperscript{106} Carman’s interpretation of death as a constant feature of all projection departs significantly from Heidegger’s description of death as a possibility. A possibility is something into which I project myself and in terms of which I understand who I am. The claim that death is an “ontological existential possibility” that I project myself into coupled with the claim that it is a constant feature of all projection trades on an equivocation of the term projection. Consider the case of ‘being-a-teacher.’ In this case ‘project’ functions as it ordinarily does in \textit{Being and Time} – I take up a role in a norm-governed social practice and understand myself in terms of what I am up to in this role. But Carman changes the meaning of the term when he speaks of projecting into death – for he does not interpret death as a possibility or even the inability to project myself into a possibility but as a feature of projecting into any possibility.

Another strange result of Carman’s interpretation is his claim that there are two kinds of death into which one can project oneself – inauthentic and authentic death (Carman 2003, 282). But Heidegger only describes one experience of existential death – a confrontation with one’s autonomy brought on by an acute episode of anxiety that leads to the self’s total dislocation from the world. Death is a specific possibility – a way to be in terms of which I understand myself, albeit a unique one – and Carman interprets death to be a constant feature of our possibilities. There is only one kind of death – there are, however, the two possible responses of authenticity and inauthenticity to the experience of existential death.
exists” does not mean that its possibilities are constantly closing down but that it is constantly coming to grips with its freedom and responsibility for itself, which is attested to, Heidegger claims, by the constant presence of anxiety in human life.\textsuperscript{107}

3.3.4 Problems with the Existential Interpretation

There are at least two strong objections to the existential interpretation of death—we can call them the hyperbole objection and the ‘bootstraps’ objection. The hyperbole objection is the claim that existential death, as I have characterized it here, is too extreme to represent an actual human experience. The idea of a total collapse of the self is simply a caricature of a life-crisis and not something one could ever really undergo. The bootstraps objection is related to the issue of hyperbole: if we assume that a total breakdown is in principle possible, that anxiety nullifies all worldly claims and no element of my practical identity is in play, what motivates me to emerge from the experience in the first place? Must there not be some starting point, some reason candidate or desire, to motivate me back towards the world, or must I somehow pull myself up by my own bootstraps in a sheer act of will that wrests me from this state of dislocation?

Hyperbole

Okrent raises the hyperbole objection forcefully in “Heidegger and Korsgaard on Human Reflection”\textsuperscript{108} in which he claims that both authors named in the title forfeit a realistic picture of human agency in favor of an “extreme existentialist voluntarism” (Okrent 1999, 73). Although Okrent judges Heidegger’s view that “no particular practical

\textsuperscript{107} Anxiety always makes itself known, whether implicitly or explicitly: “fleeing in the face of uncanniness ... announces itself, whether it does so explicitly or not, and whether it is understood or not” (BT 192, 237).

identity is necessary for any particular human being” to be quite sensible, he objects to the view, which he sees as an excrescence of Heidegger’s appropriation of Kierkegaard, that it is possible for a human being to shed all of his practical identities at a given moment. The idea that such a total breakdown of human identity is possible, Okrent argues, is artificial and the product of Heidegger’s endorsement of the traditional Cartesian commitment to a “fundamental divide between human being and animal nature” (74). We are social animals whose lives always matter in terms of and whose continued existence depends on a commitment to some set of social norms. Because we are this kind of animal we are always caught up in some social context with some practical identity and Heidegger’s ‘extreme existentialist volunartism’ – the notion that freedom can, even for a moment, somehow place us entirely outside of this context of social meaning – is patently hyperbolic. It is another testament to philosophy’s myopia vis-à-vis the naturalistic basis of human reality. Heidegger, Okrent claims, “is simply blind to the naturalistic basis of the fact that human beings must always have some practical identity or other…” (74).

The problem with Okrent’s argument, however, is that his claim that human beings must always have some practical identity or other is incompatible with his acceptance of Heidegger’s claim that no particular practical identity can be viewed as necessary for a particular human being. This latter claim is equivalent to the claim that human beings are capable of self-determination. No way of being that I can take up adheres to me like a fact; rather, each is a mode of being that I endorse and that depends on my endorsement for its continued existence. Thus, no element of my practical identity can be fixed in such a way that I cannot reject it at any moment. If an element of my
identity were fixed, then I could not consider myself autonomous vis-à-vis that identity and therefore I could not consider myself responsible for endorsing it. It is one thing to bind myself to a practical identity and quite another to be bound to it. The claim that human beings are capable of self-determination, however, also entails the possibility of a condition in which I am not engaged in any practical identity whatsoever. For if I am free for self-determination vis-à-vis any practical identity, then I must also be capable of a moment in which I do not endorse any practical identity whatsoever – for my engagement in any practical identity whatsoever depends on my endorsement. Only if such a condition is possible can I really regard my freedom as a power in its own right. Further, only if I experience myself in such a condition can I have an intuition of the fact of freedom rather than merely operating with the presupposition of freedom that I take to be valid because I act under the idea that I am free. Freedom for self-determination implies that I am free to determine myself and therefore free not to be determined (or free to be free from any determination whatsoever). If I cannot experience my freedom as a power that is independent of my action in and commitment to some practical role, then the notion that I am capable of self-determination is an assumption rather than a phenomenological insight rooted in the evidence of immanent intuition.

It is one thing to make this argument and quite another to make existential death sound like a plausible candidate for an actual human experience. Heidegger's formal indication of the experience seems to fall short of this second task. For although some readers find the account compelling and claim 'to see' the experience in the way that formal indication requires, many find the account alien to anything they've ever experienced and simply do not 'see' it. This, of course, does not constitute a real
objection to the account, because the fact that I don’t believe I have undergone a particular experience does not in any way imply that it is not a possible experience. But it might constitute a problem with the representation of the experience, and, if the experience is as fundamental as Heidegger claims, perhaps we could do a better job of making it sound more plausible to those who find it so alien. In other words, readers might not find the notion of existential death so extreme or hyperbolic if our description rendered it more intuitive.

I would like to attempt this with a brief reflection on the phenomenon of a crisis in one’s life-history. For although not all experiences of existential death presuppose anything like a life crisis – existential death can befall us at any moment – the disruptive events in an individual’s life-history that we refer to as crises often involve what Heidegger calls existential death, and they therefore provide concrete examples of what he attempts to describe in the sections on death. In other words, life crises face us with extreme, uncontrollable, and often debilitating moods that sometimes bring us face to face with our own autonomy or the fact of freedom.

Consider the following example. John is a successful businessman and father of three. He and his wife, Jane, were happily married for ten years until their youngest son, Michael, was diagnosed with Autism. This changed everything. The cost of Michael’s healthcare consumes most of John’s income and he has begun to borrow money to make ends meet. He has also increased his workload, which has led him to neglect the needs of his wife and children. Jane’s life is completely absorbed by caring for Michael; she has no time or energy for her husband or her other children. John and Jane begin to drift apart and into a depression as the quality of their life erodes and disillusionment sets in.
The crisis point for John comes when he is faced with a decision. He becomes aware of a full-time institution that will take over Michael’s care for far less money than he currently pays. Placing him there would relieve John’s financial burden and allow him to return to a life more like what he had formerly known. But the idea of placing him there fills John with guilt and he cannot bring himself to do it. John therefore enters into deliberation about two unpalatable options. He feels that he cannot make the decision and yet he knows that he cannot go on living in his current condition; and he feels as if the competing claims might tear him apart. It is in a moment such as this, I contend, that what Heidegger calls existential death is likely to occur.

For it to occur all that is required is a momentary shift in the intentionality of the experience. All of John’s anxiety, concern and suffering must cease to be about the particular contours of the decision regarding his son, and, just for a moment, they must be about John’s existence as such – they must be about the fact that all such questions about his existence are up to him. In the midst of considering a particularly difficult question, then, John ceases to suffer over the difficulty of the question and momentarily apprehends the sheer burden of the fact that this decision is his to make. For a moment, the particular problem is no longer thematic and he finds himself with a raw and uncanny feeling of anxiety and nothing besides. His failure to make a decision forces him to face what the decision relies upon, i.e., his own free endorsement. Looked at this way, talk about existential death might seem less hyperbolic. All we have to accept is that it is in principle possible to undergo a moment in which we cease to be engaged with particular worldly questions and affairs and face the condition for caring about such things in the first place – care as such.
Bootstraps

This leads into the bootstraps objection. Once I enter into such an experience – a moment in which my worldly concerns are neutralized – how do I emerge from it? If, as Heidegger claims, existential death has “no measure at all, no more or less, but signifies the possibility of the measureless impossibility of existence” and it “offers no support for becoming intent on something,” (BT 262, 307), what starting points or factual claims does it offer to motivate the individual to emerge from the experience and to return to his worldly concerns? The answer, I shall argue, is that the capacity for free endorsement that the individual encounters in his confrontation with his autonomy is a self-propulsive striving towards the world. Thus, one does not emerge from death by yanking on one’s existential bootstraps; the return to the world is not the product of a free self-conscious act of the ‘will’ or a decision to put an end to one’s exile. Rather, the moment of anxiety passes and one returns to the world of necessity; the structure of human being is such it is compelled to strive towards meaning. In other words, in the account of existential death, Heidegger has offered his own unique account of the human drive towards the world.\(^{109}\)

Heidegger explores the idea of a drive in his discussion of Leibniz in the “Last Marburg Lecture Course.”\(^{110}\) In this lecture, he not only offers an interpretation of Leibniz’s concept of a drive but he articulates what he takes to be the relationship between the concept of a drive and our own striving towards the world. In doing so, he plants the germ seeds for an interpretation of human striving, which can be seen in full

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\(^{109}\) Heidegger seems to rule out such a claim in Being and Time when he writes, “The phenomenon of care in its totality is essentially something that cannot be torn asunder; so any attempts to trace it back to special acts or drives like willing and wishing or urge [Drang] or addiction [Hang], or to construct it out of these, will be unsuccessful...” (BT 193-194, 238). But I am not trying to say that care needs to be reduced to some more basic drive to account for it; rather, I am going to argue that care is like a drive in the sense that it is a self-propulsive striving towards the world.


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bloom in his account of the origin of human striving – or care – that one encounters in the experience of existential death.

In this lecture Heidegger interprets Leibniz’s discussion of the ‘vis activa’ of the monad, which Leibniz claims is “a certain acting that is already actual, an entelechy, and is thus midway between a merely static capacity for action and the act itself and involves an intrinsic conatus, a seeking” (G. IV, 469). Heidegger attempts to interpret this Leibnizian notion in phenomenological terms. What Leibniz has in his sights, according to Heidegger, “is a capacity, but not a capacity at rest”; it means “to tend towards” or, more precisely, “to press or drive toward, drive [Drang]” (‘LMC’, 65). Heidegger argues that this drive is not a disposition or a process; it is a self-propulsive force that leads into activity and requires no stimulus – as such it is “always already released. It is triggered, however, in such a way that it is still always tensed” (‘LMC’, 65). Thus, Leibniz writes that the drive is “carried into action by itself and needs no help, but only the removal of an impediment” (G. IV, 469). From this drive arises a continual “accomplishing or carrying out” (‘LMC’, 67) – or, one might say, striving.

After reconstructing Leibniz’s concept of drive, Heidegger proposes a thesis regarding the origin of the concept. The drive was a force that Leibniz attributed to all of being; in his metaphysics every monad possesses such a drive. This attribution, however, Heidegger argues is an illicit generalization of the ontological constitution of the self to all beings; that is, on the basis of the model of his own experience Leibniz attributes this ‘drive’ to every single being (‘LMC’, 68). In support of this interpretation, Heidegger refers to one of Leibniz’s letters:

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111 Cited by Heidegger in ‘LMC’, 64.
112 Cited by Heidegger in ‘LMC’, 66.
"It can be further suggested that this principle of activity (drive) is intelligible to the highest degree because it forms to some extent an analogue to what is intrinsic to ourselves, namely, representing and striving" (Letter to de Volder, June 30, 1704; G. II, 270; B. II, 347).113

The content of Leibniz’s metaphysical claim, then, “is the idea of being that is taken from the experience of the self, from the self-activated change perceptible in the ego, from the activity of drive” (‘LMC,’ 69).

Heidegger argues, then, that the Leibnizian concept of drive is rooted in the self’s experience of its own striving -- a drive is only intelligible in light of our experience of our “constant regard for our own existence” (‘LMC’, 68). Thus, this drive is a “reaching out and embracing” (‘LMC’, 73) and “an apprehending striving or a striving apprehending” (‘LMC’, 74) towards “something it is not but could well be” (‘LMC’, 81) that is modeled on the most basic experience of the self. This basic experience is ‘care,’ which, in the “Last Marburg Lecture Course,” Heidegger glosses in the following way:

“We comport ourselves towards beings, become involved with and lose ourselves in them; we are overwhelmed and captivated by being. Yet not only do we relate to being, but we are likewise ourselves being. This we each are, and we are so, not indifferently but in such a way that our very own being is a concern for us” (‘LMC’, 68).

Thus, Heidegger never explicitly claims that the self’s striving should be understood as a drive; rather, his claim is that the idea of a drive is only intelligible in light of the fact that the self, in its being, always already experiences itself as a ‘reaching out,’ ‘embracing’ and ‘striving’ towards a meaning that ‘one is not but could well be.’ On the most basic level the self experiences its existence as a constant ‘seeking,’ ‘tending towards,’ ‘pressing or driving towards,’ ‘a capacity but not a capacity at rest,’ ‘self-propulsive force that is always already released but also always tensed’, etc.

113 Cited by Heidegger in ‘LMC’, 69.
In Division II of *Being and Time*, Heidegger offers a phenomenological account of the origin of this striving towards being that he describes with so many compelling formulations in his “Last Marburg Lecture Course” on Leibniz. Instead of relying on the notion of a drive – a concept that he maintains derives its intelligibility from our ecstatic striving and care for our own being – however, he shows that this basic striving towards meaning is indeed ‘self-propulsive’ but is nonetheless *motivated* by the structure of the self’s constitution.\(^{114}\)

As discussed in the account of existential death, the structure of our being as guilty, which “constitutes the Being to which we give the name of ‘care,’” is at once composed of a ‘way to be’ and an affective dimension. ‘Being-towards-death,’ as the moment of sheer ‘being-possible,’ makes it transparent that all of my possibilities emanate from my own freedom and belong to me. And anxiety represents the affective content of the experience. Anxiety is freedom’s mood because our freedom is a finite power discharged in an uncertain world – thus, finite freedom entails responsibility for an outcome that is *out of my control*. My existence takes place in the midst of historical and material contingency and the unpredictable freedom of Others, which means that its outcome and its normative basis is uncertain and yet *it is mine*.\(^{115}\) My existence matters to me, then, both because I am responsible for it and because it registers its claim on me.

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\(^{114}\) In his discussion of the ‘drive’ towards being Heidegger avoids the German ‘*der Trieb*’, which is the word used for drive in a strict sense. Instead, he discusses ‘*der Drang*’, which carries more of a connotation of an urge, impulse or push and is not associated with the instincts as strongly as ‘*der Trieb*’ is.

\(^{115}\) Anxiety is freedom’s affect because freedom makes Dasein responsible for an objective uncertainty. One finds this claim in Kierkegaard and Heidegger. The point is that freedom entails a risk, because in making choices one relates to the future, and the future is an ‘objective uncertainty.’ Kierkegaard makes this point in relation to the commitment that faith requires, “…without risk, no faith; the more risk, the more faith; the more objective reliability, the less inwardness (since inwardness is subjectivity); the less objective reliability, the deeper is the possible inwardness” (*CUP*, 209). Free commitment, whether in faith or some other future-directed project, always entails a risk.
affectively in the form of anxiety. This is the origin of human transcendence and it motivates a constant striving towards meaning.

Thus, the bootstraps objection is not really a problem for Heidegger’s view, because the self does not need some worldly or material incentive to motivate its movement towards the world, nor does the return to the world call for a heroic and unmotivated act of will. Such movement towards the world is always already initiated because it is motivated by the very structure of the self. A being characterized by free responsible concern for its own being simply must strive towards meaning, because it always experiences its being as an issue that it is up to it to resolve. This might seem tautological: a being characterized by care cares about its existence because it is characterized by care. But the explanation is ampliative.

Care entails the coupling of the fact of responsibility (or self-ownership) and affectivity and these things together result in the inevitability of mattering and striving towards meaning. A being that was responsible for its own being but was not affectively attuned to its existence would not care for itself – it would not experience its being as ‘an issue.’ Likewise, an individual cannot care about what he is affectively attuned to but for which he bears no responsibility. Striving and mattering are only inevitable for a being characterized by both of these things. And the total breakdown of everyday identity cannot lead to a bootstraps problem because the return to the world is driven by care – an automatic and ineradicable striving towards meaning motivated by the twin factors of responsibility and affect.

Now that we have looked at existential death, the experience that breaks the individual out of his estrangement from his own freedom by waking him to the fact of his
power for self-determination, we can take a look at the mode of existence that follows on
the heels of this experience, when its meaning is appropriated responsibly and the
individual chooses to live in light of the fact that his life is up to him, i.e., existential
birth.
Chapter 4

Existential Birth\textsuperscript{116}

(i who have died am alive again today, 
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth 
day of life and of love and wings: and of the gay 
great happening ilimitably earth)... 
(now the ears of my ears awake and 
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

--ee cummings, "I thank you God"

4.1 Introduction

Heidegger's philosophy, according to Ricoeur in \textit{Memory, History, Forgetting}, carries on the traditional obsession of metaphysics with death. In fact, Ricoeur claims that Heidegger's fascination with death leads him to neglect the phenomenon of birth in a way that renders his position one-sided, such that he grasps what our mortality gives us to understand but fails to appreciate the meaning of human natality:

"Does not the \textit{Angst} that places its seal upon the always imminent threat of dying mask the spark of life? In this respect, the silence of \textit{Being and Time} regarding the phenomenon of birth...is surprising...Should not this jubilation be opposed to what does indeed seem to be an obsession of metaphysics with the problem of death...? If it is true that the banalization of dying at the level of the 'they' amounts to flight, does not the anguished obsession with death amount to closing off the reserve of openness characterizing the potentiality of being?...Does not the jubilation produced by the vow—which I take as my own—to remain alive until...and not for death, put into relief by contrast the existentiell, partial, and unavoidably one-sided aspect of Heideggerian resoluteness in the face of dying?"\textsuperscript{117}

In other words, Ricoeur finds Heidegger's position lacking because a complete account of human existence should illuminate not only how the self exists as 'dying' but also how

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it exists as ‘born’, and Heidegger, he claims, fails to strike this balance. Ricoeur claims that this lack *Being and Time* resulted from “the absence of a reflection on the flesh, which would have allowed the designation of being-born as the condition of already being-there and not simply as an event of birth, in false symmetry to the not-yet event of death” (2004, 375). Heidegger raises this worry himself in § 72 of *Being and Time* where he claims that death understood formally is only “one of the ends by which Dasein’s totality is closed round.” The other end, “the ‘beginning’, the ‘birth’” of the self has been overlooked, which leads to the obvious judgment that “the orientation of our analytic has so far remained ‘one-sided.’” For if we only look at the self “‘facing forward’” we lose sight of its “Being-towards-the-beginning” and therefore fail to clarify the manner in which the self “*stretches along between* birth and death,” i.e., the “‘connectedness of life’” (*BT* 373, 425).

This ‘false symmetry,’ however, is merely apparent. To see this, we have to abandon the ‘common sense’ view of life as an interval of time between two endpoints, as a narrative with a discrete beginning and end, and interpret it existentially. Once we do this, we will see that Heidegger’s discussion of the self’s ‘other end,’ his answer to the objection that his account is one-sided, is his account of ‘existential birth’ or what he calls “resoluteness.” Ricoeur cannot see this because — in light of his narrative interpretation of the self — he approaches *Being and Time* in search of a narrative concept of birth. But Heidegger’s account of birth, mirroring his account of death, is not an account of the significance of the event that begins each fleshy existence but is rather an account of how the self can *be* such a beginning — how the self can *exist* as born — by constituting itself anew in action.
For Heidegger, as we have already discussed, death is not an event. The ‘not-yet event’ of human life is natural death and it is not something I can be but rather the point at which my ‘being’ is annihilated. The proper conceptual complement of natural death, then, is the event of natural birth – my coming into existence in the sense of occurrent and empirically verifiable ‘thatness.’ We could also say that the ‘not-yet’ event of life is biographical death to which the proper conceptual complement is my birth as the ‘beginning of my story.’ In either case, we are not addressing anything ‘existential’ in Heidegger’s sense of the term.

Existential death, as discussed in chapter three, is a way that the self can be, and so its complement must be a possibility in which the self can exist. In Heidegger’s sense of *Existenz*, ‘being-born’ in the natural or biographical sense is not something that I ever ‘was’ or ‘can be.’ The primary existential significance of this event was a reality for my mother. She, in Heideggerian terms, was genuinely being and becoming something and revealing what she was ‘up to’ – not me. Thus, no symmetry to Heidegger’s account of the self would be achieved with a meditation on the existential significance of the biological condition of ‘being-there.’ Heidegger rejects all non-existential conceptions of human life, death, and birth: “Understood existentially, birth is not and never is something past in the sense of something no longer present-at-hand; and death is just as far from having the kind of Being of something still outstanding, not yet present-at-hand but coming along” (*BT* 374, 425). It should come as no surprise then, if Heidegger says little to nothing about the existential significance of the event of natural or biographical birth; this event is not a way the self can be. If one appreciates this, it is clear that his
account of the self is not one-sided and asymmetrical but rather an argument that death
and birth are intimately connected possibilities of the self.

Heidegger discusses this experience under the heading of ‘resoluteness,’ which
formally indicates how the self “exists as born,” (BT 374, 425) i.e. how the self becomes
who it is by bringing itself into being through responsible action. In existential death the
self’s identity collapses, momentarily leaving no answer to the question, ‘Who am I?’ If
the self appropriates the meaning of this experience authentically, resoluteness —
‘existential birth’ — follows on its heels: it is “that understanding which follows the call of
conscience and which frees for death the possibility of acquiring power over Dasein’s
existence and of basically dispersing all fugitive Self-concealments” (BT 310, 357). The
resolute individual acts in light of his finite responsibility and reconstitutes himself anew
by disclosing himself in the world through his action, which he relates to as his own.

In what follows, I will offer a brief account of existential birth as a mode of
disclosedness and then I will take a closer look at the phenomenon through a comparative
analysis of Heidegger’s concept of resoluteness and Kierkegaard’s notion of inwardness.

4.2 Existential Birth as a Mode of Disclosedness

If birth is, as I claim, to be conceived of existentially then, like death, it must be
understood as a way of being and a mode of the self’s disclosedness: “because Being-
guilty belongs to the Being of Dasein, it must be conceived as a potentiality-for-Being-
guilty” (BT 306, 353). Existential birth is thus characterized by the three constituent
elements of disclosedness: understanding, mood, and discourse. As I did with death, I
will characterize the experience briefly in terms of these elements before offering a
deeper analysis of the phenomenon. Heidegger succinctly defines resoluteness in terms of
these three elements in § 60 of *Being and Time*: resoluteness, he claims, is “a way of reticently projecting oneself upon one’s ownmost Being-guilty, and exacting anxiety of oneself” (BT 305, 353). Thus, the mode of understanding of resoluteness is being-guilty, its mood anxiety, and its mode of discourse ‘reticence’ or ‘silence.’\(^{118}\) There are no surprises here; we can keep the characterization brief because our discussion of existential death has prepared us to understand resoluteness as the experience that follows it. Resoluteness is nothing more than seizing upon the opportunity to take responsibility for my existence that is presented to me in existential death. I will begin with a brief characterization of its mode of understanding – “reticent self-projection upon one’s ownmost Being-guilty, in which one is ready for anxiety” (BT 296-297, 343).

To project myself upon my ownmost being-guilty is to return from the dislocation of my everyday practical identity in existential death to act responsibly in that very identity in my factual context – the context of my life. In other words, in resoluteness I return to my own socio-historical milieu with a responsible stance towards my existence. As I have already argued, the term ‘guilty’ articulates the structure of existential death, because in it I become aware that my existence is characterized by the fact of responsibility. I see that my freedom – as a sheer being-possible – lies at the basis of my action and therefore is the foundation of my practical identity. And I am attuned to this freedom by my anxious concern for my existence. This freedom and anxiety constitute my being as ‘guilty’ or responsible. And resoluteness, as the mode of being in which I act in light of this responsibility, I understand myself by ‘being-guilty’ – by seizing the

\(^{118}\) He repeats this definition a few pages later: Resoluteness gets “worked out as Being-guilty, a self-projection in which one is reticent and ready for anxiety…” (BT 301, 348).
possibility to be responsible opened up by existential death. In resoluteness I return to the world to take up my particular factual existence responsibly, and this ‘taking up’ of responsibility is the mode of understanding associated with resoluteness as a possibility of the self. Like ‘being-towards-death,’ ‘being-guilty’ is a unique human possibility in Heidegger’s technical sense of the term.

Regarding the mood associated with resoluteness Heidegger speaks of a “readiness for anxiety” and of “exacting anxiety of oneself.” Is the mood of resoluteness then the same as that of existential death? This cannot be so. A key ingredient to the experience of existential death is that one is awash in the mood of anxiety to the extent that one is no longer claimed by particular features of the world and so that one ceases to act and experiences a peculiar inability-to-be. But resoluteness is an active mode of being—it is a responsible taking action in the world and so it cannot be characterized by anxiety in the same sense that existential death is. However, Heidegger claims throughout

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119 "When Dasein is resolute, it takes over authentically in its existence the fact that it is the null basis of its own nullity" (BT 306, 354). Heidegger’s terminology should not be so alien to the reader by now; in resoluteness I exist as the ground and origin of my action—the null basis (my freedom which is null because it is itself nothing) of my own nullity (the roles which I have not explicitly chosen but now take as my own).

120 At first blush, this claim might seem strange and problematic. If ‘being-guilty’ means taking up an authentic or responsible stance, can it really be understood as a possibility or ‘way to be’? Is it not rather a manner in which such possibilities are taken up? That is, it seems to be a way of carrying out my possibilities. In a sense, this is correct; ‘being-guilty’ is a kind of meta-possibility in that it is a ‘way to be’ any particular ‘way to be.’ It does, however, have the hallmark characteristics of our distinct possibilities as human beings according to Heidegger. It is a determinate form of activity—taking a self-responsible stance towards myself—in terms of which I have a self-understanding or form of identity—that of an autonomous and responsible agent. Furthermore, it is an activity that is always carried out in a particular action context—for I am never resolute as such but always resolute with regard to some particular circumstances in which I am acting. And the fact that it is a possibility that always exists simultaneously with some other possibility is not itself problematic—we frequently engage in multiple possibilities at a time and therefore understand ourselves in terms of a variety of identities at once. For instance, when I go to university to lecture I am not only engaged in the classroom understanding myself as a philosophy instructor but I might also be doing so as a father earning a living to provide for his children or as a graduate student who needs a certain amount of teaching experience to apply for jobs, etc. There is no reason to think that several distinct possibilities of being a self are not engaged at once. Being-guilty is unique because it cannot be engaged unless I am engaging in other possibilities and it is the condition for the possibility of these other possibilities being carried out responsibly, i.e., in light of the fact that I am the source or origin of them. It is in this sense that Heidegger refers to ‘being-guilty’ as our most ‘original’ possibility—it makes occupying any role responsibly possible.
Being and Time that anxiety is a constant feature of human experience because we are characterized by care – freedom and anxious concern. And this ever-present anxiety is essential to our striving towards meaning, whether this striving is an irresolute flight from responsibility or a resolute taking responsibility for oneself.

This anxiety is heightened and, in a sense, clarified – we experience it with a sense of what it is about – when we take responsibility for our action in resoluteness. It is heightened and clarified because we live in light of the freedom, concern and uncertainty that are the sources of the constant anxiety that characterizes human existence. But this anxiety is still in the background as a looming presence, a ‘reminder’ constantly attesting to the possibility of death – the possibility of the collapse of my familiar life and having to take up a new one. The resolute individual is ‘ready for anxiety’ and even ‘exact’s it of himself because he commits to responsible action with a sense of the uncertain character of action and the indeterminate outcome of his projects.

Finally, the mode of discourse associated with resoluteness is ‘reticence’: “In the call one’s constant Being-guilty is represented, and in this way the Self is brought back from the loud idle talk which goes with the common sense of the ‘they’. Thus the mode of Articulative discourse which belongs to wanting to have a conscience, is one of reticence” (BT 296, 342). This means that reticence somehow characterizes the structure of the self-projection upon one’s ‘ownmost being-guilty’ that is ‘ready for anxiety.’ This, as briefly discussed in chapter two, has nothing to do with literally keeping silent – one could resolutely take up action that requires speech. Reticence formally indicates the way I relate to the structure of my existence in resolute action; it is meant to bring us to a first-person encounter with what it is like to be resolute. By using this term Heidegger
rhetorically sets up a contrast between the resolute self and the fallen self who is caught up in ‘idle talk.’ Idle talk, again, as discussed in chapter two, is not meant to be just the palaver that gets passed along in everyday life, but it represents a way of existing – a way of not taking responsibility for oneself by shirking the task of grounding the normativity of what one says and does for oneself by deferring one’s agency to the taken-for-granted normative structure of das Man. The structure of resoluteness is the opposite of this: one takes up the task of grounding – being responsible for – what one says and does, and Heidegger uses the term ‘reticence’ to represent this way of being.

He does so not just because it is rhetorically opposed to idle palaver but because in resoluteness the self-conscious musing of the indecisive individual – who does not take responsibility for himself – is silenced. The internal, self-conscious monologue of irresolute ‘deliberation’ has no voice in a moment of genuine resolve. The irresolute individual never really resolves to act because he is indecisive and insecure about his ability to carry out his commitments and he lacks the strength to trust others to do the same. He worries about the uncertainty of the outcome of committing himself passionately to anything and so he maulders and bargain and approximates to put off the task of taking action.

Again, Heidegger is not saying that people with resolve do not talk. It is simply that the characteristically irresolute individual always talks about what he is going to do without doing it, and his talking about it becomes an indication that he has not and probably will not resolve to act on what he says. Reticence, then, is the appropriate
formal indicator to set us on the way to grasping the opposite of the irresolute individual.\textsuperscript{121} Thus, Heidegger claims,

"The ontological structure of such resoluteness reveals the existentiality of the Self’s Selfhood...\textit{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" (\textit{BT} 322-323, 369-370).

Resoluteness is a matter of \textit{being}-responsible and if I have taken up that responsibility such self-conscious inner monologue about what I plan to do is unnecessary. What I resolve upon, I do, and I reflect the constancy of my resolve to others not with words but with action. And when I make an avowal regarding the future it is clear that \textit{I} stand behind what I say. No further words are necessary to convince anyone of the certainty of my intentions – I hold myself to those intentions with my commitment and thus embody responsibility. It is because I stand behind what I say and do that the mode of existence characterized by ‘reticence’ is the opposite of that indicated by ‘idle talk’ wherein the self defers such responsibility to the anonymous norms inherent to our social practices.

\textbf{4.3 Resoluteness and the Uncertainty and Insecurity Resident in Factual Life}

With this brief account of resoluteness in view, we can explore the concept in more depth through a comparative analysis with Kierkegaard’s discussion of ‘inwardness.’ With the concepts of ‘inwardness’ and ‘resoluteness,’ the central concern for Kierkegaard and Heidegger is the problem of sustaining a commitment in the face of life’s uncertainty. They are interested in how one maintains a responsible stance towards one’s practical identity after the decision to be responsible has been taken. Both

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{121} Classic examples of this are the smoker and the alcoholic – they keep saying, “I’ll quit tomorrow. One more night and tomorrow, I’ll change.” One eventually stops taking them seriously because what they say embodies no resolve. They lack the transparency of self that belongs to those who make commitments and know they will keep them, who do not need to keep trying to convince themselves and others with continuous chatter about what they plan to do.}
Kierkegaard and Heidegger note that there is a certain insecurity and uncertainty intrinsic to existence. As Heidegger puts it, there is “insecurity resident in factual life” (PLA, 89).

Kierkegaard uses the term ‘inwardness’ to capture the mode of existence that overcomes this uncertainty, because one can never achieve certainty regarding life’s most important questions by looking outward. Only an ‘inward’ movement can accomplish this, he claims, because the source of life’s uncertainty lies in the fact that it calls on me to make commitments that cannot be substantiated or guaranteed by external evidence: “True inwardness does not demand any sign at all in externals” (CUP, 414). Certainty regarding the meaning of my existence, for reasons I shall try to make clear, must be built up from within. Inwardness is the passion and interest required to make a fundamental decision about one’s existence – “As soon as subjectivity is taken away, and passion from subjectivity, and infinite interest from passion, there is no decision whatever, whether on this issue or any other. All decision, all essential decision, is rooted in subjectivity” (CUP, 33). Likewise, resoluteness indicates that nothing external can substantiate my commitment to the form of life I disclose in a resolution; only my resolve itself can do this. The strength of my resolution lies in my freedom or existentiality.

To clarify this point, consider, for example, my commitment to quit smoking. Last month I decided to quit and I have not smoked since, and it is my intention to no longer be a smoker. What kind of external evidence could possibly substantiate or serve as proof that my commitment is ‘true’? The fact is that any so-called evidence I could adduce counts against me. After all, I have tried to quit and have made it this far in the process many times before. Are those past failures evidence that I will fail again? If we were to start a betting pool on the outcome of my resolution, based on what I know about myself,
would it be most prudent of me to bet *against* myself? This type of thinking essentially undoes my agency, because it treats my past deeds as if they will determine the outcome of my resolution, when, in fact, the outcome is up to me. Even if *I have failed in the past*, there is nothing like relevant evidence that will determine the outcome of my current resolution, precisely because what is at stake is not my past but my future. Thus, Kierkegaard claims that decisions about who I will be are “rooted in subjectivity” or inwardness (*CUP*, 33), because they require a commitment to something about which I cannot in principle acquire external certainty.

Life is uncertain, in part, due to the very structure of action. In acting one is related to a future – a ‘not yet’ – and as long as it is ‘not yet’ it is always to some degree uncertain. As Kierkegaard expresses the point, “because the future and the present do have a little moment between them” it is “possible to expect the future but impossible in *praesenti* to have certainty and definiteness” (*CUP*, 424).122 This uncertainty is complicated by at least three other aspects of existence. First, as free, I am always capable of sustaining or failing to sustain my commitments; I am not causally determined by my intentions but must determine myself in action. And this means there is always the possibility that an intention will miscarry, that I will break with my former intentions and choose another direction. Secondly, this uncertainty is accentuated by the fact that many of my commitments depend on my relation towards others who are likewise free. And,

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122 The past is uncertain too. What, for example, my first marriage meant to me at the time I was married and what it means as I walk towards the altar a second time are completely different things. The past is not safe from uncertainty either and I have to commit myself to what my past means with the understanding that it is quite likely that this too will take on a new meaning in the future.
finally, the world is mutable and changes in unpredictable ways, which means that commitments I make today might take a different shape tomorrow.\textsuperscript{123}

This commitment to the uncertain is most pronounced when it comes to the projects that matter to us most – our long-term plans for the future – such as marriage, parenting, the choice of a vocation, etc. The problem takes an acute form in these cases because they require me to repeat or sustain a single commitment over time. And in the course of time my identity, the others I make commitments to, and the world itself will change. The original commitment – its conditions and what is required of me to sustain it – can become something almost entirely different, and yet I must repeat the same commitment.

What matters to me, furthermore, is always fragile, finite, and therefore touched by death – the possibility that the way the world claims me can radically change and the life in terms of which I understand myself can come to an end. Inwardness and resoluteness represent the free self’s ability to sustain its commitment to its existence in spite of the fact that it is touched by death. In this sense, as Kierkegaard puts it, genuine commitment “receives nothing in advance but stakes everything” (CUP, 149) – one stakes one’s life as a whole on the basis of a commitment to an ‘objective uncertainty.’

Life’s uncertainty generates anxiety, which motivates a tendency to cover it up. For example, one person, when harried by anxieties about the future, might try to whittle his existence down to the narrow point of the present: “All I really have is this moment.

\textsuperscript{123} For example, a woman might commit herself to marry a man under happy circumstances, only to find that she is expected to sustain this commitment when he is stricken with a debilitating illness or a mood disorder that alters his personality and the shape of their relationship, making her more of a primary caregiver than a lover. Although Kierkegaard’s focus is the uncertainty associated with Christian belief, he argues throughout the Postscript that such uncertainty is a feature of all human action. In “Phenomenology and Religion” Heidegger too argues that faith is a special case, but in his discussion of existential commitment in Being and Time he argues that an honest look at human action reveals that the project of ‘being-certain’ in spite of life’s uncertainty is a feature of being committed to any way of life.
This beer. This burger. This football game. Everything else can be taken from me. So, I’ll just be happy now.” Another might act as if his present commitments are set in stone by some inexorable force: “You were made for me. I could never love another. Never. It’s impossible. We will always be together.” But all such attempts to cover over the uncertainty of the future are, as Kierkegaard puts it, “just a contribution to the comic” (CUP, 282) because what is certain is that no assurances can provide a guarantee. Our future-directed commitments require a kind of responsible risk that few of us are willing to take in light of its character as a risk.

According to Kierkegaard, to overcome this uncertainty one must act in the “sensu eminenti” by relating oneself “to the future with infinite passion” (CUP, 306). Such passion is required to overcome the abyss of uncertainty that opens up between the present and the future. Passionate action that is directed to the future and holds itself to a particular course in spite of its uncertainty must be understood as a kind of ‘beginning’ or ‘birth.’ Such action brings forth something new because in it I make a decision to commit myself to who I will be – someone who as of yet I am not. And this can only be accomplished through a passionate resolution: “...every beginning, when it is made (if it is not arbitrariness by not being conscious of this), does not occur by virtue of immanent thinking but is made by virtue of a resolution, essentially by virtue of faith” (CUP, 189). No amount of deliberation or speculation can give the future certainty, and I must overcome this uncertainty through passion.

To do this my commitment cannot falter; even as I recognize the uncertainty of what I commit myself to I must act with certainty. I cannot barter with the future but

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124 This is what Heidegger means when he claims that our only certainty is the possibility of death – the fact that the collapse or disruption of our lives is always possible.
rather must take a risk: "...for without risk, no faith; the more risk, the more faith; the more objective reliability, the less inwardness (since inwardness is subjectivity); the less objective reliability, the deeper is the possible inwardness" (CUP, 209). All "approximation is futile" and I must "do away with introductory observations, reliabilities, demonstrations from effects, and the whole mob of pawnbrokers and guarantors" and act with passion. Such action is "extremely strenuous" (CUP, 212) because unless I act without a trace of hesitation I will fail to carry out the 'new beginning' or 'birth' that I set my sights on - "the slightest trace of an aber then the beginning miscarries" (CUP, 139). If I hesitate or falter, then I cannot be that towards which I strive to commit myself - hesitation indicates a gap between my freedom and my commitment to being who I want to be. And in this gap lurks the demon of uncertainty and the potential for mauldering and self-doubt. I cannot 'quantify myself' by 'approximation' into a new beginning - the movement requires a 'qualitative leap' because my goal cannot be reached via demonstration. It is something that I subjectively take to be certain in spite of recognizing its objective uncertainty.

Nowhere is this more obvious, according to Kierkegaard and Heidegger, than Christianity. To commit myself to the truth of Christianity I have to commit myself to the truth of an absurdity - the idea that the eternal somehow entered the historical. But, again, even Kierkegaard the 'religious thinker' claims that our most basic commitments demand inwardness from us, e.g. a commitment to love someone, the ethical commitment to doing the right thing, the commitment to a vocation, etc: "to be a lover, a hero, etc. is

125 If we seek certainty we are attempting to extinguish risk and thus our "venturing becomes a false alarm. If that of which I am to gain possession by venturing is certain, then I am not venturing, then I am trading. Thus I do not venture by giving an apple for a pear if I am holding the pear in my hand as I make the trade. Shysters and rogues know all about this" (CUP, 425).

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reserved specifically for subjectivity, because objectively one does not become that” (CUP, 132). All of these things relate to the future in an eminent sense and so bear a relation to an objective uncertainty.

Commitment to an ‘objective uncertainty’ as certain is a paradoxical notion and it forces us to ask this question of Kierkegaard and Heidegger: How does one relate to the future with an absolute passion ‘as if’ it is certain when one simultaneously recognizes it as objectively uncertain? How can one possibly exist in such tension? Does not the recognition of something as objectively uncertain – a recognition that is essential to inwardness and resoluteness – rule out relating to it as certain? The paradox of existence, then, is that one must commit oneself to an objective uncertainty as if it is certain.

This paradox cannot be dissolved in false comforts, assurances, guarantees and other contributions to the comic. For we can cover over the paradox but we cannot evade the anxiety it provokes. Thus, we must abandon any hope to do away with the paradox; we must rather come to terms with it. In an age that has forgotten inwardness, as Kierkegaard claims his has, there is a tendency to ‘overcome’ contradictions and paradoxes in thought, but this cannot, he claims, be done in existence, “because passion is the very tension in the contradiction, and when this is taken away the passion is a pleasantry, a witty remark” (CUP, 386). Since we cannot dissolve it, we must learn to master – or least to manage – the paradox.

In what follows, I will attempt to clarify the manner in which one can exist in this paradox without attempting to dissolve it in false comforts and other contributions to the comic. As Kierkegaard puts it, “To explain the paradox would then be to comprehend ever more deeply what a paradox is and that the paradox is a paradox” (CUP, 220). All
"is lost only when one thinks that there is no paradox or only to a certain degree" (CUP, 226). The paradox cannot be dissolved or overcome in thought – it can only be overcome through freedom. ‘Certain’ is something that we must learn to be. As Heidegger puts it, “certainty’, in its primordial signification, is tantamount to ‘Being-certain’, as a kind of Being which belongs to Dasein” (BT 256, 300).

4.4 Existing in the Paradox

I have tried to make it clear that in matters regarding the meaning of my existence – regarding sustaining a commitment to a way of life – objectivity plays a limited role.126 When I am done considering the means to the end of the kind of life I want, there is a field of uncertainty opened up by my relation to a future that remains, and overcoming this uncertainty is the work of ‘subjectivity,’ ‘inwardness,’ or ‘resoluteness’ – it is the work of freedom. But this is precisely the hard work that an individual most often tries to shirk. Few deny the cogency of Burkhardt’s claim that a “future known in advance is an absurdity”127 not only because it is impossible but because such knowledge would rob life of its character as an open possibility and render suspect my sense of myself as free. Regardless of this, in flight from the anxiety associated with it, the mass of humanity tries to secure a kind of certainty with regard to the future through plans, approximations, speculations and even comforting lies or delusions.

Kierkegaard parodies this all too human desire for certainty vis-à-vis faith with his description of the ‘serious man’ who asks of the faithful, “‘Is it not possible to find out for certain, clearly and briefly, what an eternal happiness is? Can’t you describe it to

126 Such claims are not meant to downplay or disregard the importance of practical deliberation about means. That is, it is not the case, as if often claimed, that Kierkegaard and Heidegger degrade or disparage everyday practical deliberation by reducing it to an anarchic choice. What Kierkegaard and Heidegger investigate rather is the decision that necessarily comes after such deliberation.
me 'while I shave,' just as one describes the loveliness of a woman, the royal purple, or distant regions?'” (CUP, 392). Kierkegaard masterfully deploys the comic – in this case an exaggeration of ordinary human frailty and our need for security – to point out the futility of our attempts to secure the certainty of the future in the present. The 'serious man' lacks inwardness and so "never came to the point of venturing at all because he wanted to have certainty" (CUP, 342). He lacks the strength to take a responsible risk in the face of the fact that "it is certain that there is one certainty, namely, that this [commitment] is the absolute daring venture" (CUP, 342).

But the 'serious man' is not simply a parody or a figure of derision; he is a circus mirror that shows us an image, although distorted, of ourselves. He shows us that all commitment to the meaning of one's existence requires a kind of strength and a responsible risk that few of us are willing to take. This risk can only be taken responsibly if it is taken in full awareness that it is a risk, that it 'ventures everything and asks for nothing in advance.' Kierkegaard describes such a commitment in terms of faith in an 'eternal happiness': The individual must "fear being in error just as much as he, in pathos-filled tension, is in relation to his eternal happiness. Therefore his exertion is the greatest possible, all the more so since delusion is so very easy because there is nothing external to look at" (CUP, 386).

Such commitment is a freely taken risk – and therefore a risk for which I am responsible – in which I stake everything, my existence as whole, without receiving any guarantee of a successful outcome in advance. And this commitment is paradoxical because the lack of guarantee makes it undeniably uncertain and in the face of this I passionately commit myself to it as certain. Maintaining my existence in this paradox
without allowing my commitment to falter – taking the risk responsibly by maintaining myself in it through my passion and freedom – requires what Kierkegaard calls “transparency of consciousness” (CUP, 427) or “the transparency of thought in existence” (CUP, 225). By transparent, Kierkegaard is not referring to anything like privileged epistemic access to one’s intentions. Rather, this transparency amounts to a kind of confidence in knowing what one is ‘up to’ – confidence in the fact that there is no gap between the formation of my intention and my carrying it out. It is a kind of ‘self-knowledge.’ I can take a responsible risk because I ‘know’ myself, I have an appreciation of the limitations of my existence and the power of my freedom, and so I can commit myself to a direction with a respect for the uncertainty endemic to life because I ‘know’ what I am capable of taking on.

Heidegger too shows that this tension is endemic to responsible action or resoluteness and yet is overcome in it: “Only in a resolution is resoluteness sure of itself. The existentiell indefiniteness of resoluteness never makes itself definite except in a resolution; yet it has, all the same, its existential definiteness” (BT 298, 345). He characterizes what Kierkegaard calls the transparency of consciousness as a kind of “being-certain, in which one maintains oneself in what resoluteness discloses” (BT 307, 355). In being-certain the stance I take towards my commitments is transparent. My commitment towards a particular course of action is identical to and inseparable from that course of action; it binds me to my course because there is no gap between what I resolve upon and what I do. In the resolute mode of self-understanding I see that the only opposition to my commitment – the only thing that could undermine it – is my own
freedom, the very self that does the choosing.\textsuperscript{128} There is nothing external to my own freedom that could dislodge me from my pursuit of that to which I have committed myself. The stance is transparent in the sense that I know my own mind.

Drawing from Kierkegaard and Sartre, Richard Moran argues along similar lines in \textit{Authority and Estrangement}: \textquote[129]{The aim and conclusion [of making a decision] is the binding of oneself to a certain course of action (or proposition), not the production of a state of mind that I might then treat as (further) empirical evidence about how I should proceed.} There are no facts about myself that determine my action – \textit{I} determine myself. To think otherwise is to undo oneself as an autonomous agent. My commitments emanate from me; thus, to be resolute I must recognize that the responsibility to sustain my commitments lies in me. This is the transparency or \textquote{being-certain} that belongs to resoluteness.

In resoluteness there is a unity between intention and action; in fact, one could say that the intention itself disappears because one acts without hesitation. If an intention is present to my mind, then \textit{I} am not fully acting; rather, a portion of my attention is devoted to the self-conscious consideration of my intention and so is not devoted to the action. If \textit{I} am telling myself, \textquote{I am going to do x, I am going to do x, I am going to do x,}'

\textsuperscript{128} This formulation sounds somewhat obscure. What I mean is that to be transparent my resolve must emanate from myself as the practical agent who is responsible for that resolve; I cannot take a theoretical stance on myself that might undermine my own intentions. For example, my resolve might be undermined by what I know about my previous behavior vis-à-vis certain social pressures to conform and this \textquote{knowledge} might undermine my resolve to break with my sequacious behavior. If such knowledge about myself interrupts or undermines my taking up a decision then the resolution is not transparent. Likewise, if I resolve to act a certain way in a relationship but \textquote{know} that my resolve will be undermined by certain consistently neurotic behavior, my resolve is not certain in the sense that it is transparent. If my resolve is transparent it is clear that the action I resolve upon emanates from myself as a practical agent and not from something external to or \textquote{working on} that agency. I resolve to stand by my decision in spite of countervailing \textquote{evidence.} And this is because resolve regarding the future is something that does not admit of evidence, which is the point that Kierkegaard and Heidegger drive home.


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then I am considering the possibility of doing \( x \) rather than carrying it out. Resolute action, then, is in a sense free of intention, because an intention – as I am using it here – is the explicit formulation of something that must remain tacit if one is to fully act on it. An intention is a cognitive-affective anticipation of something one wants to be that one annihilates by becoming it in action.

Thus, in resoluteness one does not self-consciously inspect one’s intentions; rather, one fulfills those intentions by embodying them. When I am capable of fulfilling my intentions by becoming them in action, I can trust myself to take a responsible risk and sustain my commitments because I ‘know’ myself – I can commit myself to a form of existence with an appreciation of the uncertainty endemic to life because I know what I am capable of taking on. With this confidence I do not dissolve the paradox but exist in its tension, bearing its strain and overcoming it, because I am certain of my ability to close the gap between my resolve and my taking action. This cannot be a blind confidence in my ability to follow through on my commitments – it has to be a confidence tempered by a sense of my own fallibility. In this confidence there is always also a form of humility – a deep appreciation of and sensitivity to my own limitations.

This humility is what Heidegger calls a willingness ‘to take it back.’ That is, although I make my commitment certain, I cannot ‘become rigid as regards the

Situation, but must understand that the resolution...must be held open and free for the current factual possibility. The certainty of the resolution signifies that one holds oneself free for the possibility of taking it back” (BT 308, 356). In other words, I must not only hold my commitment to be transparently certain – in the sense that only I am responsible for sustaining it – but I must not allow that certainty to become dogmatic.
For such dogmatism ignores two aspects of commitment: First, all commitment is touched by death – the very things that my own identity depends on can die, leaving me bereft, facing me with the decision to take a new direction. Second, the normative ground of my decisions is always in question. It is always possible to ask, "Is this what I ought to do?" And this suggests that I must always hold open the possibility of admitting that I was wrong and changing my direction. Recognizing these things, however, does not diminish my confidence in my ability to be certain with regard to my commitments. Rather, it tempers this confidence with humility – an appreciation of my finite fallibility and the fact that I might be called upon to respond to a change in the world that is out of my control. I might be called upon "to give up some definite resolution, and to give it up in accordance with the demands of some possible Situation or other" (BT 391, 443).

I will address this point in greater depth in the next chapter when I highlight some of the ethical implications of resoluteness, but I can briefly foreshadow these arguments here. Although my commitment is always up to me, there are certain constraints on it. There are moments in life when a situation calls me to take my commitment back because it cannot be sustained without compromising the freedom of the Other, which such commitment depends on for its very sense and being.130

For example, when a mother of two finds that her husband cannot overcome his alcoholism and abusive ways, she might have to take back her commitment to that marriage out of respect for the dignity of her children and herself. This does nothing to the fact that the certainty of her commitment lies in her; the commitment is always up to her but she must also recognize that the world and others are not under her control and that a way of life can die for reasons that have nothing to do with the constancy of her

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130 This argument is elaborated in the final chapter.
existentiality. And this does not impugn the self's ability to freely hold itself to a way of life or a course of action; it is merely a recognition that holding something for certain that violates the freedom of the Other is a form of Narcissism and action that undermines one's own freedom is a form of self-destruction that undermines the very sense of one's agency. The paradox of action is not thus dissolved. The resolute individual recognizes that things are out of his control without allowing that fact to dampen the passion of his commitment.

The paradox of resoluteness is thus taking up a commitment that is held to be certain while recognizing that it might have to be taken back without undermining the strength of my commitment. It does not represent an unthinking and brash mode of existence in which one wills one thing here and another there, taking each back as reality crashes in on naïve commitments. It is not complacent and overly self-certain because it appreciates the fragility of human life. But it is at the same time 'fully committed,' carrying out this way of life with a passionate commitment to it as the meaning of one's existence. There is no way out of this paradoxical tension; in fact, for Kierkegaard and Heidegger the goal of existence is to find one's way into it without falling prey to false comforts and self-concealments. Becoming a self, then, is a process of learning to trust myself by finding the confidence to exist in the tension between the world's uncertainty and my capacity to hold the meaning of my existence to be certain. In addition to transparency, achieving this confidence requires what Kierkegaard and Heidegger call constancy.

4.5 Constancy

Inwardness and resoluteness are not the work of a single decision. They both involve, rather, sustaining a responsible stance towards existence over time that is
initiated by a decision. As Kierkegaard expresses the point, because whatever course of action and identity (or form of existence) that guides one’s action is, for the reasons already discussed, uncertain at every moment, “this uncertainty is vanquished only by my vanquishing it every moment” (CUP, 167). Thus my decision to responsibly endorse a commitment must be sustained in each passing moment in what Kierkegaard calls the realm of ‘becoming.’ The moment of choice is important as it sets the responsible stance in motion but equally important, perhaps even more important, is the hard work of sustaining that commitment follows this decision.

Kierkegaard claims that there is, in fact, a danger inherent in fetishizing the moment of decision. If I treat the decision as if it is all that matters and get caught up in its romantic grandeur, carried away by the temporary welling up of emotion associated with it, it is easy make a commitment on the basis of this momentum that I cannot back up over time. Commitments made in the grips of the extreme pathos associated with intense situations – e.g., a commitment made to love someone in a moment of pity or lust – are frequently nothing more than the “momentary outpouring of inwardness” which leave “behind a lethargy that is dangerous” (CUP, 240).

These outpourings are dangerous because they are not taken as responsible risks. They are haphazard commitments made like an oniomaniac writing hot checks. Such commitments are rooted in a temporary and uncontrolled passion that will not be made good on because when the passion fades and one returns to ordinary emotional conditions, the commitment seems alien to the one who made it. He is not really committed to the practical identity in terms of which the commitment was made – he is merely excited by the intense emotion associated with the commitment in the moment.
Such commitments bind the agent to tasks he cannot carry through and often involve others in trusting or relying on him even though, in this case, he is unreliable and cannot be trusted. The lethargy these commitments leave behind is that associated with the agent’s disappointment in his inability to carry through his promise and the disappointment of the Other who shall not receive what she was promised.

Genuine commitment, then, “is never a matter of occasionally making a huge effort but is constancy in the relation, the constancy with which it [the content of the commitment] is joined together with everything [in the individual’s existence]” (CUP, 535). Such commitment is bound up with the meaning of the agent’s practical identity – it is part of the very way he understands himself.\textsuperscript{131} Heidegger follows Kierkegaard on this point as well, when he claims that resoluteness is in fact synonymous with the constancy of the self:

"The constancy of the Self, in the double sense of steadiness and steadfastness, is the authentic counter-possibility to the non-Self-constancy which is characteristic of irresolute falling. Existentially, ‘Self-constancy’ signifies nothing other than anticipatory resoluteness” (BT 322, 369).

Only a commitment sustained over time can be understood as resolute. The resolute individual does not, as Heidegger says, keep saying ‘I’ because he is not caught up in inner deliberation but is already taking action, and, likewise, he does not talk about great decisions – and does not place great weight on the moment of decision – because the real value of such decisions exists only in the project of carrying them through. The self is

\textsuperscript{131} This also mirrors Kant’s discussion of ‘putting on the new man.’ Kant does not make the choice to take up a revolution in one’s cast of mind all important, but argues that the process of becoming good is “an ever-enduring struggle toward the better, hence…a gradual reformation of the propensity of evil, the perverted cast of mind” (RWL, 43). Thus, the responsible stance happens all at once in a moment of decision but the process of becoming a new man is arduous work, a slow process of overcoming one’s recalcitrant sensuous nature. In this way, Kant’s account, which I have already shown to be a conceptual and structural forerunner to Kierkegaard and Heidegger, emphasizes constancy as well.
'guilty' or 'responsible' in its very nature – this is a fact of being a self – and so the self that projects itself into 'being-guilty' or taking up this responsibility must be responsible in every moment. The resolute self must exist constantly in a state of responsible commitment that vanquishes uncertainty in every moment:

"To project oneself upon this being-guilty, which Dasein is as long as it is, belongs to the very meaning of resoluteness. The existentiell way of taking over this 'guilt' in resoluteness, is therefore authentically accomplished only when that resoluteness, in its disclosure of Dasein, has become so transparent that Being-guilty is understood as something constant" (BT 305, 353).

By fetishizing the decision it is easy to romanticize the 'existential' dimension of the 'moment' without paying attention to the arduous work associated with sustaining a commitment. But this hyper-emphasis on the decision overlooks the all too important, albeit mundane, task of standing by one's decisions that is the very heart of what Kierkegaard and Heidegger take to be the task of being a self. The decision to take on the passion of 'inwardness' or the commitment to 'being-guilty' is nothing without the subsequent work 'self-constancy.' This commitment gives the decision meaning by fulfilling it.

This is hard work because to fulfill the decision – to break with the inauthentic evasion of responsibility – the self must constantly – with steadiness and steadfastness – maintain the decision towards its course of action against the resistance of many deeply sedimented dispositions and habits. That is, the inauthentic self not only exists in a way that evades responsibility but it has deeply established habits of doing so. And the constant self, then, must overcome not only natural inclinations and habits that are inconsistent with its responsible stance but often must maintain this stance against the way the world mattered to it prior to the decision to change. In some cases, maintaining a
commitment will involve re-structuring the way the world matters to me inasmuch as the way it has mattered to me habitually in my inauthentic existence is incompatible with my new path. The unique way in which the world hangs together for me needs to be brought in line with my commitment to being responsible self.

Resoluteness, then, understood as ‘being-responsible,’ makes it possible for me to be a self – it is constitutive of my sense of who I am, as an individual with a point of view that he can call his own and from which he can respond to others. It makes one capable not only giving birth to oneself – choosing who one will be in action – but of staying true to the choice in a constant re-affirmation of its value. Responsibility is what makes me capable of offering myself in a way that is meaningful because it makes it such that I can back up my word by ‘transparently’ sustaining my commitments. This capacity to freely commit myself and to hold myself to my commitments makes sense of my pledges, promises, declarations of love, etc. as words that others can count on. It allows me to commit and bind myself freely to any intended course of action, belief, standard, relationship, etc. Only because I can make myself responsible can I count on myself to (and guarantee to others that I will) persistently endorse my commitments.

In the next chapter, we shall turn our attention to one of the most important and elusive questions of Being and Time: What motivates the responsible mode of existence that Heidegger calls resoluteness? It cannot be the call of conscience alone, because the confrontation with one’s autonomy in existential death totally depersonalizes and dislocates the self from the world, which means there are no claims in play that would motivate a particular kind of life or a determinate way of carrying out that life. The question that remains, then, is why one would choose to make one’s return to the world in
a responsible fashion. Is there something built into the very structure of existence that motivates us to carry it out responsibly?
Chapter 5

The Source of Resoluteness

5.1 The Apparent Absence of a Motive

In *Self-Consciousness and Self-Determination*, as a prefatory remark to his discussion of Heidegger’s account of deliberation, Ernst Tugendhat recounts a story from his student years: “When Heidegger first presented his ideas in lectures at Marburg, the students remarked jokingly, ‘We are resolute, but we do not know to what purpose’” (1986, 207). This was an ironic criticism. The irony lies both in the notion that one could be resolute without knowing the purpose of one’s resolution – which, indeed, would make for a rather empty resolution – and in the collective declaration of having achieved an ideal of individual existence. The implicit criticism seems to be either that a) Heidegger endorses resolve without purpose or that b) his account of resoluteness is so obscure that it is unclear whether resolute action is purposive. Tugendhat makes it clear that he thinks both are the case. Spoken in unison, the ‘joke’ also implies a criticism that an empty resoluteness – a sheer willing without real motivation – is a danger to the public sphere, as it would seem to encourage the kind of unthinking will-to-action that, at least in certain groups, can lead to a mob mentality. In Tugendhat’s lectures, this story leads into his account of Heidegger’s so-called ‘decisionism’ – the claim that Heidegger

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132 There is, of course, the further irony that ‘resoluteness,’ as discussed in the last chapter, has the criterion of ‘silence’; that is, the self-conscious proclamation of having attained such a state would seem to undermine the possibility of having done so, as one would be focusing on an intention or way of being rather than actually being something: “Everyone who in truth has ventured his life has had the criterion of silence,” (CUP, 548). This, however, does not seem to be at play in the ‘joke’ of Tugendhat and his fellow students.

133 Even if this was far from the students’ minds at the time, Tugendhat recommends this interpretation of the event in his lectures and, like many critics before and after him, directly associates Heidegger’s political engagement with the concept of resoluteness.
endorses a heroic nihilism of self-choice in which an individual chooses himself merely for decision's sake, no matter how groundless, purposeless or directionless the decision happens to be.

I will discuss Tugendhat's critique in greater detail in the next chapter when we analyze the ethical implications of resoluteness, but it is already relevant here as we are interested in precisely what motivates a resolute stance towards one's existence. The inability to account for this motivation, as Tugendhat suggests, would render Heidegger's position fairly empty – for it would mean that there are no real considerations, endemic to existence itself, that count in favor of resoluteness.

Heidegger's account of fallenness and resoluteness, then, would be nothing more than a value neutral description of two possible ways of living. This is precisely Tugendhat's claim: Heidegger motivates the stance with nothing more than the empty rhetoric of a heroic nihilism and offers no reasons in favor of a resolute existence. Before we deal with the question of 'ethical constraints' in the next chapter, which will be necessary to ward off worries about ethical relativism,^{134} we first need to show that there is a real motivation in existence itself to take responsibility for oneself. Against Tugendhat's suggestion, we need to show that the decision to be responsible is not a sheer groundless 'will-to-will' without motivation.

We cannot, as already noted, locate the motivation to take responsibility for oneself in the experience of existential death. This experience reveals that existence as

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^{134} In other words, even if we discern a motivation in existence to take up responsibility, we will have to consider whether any project can be taken up responsibly or if being-responsible involves certain constraints on what can count as responsible action. For example, on Kant's view responsibility and morality are reciprocal concepts – I cannot simultaneously be responsible and treat others as means to my ends. If Heidegger's position does not entail such constraints, then even if resoluteness is motivated by existence, it will still represent a relativistic picture of human life. In other words, existence could motivate responsibility without involving anything like an ethical criterion. The question in this chapter, however, is simply whether existence motivates responsibility.
such must matter to me – that the fundamental structure of my being *motivates* a striving towards meaning; the encounter with the necessity of ‘care,’ however, fails to motivate resoluteness: “Anxiety merely brings one into the mood for a *possible* resolution” (*BT* 344, 394). The motivation to take responsibility for my existence could not occur in existential death, because it is an experience of acute anxiety and depersonalization in which the world *fails to claim me*.

In other words, in this moment there is no content to my practical identity for me to consider taking up responsibly. The decision, then, has to take place when life is under way so that I can choose to live *this* particular life responsibly. Motivation always has the structure of claim and response – a claim must necessarily precede any response for that response to be understood as motivated. And if the response in question is taking up a particular life responsibly, then the claims of that life have to stand before the individual as considerations that count in favor of taking it up. No such considerations are available in existential death.

**5.2 The Motives**

Resoluteness, I contend, has two sources of motivation: 1) the factual claims that the world and others make on me and 2) an insight regarding the relationship between responsibility and existential satisfaction furnished by the experience of existential death. The structure of the self motivates care – an original striving towards meaning. This striving, however, takes an idiosyncratic shape in the world because of my factual makeup and it therefore demands a specific kind of satisfaction – a life that *satisfies* must not just meet a generic need for meaning but rather a meaning tailored specifically *to me* as a unique individual. Thus, a desire to live a life that resonates with the way the world claims me is one motive for resolute striving. The other motive is an insight won in
existential death: only a life lived responsibly can yield satisfaction. These two motives work together as considerations that count in favor of a responsible life.

We can already see that we are on the way to answering Tugendhat’s criticism. Heidegger cannot specify the end towards which authentic resoluteness is oriented because what motivates resoluteness is specific to the individual’s idiosyncratic makeup. What features of the world will claim the individual and what form of life will satisfy the style of his striving cannot be specified in advance:

“The resolute taking over of one’s factical ‘there’, signifies, at the same time, that the Situation is one which has been resolved upon. In the existential analysis we cannot, in principle, discuss what Dasein factically resolves in any particular case. Our investigation excludes even the existential projection of the factical possibilities of existence” (BT 382-383, 434).

The factical motives for resoluteness are specific to the individual. They are a matter of how one’s facticity interacts with the contours of one’s social-historical context. There is no way to specify in advance or in general, then, what will motivate an individual to live with passion.

Thus, if Heidegger’s students did not know the ends of their resolve, he could do nothing more helpful than serving as a model, by pursuing his own existence passionately, because deciphering these ends is a task assigned to each individual. The fact that Heidegger offers no recommendations, then, does not indicate the absence of a motive; it indicates that such motives are not generic. Discerning one’s ends is a project that involves the individual self-differentiation. In this context, individual refers to what we ordinarily think of when we hear the term. My identity is differentiated in a number of ways that are factical – I am not just a capacity for self-determination (existentiality) but I am also my factical self (thrown). I am my life history, my set of affective dispositions,
my style of being-in-the-world, a particular constellation of abilities, and so on. Because I am someone in particular my essential striving towards meaning takes a determinate shape, and it will not be satisfied with just any meaning. The fact that we are the free does not mean that our factual determinations do not demand something from us – it only means that it is up to us to determine which demands ought to be answered. My capacity for self-projection makes it such that I care about my existence as such, even when my worldly identity collapses, and my thrown factual dimension makes it such that I care about this particular life, this sense of who I am, i.e., me.

I can live in a way that pursues this sense of who I am or denies it. Such denial, however, leads to existential dissatisfaction. ‘Existential satisfaction’ here does not simply mean an existence that strikes me as ‘adequate’ or ‘sufficient’ to keep me among the living. I define satisfaction in existence as carrying out a form of life that is cut to fit the shape of my striving towards meaning in its factual particularity. To clarify this point, we can consider existential satisfaction in one domain and then expand the notion to one’s existence as a whole. If, for example, part of my practical identity entails being a teacher, a satisfactory experience of being-a-teacher occurs when I arrive to my class well prepared and convey the material in a clear and compelling manner to my students and engage them in a way that brings the material to life. Such an experience is not only satisfying because I find my skills and abilities to be up to the task of teaching and I do it well; the satisfaction also stems from the fact that in the experience of teaching I feel that the project of being-a-teacher, which my free endorsement sustains, is appropriate to who I am and who I want to be.
I ‘lose’ myself in the activity in the sense that I am given over to it. As much as possible, I narrow the gap – opened up by resentment, indecision, self-doubt, self-conscious mauldering, etc. – between what I am doing and who I am. My abilities ‘match’ the action context in such a way that I have a sense of striving towards the fulfillment of my desires and expectations, as if the context is ‘where I belong.’ In other words, in losing myself there I also ‘find’ myself. I experience consanguinity between my being and the world – between my striving and life. A satisfying existence, then, is one that suits me in this manner on a global level. This does not mean that my life is completely free from hardship, boredom and other forms of dissatisfaction. It only means that I live a life that – on a whole – I not only experience as worth living but as the life that I was meant to live.\textsuperscript{135}

Satisfaction, then, is a continuum concept. Its highpoint is a life that I experience as meant for me – as my ‘fate’ – and its nadir is the utter dissatisfaction one encounters in a life that feels alien, a life from which I feel utterly estranged, as if it were meant for someone else. Such dissatisfaction, at its extreme, leads to death – the reassertion of the striving towards meaning that is motivated by the structure of the self. When an individual lives his life in a manner that is dissatisfactory, he obscures the fact that his existence matters to him and, when such dissatisfaction reaches an extreme level, this can bring him to the point where life no longer seems to matter at all.

Such dissatisfaction can result from one’s own obedience to what ‘one does’ at the expense of being true to oneself, but it can also result from conditions that are out of one’s control. In the face of radical dissatisfaction, when the cause is not out of the individual’s control but the result of his own free choice, existential death forces him to...

\textsuperscript{135} For the remainder of the thesis the term satisfaction will be used in this and only this existential sense.
face his responsibility for his existence, waking him to the fact that – on pain of
dissatisfaction and death – he must live his life in a way that is in concert with what
matters to him. If he fails to do so, he will obscure the fact that his existence matters and
undergo daily dissatisfaction, which leads to a breakdown that once again attests to the
fact of care. This is why existential death is always a chance for rebirth. If the way one
lives leads to death, one must find a new way to live.

We can say, then, that the world claims me in a way tailored to the idiosyncratic
style of my facticity, and these claims bid me to ‘become who I am.’ When I fail to
become who I am, dissatisfaction results, but when I act in light of these claims and
develop this inner sense – most likely with many modifications, as my sense of who I am
changes over time – I will (with luck) carve out a life that suits and satisfies me. But what
motivates me to pursue this particular form of life responsibly?

These factual claims can be stifled and obscured in everyday life, I can become
estranged from them, but they are always tacitly present. I need not undergo existential
death to feel their pull. They do, however, take on a particular salience in light of the
experience of existential death because it allows me to experience them as mine.
Existential death makes this possible because it clears away everyday concerns about
getting along the way ‘one does,’ which ordinarily obscure my sense of who I am and the
motivation to ‘become who I am.’ In death, I catch a glimpse of myself as a free self-
determining agent and this puts the factual claims of the world in a new light. The
impediments to pursuing the direction in which I feel called are, momentarily, bracketed,
revealing that the only real impediment to this project is my own failure to take it up.136

136 This is not to claim that life does not present real obstacles to my having a particular kind of life. It is
only to say that no matter what my situation, there is nothing to prevent me from striving to have a
In existential death, then, I am distanced or dislocated from my everyday worldly concerns and thrown back upon my freedom. The experience has the character of extreme passivity and openness. Like a bowstring pulled taut, freedom reposes in its own reserves, the self-propulsive ‘drive’ both released and tensed, prior to its return to the world through self-projection and action. In this moment, I come before the essential decision between responsibility and irresponsibility, but I do not make this decision. The moment of decision (*Augenblick*) marks my transition from this passive experience into action. This decision marks a re-entry – a return from a state of depersonalization to my personality and from the defamiliarization of the world to the familiar conditions of my existence: “those possibilities of existence which have been factically disclosed are not to be gathered from death. And this is still less the case when one’s anticipation of this possibility does not signify that one is speculating about it, but signifies precisely that one is coming back to one’s factual ‘there’” (*BT* 383, 434). In fact, “Resoluteness brings the Self right into its current concernful Being-alongside what is ready-to-hand, and pushes it into solicitous Being with Others” (*BT* 298, 344). Thus, in the moment of decision – and not existential death – factical life claims *me* as a particular individual and this motivates me to pursue a particular form of life. But I am only motivated to do so *responsibly* in light of the insight won in existential death: If I take responsibility, I can experience my existence as my *own* and, if I fail to do so, I am divested of such ownership, estranged from own life, possessed and determined by ‘what one does.’ In other words, *I realize that the only way I can experience the form of life that claims me as my own is to take*
responsibility for it, and, equally important, I realize that only if I experience it as my own can I take satisfaction in it.

Without being-responsible I am estranged from my life, a divided and dis-integrated self, held at a distance from experiencing that life as mine. And when I cannot experience it as mine, I cannot possibly take satisfaction in it. Only by being-responsible can I genuinely have my life rather than merely haunting it. The encounter with my autonomy makes it clear that in spite of the fact that my existence is mine, I do not necessarily experience it as mine. Thus, the experience clarifies a condition for the possibility of taking satisfaction in my existence – responsibility or self-ownership – because I can only take satisfaction in that which properly belongs to me. In other words, to be motivated to take up responsibility the following two considerations must work in concert: 1) only a particular form of life could satisfy my unique factual makeup and 2) I can only experience satisfaction in that which is properly mine or that for which I can be responsible.137

5.3 Satisfaction and Responsibility

We need to take a closer look at the relationship between responsibility and satisfaction to sharpen this point. Taking satisfaction in a life I do not experience as my own would be like taking satisfaction in someone else’s deeds. I can be happy for my friend when his life goes well, but I cannot take satisfaction in his life. This would be an inappropriate paternalism or delusion that appropriates the Other’s deeds as my own – as

137 It might seem unclear what is doing the motivational work here, because prior to the motivation to pursue a particular form of existence set up by my factual makeup is the ‘drive’ to strive towards meaning in general motivated by the structure of my existence. The point is that the freedom-anxious-concern structure of my existence motivates striving in general and that my factual makeup motivates a particular style of striving, which, taken in conjunction with the insight furnished by existential death, motivates responsible striving. Care is just experienced as a ‘drive’ that gets carried out in both inauthentic and authentic modalities, but only responsible striving towards a particular meaning of existence, I contend, can lead to existential satisfaction.
if the Other’s accomplishments somehow reflect my subjectivity. Likewise, it is not possible to take satisfaction in my own life if I do not experience it as my own. If I do not experience myself as the subject of my own deeds, how could I take satisfaction in them?

This idea is not as strange as it might initially seem, and examples of people who experience this kind of estrangement from their own deeds are easy to find in everyday life, literature, and case studies of patients who suffer from depression. Most everyone has come across individuals who appear to be quite successful and have every ‘reason’ to take satisfaction in their lives, who are still dissatisfied with existence because they suffer from a sense that their accomplishments are meaningless. In many cases, I’m suggesting, such dissatisfaction is rooted in the fact that they are not living a life they can experience as their own. Most often, these people have found their way into this condition by taking up a form of life by going along with what ‘one does’ rather than pursuing a life compatible with their sense of who they want to be. And this happens because they are estranged from the sense of their responsibility for their existence and the fact that it is up to them to pursue the life they want. But even a life that suits them might not be experienced as satisfying if they do not have a sense that the life they are living is the product of their own power for self-determination.

Prima facie there are obvious objections to this point. I might object that I take satisfaction every single day in a variety of things that in no way depend on my responsibility and therefore do not seem to be mine in any relevant sense. For example, I take great satisfaction in the victories of my favorite football team, the deeds of my national representatives, and my daughter’s accomplishments. And I see no reason why
this should not be considered genuine satisfaction even if these things are not sustained by my 'own free endorsement.'

If the satisfaction taken in these deeds is genuine, it is so because one takes satisfaction in terms of one's own possibilities for being-a-self for which one is responsible. To consider one of the examples, I can take satisfaction in the outcome of a sporting event for which I am in no way responsible, because I do so in light of some dimension of my practical identity in terms of which I take a stance on that outcome. And that stance belongs to me because of who I am – in this case, 'a fan of team X.' I do not take satisfaction in the game, then, because I am responsible for its outcome; I do so because I am responsible for my self-understanding as a 'fan of team X.' And the game provides a certain anxious frisson because, although I chose to be a fan, I can play no role in determining how that choice will turn out for me. I am responsible for choosing to take up a role whose fate hangs on the deeds on other men – and it is in terms of this choice that I am a 'loser' if my team loses. I can only experience loss along with the team because the team's fate is somehow tied up with my own identity, as a result of my own choice. Loss is only possible if what I lose somehow belongs to me, and something can only belong to me if I am responsible for it. And what I am responsible for are those roles into which I freely project myself. Thus, the fate of something for which I am not directly responsible can matter to me only in terms of some relevant role into which I freely

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138 This explanation of 'fanhood' would explain the tendency of fans to dissociate themselves from a team after particularly devastating losses. They reject their status as a fan, as anything that they claim to be, as a self-defense against the disappointment associated with that dimension of their identity. In fact, this form of identity-rejection serves as a defense mechanism against many forms of loss: "I never cared about that relationship," one might say, after his lover leaves him for someone else. The idea behind this tactic is that one can dissociate oneself from the disappointment – the way in which the mattering registers in the face of failure – by dissociating oneself from the identity for which one is responsible. The tactic attests to the connection between responsibility and mattering.
reliable. I care about the fate of the team but I do so in light of my commitment as a
fan. ¹³⁹

When I evade responsibility, then, I hold my existence at a distance, estranged from my practical identity and the commitments associated with it. These commitments are not experienced as mine because I carry them out as ‘one does’ and experience my life as the mere repetition of a type rather than a unique fate that is mine alone and could only be mine. The failure to possess my life leads to the uncanny feeling that it somehow possesses me. The claims the world makes on me are not experienced as sources of motivation upon which I act in light of their appropriateness to who I am and want to be; instead, I experience them ‘as if’ they constitute an alien force that has me in its sway, ‘pushing’ me here and there and occasionally lying there inert. I am a stranger to myself, because I do not live my life as my own but as some one’s life.

Thus, built into factual existence is a source of motivation to take responsibility for my existence, i.e., the constellation of claims that the world makes on me coupled with the consideration that only a life lived responsibly could be experienced as mine and therefore be satisfying. ¹⁴⁰ But how exactly do these motivating reasons work in concert?

5.4 The Motives in Concert

¹³⁹ This might seem to represent a morally repellent strand of egoism. One might object: according to this view, it would seem that all that matters are one’s ego-identities and not the others who are relevant to these identities. For example, it would seem that in the case of my daughter, it is not my daughter that matters but only my role as her parent. Is this not a monstrous conclusion? I will discuss this issue in greater depth in the next chapter, which deals with some of the ethical implications of the Heideggerian position I develop in this thesis. To respond briefly to the objection here: To claim that my daughter matters to me in terms of my role as her parent is not to say that my daughter herself does not matter to me. It is only to say that she matters to me in terms of my role as her parent – she matters to me in the way she does because her fate is relevant to who I am and what I can do, which I am responsible for. In other words, it is my child herself that matters to me but she matters to me the way she does because her existence is inseparable from my practical identity of being-her-parent.

¹⁴⁰ To live responsibly means to make my own decisions and to choose the standards in light of which I choose. In the next chapter, we will also see that responsibility entails an ethical criterion. All of these elements of responsibility, then, must be met to experience satisfaction in one’s existence.
The tendency to interpret the call itself as the motivation to be responsible fails because the insight furnished by the call is ineffectual in the moment I am divorced from the world. The call clarifies the fact that responsibility is a necessary condition for the possibility of a satisfying existence, but this consideration only has motivating force once the self has made its return to the world. In death there is no content to my identity for me to responsibly appropriate. Thus, only when I return to the world of my everyday concern – in which there is something that I can take up responsibly – can this insight garnered from death serve as a consideration that counts in favor of being-responsible.

This might seem like a minor point. It is important to note, however, for the following reason: it rules out the claim that Heidegger endorses making a decision in the absence of anything like reasons. The decision he endorses, rather, involves two kinds of reasons working in concert. The factual claims of the world serve as considerations that count in favor of living a particular form of life. Furthermore, when these claims are in play, the insight won in existential death also operates as a motivating reason – a consideration that counts in favor of carrying out that particular form of existence responsibly. The call alone, then, does not motivate responsibility. But the insight from existential death does play a vital motivating role after my return to the world.

I will try to clarify how these motives work in concert with an analogy. Consider an Air Force pilot who, after being dropped into the woods for his ‘Survival Training,’ is in search of food. This search for food is initially motivated by his hunger or his anticipation of being hungry. He then comes across what seems to be a fruit-bearing tree and is motivated by his hunger and the fruitlike qualities of the objects on the tree to eat from it. He initially abstains, however, because he fears the objects might be poisonous.
Therefore, he decides to confer with another pilot who is more knowledgeable in such matters. When he finds the other pilot and she tells him that the fruit is safe to eat, he eats it and thereby satisfies the striving initially motivated by hunger.

To make good on this analogy, we have to see how our pilot’s feelings of hunger and the fruitlike qualities of the objects work together with the insight provided by his fellow pilot to motivate the act of eating. The act is initially motivated by his hunger and the fruitlike qualities of the objects that present them as possible satisfaction candidates. In the absence of hunger and these fruitlike objects, the insight that such objects are edible does not really motivate anything. However, once this hunger and the fruitlike objects are present the advice from his fellow pilot becomes an essential consideration that counts in favor of the act of eating. In other words, the twin motivations of hunger and the fruitlike qualities of the object and the insight that these objects are edible have to be in play to motivate the act of eating.

Something analogous is at work with regard to what motivates my responsible striving towards a particular form of life. For responsible striving to emerge as an issue I first have to be claimed by the world to strive towards a particular form of life. In the absence of such claims, the fact that only a responsible life can be experienced as satisfying does not really motivate anything – for these claims set up my desire for a particular form of satisfaction. Once these claims are in play, however, my appreciation of the fact that only a life lived responsibly can be experienced as my own – and therefore be genuinely satisfying – is an essential consideration that counts in favor of carrying out my life responsibly. Thus, the factual claims that the world makes on me
and the insight won in existential death must work in concert to motivate resoluteness or responsible striving.

I should also note that I do not mean to intellectualize Heidegger's position by using the term 'insight' for what conscience 'gives us to understand.' This 'insight' is not a 'cognitive helpmeet' like the pilot's advice in the fictional scenario above. Conscience gives us something to understand in Heidegger's sense of the term understanding: "to be projecting towards a potentiality-for-Being for the sake of which any Dasein exists" (BT 336, 385). This 'insight,' then, refers to the 'lived sense' of having undergone the pragmatic-affective affair that is the experience of existential death.

One can exist in light of this 'lived sense' without even being able to – or interested in – explicitly translating that experience into a piece of thematic knowledge the way I have attempted to do in this thesis. And this implies that there is absolutely no reason to expect greater 'authenticity' from a Heideggerian than a Black Forest peasant or, for that matter, a used car salesman. When I claim that my 'appreciation' of this 'insight' is an essential consideration that counts in favor of a responsible existence, I am referring to the 'lived sense' of responsibility won in the experience that necessarily precedes but does not necessarily proceed into any explicit philosophical articulation of this sense.\(^{141}\)

5.5 Resoluteness and Individuality

\(^{141}\) This last claim is not meant to imply that you have to 'be authentic' to clarify the notion adequately. All one would need to do to be in a position to characterize these phenomena would be to undergo something like existential death, which would allow one to catch sight of the manner in which existence is sustained by one's own free endorsement and to then consider what living in light of this realization would entail. One has to be committed to grounding one's account on the basis of the 'things themselves' and for oneself, but one does not have to exist in a state of authenticity to offer an account of it. Although authenticity is an achievement it is not the apotheosis of the self – it is an ongoing struggle to realize an ideal, and in this struggle one goes back and forth between varying degrees of success and failure.
When I appropriate the factual claims of the world as my own by taking responsibility for my existence, I open myself up the possibility of becoming who I am—or giving ‘birth’ to myself, as a unique individual, in action:

“Resoluteness, by its ontological essence, is always the resolution of some factual Dasein at a particular time….Resoluteness ‘exists’ only as a resolution [Entschluss] which understandingly projects itself. But on what basis does Dasein disclose itself in resoluteness? On what is it to resolve? Only the resolution itself can give the answer. One would completely misunderstand the phenomenon of resoluteness if one should want to suppose that this consists simply in taking up possibilities which have been proposed and recommended, and seizing hold of them. The resolution is precisely the disclosive projection and determination of what is factically possible at the time” (BT 298, 345).

The resolute individual does not simply resolve on the basis of what is ‘proposed and recommended’ by ‘the one,’ then, but rather he pursues a particular meaning based on what is ‘factically possible at the time,’ i.e., based on his sense of who he wants to be or what kind of existence he can take up responsibly. The mode of existence that he can take up responsibly is the one that claims him in his uniqueness; it is that form of life that his inner sense of who he is, no matter how inchoate, tells him that he needs to live at the moment. The failure to heed the demands of these factual claims, the failure to be who one wants to be, will lead to dissatisfaction and eventually to an uncanny distance or estrangement from his life. Thus, what he resolves on in the moment must be the way of being to which he feels called.142

I cannot take up just any ‘possibility’ and expect satisfaction – I have to take up that possibility that claims me. This is the meaning of Heidegger’s notorious claim that

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142 At the moment, I ask the reader to bracket worries about relativism and self-serving individualism. We will address these issues in the next chapter.
'only the resolution itself can give the answer' to that upon which I ought to resolve.\textsuperscript{143}

No one can specify the content of this resolution for me – for it is my resolution and this means that it can only be determined by my sense of who I am. Responsible striving, then, aims at a particular satisfaction whereas irresponsible action aims at whatever is 'proposed and recommended' rather than a possibility rooted in my sense of who I am:

"The more authentically Dasein resolves—and this means that in anticipating death it understands itself unambiguously in terms of its ownmost distinctive possibility—the more unequivocally does it choose and find the possibility of its existence, and the less does it do so by accident. Only by the anticipation of death is every accidental and 'provisional' possibility driven out. Only Being-free for death, gives Dasein its goal outright and pushes existence into its finitude" (\textit{BT} 384, 435).

Accidental and provisional possibilities are 'driven out' because the world claims me in a very specific way and I realize that fulfilling these claims in action – my own satisfaction – is up to me, and that such satisfaction can only be attained through responsible pursuit of a life that claims me factically.

Heidegger thus addresses two ways in which the self can be an individual. In existential death I experience myself as an individual in the sense that who I am emanates from my capacity for self-determination. My freedom determines my ownmost domain for which I am responsible – it individuates me. But this experience opens up the possibility for another kind of individuation. The self that I take responsibility for is not someone in general in a generic situation but a particular individual with a determinate life history, constellation of affective dispositions, and practical identity in a determinate

\textsuperscript{143} This is the very line that Tugendhat discusses in relation to the story from his student years recounted above; he takes the claim, rather uncharitably, to be vacuous and, from a moral point of view, dangerous and nihilistic. But the given autonomy of each individual and the idiosyncratic way in which the world claims each one of us makes it impossible to specify that upon which any other individual ought to resolve. This was my point at the outset when I suggested that Heidegger had no answer as to what purpose his students should be resolute – this is a decision that is up to each one us alone.
and specific action-context (or situation). And it is *this* individual life for which I take responsibility. Resoluteness, then, is the moment of my birth because I set myself on the path to becoming a self – a responsible individual – and to ‘becoming who I am’ in my unique distinctness.

This is a major point of contrast between my view and that laid out by Dreyfus and Rubin in their *Appendix to Being-in-the-World*. In their discussion of Division II, they claim that resoluteness amounts to an “openness” characterized by the “realization that the self is impotent and empty,” and that in it “Dasein as a disclosing way of being accepts the *call* to acknowledge its essential empty openness” (Dreyfus 1991, 318). This cannot be right. The self is not empty simply because it undergoes an experience of depersonalization in which it grasps its capacity for self-determination and the fact that no element of its identity is necessary to its being.

In resoluteness the individual returns to a world that claims him in a particular way and passionately commits to a particular form of life. Dreyfus and Rubin’s claim, then, that the appropriate response to existential death is the acknowledgment of one’s ‘essential empty openness’ and a kind of resignation or detachment from the self’s particularity is a mistake. This mistake is a byproduct of their interpretation of Heidegger as a secularized, atheist, and, in a certain sense, nihilistic version of Kierkegaard. To illustrate their interpretation Dreyfus and Rubin refer to the ‘authentic’ athlete who has faced the nothingness underlying existence – its essential ‘meaninglessness’ – and therefore detaches himself from any specific meaning of his existence:

“…having faced this nothingness, authentic Dasein is ready for all specific disasters. Our authentic athlete can therefore pursue sports without worry, enjoy success without fear of being crushed by defeat, accept a broken leg without grief, and, indifferent to what one would
normally do, he can find convalescing, if that is the immediate task the
Situation imposes, as meaningful (i.e., meaningless) as winning a world
championship" (Dreyfus 1991, 323).\textsuperscript{144}

This does not seem to be a fair representation of Heidegger’s position and it certainly
does not seem to represent an ideal of human existence. Heidegger does not endorse
Buddhist detachment or Stoic resignation,\textsuperscript{145} as Dreyfus and Rubin seem to suggest: the
resolute individual, “by soberly facing the impossibility of having any possibilities of its
own, is insured against absolute commitments and their concomitant risk of grief” (1991,
325).

But does this sound like a resolute athlete? If he undergoes the kind of loss
Dreyfus and Rubin describe, then it would seem to attest to a lack of commitment if he
experienced no dissatisfaction in the face of such loss.\textsuperscript{146} If he is resolute, he certainly
will strive to pursue a new form of life. But to claim that resoluteness entails suffering
this type of loss “without grief” is to attribute to Heidegger’s position the negation of
something essential to being a self – a need not just for meaning but for a particular

\textsuperscript{144} Dreyfus and Rubin further argue that this nothingness, as they conceive it, can be “an exciting
manifestation of Dasein’s finitude…If Dasein accepted its nullity, the same structure that seemed to
threaten all its secure projects and its very identity would be seen to be challenging and liberating. Anxiety
then would not be paralyzing like fear but would make Dasein clear-sighted and fearless” (1991, 317). But
there is no reason to interpret the meaninglessness they attribute to existence in this way. Such an
understanding of life could just as easily lead to despair and the sense that what I do not matter
because nothing \textit{really} matters – a Stoic, Epicurean, or Nihilist response is equally appropriate. In fact, in
terms of emotional logic, a Nihilist response seems more appropriate to waking up to the realization that
everything one has hitherto cared about – every project and role one has taken up – is meaningless. As I
have already argued, this interpretation of resoluteness it utterly at odds with my position.

\textsuperscript{145} “Anticipatory resoluteness is not a way of escape, fabricated for the ‘overcoming’ of death; it is rather
that understanding which follows the call of conscience and which frees for death the possibility of
acquiring \textit{power} over Dasein’s \textit{existence} and of basically dispersing all fugitive Self-Concealments” (\textit{BT}
310, 357). With the phrase ‘fugitive self-concealments’ Heidegger is referring to ways in which the self
covers over its responsibility for itself; but it does not refer to the roles in terms of which it understands
itself. There is no self-concealment intrinsic to committing myself passionately to a role and so the
detachment Dreyfus and Rubin attribute to the resolute stance is unnecessary and incompatible with
Heidegger’s claim that resoluteness involves passionate, constant and transparent commitment to one’s
‘Situation’.

\textsuperscript{146} This is also evidenced by the fact that no one wants a teammate who sees breaking his leg and sitting out
the season to be as meaningful (or meaningless) as winning the championship. Could such a person
possibly care about the fate of the team?
meaning, which weighs with one so deeply that its death cannot simply be shrugged off. Even if the meaning of my life cannot be specified in advance, when I commit to it passionately I experience it as essential to my being, and losing it has real consequences that, if I was resolute, I recognized as a risk when I entered into the commitment. There would be no risk in life if one could simply detach oneself from the pain and grief associated with loss. The resolute individual must pursue a particular form of life passionately and such passion in the face of defeat results in real pain, grief and disappointment. One does not cease to be human in resoluteness – it is rather human life at its highest pitch. In resoluteness I do not hold back or abstain from passionate commitment to avoid its risk; I fully commit myself and maintain this commitment with ‘fear and trembling’ in the face of the fragility of life. Owning up to this responsibility does not entail understanding it all as ‘meaningless’ – it means that I take the meaning of a life that matters to me upon myself and strive to maintain it in the face of uncertainty.

The idea that my life as a particular individual is a matter of no moment, then, is a mistake. It is the self of Division I – the self who merely goes along with the way ‘one does things’ and occupies roles in an anonymous or interchangeable way – who can experience his life as if his particularity does not matter. This self is ‘interchangeable’ because he has not taken it upon himself to become who he is. A self who takes responsibility for his existence, however, can never be interchangeable in this way because he understands the life he lives as his fate and fates are not fungible.

This view is completely at odds with the claim that the particularity of the self is, according to Heidegger, irrelevant, which interpreters such as Dreyfus and Rubin maintain when they claim,
“this authentic way of acting *individuates* Dasein, but only in the negative sense that it takes it out of the anonymity and dispersion of the one and destroys its illusion of having an identity, not in the positive Kierkegaardian sense that it gives Dasein a self-definition in terms of something specific” (Dreyfus 1991, 313).

It is true that *death* does not give the individual a particular self-definition, but factual *life* claims me in terms of a particular self-understanding, and pursuing it responsibly is vital to existential satisfaction. Thus, Heidegger, like Kierkegaard, maintains that the individuated self is not just a responsible self but also a differentiated one who responsibly pursues a form of life that he holds to be his ‘fate.’

5.6 The ‘Truth of Existence’ and ‘Fate’

In light of the foregoing discussion, I can now further pursue a comparative analysis of Kierkegaard and Heidegger’s respective accounts of being a responsible self. When Kierkegaard claims that “subjectivity, inwardness, is truth” (*CUP*, 279) and Heidegger that resoluteness must be understood “as the truth of existence” (*BT* 221, 264), this means that striving towards a particular form of existence in the pursuit of satisfaction is how the individual becomes who he is. The ‘truth of my existence’ is the pursuit of – or the being-true in resolute commitment to – a particular form of life that I understand as the ‘truth’ regarding the question of who I am. In what follows I will offer a comparative analysis of these claims that also constitutes an attempt at a phenomenological clarification of the mode of being they intend.

As I will discuss in the next chapter, much has been written about Heidegger’s account of truth and its adequacy regarding practices such as science and ethics. His critics decry his concept of truth as a rhetorically veiled strand of contextualist relativism. The general strategy of the critique is to argue that Heidegger’s thesis that all factual
claims are circumscribed in a particular ‘world-disclosure’ implies that there is no such thing as a statement that is true about something as it is in itself – a statement can only be true within its particular world-disclosure or context. If there are no context-transcendent truths, then we are condemned to a mealy-mouthed relativism regarding not only statements in the sciences but also those about the ‘good.’ I will take no stance in this debate, because I consider its relevance to the questions I have set out to answer to be quite limited. Whether Heidegger’s theory of truth is ultimately relativistic and inadequate to account for the truth of scientific claims or claims about the ‘good’ is not terribly important when we are interested in understanding how one sustains a commitment to an objective uncertainty. In this context, truth claims – where truth is understood as the ‘correctness’ of a representation or the ‘correspondence’ of a statement to a state of affairs – are not our concern.¹⁴⁷

For example, when I say ‘I do’ to my wedding vows and commit myself to the role of husband, this illocutionary act is not best understood as a statement that ‘correctly represents’ or ‘corresponds to’ a state of affairs. The truth of such a statement is a matter of commitment and my ability to sustain an identity that is congruent with its meaning. That is, the ‘truth’ of such a claim lies in my ability to consistently act towards my wife in a way that embodies my vows. This is why the vow consists of nothing more than the words ‘I do.’ It is a first-person statement in the present tense that represents nothing more than the free commitment of a responsible agent who is already taking action – as the present tense suggests – towards standing by his vow. The statement is not ‘true’ or

‘false’ in the sense that it succeeds or fails to represent correctly a state of affairs. The statement is ‘true’ if my commitment is resolute – transparent and constant – and this truth is fulfilled performatively over time. At the time of its utterance, the statement is not true as a matter of fact; it is true if and when I know my own mind, I know what I am up to, and I bind myself to it. It is true because I resolve to make it true and its truth is indistinguishable from my resolve.148 The truth regarding my commitment to any way of being or practical identity that I sustain over time must be understood this way.

One might object that this claim is disingenuous. There is clearly a matter of fact – or state of affairs – regarding my behavior towards my wife that can be represented in a proposition that is true or false. The truthfulness of my vow, then, is a matter of fact. This objection is correct but it misses the main point. A proposition can accurately represent the state of affairs ‘I am true to my vows’ only because I am being-true to those vows in the sense that I hold myself to them. And if the proposition ‘you have failed to be true to your vows’ accurately represents a state of affairs, it is only so on the basis my having failed to hold myself to my commitment to be true. Being-true or failing-to-be-true is the existential basis of the truth-value of third-person propositions regarding my success or failure to live up to my commitments.149 It is, as Heidegger likes to say, the ‘more

148 Kierkegaard argues that the claim that the truth of subjectivity runs so deep that it is at play even in the appropriation of objective truth. That is, even the appropriation of objective truth requires a moment of subjectivity in which the objective truth is held to be true: “With regard to the subject’s relation to known truth, it is assumed that if only the objective truth has been obtained, appropriation is an easy matter; it is automatically included as part of the bargain, and am Ende the individual is a matter of indifference. Precisely this is the basis of the scholar’s elevated calm and the parrot’s comical thoughtlessness” (CUP, 22).

149 Moreover, I would go so far as to argue that the experience of being-true – by holding fast to a commitment – to a way of being is the original experience that makes the idea of a correspondence between a proposition and a state of affairs possible. In other words, if I did not have the experience of the identity between my free capacity for self-projection and a worldly possibility – i.e., of being something – then I could not make sense of the identity that is supposed to obtain between a statement and some fact in the world. Heidegger raises this issue in his famous essay “On The Essence of Truth.” In this essay he makes it clear that the notion that a statement can ‘correspond’ to a ‘state of affairs’ is really quite a bizarre idea that
original truth' on the basis of which such statements are predicated. Thus, I do not mean
to claim that I cannot make factual statements regarding what commitments I have in fact
lived up to or failed to live up to. The point is merely that assertions regarding the factual
truth of how well or poorly I have lived up to my commitments are true or false only
because I am first true to or fail to be true to my commitments. And the statement 'he is
true to his wife' will only be true in the future if I make it true by holding myself to that
commitment; I make such statements true by being-true.

In my factual life, then, the truth of who I am is a matter of what set of
commitments and practical identity I hold myself to in action. From the third-person
perspective, this truth is how my life as a whole, as a sum total of actions, 'adds up.' But
from the first-person perspective the truth of who I am can never be reduced to
statements that correspond to a constellation of actions that can be attributed to me up to
the present moment, and this is because the commitments that constitute my practical
identity are always directed towards the future. Thus, their 'truth value' – from the third-
person perspective – is always uncertain and to a certain extent yet to be determined; the
truth of who I am – the truth regarding the commitments I embody – is always up to me
to make true by standing by them and fulfilling them in action. And fulfilling them in
action does not necessarily entail 'objective success' but rather embodying my
commitments in action. Looking backwards I have a sense of who I have been, but living
forwards the truth regarding who I am is something that I must sustain. The truth of who I

needs to be clarified existentially if we are to make sense of it. How do words correspond to things? What
is the nature of the identity between words and things? How is it that the black print on paper or the sounds
that emerge from the human mouth are somehow the same thing as the state of affairs they purport to
represent? I contend that this notion is something we can make sense of because we have an original
experience of the identification of our freedom with a way of being. Statements can hold true because I can
hold myself to be true. This is obviously too large of an issue to fully deal with in a footnote. In the context
of our current discussion, however, the point is fairly straightforward: factual statements regarding my
commitments are true or false only because I am first true to or fail to be true to my commitments.
am, then, is never settled but is always a matter of holding myself to the commitments I have in light of who I understand myself to be.

At first blush, this might seem like an irresponsible misuse of the term truth, but in Kierkegaard and Heidegger the claim comes with a philosophical justification. Kierkegaard makes clear that he raises the question of truth in a subjective – i.e., only with regard to a self directed towards the future – and not an objective register: “When the question about truth is asked subjectively, the individual’s relation is reflected upon subjectively. If only the how of this relation is in truth, the individual is in truth, even if he in this way were to relate himself to untruth” (CUP, 199). ¹⁵⁰ From the point of view of being a self, the truth of who I am is not a matter of ‘getting things right’ but a matter of holding myself to the commitments that I passionately take to be what defines me as a self – by sustaining an identity between my commitments and my being. And the truth in this identity is the truth for me:

“Only the truth that builds up is truth for you. This is an essential predicate in relation to truth as inwardness, whereby its decisive qualification as upbuilding for you, that is, for the subject, is its essential difference from all objective knowledge, inasmuch as the subjectivity itself becomes the sign of truth” (CUP, 253). ¹⁵¹

If I hold myself to my commitments, then I am true in my resolve to constantly repeat them over time: “Repetition is basically the expression for immanence; thus one finishes despairing and has oneself; one finishes doubting and has the truth” (CUP, 263). ¹⁵² I am

¹⁵⁰ One can even appropriate an untruth in a way that is true from the point of view of subjectivity: “It cannot be expressed more inwardly that subjectivity is truth than when subjectivity is at first untruth, and yet subjectivity is truth” (CUP, 213).
¹⁵¹ This is a passage from Either/Or, Part II, p. 368 that Kierkegaard quotes it in the Postscript.
¹⁵² Kierkegaard’s language of “having myself” suggests the same point about self-ownership and satisfaction that I try to clarify in this chapter. I have myself or I am not estranged from myself because of the identity between my being and my commitments. I can live my life as mine, and this makes taking satisfaction in it possible.
in the truth, then, even if some of my commitments entail beliefs that are in the objective sense untrue.

Likewise, when Heidegger speaks of the truth associated with resoluteness, he does so in a manner that is tailored to the domain of action of a self directed towards the future, and this is appropriate, he argues, because the "kind of truth, and along with it, the certainty, varies with the way entities differ, and accords with the guiding tendency and extent of the disclosure" (BT 256, 300). This claim does not necessarily commit Heidegger to a relativism regarding matters of fact; rather, his point is that the sense in which truth can be spoken of varies according to the domain of experience about which we are speaking.

And establishing the fact that we have access to matters of fact is not what matters in the stratum of existence in which I hold for certain a set of commitments to be the meaning of my being, e.g. holding-myself-to-be-true to my commitment to my life’s vocation. There is only a matter of fact regarding such a commitment when we look backwards.\textsuperscript{153} Looking forward, which is the primary issue regarding commitments, there is merely a commitment that I resolve upon and that I can succeed or fail to fulfill in the

\textsuperscript{153} There will not always be a perfect correspondence between matters of fact regarding my objective success at being something and my subjective success of holding myself to my commitments. In the example of being true to my vows, there are some cases in which my objective failure is inseparable from my subjective failure, although the former is always based on the latter. For example, if someone points out that I, as a matter of fact, physically abused my wife, then that objective fact points to and is based on a subjective failure and the two are inseparable from one another. But in other cases, for example, my commitment to being-a-writer, when we look backwards at the matter of fact regarding my commitment, an objective failure to be a writer might not indicate a subjective failure. I might have held myself true to my commitments (subjectively) while I failed (objectively) at being a writer – if, for example, no one considers me a writer and everyone regards my work as garbage. The main point here, however, is that the primary issue is subjective and we can only make true statements about subjective matters looking backwards. And we have to assess the truth of these matters for ourselves – other people might be able to help us but the judgment is ours to make. Of course, in the example of physically abusing my wife, if I try to claim that I held myself true to my commitment to my vows, I am patently a liar. Looking forwards, however, there are no matters of fact regarding my commitments – it is always a matter of being-true and determining which factual statements about my subjective commitments will be true or false the next time I look back on my life.
course of time. And fulfilling this truth, because it is ‘subjective,’ is a matter of carrying out my commitments though not necessarily a matter of achieving objective success in this pursuit.

The reader might object that if this process involves anything like discerning who I am and testing the fruits of that discernment in the world, then there seem to be important ways in which it will involve ‘getting things right.’ I not only have to get things right about who I am but I have to test my ‘hunches’ regarding who I am, which means that I will have to carry out projects in the world that will involve getting things right and a commitment to the possibility of getting things right. We can reject this objection because, even though ‘reality testing’ presupposes a commitment to the idea that I have unproblematic epistemic access to the world, it does not require that I establish as ‘a matter of fact’ or as ‘an essential truth’ that I really have that kind of access.\textsuperscript{154} Reality testing relies on success and failure and for the most part our access to standards that measure success and failure is unproblematic and the least of our worries when it comes to achieving our goals. Success and failure generally show up, so to speak, in loud colors.\textsuperscript{155}

\textsuperscript{154} If it did, then we could say that no one has ever tested reality. To my knowledge, at least, there has been no definitive consensus among epistemologists that we do, in fact, have such access – nor has anyone clarified a procedure whereby each of us can have certainty when it comes to attaining such access. We act as if we have such access, but there is no reason to think that we need to establish the fact that we have such access to test the reality of our sense of who we are in action.

\textsuperscript{155} And if we want to contest the standards that determine our success or failure, the matter will be contested in the social world, and this contestation will be about the ‘validity’ of these standards and not a matter of factual correctness. Furthermore, if my winning or losing this contest does hang on ‘matters of fact,’ then it does so not because of the facts themselves so much as the stance that those involved in the contest take on those facts. And if this stance assigns ‘getting things right’ the highest value in determining the contest, who gets things right will be determined by the agreement of those involved in the contest, or the ‘judges’ of the contest, regarding what counts as evidence, and this will be about the stance they take on what counts as a fact. The criteria they select will not necessarily guarantee or need to guarantee – even if they purport to guarantee – that the one who wins the contest, in fact, has things ‘right.’
Second, the reader might object that getting things right is a constitutive element of certain practices. This is correct but the truthfulness of my commitment to getting things right is itself a matter of standing by that commitment and not a matter of getting things right as a matter of fact. Even if I am an epistemologist and my commitment is to getting things right about getting things right, the veracity of that commitment is a matter of holding myself to strive to get things right about getting things right, and it is never a matter of the factual achievement of getting things right about getting things right. We test reality through success and failure and we make our commitments true by holding ourselves to them. Thus, in the domain of being a self we do not need to establish the fact of our unproblematic epistemic access to the world to test our inner sense of who we are or to pursue that inner sense via resolute commitment.

It is important to point out that my ‘inner sense of who I am’ is not an ‘inner essence’ or an ‘immutable truth’ about my being. It is a provisional ‘sense’ of who I want to be that evolves over time and ‘the truth of my existence’ is a matter of fulfilling my commitment to this provisional sense of who I am in action. Thus, I am not committed to the kind of position that Robert Pippin criticizes in his essay on Proust.156 Becoming who one is, he claims, cannot be a matter of an inner essence revealed in some kind of epiphany but rather “is much more like resolve than discovery” (Pippin 2005, 310). Saying who one is, then, as Pippin puts it, “is more like the expression of a commitment, usually a provisional commitment, which one can sustain or fail to sustain, and so is something one can always only ‘be becoming’ (or failing to become)” (309). My self-image, he writes, is not just a matter of “fidelity to an inner essence but is ultimately a

matter of action, what we actually do, a matter of engagement in the world, as well as, in a way, a kind of negotiation with others about what, exactly, it was that one did" (309). These claims are compatible with my Kierkegaardian-Heideggerian position. Negotiating precisely what it was that I did with others is an indication that I take my commitments seriously while maintaining the appropriate sense of humility associated with being finite and fallible, i.e., avoiding the dogmatic complacency of a self who is unwilling and too inflexible ‘to take a commitment back.’

Pippin goes too far in favor of the relevance of third-person reports, however, when he claims that in the course of this self-defining process who one is becomes a ‘social fact.’ This claim is problematic, I contend, because the matter of the truth of one’s existence must always remain a first-person affair – a matter of commitment. And fulfilling this commitment is not equivalent to achieving objective success. Pippin, however, raises excellent arguments against the claim that ‘becoming who one is’ can remain a first-person affair:

“A self-image, for example, that is not at all reflected or accepted in practice by others or, especially, that is contradicted by the way one is treated or regarded would have to count as some sort of failure to become who one is… A self-image never realized in social space, never expressed in public action, has to count as more a fantasy than a piece of self-knowledge… One’s self-image becomes a social fact through action, and its meaning can then no longer be tied to intention or will or the agent alone. This is, of course, exactly why many people forever postpone such action, never write that book, send off that manuscript, finish that dissertation” (319).

As compelling as Pippin makes the point seem, and as incisive as his characterization of an irresolute self is, the idea that the truth of my existence is true to the extent that it is realized as a ‘social fact’ goes too far in making the project a third-person affair. It gives the ultimate decision about who one is over to one’s social milieu.
As Kierkegaard and Heidegger point out, the truth of my commitment to who I am is more a matter of a ‘how’ than a ‘what.’ In other words, if hold myself to my commitment to my sense of myself as a writer – if I commit myself responsibly to the practice of writing – then it is true that I am committed to my practical identity as a writer, and this commitment is itself the truth of my existence. But my success at being-true subjectively will not always track with the claims an outsider would make; and there is no reason to privilege an outside perspective when we are addressing a first-person commitment.

Pippin’s point is a forceful one but he places too much value on ‘objective success’ at the expense of the value of resolute striving. The delusional neurotic he describes, the individual whose ‘self-image’ is more a ‘fantasy’ than a ‘piece of self-knowledge,’ does not fail to become who he is because he does not realize that self as a ‘social fact’ or achieve ‘objective success.’ The fact that he does not write or writes without passion is not equivalent to his failure but a symptom of it. If being-a-writer is what he is up to, then he fails because he does not hold himself to the commitments associated with being-a-writer, and this irresoluteness manifests itself to the world in the fact that he does not embody these commitments in action. His failure to act with passion is a sign – to himself and others – that he does not really understand himself in terms of his co-commitments. They indicate a high probability that he is not really committed to being-a-writer because he fails to exhibit any signs that he has taken ownership of that practical identity. And we can think of all kinds of potential grounds for this failure: he likely fears (or ‘knows’) that he will never be a great writer, or he finds it a useful way to attract women, or the pseudo-self-understanding ‘writer’ serves as a distraction to help him avoid really facing his responsibility for his existence. But failure to act on his alleged self-understanding
can only be taken as a sign that point towards – and not an *established fact* regarding –
his irresoluteness. From the third-person perspective this remains a hypothesis.

Resolutely and constantly endorsing a commitment to being-a-writer is the same
thing as being-a-writer. Holding myself to being-a-writer is what makes me a writer and
nothing objective about my writing can make it such that I am not a writer. This is by no
means the same as the claim that merely thinking of myself as a writer makes me a
writer. Holding myself to the commitment to thinking of myself as a writer means that I
hold myself to the commitments involved in being-someone-who-thinks-he-is-a-writer.
Likewise, social facts cannot make me a writer either. If I take the ‘social fact’ that I am
considered a writer to be that which determines me to be one, I estrange myself from the
subjective activity that actually sustains my being-a-writer. Taking the fact that I am
considered a ‘writer’ as that which makes me a writer is like Kierkegaard’s example of
the Christian who thinks that his baptismal certificate makes him a Christian. It ignores
the necessity of appropriation involved in being anything. Nothing can make me
something other than the activity of holding myself to the commitments of being that
something in action.

Pippin’s delusional neurotic who maintains the self-image of a writer but does not
write, then, is not really a problem for this view. In the first place, someone can be a
writer and not write: he might, for example, be garnering unique life experiences about
which he fully intends to write. Putting this concern aside, however, I wonder if we can
take seriously the idea that someone who is only neurotic (and not psychotic) can really
take himself to be a writer and then have *nothing* to do with any of the activities
associated with being-a-writer. If writing never crosses his mind and he has no real
intention of ever writing and yet he presents himself in public life as a writer, then there seem to be two possible explanations: 1) he does not really think of himself as a writer or 2) he is maintaining an elaborate delusion that in no way tracks with reality. In the first case, this individual is not a problem for my argument. He does not really think of himself as a writer and he does not hold himself to any commitment to being-a-writer, and so he is not a writer. Being-a-writer is a fantasy and he knows it; and this is not because it is a social fact but because he knows that he does not hold himself to the commitment to being-a-writer. The second case is not a problem either – people with delusions of this magnitude in no way embody what I have characterized as resoluteness. It is at best a pseudo-resoluteness in which one holds oneself to the commitments involved in thinking-one-is-a-writer. Further, it does not seem that these people can really even manage to do this. That is, the person capable of a delusion that makes no contact with reality does not live with a sense that his commitment is really true. He has no contact with reality and so his sense of being-a-writer is qualitatively different from someone holding himself to the project of being-a-writer in a non-delusional way. If Pippin is just talking about someone who pretends to be a writer and fails to back this pretense up with action, then we do not need to appeal to the social fact that this person is not accepted as a writer to show that he is not a writer. All we need to see is that he is not holding himself, transparently and constantly, to the commitments endemic to being-a-writer, which is the first-person basis of any social facts regarding his status as a non-writer.

Whether an individual resolutely and constantly endorses a commitment to being-a-writer, then, is not a judgment for a third-person to make. No one can weigh a
commitment from the outside. If I occupy the appropriate position vis-à-vis such an
individual, there might be some things I can do as a second-person: I can make inquiries
regarding the status of his commitments and, if appropriate conditions obtain, question
the apparent contradiction between his professed commitments and his actions. In most
cases, such people already know that they are not resolutely appropriating their professed
self-understanding — that they are not becoming who they are — and they are usually
suffering from their inability to do so. The failed writer, then, from the point of view of
existence, is a failure because he fails to hold himself to his commitment to being-a-
writer and not because his work is rejected. Rejection can never make one a failure on the
level of subjectivity, the level of commitment and resolve. This does not mean that
rejection cannot lead to the revision of my commitments. If my novels are, in fact,
universally rejected and I fail to take that fact as a consideration that counts in favor of
my ‘taking my commitment back,’ then it is likely that I lack the humility that
accompanies resoluteness. Pippin is right that the hallmark of genuine resolve is action —
as I have already argued, this is why Kierkegaard and Heidegger associate silence and
reticence with inwardness and resoluteness. But he goes too far when he claims that the
matter can ever be handed over to a judgment by one’s social milieu regarding one’s
objective success.  

5.7 ‘Becoming Who One Is’

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157 If objective success could make one a writer, then an author who fails to be an objective success in his
lifetime but achieves great acclaim after being dead for 100 years would then ‘become who he is’ post
mortem. If Kierkegaard had not been rediscovered by 20th century philosophy, a contingency that is
certainly imaginable, then he would have never ‘become himself,’ in spite of his passionate commitment to
his writing. If objective success, as Pippin claims, is a criterion for becoming who one is, then an author
could become who he is after dying, or an author with all the marks of greatness who by contingent
circumstance was forgotten by history might be viewed as a failure at self-becoming. This makes becoming
who one is no longer a matter of ‘becoming’ or ‘resolve’ but a matter of fact. Becoming who one is must be
understood as an essentially first-personal future oriented project in relation to an objective uncertainty and
it can never be reduced to a matter of fact.
Resoluteness as "the truth of my existence" involves a commitment to an ongoing process of 'becoming who I am.' My inner sense of who I am is always changing shape in light of my experience, calling for the continual adjustment and renewal of my identity and the commitments associated with it. To engage in the striving that is the 'truth of my existence' is to act such that my inner sense of who I want to be is realized in the world, but this realization is a continual process that can never come to an end because we exist in time and our sense of self never reaches a final resting point. This is the task that Kierkegaard calls 'becoming subjective'; it is "the highest task assigned to every human being, a task that can indeed be sufficient for even the longest life, since it has the singular quality that it is not over until life is over" (CUP, 158). This pursuit is an ongoing two-sided process of reflection and action. On the side of reflection, I discern an inner sense of who I want to be measured against an assessment of the reality of who I have been, and engage in a back and forth, recursive process of reflection between imagination and the real. And on the side of action, the field in which the conclusions of imaginative reflection can be tested, I discover and reveal, and thereby actually become, who I am in my attempts to embody the fruits of my reflection. I become who I am by resolutely holding fast to my commitment to my inner sense of who I want to be as I strive to realize that inner sense in action.

This inner sense of who I want to be is nothing other than the factual style of striving I have been discussing, which is formed in the course of my life history and is motivated by the complex ways in which the world claims me. The discernment of the contours of this factual striving through reflection and the struggle to make it properly 'fit' the world is an involved and difficult process. And this is so because the ways in
which the world claims us are complicated and sometimes initially opaque, often contradictory and calling for revision of some claims in favor of others, and the world is not designed for us and not subject to our control – it often forces us to make the fit work ‘on our end of things.’ Becoming who I am, then, is the ongoing task of discerning and striving to realize an inner sense of the style of my factual striving. Resoluteness, then, as ‘the truth of my existence,’ is a commitment to strive responsibly towards an existence that embodies who I want to be.\(^{158}\) Resolve and self-discovery are intimately bound up with one another.

Because it is caught up in time, a decision is never finished once and for all but rather calls for continual striving:

> “the existing person is in the temporal realm, and the subjective ‘how’ is transformed into a striving that is motivated and repeatedly refreshed by the decisive passion of the infinite, but it is nevertheless a striving… Objectively he then has only uncertainty, but this is precisely what intensifies the infinite passion of inwardness, and truth is precisely the daring venture of choosing the objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite” (CUP, 203).

This manner of striving in action calls both on the constancy of my resolve and the flexibility of my personality. As Heidegger puts it,

> “The holding-for-true of resoluteness (as the truth of existence) by no means lets itself fall back into irresoluteness. On the contrary, this holding-for-true, as a resolute holding-free for taking back, is authentic resoluteness which resolves to keep repeating itself” (BT 308, 355).

I must not only sustain commitments over time to pursue ways to be consistent with my inner sense of who I want to be, but I must also constantly assess the changes that my striving brings about and adjust my trajectory in light of these changes. I must constantly

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\(^{158}\) To try to avoid an ambiguity: this ‘inner sense’ that my striving aims at is a kind of ‘truth’ about who I am, however provisional it is or recursively adjusted it will be. The ‘truth of my existence,’ however, is the resolute striving towards this ‘truth,’ because it is in this resolute striving that I attempt to realize this ‘truth’ or ‘inner sense.’
test the strength of my commitments against the changes that are incompatible with them – resolutely holding open the possibility that changes in my self or in my situation might call on me to ‘take’ these commitments ‘back.’ In this process of resolve and self-discovery I strive to achieve the proper balance between sustaining my resolve to my commitments and accepting breaking with a resolution when the situation calls me to do so or, at the extreme, when a way of life dies and is no longer a viable way for me to go on. The inner sense that one is striving to realize in the world becomes more differentiated as its inchoate form is clarified and given flesh in the process of tracing it out in the world: “existential pathos immerses itself in existing, pierces all illusions with the consciousness of existing, and becomes more and more concrete by acting to transform existence” (CUP, 432). The process involves a constant activity of self-transformation through resolve (commitment and constancy), striving, change, and revision followed by further resolve. In this process one becomes and comes to know who one is, when self-knowledge is understood, as Pippin aptly phrases it in his essay on Proust, “as a product of long experience, profound struggle, and negotiations with others, never a moment of epiphanic insight” (2005, 311). And one is in the ‘truth of one’s existence’ whenever one is transparently engaged in responsibly carrying out this process.159

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159 The fact that the truth of my existence is always provisional and always being worked out results not only from the fact that it is difficult to realize the appropriate conditions that would lead to our satisfaction but that we have a finite and imperfect access to knowing what conditions would lead to such satisfaction. And this lack, in part, has to do with the inevitability of being absorbed in the world, relinquishing our responsibility, and taking on generic norms to guide our lives rather than doing the hard work of maintaining a commitment to what we take to be our possibilities: “Its absorption in the ‘they’ signifies that it is dominated by the way things are publicly interpreted. That which has been uncovered and disclosed stands in a mode in which it has been disguised and closed off by idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity. Being towards entities has not been extinguished, but it has been uprooted. Entities have not been completely hidden; they are precisely the sort of thing that has been uncovered, but at the same time they have been disguised. They show themselves, but in the mode of semblance. Likewise what has formerly been
Heidegger captures the specificity of the manner in which the world claims me with the concept of 'the situation' – the concrete factual action context in which I resolve to become who I am: "The current factual involvement-character of the circumstances discloses itself to the Self only when that involvement-character is such that one has resolved upon the 'there' as which that Self, in existing, has to be" (BT 300,346). The situation is only revealed in its particularity that is relevant to me when I resolve to act as and for myself within it, i.e., when I have resolved upon its claims as what I have 'to be' and this form of existence as mine:

"The phenomenon of resoluteness has brought us before the primordial truth of existence. As resolute, Dasein is revealed to itself in its current factual potentiality-for-Being, and in such a way that Dasein itself is this revealing and Being-revealed... The primordial truth of existence demands an equiprimordial being-certain, in which one maintains oneself in what resoluteness discloses. It gives itself the current factual Situation, and brings itself into that Situation" (BT 307, 355).

The situation is the action context in which I find myself because I open myself to its claims resolutely; that is, I open myself to them as that which I am called to take on in order to become who I am. And this situation is only available to the resolute individual who responsibly pursues the satisfaction of becoming a distinct and differentiated individual.

For the self who is alienated from this task – the fallen self who evades responsibility and cannot relate to his life as his own – "the Situation is essentially something that has been closed off" (BT 300, 346). The irresponsible self, according to Heidegger, "knows only the 'general situation', loses itself in those 'opportunities' which are closest to it, and pays Dasein's way by a reckoning up of 'accidents' which it uncovered sings back again, hidden and disguised. Because Dasein is essentially falling, its state of Being is such that it is in 'untruth'." (BT 222, 265).
fails to recognize, deems its own achievement, and passes off as such” (BT 300, 346-347). And this is because the irresponsible self cannot experience the situation as that which claims him in his uniqueness; he is alienated from the possibility of experiencing his existence as his own. Only when an individual takes responsibility for himself can he experience an action context as something that claims him as the particular individual that he is – as a moment in a life that belongs to him. There is no genuine pursuit of the form of life that would satisfy my striving that is not a resolute or responsible pursuit, for irresponsibility estranges me from the possibility of self-ownership and therefore rules out existential satisfaction. Thus, to be in the truth of my existence I must at once commit myself to pursuing the form of life that I take to be appropriate to who I am as a unique individual and I must do so transparently and responsibly. The truth of my existence is always a matter of who I take myself to be and how I pursue an existence that is congruent with that identity.

This striving is a kind of deep deliberation, an attempt to understand my being as a whole – an on-going, resolute and reflective self-examination of my own feeling or inner sense of who I want to be. In deep deliberation I am guided by a sense that the path chosen appears illuminated for me. This truth, then, is not anything that I can check regarding its adequacy to a certain state of affairs in the world but it is a commitment directed toward the future and a particular way of life. I commit myself to a way of life and it is the manner in which I make this commitment that constitutes its truth: “The how of the truth is precisely the truth” (CUP, 323). This is what Kierkegaard is getting at when he claims that an “objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness, is the truth, the highest truth there is for an existing person”
and it is what Heidegger intends when he claims that the “holding-for-true of resoluteness” is “the truth of existence” (*BT* 307, 355).

### 5.8 Fate

In § 74 of *Being and Time* Heidegger ties his discussion of resoluteness as the ‘truth of existence’ to the concept of fate: “Resoluteness implies handing oneself down by anticipation to the ‘there’ of the moment of vision; and this handing down we call ‘fate’” (*BT* 386, 438). Fate, then, is not handed to me by an external power but I hand it down to myself in a responsible decision to take up the particular form of life to which I feel called: “Fate does not first arise from the clashing together of events and circumstances. Even one who is irresolute gets driven about by these—more so than one who has chosen; and yet he can ‘have’ no fate” (*BT* 348, 436). Fate is tied to choice for Heidegger because only one who has resolved upon the commitments associated with who he wants to be can experience himself as having a fate that unifies him as an individual. Fate only makes sense in terms of what my life means to me – only if I am committed to a particular form of life can I experience my ‘fate’ as tragic or comic. I can only succeed or fail to be who I want to be, if I have already committed myself to an inner sense of who I am that I resolutely test against reality. Events that are not given meaning in terms of who I am are merely chance happenings. Without a definite and passionate commitment to who he wants to be, an individual can have no fate, for there is no real sense that he can succeed or fail to become who he is.

The form of life I passionately choose, then, is my ‘fate.’[^160] Taking on the task of responsibly striving towards my fate transforms and simplifies my life by giving it a

[^160]: These possibilities are drawn from one’s heritage – the socio-historical possibilities of one’s cultural milieu: “The resoluteness in which Dasein comes back to itself, discloses current factual possibilities of
defining purpose that serves as an organizing principle of what matters to me and eliminates more and more from my life those things that are irrelevant to this defining principle. What occurs is a kind of reduction – the meaning of my life is distilled to its essential elements and in action I strive to excise that which is irrelevant or inimical to that essence:

“Once one has grasped the finitude of one’s existence, it snatches one back form the endless multiplicity of possibilities which offer themselves as closest to one—those of comfortableness, shirking, and taking things lightly—and brings Dasein into the simplicity of its fate. This is how we designate Dasein’s primordial historizing, which lies in authentic resoluteness and in which Dasein hands itself down to itself; free for death, in a possibility which it has inherited and yet has chosen” (BT 384, 435).

When I commit myself to the truth of my existence – when I experience it as my fate – I embrace the commitments associated with that way of life and resolve to act in light of them. This simplifies my existence because I act only in light of those commitments and therefore, as much as possible, eliminate actions that are irrelevant to them.¹⁶¹

Heidegger claims that possibilities such as ‘comfortableness, shirking, and taking things lightly’ are eliminated not because existence is ‘all work’ once one embraces one’s fate. His point with these terms is to formally indicate the manner in which resoluteness eliminates the lingering mode of existence associated with being estranged from a sense authentic existing, and discloses them in terms of the heritage which that resoluteness, as thrown, takes over. In one’s coming back resolutely to one’s thrownness, there is hidden a handing down to oneself of the possibilities that have come down to one, but not necessarily as having come down” (BT 383, 435). These possibilities, however, are not taken up because they belong to that heritage; fate is not about cultural loyalty or the participation in the historical narrative of one’s ‘people.’ It is simply a fact that our possibilities come from our heritage; the only possibilities available to us are those that belong to our cultural milieu.¹⁶¹ Of course, I never do this perfectly. Heidegger points out continuously that fallenness, the evasion of responsibility, and so irresoluteness and untruth are constant features of human experience because of the structures endemic to human sociality that I discussed in the second chapter. Resoluteness, however, is an ideal that I pursue and the more closely I approach it, however asymptotically, the more my existence will be refined and simplified by my sense of purpose.

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of who one is, who one wants to be, and therefore what one wants and ought to be doing. Shirking, for example, if it is a regular feature of one’s behavior, suggests a kind of estrangement from one’s identity, an inability to take responsibility for one’s commitments and therefore an inability to relate to these commitments as one’s own.\textsuperscript{162}

Once I resolutely embrace the commitments associated with the form of life I want to pursue, however, this type of estrangement is minimized – I experience the tasks associated with my existence as my own, as appropriate to who I am and who I want to be, and I set myself to them in the pursuit and anticipation of the satisfaction of living a life that is appropriate to who I am.\textsuperscript{163}

\textsuperscript{162} We could think of Pippin’s example of the writer who does not write in these terms.

\textsuperscript{163} We must reject Heidegger’s concept of destiny as incompatible with his overall phenomenological enterprise: “But if fateful Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, exists essentially in Being-with Others, its historizing is a co-historizing and is determinative for it as destiny [Geschick]. This is how we designate the historizing of the community, of a people. Destiny is not something that puts itself together out of individual fates, any more than Being-with-one-another can be conceived as the occurring together of several Subjects. Our fates have already been guided in advance, in our Being with one another in the same world and in our resoluteness for definite possibilities” (BT 384, 436); “Resoluteness implies handing oneself down by anticipation to the ‘there’ of the moment of vision; and this handing down we call ‘fate’. This is also the ground for destiny, by which we understand Dasein’s historizing in Being-with Others. In repetition, fateful destiny can be disclosed explicitly as bound up with the heritage which has come down to us. By repetition, Dasein first has its own history made manifest. Historizing is itself grounded existentially in the fact that Dasein, as temporal, is open ecstatically; so too is the disclosedness which belongs to historizing, or rather so too is the way in which we make this disclosedness our own” (BT 386, 438). These reflections on the destiny of a people are incompatible with the overall tenor of Heidegger’s project. Resoluteness is a first-person affair that depends on taking responsibility for oneself and striving towards one’s ‘fate.’ It is a matter of being-true to one’s sense of who one is by binding oneself to one’s commitments. And these matters of responsibility cannot be extended to a community – there is no such thing as communal responsibility unless we accept an equivocation on the term responsibility. We can be ‘responsible’ because we are ‘guilty’ – because of the fact that our actions emanate form us as individuals – but there is no way to broaden these reflections into a ‘first-person we’ because, even if we act at the same time, we all act on our own. There is no way to demarcate the ‘sphere of ownness’ for a collectivity. It is a worthy project for a political community to strive to determine that for which it is responsible. But ‘collective responsibility’ is always an abstraction derived from the experience of individual responsibility, and there is no such thing as phenomenological access to something like the ‘first-person we’ coming face to face with the fact that it is ‘guilty.’ Something like this would require the unity of individual consciences in a collective conscience – something like a ‘mob soul’ – that could have an experience of that which emanates from its ‘mob freedom.’ The concept of collective responsibility, then, if it does not explicitly recognize that it deploys the term responsibility in a ‘creative’ way that is an abstraction from its originary meaning, rests on an equivocation. Responsibility cannot mean the same thing for a community that it does for an individual; rather, the project of understanding the former is carried out in light of but can never be reduced to the latter. The very idea of the ‘first-person we’ is, then, completely alien to the project of phenomenology and thus Heidegger’s tip of the hat to the notion in his discussion of ‘destiny’ should be

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There remains a very important question to be answered, it seems, before any responsible individual could take this account of human striving seriously: Are there any ethical constraints on this process whereby I pursue my fate? What if I feel called to a life that inflicts harm on, oppresses, or otherwise runs roughshod over the freedom of others? Can such a life be pursued authentically or resolutely? If there is an individual whose life history, capacities, affective dispositions, style of being-in-the-world, etc. seem to be suited to and call him to a life that compromises the freedom or well-being of others, is there any reason for us to expect that the kind of satisfaction I have been talking about would not be possible to achieve in a life that so violates the Other? Or will an individual who feels compelled to live a life that is toxic to the Other have to somehow ‘work on himself’ in order to experience existential satisfaction? In the next chapter I will argue that existential death and the claims of the world on the individual attest to certain ethical constraints on the process of ‘becoming who one is.’ They attest to the fact that a way of life that compromises the Other’s freedom somehow detracts from, covers over, and ‘brings ruin to’ the meaning of my own existence.

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taken as a momentary lapse in his otherwise inimitable phenomenological judgment. And it should be rejected as an anomaly.
Chapter 6

The Ethical Implications of Resoluteness

"What is the criterion for moral action? (1) its selflessness (2) its universal validity, etc. But that’s armchair moralizing. One must study the peoples of the world, and see what the criterion is in each case and what is expressed in it. A belief that ‘to behave like this is among the first conditions of our existence’. Immoral means ‘bringing ruin’."

—Nietzsche. Late Notebooks [my italics].

6.1 Introduction

It is a fairly well known ‘fact’ among scholars of Modern European Philosophy that Heidegger’s position in Being and Time affords us no resources to provide an account of the ground of ethics. Lévinas epitomizes this criticism in Totality and Infinity in which he claims that the fundamental question of philosophy for our time is one to which Heidegger’s philosophy provides a disappointing answer: “Everyone will readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality.” 164 According to Lévinas, much of Modern philosophy would have us believe that we are, in fact, duped by morality, and he locates the origin of this moral skepticism in Nietzsche, whose work he links to Heidegger’s position with the language of war 165:

“Does not lucidity, the mind’s openness upon the true, consist in catching sight of the permanent possibility of war? The state of war suspends morality; it divests the eternal institutions and obligations of their eternity and rescinds ad interim the unconditional imperatives...[We see that] being reveals itself as war to philosophical thought, that war does not only affect it as the most patent fact, but as the very patency, or the truth, of the real” (Levinas 1929, 21).

This Nietzschean brand of moral skepticism is, according to Lévinas, a product of philosophy’s prioritization of ontology over ethics – its failure to recognize that prior to

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165 The use of the language of polemos is a straightforward rhetorical association of Nietzsche with Heidegger, as both philosophers appropriate this term from Heraclitus.
our ‘care’ for our ‘being’ is an encounter with the Other’s transcendence.\textsuperscript{166} Philosophy’s failure to ‘get its priorities straight,’ Lévinas claims, can be seen as the origin of this moral skepticism, which maintains that, behind the smokescreen of all so-called justice, human social relations reduce to power relations – an ongoing and irremediable war of wills.\textsuperscript{167} According to this Nietzschean view of morality, which Lévinas associates with Heidegger’s ontology, the religious and political tradition has duped the ‘herds’ of humankind, convincing them to believe in ‘fictional’ properties – values – or illusions that conceal what is really going on under the surface of things – the “will to power.” Human interaction is nothing more than the struggle of each will against every other: “To will at all is the same thing as to will to become \textit{stronger}, to will to grow…” (Nietzsche, \textit{WP}, 675). The task of the ‘sovereign’ or ‘resolute’ individual, then, is to preserve and enhance his dominant will to power.\textsuperscript{168} And there are no \textit{real} ethical constraints on this task.

Reading Heidegger as an heir to Nietzsche, however, is rather one-sided, just as it is one-sided to confine Nietzsche to this traditional reading.\textsuperscript{169} In response to critiques of

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\textsuperscript{166} As Ricoeur expresses Lévinas’s point with respect to Heidegger, there “is no clearer way” to abolish “the primacy of ethics” than Heidegger’s suggestion that ‘being-guilty’ is the basis of morality and that, Heidegger, unfortunately, “does not show how one could travel the opposite path—from ontology toward ethics.” According to Ricoeur, “fundamental ontology refrains from making any pronouncements about the orientation of action….It is as though the philosopher were referring his reader to a moral situationism destined to fill the silence of an indeterminate call” (Ricoeur, Paul. \textit{Oneself as Another}. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. pp. 350-351).

\textsuperscript{167} In another article on ‘Hitlerism,’ Lévinas directly connects this approach with the possibility of the “the bloody barbarism of National Socialism,” again linking Heidegger’s ontology to the problem (Lévinas, Emmanuel. “Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlernism,” 28 March 1990;1934).


\textsuperscript{169} That is, it is one-sided to read Nietzsche as nothing but a skeptic undermining morality with metaethical arguments about the ‘base’ origins of our ‘lofty’ ideals. Pippin points this out in his \textit{Idealism as Modernism}, arguing that although the main thrust of his position is elitist and anti-universalist, there are passages in Nietzsche’s work that come “very close to associating the possibility of the master’s self-esteem, his ‘distinction’…with ‘recognition’ by the other” (Pippin, Robert. \textit{Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations}. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 347). Pippin quotes the following
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Heidegger’s alleged moral skepticism, philosophers such as Frederick Olafson, Steven Crowell, and Sonia Sikka, *inter alios*, have attempted to bring to light potential grounds for an ethics in *Being and Time*.

Here I will join this group with an attempt to redeem Heidegger’s claim that “being-guilty” is the “existential condition...for morality in general and for the possible forms which this may take factically” (*BT* 286, 332).

I will develop my argument as a response to the ‘decisionism critique’ of Heidegger’s practical philosophy. I have selected this critique for three reasons: 1) I take it to be the most powerful sustained ‘internal’ critique of Heidegger’s position, 2) its influence on contemporary Heidegger scholarship is considerable, and 3) to answer it one must provide evidence that there are *real* ethical constraints on resolute action, which means that this answer must be understood as a response by *modus tollens* to the critiques of figures such as Lévinas and Sartre as well. My response will focus on Ernst Tugendhat’s formulation of the decisionism critique, which I take to be its most compelling variant.

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passage from *On the Genealogy of Morals* in defense of this claim: “How much reverence has a noble man for his enemies! – and such reverence is a bridge to love. – For he desires his enemy for himself, as his mark of distinction; he can endure no other enemy than one in whom there is nothing to despise and very much to honor” (Ibid.). Pippin points out that this does not really go much further than suggesting the possibility of “social elite of mutually worthy antagonists” but it points to a tension in Nietzsche’s thinking on these matters.


That is, it criticizes Heidegger on the basis of a detailed interpretation of his basic concepts rather than rejecting his position as ‘immoralism’ on the basis of an interpretation of a particular section or a few de-contextualized passages torn from *Being and Time*. Although Tugendhat’s interpretation of resoluteness misses the mark, this unsuccessful part of his interpretation takes place within a broader analysis of Heidegger’s philosophy that is excellent and shows a deep appreciation of many of the important nuances and key concepts.

As discussed in the introduction, the decisionism critique is by now a commonplace of critical Heidegger scholarship. Some versions of it predate Tugendhat’s – for example, critical theorists such as Karl Löwith and Herbert Marcuse formed a first wave of Heidegger critics who decried *Being and Time* as the philosophical handmaiden to Nazi fascism (Marcuse, Herbert. “German Philosophy Between 1871 and
Tugendhat argues that Heidegger’s account of the self offers us no resources to identify any ethical constraints – material or formal – on practical deliberation: “If we understand by morality those norms that specify what is good or bad for me to do in light of a consideration of the interests of others,” Tugendhat claims, “such an understanding of morality is not to be found in Being and Time” (1986, 217). Instead, he contends, Heidegger sees such deliberation as an anarchic decision that makes no recourse to reasons. Since this decision is not based on reasons, the argument continues, it cannot be thought of as governed by any real standard or norm. Moreover, a decision that is not made with a view to some material criteria or in light of some standard cannot really be understood as a decision. It is a decision made for decision’s sake. Hence, Tugendhat dubs Heidegger’s position an empty ‘decisionism.’ There are certainly passages in Being and Time that, on the face of things, seem to support the claim that Heidegger endorses decisionism. For instance, in a passage we discussed in the last chapter from §60, Heidegger writes, “But on what basis does Dasein disclose itself in resoluteness? On what is it to resolve? Only the resolution itself can give the answer” (BT 298, 345). Passages like these do seem to endorse the kind of radical choice theory of deliberation associated with Sartre’s “Existentialism.” I shall argue, however, that the interpretation is ultimately wrong.

1933”, Herbert Marcuses: Heideggerian Marxism, edited by Wolin and Abromeit, 2004; Löwith, Karl. Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism; ed. Richard Wolin. Columbia University Press: 1995). There have also been significant formulations of the decisionism critique after Tugendhat. Pierre Bourdieu, Reiner Schürman, and Jürgen Habermas, to name only a few, develop their own strands of the argument (Bourdieu, Pierre. The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger. Stanford University Press: 1991. Habermas, Jürgen. The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990). Tugendhat is selected to represent the critique here not because he was the first to raise it or because his version is most widely read, but because, by my lights, it is more trenchant than those that preceded and succeeded it.
By continuing to investigate neo-Kantian – rather than neo-Nietzschean – dimensions of Heidegger’s thought, I shall argue, against the well known ‘fact’ mentioned in the first sentence of this introduction, that his position does, in fact, contain the elements necessary to provide the grounds for an ethics. To foreshadow my argument: I will argue that responsible action, according to the logic of Heidegger’s position, presupposes recognition of the fact that the self always already depends on the freedom of the Other to exercise its own freedom. Moreover, since responsibility is a criterion for experiencing satisfaction in one’s own life and recognizing the Other’s freedom is essential to responsibility, respecting the Other must be understood as a necessary condition for the possibility of existential satisfaction.

The stakes surrounding this issue are high: Heidegger’s philosophy either constitutes a farewell to morality a lá ‘Nietzsche’ or a resource to help us uncover its sources a lá Kant. Are we ‘duped by morality’, or, in Kant’s terms, is morality a ‘phantom of the brain,’\(^{173}\) or is it fundamental to the project of being a self? I make a case for the latter based on resources drawn from Heidegger’s position. With these resources I develop a position that shows, as Nietzsche puts it in the Late Notebooks, that immoral means ‘bringing ruin.’\(^ {174}\) But it does not mean this in terms of some historical-anthropological analysis regarding the use of morality as a social tool to control the vast


\(^{174}\) Heidegger never provided anything like a justification of morality or a straightforward attempt to account for something like moral motivation. His project of fundamental ontology was concerned with the phenomenological elucidation of the basic categories of existence. Thus, as Sikka points out, “If a moral philosophy is supposed to develop, and to justify, principle for human conduct, then providing such a philosophy falls outside the parameters of Heidegger’s project” (Sikka, Sonia. “Kantian Ethics in *Being and Time,*” *Journal of Philosophical Research,* Forthcoming). In other words, what I attempt in this chapter itself falls outside of the project envisioned in *Being and Time,* but it as an attempt to articulate claims that can be made on the basis of the analysis of the fundamental categories of human being. Much of this thesis is ‘constructive’ in this sense.
'herds' of humankind. Immoral, rather, means 'bringing ruin' because a life lived without real moral concern for others is not a life worth living.

6.2 Tugendhat's Critique

In *Self-Consciousness and Self-determination*, Tugendhat argues that when we deliberate about a future course of action, reflection gives us the ability and a motivating reason to "step back" from our current situation to consider the decision from a normative perspective. 175 This reflective capacity, he claims, *motivates* us to raise the fundamental questions of practical deliberation: "How should I or how do I want to live and be? What is the best possible way to live?" (171). This ability to distance ourselves from our impulses and current purposes allows us to formulate questions about future actions with a view to "What is good, better, [or] the best," (171) because it allows us to consider a variety of possible outcomes, which can be assessed as better or worse for our needs and purposes. Deliberation, then, always involves statements about what *should* be done. And these statements "predicate a character of preferability of a state of affairs;" they are "*objective* statements that raise a claim to be justified...Deliberation aims at an *objectively* justified choice" (212, my italics).

By Tugendhat’s lights, the moral deficit of *Being and Time* lies in Heidegger’s failure to account for this ‘objective’ ground of deliberation; and this failure, he continues, can be understood as a consequence of Heidegger’s concept of truth. In “*Heideggers Idee von Wahrheit,*” Tugendhat argues that Heidegger strips the concept of

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175 How does the mere capacity to distance myself from an impulse *motivate* me to do so? Further, how does it make choosing the ‘better’ option *normative* for me? Why make the ‘best’ choice rather than the most ‘expedient’? Why would the mere fact that something is better motivate me to leave my mediocre but comfortable condition? I will not go into the argument that self-consciousness cannot be understood as the source of the normative as Tugendhat suggests. Crowell makes this point cogently enough in his “*Sorge oder Selbstbewußtsein*? Heidegger and Korsgaard on the Sources of Normativity,” *European Journal of Philosophy.* 15:3, ISSN 0966-8372, pp. 315-333, 2007.
truth of its normative dimension by dropping the “in-itself” criterion of evidence. Initially, Tugendhat claims, Heidegger’s discussion of truth in § 44 of *Being and Time* seems to be a repetition of Husserl’s account in the *Sixth Logical Investigation*, which Heidegger footnotes in the passage where he writes, “To say that an assertion ‘is true’ signifies that it uncovers the entity as it is in itself” (*BT* 218, 261). But, Tugendhat continues, Heidegger cancels out this initial similarity by dropping the ‘in itself’ criterion from his formulation when he writes, “The Being-true (truth) of the assertion must be understood as Being-uncovering” (*BT* 218, 261). For Tugendhat, the “as it is in itself” must be preserved to speak of truth as a normative standard to which our statements can either succeed or fail to measure up. He grants the validity of the claim that for an assertion to accord with an entity the entity must show itself, and this means that propositional truth is grounded on unconcealment. But he claims that Heidegger does away with the ‘in itself’ criterion of evidence when he calls the background disclosure of the world, which makes propositional truth possible, truth itself. And this, he claims, leads to a serious problem with Heidegger’s concept of truth.

Propositional truth no longer has the normative force of a context-transcendent validity; there is no longer any sense to the notion of getting the thing right ‘as it is in itself.’ Instead, as I discussed in the last chapter, Heidegger seems to relativize all human practices, and, therefore, all statements made within those practices, to a given world-disclosure. And since all statements are relative to an historical context, no particular claim can be legitimately said to have a truth-value that is valid beyond any such context.
Statements do not disclose the thing "as it is in itself," rather, they show the thing as it is in a particular historically situated practice.\textsuperscript{176}

In \textit{Self-Consciousness and Self-Determination}, Tugendhat transposes this critique from the theoretical to the practical domain. He argues that because Heidegger relativizes the truth-value of all statements to particular historical contexts, he must maintain that all statements regarding what is ethically ‘good’ or morally ‘right’ are likewise historically and culturally relative: "The concept of the good also falls under the concept of truth, since all statements contain a truth claim (and this means a claim to justification); and sentences that say that something is good or better are statements" (Tugendhat 1986, 214).\textsuperscript{177} Because Heidegger fails to see truth as an objective matter about a subject-independent state of affairs, he cannot identify the objective basis of deliberation, which involves attending to the following: (1) my motives and intentions, (2) the factual

\textsuperscript{176} In Tugendhat's words, "any truth-assertion about inner worldly beings is relative to the historical horizon of our understanding." Tugendhat, Ernst. "Heidegger's Concept of Truth," in \textit{The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader}, ed. Wolin, Richard. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993, p. 237. This leads to another serious problem that is not exactly relevant to our primary concerns but is worth mentioning: If all truth-assertions about inner-worldly beings are relative to an historical horizon, "then the entire truth problem is now concentrated upon this horizon and the decisive question now has to be: in what manner can one inquire into the truth of this horizon, or is it not rather the case that the question of truth can no longer be applied to the horizon itself?" (237). Because Heidegger calls the horizon itself "truth", inquiring into the truth of this horizon takes on the non-sense structure of inquiring into the truth of a truth. As this seems impossible, and Heidegger offers no explanation of how it might be done, his position, according to Tugendhat, entails the "renunciation of the idea of critical consciousness" (238).

\textsuperscript{177} Numerous philosophers and intellectual historians in the tradition of critical theory follow Tugendhat's lead pursuing this line of criticism. See, for example, Richard Wolin's \textit{The Politics of Being: The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger}. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990. Much like Tugendhat, Wolin claims that Heidegger's concept of truth leaves the human agent without a genuine commitment to any material criteria in decision and action: "For when it is devoid of any and every normative orientation, 'decision' can only be \textit{blind} and \textit{uninformed}—ultimately, it becomes a leap into the void. Without any \textit{material criteria} for decision, it becomes impossible to distinguish an \textit{authentic} from an \textit{inauthentic} decision, \textit{responsible} from \textit{irresponsible} action—let alone on what grounds an individual would even prefer one course of action to another...But as a result, decision takes on an entirely arbitrary character; it becomes something particularistic and discrete, unnamable to evaluation according to more general, publicly accessible standards" (53). For Wolin, this inadequacy of Heidegger's position lies in "a deep-seated theoretical inability to distinguish between \textit{truth} and \textit{untruth}" (118). He argues that Heidegger rashly dismisses the idea of propositional truth and thus dismisses the "truth/untruth" dichotomy," with which he "rendered himself intellectually (and morally) defenseless against the 'absolute historical evil' of the twentieth century" (118).
assumptions implied by my intentions, (3) the normative assumptions regarding my obligations toward others, and (4) the evaluative assumptions regarding my own well-being (Tugendhat 1986, 215). 178

Once Tugendhat establishes Heidegger’s failure to account for these objective material criteria of deliberation, he argues that Heidegger also fails to indicate any standard that might prevent deliberation from being arbitrary and ethically vacuous:

“According to Heidegger, authentic choice is supposed to bring Dasein back from its lostness in the arbitrariness and contingency of the possibilities in which it actually finds itself. If this is to be the meaning of the choice, it requires a criterion or standard” (1986, 216). Tugendhat argues that the authentic self’s confrontation with its own death offers no such standard for making this choice, rather, the individual can look only to her “thrownness”, the given historical world, for these possibilities. And she must do so without recourse to anything like a standard for assessing her decision. Thus, according to Tugendhat, Heidegger’s argument moves in circles:

“On the one hand, the choice is supposed to free one from the contingency of possibilities in which one actually finds oneself; on the other hand, he refers the choice itself to historicity, to the possibilities in which one actually finds oneself. Since Heidegger envisages no justification for why one of several historically given possibilities is chosen instead of another, it is an irrational choice in the strict sense of the word” (1986, 217).

In other words, in addition to Heidegger’s failure to see the relevance of material criteria in everyday deliberation, he fails to provide any context-independent norm or standard to

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178 The second problem Tugendhat has with Heidegger’s theory of truth, which I describe in the footnote before the last, also leads to problems in the practical domain: if each world-disclosure is ‘the truth,’ we seem to be left with no criteria to adjudicate between such ‘truths.’ Forms of life, then, seem to be like ‘apples and oranges’ – they are incomparable ‘events’ of ‘being.’ But this is more of a problem for adjudicating moral disputes between different cultural ‘worlds,’ which is not a problem raised in this thesis. However, it is an important part of Tugendhat’s noteworthy and influential criticism of Heidegger’s position.
govern one's decision. And this means that there is no way to distinguish an authentic
decision from an inauthentic one.

I will offer a two-part defense of Heidegger's position against Tugendhat's
critique. The first part treats a matter of textual interpretation: Tugendhat's critique rests,
in part, on a misinterpretation of Heidegger's discussion of death in *Being and Time*. In
the second part I will show that a major assumption that Tugendhat's critique of
Heidegger depends on – his assumption regarding the continuity between factual
statements and normative statements about the good – rests on a misunderstanding of the
nature of normative statements. I shall then offer a Heideggerian account of the ground of
ethics.

6.3 Tugendhat's Misinterpretation of Death and Being-Towards-Death

Tugendhat's claim that Heidegger endorses an empty 'decisionism' is based, in
part, on two related fundamental interpretive errors. First, he takes the term death in a
narrative rather than an existential sense. Second, related to his narrative understanding of
death, he takes 'being-towards-death' to be an account of practical deliberation. The rest
proceeds from these two errors. If death refers to the fact that I will one day be a corpse,
and 'being-towards-death' refers to a moment of practical deliberation, then Division II
of *Being and Time* reads like an account of practical deliberation about the course of
one's life in the face of the inevitable fact of one's animal death. This interpretation,
then, turns Heidegger's account of the structure of human autonomy and the nature of the
self's confrontation with the fact responsibility into a heroic tale about making my
choices in light of – *and only in light of* – the fact that I will one day be a corpse.
If this is what one takes Heidegger to be up to, then, indeed, one ought to reject ‘self-choice’ and its nihilistic implications. After all, Heidegger would be saying that we choose who are going to be in a moment when the world completely fails to claim us – no family, loved ones, members of our community, etc. are relevant to the decision. Our only helpmeet in making this decision is the ‘call of conscience,’ and this call, if we do not grasp its formally indicative significance, says nothing to us – it “fails to give any...‘practical’ injunctions” and “discloses nothing...with which we can concern ourselves” (BT 294, 340-341). Based on Tugendhat’s two errors, then, Heidegger recommends that I choose ‘my life as a whole’ without any criteria other than the fact that I will one day be a corpse. This could be nothing but a nihilistic and blind irrationalism. I am supposed to choose my entire life – not on the basis of the ongoing two-sided process of reflection and action, which at once strives for constancy and humility, which I described in the last chapter – but on the basis of my inevitable animal death.

Can such a choice even be represented as a real possibility? Can we imagine what such a ‘deliberation’ would look like? The general idea is that in ‘being-towards-death’ I come to a crossroads in my life: in the face of the realization that I will one day die like an animal, I face the task of choosing who I will be. This much of the picture is intelligible. In fact, something like this really seems to happen to people. But can we imagine the rest of the picture? If I am to choose myself resolutely, I cannot choose on the basis of any considerations that count in favor of one direction or another. I cannot take any of my preferences, desires, capacities, or the people I love and care about into consideration when I make this choice. The resolute individual brackets such
considerations. The only thing I am allowed to base my decision on, according to Tugendhat’s interpretation of Heidegger, is, again, the inevitable fact of my animal death.

But in the absence of all other considerations, the fact that I will one day be a corpse could not possibly lead to a decision about my life as a whole. For deliberation to be a real possibility, there would have to be at least some consideration other than the fact that I will one day be a corpse at work, if I am to be inclined to choose one direction rather than another. If I had to choose between ‘true love’ and ‘my vocation,’ for instance, then perhaps my animal mortality could be understood as a relevant consideration that counts in favor of love. 179 But how am I supposed to be moved, what could possibly motivate me to act in the absence of any consideration other than my animal mortality? This, of course, is the point of Tugendhat’s critique: Heidegger, he claims, endorses a meaningless position that involves a decision for decision’s sake. But how could a philosopher like Tugendhat — not to mention philosophers like Löwith and Habermas — think that Heidegger’s otherwise considerable philosophical insight could fail him so utterly in these key analyses of Being and Time? 180

179 I say perhaps, of course, because my animal mortality does not, for example, necessarily point in the direction of choosing love over my vocation. Such a decision would always depend on how these things weigh with the individual making the decision. Moreover, there is little reason to think that bringing one’s animal mortality into the picture as a consideration really helps much when it comes to making major decisions. This consideration really only seems to have force when an individual is in Ilyich’s situation — you have X many months to live and then you will die. But even then, does animal death bear a univocal meaning and does it count in favor of a particular kind of life? If I am given a death sentence, should I finish my dissertation or go on a Bacchanalian spree? The fact of my animal death is not going to tell me what to do.

180 The answer seems to be National Socialism — the deep psychological scars of being betrayed by one’s teacher or intellectual hero. I have argued against the use of biography in textual analysis in a couple of my other footnotes, so perhaps I should not indulge in it here. But from a biographical or psychological point of view, it makes sense that Heidegger’s students would need some kind of justification for his inexplicable lack of political judgment and his apparent lack of character after his return to philosophy in 1953, when he failed to show any visible signs of remorse regarding his political associations. To be clear, I do not mean to suggest that Tugendhat’s critique of Heidegger’s position lacks merit. I only mean to suggest that this extreme formulation of Heidegger’s position, from a textual point of view, does not seem to be motivated. And there are many alternative ways to read these sections from Being and Time that Tugendhat and others should have considered rather than attributing this interpretation to Heidegger’s discussion of ‘being-
Fortunately, this is not Heidegger’s position. The concept of death in *Being and Time* is not narrative but existential. And the discussion of ‘being-towards-death’ is an account of the self’s confrontation with its own autonomy and its realization of the fact of responsibility. This experience, then, does not provide the opportunity to deliberate about my life course nor does it afford any immediate motives for such deliberation – for in it questions about making good or ethical decisions in a particular set of circumstances are simply not in play. It is a moment of insight into the *formal structure* of my autonomy; it merely brings me face to face with the fact of responsibility and makes me aware that being-responsible and being-irresponsible are possible ways to carry out my existence.

The choice to choose myself is a decision to take responsibility for myself – not only for the decisions I make but for the norms in light of which I make them – by choosing to ‘be-responsible.’ It is a choice to integrate the thrown and existential dimensions of my being – to have *integrity*. This choice, however, is not made in the moment of existential death, when all of the world’s claims are dead to me. Heidegger argues throughout *Being and Time* that action is contextually bound – without an everyday identity the self would have no content and therefore would be incapable of making a decision about its life. And by incapable I mean that such a decision would be *impossible*. This is why Heidegger calls ‘being-towards-death’ the ‘possibility of impossibility’ – it is a moment in which I cannot be, and being, for a self, means action and decision.

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towards-death’ in which one is called to make a choice that cannot be understood as a choice at all. The idea that Heidegger’s position might lack any moral standard to govern resoluteness, however, is a valid worry that is motivated by the text. But resoluteness, inasmuch as it is enacted by a decision, has to be understood as having some motivation, and, as I argued in the last chapter, our factual particularity is an excellent candidate to provide such motivation.
Thus, the choice to ‘be-responsible’ is made, as I argued in the last chapter, in the moment of my return to the world, and resolute striving towards a particular form of life is motivated by the factual claims that the world makes on me as a particular, idiosyncratically constituted individual and the insight furnished by existential death. These factual claims are reasons inasmuch as they are considerations that count in favor of choosing a particular kind of life. And the insight furnished by existential death regarding the relationship between responsibility and satisfaction is also a reason in light of which I make this choice — but it only serves as a motivating reason once I have made my return to the world.

This does away with the idea that Heidegger regards all reasons other than the fact of my animal death irrelevant to self-choice and rules out Tugendhat’s claim that Heidegger endorses a decision without any regard to relevant material criteria. It does not, however, do away with the problem regarding whether resolute striving is constrained by any kind of ethical norm, which means that Tugendhat’s criticism that there seems to be no standard in light of which the resolute individual chooses himself still needs to be answered. If the responsible mode of existence that Heidegger calls resoluteness does not involve such a norm, then, as Ricoeur puts it with his characteristic flare, it seems to be a strictly self-referential concept:

“What is termed authenticity...lacks any criterion of intelligibility: the authenticity speaks for itself and allows itself to be recognized as such by whomever is drawn into it. It is a self-referential term in the discourse of Being and Time. Its imprecision is unequalled, except for that striking other term of the Heideggerian vocabulary: resoluteness, a term singularly associated with ‘being ahead of oneself’ and which contains no determination, no preferential mark concerning any project of accomplishment whatsoever; conscience as a summons of the self to itself without any indication relative to good or evil, to what is permitted or forbidden, to obligation or interdiction. From start to finish, the
philosophical act, permeated with *angst*, emerges from nothingness and is dispersed in the shadows."\textsuperscript{181}

6.4 The Relevance of Truth to Practical Deliberation

Before I attempt to clarify the ethical norm that governs resolute self-choice and responsible action, we need to address another element of Tugendhat’s critique: the claim that Heidegger’s concept of truth makes it impossible for him to account for the objective ground of deliberation. This claim has been picked up by many of Heidegger’s critics, and in this section I want to challenge one of its basic presuppositions – the idea that normative rightness can somehow be assimilated to or grounded in factual truth.

Approaching the problem of ethics through the problem of truth is generally carried out by following one of three paths: One path leads to moral realism, the idea that there is a metaphysical order of ethical values that can be described by reason and about which we can make true statements. Moral realism often approaches the problem of the truth-value of moral judgments by attempting to find ways in which moral judgments mimic factual judgments. But the project of assimilating value discourse to factual discourse, as I will touch on below, leads to unmanageable difficulties, as there are significant asymmetries between the two forms of discourse. The second path declares that, since we can never attain the kind of certainty characteristic of scientific judgments or assertions about the “real physical world” in our moral judgments, we should give up the pretension that we can have the kind of certainty we reach in the sciences in the moral domain. The “queerness” of values, then, makes it impossible to make certain claims

\textsuperscript{181} Ricouer, Paul. Memory, History, Forgetting; Trans Kathleen Blamey & David Pellauer. The University of Chicago Press: 2004, p. 349. This passage from Ricouer marks a distinction between authenticity and resoluteness that is based on his narrative reading of *Being and Time*. I have treated the terms as more or less synonymous throughout the this thesis with the thought that authenticity emphasizes the issue of ‘ownership’ and resoluteness that of ‘resolve’ and ‘decision,’ and that these are facets of Heidegger’s overall account of responsibility to which both terms refer.
about them. As Mackie lays out this position, statements about value that purported to be true are always in ‘error,’ since the objects of such statements – values – do not admit of truth or falsity.\(^2\) The third path, the one taken by Tugendhat, operates on the hope that an appeal to the practical wisdom of experts or communicative consensus will shed light on the \textit{true good}. But there seems to be little reason to believe that intersubjective agreement about moral values will track or converge on anything like “the truth” about these matters. Furthermore, the claim that consensus \textit{should} govern our value judgments presupposes a principle of fairness – that all should be involved in determining our values – without offering a separate justification for the validity of that principle but rather assuming it is legitimate.\(^3\)

In developing a Heideggerian account of the ground of our moral practices, then, I will avoid all three of these paths by taking an approach that sidesteps the issue of truth altogether. In this way my position shares a certain affinity with practical reasoning

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\(^3\) I will briefly reconstruct Tugendhat’s approach here to indicate why it fails. According to Tugendhat, when we deliberate, because of the reflective nature of self-consciousness, we have reason to ask the question, ‘Which life is best?’ and because we are human, we ask this question with an orientation towards a vision of human well-being. But how do we get our bearings with respect to what, in fact, constitutes “the good life” or “human well-being”? Given the centrality of the notion of the “true good” in his critique of Heidegger, one might expect Tugendhat to offer a true account of the good life that squares with an objective account of human well-being. But he argues that such things are in principle unknowable and will forever be subject to dispute. Unable to offer an objective account of “the good life”, then, he takes a cue from Aristotle, who writes in the \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, “We call in others to aid us in deliberation on important questions, distrusting ourselves as not being equal to deciding” (1756 1112b1 – 10). Since we cannot know what the good life is, we must turn to those who are experts in the matter (Tugendhat 1986, 254). But, Tugendhat asks, how is it “to be decided which people understand the matter properly if there are no objective criteria”? (1986, 247). His answer is that experts are not just recognized as such – they are ‘experienced’ and they exhibit practical wisdom. Furthermore, they rely on \textit{reasons} to convince others that their views are correct. “Thus, good or better in this sense is what would be acknowledged as such by everyone once they have had the necessary experiences: The consensus… is not a consequence of objective criteria, but is itself the \textit{sole criterion}” (1986, 247). Invoking the notion of consensus, however, does not move Tugendhat’s position beyond relativism into the domain of genuinely objective statements about the good. The Aristotelian notion of the good life is only compelling if we have reason to believe that it rests on a \textit{true} account of human well-being. Otherwise, our only security rests in consensus and, unfortunately, evil men are often very good at generating consensus. Intersubjective agreement is no guarantor of normative rightness; it merely presupposes an idea of fairness – valuing the input of experts with regard to the good who represent a consensus view – without justifying why deliberation ought to be grounded in consensus in the first place.

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theories, which maintain that moral judgments cannot be governed by knowledge of some metaphysical order of values but rather are action-guiding ethical imperatives that emanate from the structure of practical agency as such. In this vein, I will argue that normative judgments about ethics admit of a certain kind of validity that is grounded in the constitution of the self. This move is warranted because the mere fact that normative statements about ethics share the assertoric structure of factual statements, a fact that Tugendhat trades on heavily in his critique of Heidegger (Tugendhat 1986, 214), is not a sufficient reason to assimilate the former to the latter. Nor do the asymmetries between scientific and normative discourse give us license to dismiss value-talk as non-sense. Values are not qualities of the natural world that is understood to be the object of factual discourse modeled on the natural sciences. ‘Nature’ is the correlate of an objectivizing attitude that is a refinement of the pretheoretical attitude of our everyday experience, which is the proper domain of values and claims to normative rightness. Values “exist” only in human life; they belong to the overarching context of meaning set up by human experience, in which the ‘objective world’ is one constituted sphere of meaning among many.

In Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action Habermas provides an exemplary account of an approach to moral philosophy that does not seek to place value in ‘nature’ but rather treats it as an autonomous sphere of validity. He argues that rather than attempting to show that moral statements have truth values in the way that factual statements do, we should “proceed on a weaker assumption, namely that normative claims to validity are analogous to truth claims.”\(^{184}\) To motivate this idea he highlights the asymmetries between normative and factual discourse, focusing on the fact that

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theoretical truth claims are meant to signify a certain state of affairs while the normative claims of practical reason pertain to "legitimately ordered social relations" (1990, 61).

That is,

"...orders of society, which we either conform to or deviate from, are not constituted independently of validity, as are the orders of nature, toward which we can assume an objectivating attitude. The social reality that we address in our regulative speech acts has by its very nature an intrinsic link to normative validity claims" (1990, 61).

Claims to rightness, then, have a certain kind of normative validity that cannot be framed in terms of the assertoric model of truth. When we make claims regarding ethically appropriate behavior towards others, we appeal to normative validity.

For example, to claim that slavery is wrong is to maintain that society should be ordered such that no one subordinates her freedom to another. Furthermore, it is to claim that – in light of a shared ideal of justice or fairness – we all should agree that slavery is impermissible. Factual claims, however, make no such appeal to normative validity. To claim that the carbon bonds of nanotubes make for strong structures says nothing about how these bonds ought to behave. Independently of how the world happens to be, there is no sense that we should all agree that carbon bonds in nanotubes ought to be strong.185 Nanostructures just are strong and they behave this way because of certain natural laws but not in light of them. Factual and normative discourses are asymmetrical and one cannot be assimilated to the other.

6.5 Grounding Ethics in Heidegger's Account of Conscience

185 Of course, if in some experimental context we find carbon bonds in a nanotube behaving abnormally we might say, "They shouldn't be doing that." But this simply means that they do not usually behave that way in a world ordered by the natural laws with which we are familiar. The issue this raises is whether we can get the experimental data to agree with the known laws or we have to come up with new laws to save the phenomena. But there is no sense that carbon bonds ought to behave a certain way independently of the way they actually behave, nor is there a sense that it is up to us to articulate what laws the universe ought to have independently of the laws it happens, as a matter of fact, to have.
The question we want to answer now is whether the choice to be responsible is governed by an ethical norm. "In other words," as Olafson frames the question, "in choosing authentically can we fail or go wrong in some sense that has ethical relevance or does resoluteness itself constitute the only warrant we can have for what we do?"¹⁸⁶ To show that the choice to be responsible involves an ethical norm in this sense, I contend, we must read Heidegger’s discussion of the call of conscience in light of his claim that Mitsein is an “existential constituent of Being-in-the-world” (*BT* 125, 163).

This is an unorthodox move. The orthodox approach argues that Mitsein can in no way be understood as relevant to the call; rather, the call represents a solipsistic moment in the otherwise anti-Cartesian project of *Being and Time*. This claim trades on strong interpretations of passages that emphasize the fact that the call comes from the self to itself: “the call undoubtedly does not come from someone else who is with me in the world. The call comes from me and yet from beyond me and over me” (*BT* 275, 320). Such passages make this approach seem fairly obvious. If the call comes only from me and not from someone in the world, how could it have anything to do with others? The patent transparency of this interpretation, however, is misleading. Many of Heidegger’s descriptions of the call point us in a different direction:

"The appeal to the Self in the they-self 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* 273, 318).

The call, then, does not appeal to the self in its everyday practical identity, nor does it appeal to itself as a solipsistic ego. Rather, the self appeals to itself as ‘Being-in-the-

world.’ And this means that the self calls to itself as a self that is ontologically characterized by *Mitsein*; it calls to itself as a social self whose being is always characterized by and only possible because it is a ‘being-with’ others.

*Mitsein* is an essential existential constituent of human existence because all human possibilities, all modes of *Existenz*, depend on their reference to others or an intersubjective reality for their intelligibility and being. For example, writing implies potential readers, manual work refers to those for whom the work is done, and even the ‘private’ activity of thinking involves the voices of others, imagined conversations, and those about whom or with whom one thinks. An authentic or resolute existence, though it is said to radically individuate the self, does not change this: "**Authentic being one’s self is not based on an exceptional state of the subject, a state detached from ‘the they,’ but is an existentiell modification of the they as an essential existential**" (*BT* 130, 168). In other words, even when I am my ownmost self I am still with others – “a bare subject without a world never ‘is’” (*BT* 116, 152). I am always already with the Other.

Even if we recognize Heidegger’s explicit claims regarding *Mitsein’s* status as an essential existential structure, however, what are we to do with passages where Heidegger seems to deny outright that others are in any way relevant to existential death? For instance,

"…death is the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there. If Dasein stands before itself as this possibility, it has been *fully* assigned to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. When it stands before itself in this way, *all its relations to any other Dasein have been undone*” (*BT* 250, 294, my italics).

The obvious interpretation of this passage is the following: If *all* of my relations to others are undone in this experience, then facing my autonomy in existential death clearly has
nothing to do with the Other. But the claim is not as antisocial as it seems. The dissolution of my worldly relations to others is, rather, a consequence of the collapse of my everyday identity in existential death: since my practical identity collapses in this experience, I am completely alienated from worldly meaning, and this includes ‘the others’ in their everyday worldly roles. This, however, does not necessarily mean that there is no place in the experience for the Other qua ‘being-in-the-world.’ In fact, that is precisely what I intend to argue – even in existential death the Other has a place that makes my own experience possible.

In the next section, I will offer five reasons based on the logic of Heidegger’s text that cut in favor of this ‘unorthodox’ social interpretation of the call. These considerations, I contend, indicate an ineliminably social dimension to the call, i.e., that the call can only be understood in relation to the Other. Moreover, this will show that there are certain ethical constraints built into the concept of responsibility that Heidegger articulates in *Being and Time*, and, ultimately, that being-responsible itself is governed by an ethical norm.

### 6.5.1 The Social Dimension of the Call

The first reason that the call can only be understood in relation to the Other is that it is significant. Although it is not delivered in any ‘linguistic’ form, the call bears a

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187 This claim raises the familiar worry that Heidegger’s theory of sociality is solipsistic or monadological. One example of this worry is Jean-Paul Sartre’s claim that because Dasein transcendentally constitutes the other it cannot have a concrete encounter with the other as an Other. Schatzki addresses this monadological worry in various guises in his “Early Heidegger on Sociality,” in *A Companion to Heidegger*. Dreyfus, Hubert and Wrathall, Mark A. eds. Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005. There he writes, “Sartre’s claim that Heidegger holds that Dasein transcendentally constitutes the other is correct if this is understood as meaning that it is on the basis of its understanding of type of being X, here Mtdasein, that Dasein is able to encounter a X entity, here another Dasein. But it is important to be clear about the sort of constitution at work. What Dasein is able to encounter on the basis of its understanding of Mtdasein is another Dasein as Dasein...This hardly nullifies true otherness. Indeed, it enables a Dasein to be understood precisely as an Other – as another Dasein” (237). I will use an argument with a similar structure against the claim that the position I develop here represents a form of egoism.
meaning, i.e., it points to the fact of responsibility. Since it is meaningful, the call can be understood or misunderstood, and the possibility of succeeding or failing to understand implies a shared norm that governs the meaning of what is understood.\textsuperscript{188} I do not mean to suggest that one must know what this norm is. Of course, the meaning and the norm that governs it can always be misunderstood. To be precise, then, the claim is that the simple fact that something bears a meaning — whether I in fact understand it or even if I am certain that I do not understand it — implies recognizing that one could in principle fail to understand it. And for failure to register as a possibility, at least a tacit recognition of a norm — whether I precisely grasp that norm or not — that could determine such failure must also be in place. In other words, recognizing the possibility of success or failure to understand implies an awareness of the fact there is something that would count as a valid understanding of what the call means, and this implies that some kind of norm is in place to measure such success or failure.

Moreover, if there must be a norm in place that distinguishes between success and failure to understand the call, then there must also be a difference between a valid and an invalid account of what it means. If it is possible to tell, in the sense of understand or discern, what the experience means, then it is possible that something would count as a valid account of the experience — that I could in principle tell someone what it means. And this indicates that the content of the experience must be understood as in principle sharable. The call, then, cannot be understood as meaningful unless what the call gives us to understand is in principle sharable. And if it must be understood as in principle

\textsuperscript{188} This is a simple claim: if there is no possibility of getting something right, then nothing like a standard is in place. If there is a possibility of getting something right, there must be standard in place.
sharable to be intelligible, then it has an intrinsically social dimension. Without sociality the call to responsibility could not bear a meaning.\textsuperscript{189}

The second reason that the call is intrinsically social, again, is related to the conditions of its intelligibility. If the call makes me aware of the \textit{fact} of responsibility, then, as I have suggested throughout, it must also make me aware of my choice between being-responsible and failing to be responsible. In other words, understanding that my being is characterized by this fact is equivalent to understanding myself as free to make this choice – the fact of responsibility is unintelligible without this choice. Thus, to understand the call, I have to understand myself as capable not only of making my own decisions but also autonomously choosing the standards in light of which I choose. The call, then, presents me with the option of taking an autonomous stance towards my existence. And the fact that I must understand myself as capable of taking a \textit{stance} to grasp the significance of the call indicates another social dimension of the experience,

\textsuperscript{189} This argument draws inspiration from Wittgenstein's private language argument: "But 'I impress it on myself' [that is, I impress upon my self that 'S' will be my name for this sensation] can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connection right in the future. But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we cannot talk about 'right'" (Wittgenstein, Ludwig. \textit{Philosophical Investigations}, sections 243 ff., pp.88ff). Meaningful language entails a standard of correctness in light of which one can succeed or fail at predicing meanings. In the case of the sensation 'S', I have no standard of correctness because S is something that I simply attribute to one momentary sensation, and in that moment or case of predication, I could not possibly be wrong. Since I cannot possibly be wrong, there is no standard of correctness in place, which means that I cannot meaningfully be said to be right either. One might object that I could specify the conditions under which I predicate 'S' of an experience, thereby creating a standard for future predications of 'S' for all experiences that satisfy these conditions. But as soon as such conditions are specified and a standard of predication is created, the terms for the predication of 'S' have a determinate set of conditions, and these are \textit{in principle} sharable. The impossibility of a private language does not mean that I keep things to myself – it means that I cannot create a language – a system of \textit{meaningful} terms – that in principle cannot be shared. An argument for the possibility of a private language – and private meaning – would have to indicate a way that conditions for predication can be set that are in principle incommunicable or could not be shared by others. But the ability to specify such conditions would require that someone else could understand the conditions being specified, which again would undermine the claim to privacy. Thus, I can predicate 'S' of an experience without there being any sense in which I can understand the predication as right or wrong or I can specify conditions of predicing 'S' on my own that are in principle shareable and therefore not truly private in the sense Wittgenstein intends. Drawing on the structure of the private language argument was motivated by Korsgaard's discussion of the argument in her \textit{Sources of Normativity}. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
since sociality is essential to the phenomenology of stance-taking.

To take a stance towards existence attests to the presence of one for whom, with whom, or against whom this stance is taken. It implies, at the very least, a possible community or confrontation. Taking a responsible stance towards my existence, then, only makes sense in light of the fact that there are others to whom my stance could be relevant. In the complete absence of others, who, like me, are capable of such activity, taking a stance would be unintelligible. What could it possibly mean to take a stance if there were no one for, with, or against whom to take it? In other words, stance-taking is a human possibility because human being is socially constituted. Since stance-taking is intrinsically social, and the notion of a stance must be operative to understand the call. Its presentation of the opportunity to take a responsible stance represents another one of its ineliminably social dimensions.

Moving on to more important considerations – with regard to the question of ethics – the third reason that the call must be understood as in some sense social is that it highlights my ownmost sphere of responsibility, i.e., it individuates me. Individuation is unintelligible in the absence of alterity. This applies to any individual thing. For an ordinary object to be understood as an individual unity unto itself, it has to show up against a backdrop from which it is distinct; a figure needs a background. Likewise, to differentiate myself is to differentiate myself from the world and others. Being an individual – whether I stand out against an undifferentiated mob or stand among a community of individuals – only makes sense if there are others from whom I am distinct. In other words, I can only be individuated in light of there being others present who are not me – ‘ownness’ is only intelligible in light of ‘otherness.’
The fourth reason the call must have a social dimension is that it presents me with the opportunity to be-responsible and one can only have a sense of what this possibility means in relation to some possible Other. This point is related to the second reason adduced for the social character of the call: if stance-taking is intrinsically social, then the stance of responsibility is so a fortiori. Responsibility is an intrinsically relational and therefore social concept. As Olafson points out, the concept of responsibility “normally involves both someone to whom one is responsible and something for which one is responsible” (1998, 52). I would go even further to claim that the concept of responsibility always involves this social dimension. Being-responsible, as we see in its original meaning as ‘correspondent,’190 might not always concretely involve offering the Other a response – for I might take responsibility for a project for which no one ever calls me to respond. But being-responsible always involves taking up a position (or stance) from which such a response is possible, if I were called upon to give one, and doing so only makes sense in light of the fact that some Other might call on me to give a response. To be responsible I must demarcate my own standpoint – my ownmost sphere – from which I can be a respondent; and it is that standpoint from which I am always ready and capable, in word or deed, to respond to the Other.

This readiness to respond to the Other is intrinsic to responsible action not only because I must define my own standpoint to be responsible; it also has to do with the fact that responsible action always involves a relation to or regard towards others. In other words, as death reveals, responsibility cannot be taken up in the self’s moment of dislocation from the world. As I have argued repeatedly, existential death only presents

me with the *option* between being-responsible and failing to do so, but the choice itself cannot be made in this condition. Rather, since death offers no starting points — no factual claims of the world — to make such a decision; the ‘moment of decision’ only occurs in one’s return to the world and all of its factual texture. The call, then, makes it transparent that responsible action is always action *in the world*, which means that it is always action in some worldly role that is inseparable from and bi-directionally constituted in relation to others. I cannot disclose myself in responsible action except in some particular role, and my ability to disclose myself in that role always depends on the Other; it depends not only on her recognizing me in that role but on her acting with me in the world in a way that enables my self-disclosure. I can only take up my possibilities in relation to others, and my self-disclosure, in turn, enables that of others. Being-responsible is only possible in the world and being-in-the-world is always a being-with others. I cannot *be* anything except in relation to others.

And this leads into my final point regarding the ineliminably social dimension of the call of care in existential death. Death reveals that when I am dislocated from the world, when I momentarily cannot be and my practical identity collapses — and this means I am without the Other whose being is inseparable from my own — I *am nothing*. Torn from the world, in the absence of others, my freedom is nothing but a sheer being-possible, a passive letting-go of everything. I am incapable of projection, reposed, and waiting to make my return to the world to be with the others who give my identity its substance and make my being-in-the-world possible. This is one of the implications of Heidegger’s claim that freedom “is only in the choice of one possibility” (*BT* 285, 331). This claim not only indicates that we must tolerate the limitations of projection to be free;
it also indicates that there is no real freedom outside of projecting oneself into a worldly possibility. And I can only project myself into a worldly possibility, again, because the Other makes that possible with her own self-disclosure and vice versa.

These arguments indicate that being-responsible, acting in light of the call that reveals the fact of responsibility, entails more than making my own decisions and choosing the standards in light of which I make those decisions. The call also indicates that the experience of the fact of responsibility and the act of being-responsible are only intelligible and possible because of the Other's freedom. Existential death, by taking me from the world and highlighting the fact that I am nothing in separation from it, reveals that the meaningful exercise of my freedom depends on the freedom of the Other and vice versa. In other words, the call reveals the mutual web of interdependence that action presupposes and the futility of life – the vacuum of nothingness that opens up – without it. And this means that living in light of the call by taking up responsible action entails acting in such a way that acknowledges and therefore embodies an awareness of the fact that the Other makes such action possible.

This last claim has to do with the fact that to be something successfully I cannot undermine the conditions of its possibility. This is not only a point about performative contradictions – by violating the freedom of the Other I performatively contradict my own action by violating the very thing that makes such a free act possible. This is certainly true, but the point runs a bit deeper when that which is contradicted is fundamental to sustaining and holding together the tissue of being that very thing. Schelling points to this same insight in his discussion of evil: "In evil there is that contradiction which devours and always negates itself, which just while striving to
become a creature destroys the nexus of creation and, in its ambition to be everything, falls into non-being."\textsuperscript{191} I will not make a foray into Schelling’s account of evil; I only mean to suggest that this point has relevance within the context of our current discussion. By undermining the conditions that make a mode of being possible, I destroy the conditions or the ‘nexus of creation’ that sustains that mode of being and therefore \textit{fail to be it} or ‘\textit{fall into non-being}.’ This is a fundamental point about integrity or oneness.

Consider the everyday project of being-a-guardian in this light. Implicit in our shared understanding of what it means to be a child’s guardian is a concern for the well-being of that child. In other words, embedded in the very sense of being-a-guardian is a concern that one’s child does not come in harm’s way, and \textit{a fortiori} there is a demand built into the meaning of being-a-guardian that one not harm one’s child. Therefore, a ‘guardian’ who physically or psychologically abuses his child undermines the conditions that make sense of his role as a guardian and thereby \textit{brings ruin to} or \textit{destroys} that very role. Qua guardian, he ‘falls into non-being.’ He is not just a bad guardian or a failed guardian but rather acts in such a way that he no longer \textit{is} a guardian at all – for he undermines the conditions that make being-a-guardian possible. And if we were to maintain that a guardian could abuse his child and still remain a guardian, then we would have to wonder if the term really means anything as a possibility. We might be able to claim that a guardian could do anything to his child and still remain a guardian, if we take the term in its legal sense. But the legal meaning is not something that one can be; it is

not a possibility but a label.

If we are to understand being-a-guardian as a possibility, we cannot hold that one can harm his child and still be a guardian, because if any form of treatment counts as being-a-guardian to one’s child, then being-a-guardian ceases to have a particular meaning.\(^{192}\) If a mode of being is to have a determinate sense, we cannot just allow any actions to count as instantiations of it. If we did, we could not say anything intelligible about the kinds of action that constitute taking part in it. And, I contend, we have to understand those actions that undermine the conditions for the possibility of that mode of being to be actions that actually remove us from the category of individuals who participate in it. Otherwise, one would be something and at the same time engaged in an activity that makes being it impossible; one would be a possibility that he was currently engaged in making impossible. Thus, a guardian who abuses his child falls into non-being as a guardian because he destroys the conditions that make the satisfaction of that task possible – such a person is not a guardian at all.\(^{193}\)

The same is true of being-responsible. I cannot undermine the very conditions of

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\(^{192}\) Consider the following example as an analogy: I can play soccer very poorly and still play soccer. However, when I pick the ball up with my hands and run towards the opponents’ goal, I can no longer claim that I am playing soccer in any meaningful sense. If we were to claim that running across the field with the ball in one’s hands is an instance of playing-soccer, the possibility would cease to have the meaning we associate with it. If any form of activity with a soccerball counts as soccer, then the possibility ceases to have a determinate meaning. Thus, if I act in such a way that I undermine the conditions for the possibility of a soccer match, I would ‘ruin’ the game and would undermine my ability to understand myself as playing soccer. This is not meant to be an example of moral failure. It is an analogy meant show that one brings a practice to ruin – or one ceases to engage in a practice – when one violates the conditions for its possibility.

\(^{193}\) I have chosen ‘guardian’ here to avoid the obvious complications regarding the biological ‘conditions’ of fatherhood. That is, even if I do a lousy job, we share a sense that I am my child’s father, technically speaking, in virtue of a genetic fact. This ‘shared sense,’ however, is a product of the fact that we share a ‘fallen,’ distorted view of ourselves due to the pervasive naturalism characteristic of contemporary Western cultures. If pushed, I would make the same argument regarding fatherhood. As I have argued throughout, genetic or natural ‘facts’ can never constitute my being. And I would contend that anyone who violates the conditions of guardianship as I articulate them here should not properly be considered a father. A father who violates the conditions of fatherhood does not deserve the title – he does not deserve a ‘Hallmark Greetings’ card on ‘Father’s Day’ – because he is not a father, since the self is not a ‘what’ but a ‘who’ and that who is defined in terms of its Existenz.
being-responsible and properly consider myself (or be) a responsible agent. I cannot fail to choose the standards in light of which I make my decisions and legitimately count myself responsible. Likewise, if I violate the freedom of the Other, whose freedom is a condition for the possibility of the project of responsibility, I cannot properly be counted as a member of the community of responsible agents. An agent who violates the freedom of the Other cannot be a responsible agent – such violation undermines one of the essential conditions for the possibility of such agency and thereby ‘ruins it.’ If such a violation undermines the possibility of being-responsible, and being-responsible, as I argued at the end of chapter three, is a condition for the possibility of being an integrated self (the unity of thrown-project), then the problem of integrity is even more acute in this case. For this implies that violating the freedom of the Other – thereby destroying a condition for the possibility of maintaining the integrity of the project of being-responsible – amounts to undoing the possibility of being an integrated self at all.\footnote{This account could be understood as an adjudication of the worry Lévinas raises regarding the priority of ethics to ontology. On this account the two are viewed as equiprimordial. The constitution of my being as a self is inseparable from respect for the Other’s freedom. In this sense, then, the ethical and the ontological are embedded in one another, and the effort to separate them into different moments, taking one to be more primordial than the other, is artificial.}

Thus, the issue of integrity is most ‘acute’ here because the most is at stake. If I violate a condition of being-a-student,\footnote{Clearly the violation in this example cannot be an ethical violation – that is, a violation of the Other’s freedom – for that would fall under the category of violating the integrity of my selfhood and not just my role of being-a-student.} then I lose that dimension of my self-understanding. But if I violate a condition of the very integrity of my selfhood, I lose my self.

If the call of conscience indicates that responsible action presupposes respect for the Other’s freedom, then, at the roots of human agency, one encounters the insight that one free being cannot treat another as a means to his own ends without undermining the conditions of being a responsible integrated self and thereby ‘bringing himself to ruin.’
Acts that undermine the Other’s freedom, as Kant argues of evil deeds in the *Religion*, are corrupt at their very root and therefore indicate a corruption in the agent himself.

In chapter four, I argued that I must always be willing to ‘take it back,’ i.e., to temper my commitments with humility, due to the objective and *normative* uncertainty of my commitments. In that chapter, however, I focused on objective uncertainty and only touched on why the normative uncertainty of my commitments also calls for humility. In that brief discussion, I claimed that there are situations in life that call me to take my commitment back because it cannot be sustained without compromising the freedom of the Other, which such commitment depends on for its very sense and being. The argument of this section has been an attempt to elaborate and make good on this claim. To be responsible I cannot undermine the conditions that make responsibility possible and one of these conditions is the Other’s freedom. Thus, to be resolute, I must be willing to take back any commitments to actions that would undermine or disrespect the Other’s freedom, because responsible action is impossible without an interdiction against such disrespect.

What remains to be answered, however, is the question of moral motivation. What motivates a concern for these constraints in the life of the self? In other words, even if I cannot be responsible without attending to an ethical norm that places constraints on my action, what *motivates* actually comporting myself towards the Other in a way that is governed by this norm? What gives me a reason to act in light of the fact that my care for myself is inseparable from a concern for the Other?

**6.6 Moral Motivation**

In light of this argument, how are we to account for moral motivation? The answer
has already been explored in chapter five but it needs to be reconsidered in light of the argument from § 6.5. I will not go into much detail rehearsing the argument from chapter five, but will only offer a brief reconstruction before synthesizing it with the claim that an ethical regard for the Other is a criterion of responsible action.

In existential death I come face to face with the possibility of carrying out my life responsibly or irresponsibly, but I do not make a decision to carry my life out in one of these modalities in this experience. Making this decision, rather, marks the moment when I ‘recover’ from death and return to my everyday existence. In this return I find once again that the world claims me in my factual particularity. These factual claims motivate me to direct my striving towards a particular form of life that will satisfy my idiosyncratic sense of who I am and want to be. And the insight from existential death motivates me to take up this striving towards meaning responsibly – or in a mode of self-ownership – because only a life lived responsibly can be experienced as my own. If I do not carry out my existence responsibly, I hold it at a distance, experiencing it as some ‘one’s’ life rather than my own, and I cannot take satisfaction in that which is not mine. Since the unique factual style of my ‘drive’ towards meaning demands satisfaction, and such satisfaction can only be won in a life experienced as my own, i.e. a life carried out responsibly, this desire for satisfaction motivates me to take up my existence responsibly.

Moral motivation takes its place this structure. The argument from the preceding section indicates that respecting the Other’s freedom is an essential criterion of responsible action – it is a condition for the possibility of such action. Furthermore, if an ethical regard towards the Other is an essential aspect of responsible action, and only responsible action can lead to existential satisfaction, then such satisfaction is impossible
in a life lived without moral concern for the Other. In other words, the relationship between ownership (responsibility) and satisfaction serves as an essential consideration that counts in favor of – and therefore motivates – responsible striving. And to fully appropriate or live in light of this consideration, we now see, I must satisfy three criteria: I must make my own decisions, choose the standards in light of which I make those decisions, and my decisions and actions must be measured by a respect for the Other’s freedom. Failing to meet any of these criteria marks a failure to be responsible, and such failure can only result in dissatisfaction. The considerations that count in favor of a responsible existence, then, include an ethical moment. An ethical regard for the Other is an essential component of leading a satisfying life.

It is important to note here, as we did in the last chapter, that the motivation to take responsibility – and to take up the ethical constraints that responsibility entails – is only effective when the factual claims of the world and the insight furnished by existential death work in concert. If I was not motivated by the world towards a particular form of life, and claimed by particular individuals who concretely represent the freedom upon which my own freedom depends, I would not be motivated to take up responsibility on the basis of the experience of the call. Once these claims are in place, however, the insight regarding the relationship between responsibility, which we now see entails an ethical moment, and satisfaction serves as a motivating reason or an active consideration that counts in favor of responsible striving.

Conscience, then, renders clear that only a responsible stance – a stance that respects the Other’s freedom – towards my existence will allow me to experience my life as my own. But this clarity only serves as a motivating reason when it is coupled with a
desire for satisfaction in a world where a certain form of life seems to call me out of myself, and certain others motivate me to become who I am as friends, workers, competitors, lovers, etc. The world and others initiate my striving and the insight of death and conscience counts as a consideration in favor of taking responsibility for myself, which entails comporting myself towards the Other with a respect for her freedom.

6.7 Hypothetical Egoism?

There are a number of good reasons to object to this account of moral motivation. What I take to be the most serious objections could be summed up in the claim that it seems to constitute a 'hypothetical egoism.' Moral motivation on this view seems to be hypothetical in the sense that my decision to be responsible hinges on my own desire for existential satisfaction. In other words, the claim that ethical action is motivated by the unique way in which the world claims me and the consideration that only a responsible existence can lead to satisfaction seems to imply a hypothetical imperative: If I want my striving to meet with satisfaction, then I ought to respect the Other's freedom, i.e. I ought to lead a moral life. The moral demand, then, does not seem to be categorical but rather contingent on my own desire for satisfaction.

Furthermore, the position seems to wear the stamp of egoism because my existential satisfaction plays a role in my decision to take up ethical action. Moral motivation, then, is not a matter of intuiting a subject-independent (or self-transcendent) truth or receiving a command from an absolutely transcendent Other but rather has its source in a striving at the roots of my own being that is set off by the way the world claims me. And the fact that only a responsible life can lead to satisfaction is always in the background as a consideration that counts in favor of a moral life. Does this not have the bitter taste of
egoism? Does it not treat the imperative to respect others as an issue regarding my own satisfaction and integrity? Does it not, then, miss the fact that our moral life is about de-centering ourselves and putting the Other at the heart of our concerns, rather than regarding life as a quest for one’s own satisfaction? If so, can it be anything but a distortion of the moral impulse?

We shall begin with the more damning charge of egoism before we treat the objection that the argument has a hypothetical structure at the end of this section. We should begin by emphasizing that the claims of the world that motivate my responsible striving towards a particular form of life do not just come from worldly things and practices but also always necessarily entail claims that particular individuals make on me. I do not just feel called to marry but I feel called to marry this particular woman. I am not simply called to teach but I am motivated to teach responsibly by the students who make up my class. In other words, I am always called to do something for or with some Other – my responsible striving towards a form of life is always a response to particular individuals in the world who call me to friendship, love, service, competition, etc. Thus, my desire for satisfaction is motivated in many different ways by the Other. This makes it clear that what sets off my striving towards the world is in many cases the Other, but it does not constitute a response to the charge of egoism. Even if I am claimed by the Other, a moral life is still taken up in light of the fact that only a responsible existence can lead to existential satisfaction. Does this amount to a form of egoism though? It certainly does not constitute the most morally repugnant strand: the claim that human action is in each case motivated by self-interest.

I will begin to make this clear by expanding an argument from one of my notes in
chapter five. In § 5.3, I argued that one always experiences satisfaction in existence through one’s own possibilities, because taking satisfaction is only appropriate with regard to those things for which one can properly take credit. For instance, I claimed that I could not take satisfaction in my daughter’s achievements, since taking satisfaction in them would represent an illegitimate appropriation of her deeds. When I experience satisfaction in relation to my daughter’s success, then, it must be understood in terms of my role as her parent. I must maintain an appropriate distance from her success in order not to identify myself with it. For such identification leaves no room for her to recognize herself as the subject of her own deeds. I can enjoy and value her success and happiness but satisfaction in what she does is only appropriate through a return to my own understanding of myself as having been-a-good-father. To concretize the point: if my daughter is an excellent pianist, I can be satisfied in having provided the means and appropriate encouragement for the development of her skills, but those skills are hers and not mine to take satisfaction in.

But, as I argued in the note in § 5.3, this does not indicate that I do not care about my daughter herself but only my role in relation to her—far from it. The point was only to indicate that it would be an inappropriate usurpation of her deeds if I were to take satisfaction in them, because satisfaction must always point to something for which I am responsible. But, to emphasize the crucial point, my care is not limited to those roles or

196 Of course, I can take pride in my daughter’s deeds. Pride in my child is always pride in my child, but it is not for this reason an unethical or morally inappropriate sentiment. As long as I recognize that the aspect of her being that I am proud of is hers and not mine, and that I bear a special relationship to this aspect of her being because she is my child in virtue of my role of being-a-father, there is nothing particularly problematic about being proud of her deeds. The real problem or moral failure emerges when parents usurp the deeds of their children as if they belong to the parent, i.e., the child and her deeds show up as an extension or appendage of the parent’s own being. Incidentally, this kind of usurpation is possible precisely because of the inseparability of my valuing the Other and the dimension of my being that opens me up to valuing her. When the latter is experienced as ‘all there is’ to the relationship, the Other is not valued in her distinctness but as an appendage of my self.
possibilities for which I am responsible; rather, my care for my possibilities opens me up to caring for the entities and others relevant to those possibilities. My possibility of being-a-father gives me access to caring about my daughter in the way that I do; and the fact that I can only access her in a caring way through my own mode of self-understanding does nothing to diminish the fact that I care about her. She herself, her well-being and her development, etc., matter to me in themselves because the role I take up in relation to her opens and disposes me to caring for her in a very particular way.

There is an analogous structure at work in being a responsible practical agent. Just as being-a-father opens and disposes me to caring for my daughter herself in a particular way, being-responsible opens and disposes me to caring for the Other in a particular way, i.e. it opens me to her as an Other and disposes me to respect her freedom. In other words, I have access to other people through the first-person perspective of my practical agency – that is simply a fact of life in the sense that no other perspective is available to me. If something is going to matter to me, it will do so from that perspective and not from some artificial or imagined ‘view from nowhere.’ If, however, we look closely at this fact, it is clear that although my perspective is inescapable, it does not prevent me from regarding others as mattering in-themselves even if they always only matter in-themselves ‘to me.’

Being-responsible gives me access to another individual as an Other, as an agent upon whose freedom my own freedom depends, and it thereby gives me access to the project of concerning myself with the value of her freedom. In the project of being-responsible, then, I must treat the Other as an end in herself and never as a means to my ends, or the project fails, because respecting her entails recognizing that her freedom, due
to our mutual interdependence, is equivalent to mine. And treating her as an end in herself means promoting — or at least abstaining from interfering with — the projects associated with her freedom because that freedom, like my own, matters to me as an end in itself in light of my understanding of myself as a responsible agent. Being-responsible gives me access to the Other as a self-transcendent value, as an end in herself.¹⁹⁷

Clearly, this does not imply the morally repugnant strand of egoism. If I must always respect the Other’s freedom and treat her as an end in herself in order to experience existential satisfaction, then it is not the case that my actions are in each case motivated by self-interest. It does not rule out acting on self-interest as such; but it does rule out acting on self-interest in cases when doing so would compromise the Other’s freedom. And this means it rules out acting on self-interest independently of any reflection regarding whether that interest is at odds with my commitment to respecting the Other’s freedom. In other words, the ethical regard towards the Other always comes before egotistical self-interest. Unless one is extraordinarily lucky, then, which is not in principle impossible, one cannot, on this view, in each case act in a way that is motivated by self-interest. To live in light of the ethical norm that governs responsible action one will, no doubt, on many occasions be called upon to sacrifice one’s own self-interest in order to respect the Other’s freedom and to treat her as an end in herself. If the nasty strand of egoism is ruled out, then the issue seems to become a worry about whether it is morally wrong for my overall satisfaction in life to be a consideration that counts in favor

¹⁹⁷ Although this fact about human existence does not need to be construed as morally problematic, it could also be used to explain certain moral failures and personality disorders. That is, it could account for them as a failure to understand that the simple fact that I only have access to others from the perspective in terms of which they matter to me does not imply that others only matter in these terms and not in themselves. Pathological Narcissism, for instance, could be interpreted as a failure to recognize that the first-person perspective gives us access to actually caring about others in themselves and not just the relative value of others in terms of our own perspective. My point here is that this structure affords us the resources to understand not only how moral behavior works when it works but also why it fails when it fails.
of treating others as ends in themselves. It is the self-mortifying worry that action done in
light of a consideration regarding my own satisfaction cannot possibly count as moral
action. But does the fact that my own satisfaction coincides with an ethical life morally
problematic? Is it proper to call this egoism?

Perhaps we should consider the problem from another angle. I have already argued
that the mere fact that I open myself to the Other in terms of my own projects does not
prevent me from caring for her as an end in herself and I have claimed that many of my
motives to be responsible – the factual claims of the world – come from the Other.
Furthermore, although I choose to live a responsible life in light of the fact that only such
a life can be satisfying, built into my own need for a satisfying existence – a need that
cannot be satisfied unless it is taken up responsibly by an integrated self – is the
requirement of treating others with respect. Self-ownership, integrity, making my own
decisions, choosing the standards in light of which I choose, and an interdiction against
violating the freedom of the Other are all interwoven in the project of responsible
striving. An individual cannot hope to attain existential satisfaction when any of these
things are lacking in his life. Thus, I cannot experience satisfaction in my own life
without caring for the Other's freedom. Instead of egoism, then, this position implies that
there is no ego without the alter, no Existenz without the Other. Care for oneself and care
for the Other are inseparable; they cannot be pursued as discrete independent goals.
Without those who love me and those I love, those who care for me and those I care for,
my life is destitute.

The Other provides a place for me to be, and I respond in kind. I have access to the
Other, and the Other can count on me only in virtue of the fact that I am free: “only
because Dasein as such, as free, applies itself for itself, is Dasein essentially such that in each case it factically stands before the choice of how it should...apply itself for others and for itself" (MFL, 196). But, at the same time, my freedom is only of value to me because others make it possible for me to be someone in particular. I live from the world—my loves and passions dwell in it. But I am only able to live from the world in this sense because I share it with the Other. My existence is utterly dependent on the others with whom I share my life; without them the meaningful exercise of my own freedom is not possible. In light of the fact that my own satisfaction is inextricably tied up with respecting the Other’s freedom, it seems to make little sense to regard this position as a form of egoism.

We can now return to the issue of the argument’s hypothetical structure. Ethical action is taken up in light of the fact that only responsible striving can lead to a satisfying existence. Thus, moral motivation is hypothetical: if I desire existential satisfaction, I must treat the Other with respect. I see no definitive way around this objection. Thus, although I reject the attribution of the term ‘egoism’, I accept the designation of ‘hypothetical’ with certain reservations. That is, although I cannot fully deny the hypothetical structure of the argument, it strikes me as artificial to understand the human desire for satisfaction as something instrumental or hypothetical.

As I argued in chapter five, the striving towards a particular form of life that one experiences as one’s own is not experienced as something that one needs ‘only incidentally.’ The clearest indication of this is that the result of failing to strive responsibly towards this particular meaning is dissatisfaction and, at its extreme, death. In other words, the motivation towards responsible striving is a real force in human life—
it is not a project to take up or put down on a whim – and when we fail to respond to it, it makes itself known. This striving demands satisfaction and thus it demands that I be responsible and treat the Other with respect. It seems wrong to refer to such things as ‘hypothetical’; strictly speaking, however, there is a hypothetical structure at work in the argument.

6.8 How to Respect the Other in Everyday Life

“...to experience one human being as unique means to love him.”
—Victor Frankl, The Doctor and the Soul

If my argument in § 6.5 succeeds at showing that respect for the Other’s freedom is an essential ingredient to being-responsible – since there is a certain overlap between responsible and ethical action\(^{198}\) – then we can assume that there are acts that obviously cannot be taken up responsibly. If being-responsible presupposes a regard for the Other’s freedom, it is fairly uncontroversial that certain acts can be ruled out of the category of deeds that belong to a responsible moral life, e.g. rape, murder, genocide, theft, fraud,

\(^{198}\) What is the precise nature of the overlap between responsible and ethical action? Being-responsible presupposes an ethical constraint on my action and, thus, all ethical action can be considered responsible. In other words, my action cannot be responsible and unethical. It might be possible, however, to carry out responsible actions that are morally neutral. Furthermore, not all irresponsible actions are unethical – for irresponsible deeds can also be morally neutral. All evil deeds, however, must be considered irresponsible. To be clear, however, the fact that all evil deeds are considered irresponsible by no means suggests that the agent who carries them out is not responsible for them. An evil deed must, on this view, be considered an irresponsible deed. However, the fact of responsibility makes it such that all deeds that emanate from my freedom are imputable to me; thus, I am responsible – in the sense that I am ‘guilty’ – for my evil deeds. Such deeds, however, always represent a failure on my part to be responsible. But another troublesome question still lurks here: Can we really say that all ethical deeds are responsible and all unethical deeds are irresponsible? My answer to this question is affirmative. If my actions are not carried out responsibly, even if they appear ‘ethical’ from the outside, if they do not flow from my consideration for the Other, their ‘ethical’ quality is simply a matter of appearance and sheer contingency. They just happen to have an ‘ethical’ flavor from the third-person perspective. Similarly, when my deeds lead to some unforeseen ‘evil’ even when I responsibly maintained my regard for the Other’s freedom, then the ‘evil’ result must be considered contingent and should not be taken as a reflection of my character. What about cases of neglect or practical myopia? Such cases, I contend, would have to be analyzed on a case-to-case basis and cannot be part of this limited taxonomy of deeds.
pedophilia,\textsuperscript{199} physical coercion not done in self-defense or in defense of the innocent, etc. Based on the foregoing argument, then, there is an unproblematic interdiction against crimes that constitute a patent disrespect of the Other’s freedom.\textsuperscript{200} Thus, I do not wish to articulate a ‘decision procedure’ or a formal moral criterion here; rather, I understand such procedures as attempts to justify a claim that one \textit{should} not run roughshod over the freedom of others, which is what I attempt to justify with my account of the necessary conditions of responsible action.

The final moral issue I would like to address is how the demand to respect the Other’s freedom is carried out in everyday existence with regard to those with whom we share our lives. This issue, I contend, presents ethical considerations that are more fraught

\textsuperscript{199} Are children a problem for this view? That is, does the claim that the meaningful exercise of my own freedom depends on the freedom of the Other not leave children out of the equation? Children certainly cannot be responsible on my view. I do not have any empirical data regarding the precise age at which human beings develop the ability to choose the standards in light of which they make their decisions. It is clear, however, that very young children are incapable of making such a choice and therefore cannot be considered responsible. This, in part, accounts for the fact that Heidegger does not count children among those beings picked out by the term ‘Dasein.’ It seems to me, however, that this does not imply that children lack any kind of freedom whatsoever. Children can be coerced – and they can cry out and resist coercion – and this seems to attest to something like freedom, however inchoate and undeveloped. Furthermore, the freedom of children, however limited its range may be, plays a major role in the bidirectional constitution discussed above. A child makes it possible for me to be a father. And I do not mean this in a strictly biological sense – with the active presentation of its needs a child makes being-a-father a possibility for me. Thus, a certain inseparability holds between the child’s freedom, however limited his or her free anxious striving may be, and my freedom. Thus, \textit{prima facie}, at least, my position seems to entail an interdiction against acts like pedophilia and other physically and psychologically abusive acts against very young human beings who, as Heidegger puts it, are ‘poor in world.’ If the interdiction cannot be justified in this direction, then perhaps acts like pedophilia can be ruled out because of the kind of psychological and moral ruin they bring upon the perpetrator. But it seems more appropriate that the primary interdiction would go in the other direction, even if the perpetrator does considerable damage to \textit{himself} and the act can properly be understood as self-destructive in addition to being Other-destructive. Self-destruction is another category of action that I could not go into in this short chapter. But it certainly undermines the conditions for responsible action: my own freedom is a condition for the possibility of responsible action and so cannot be undermined without making responsible action impossible. Self-destruction, then, cannot be part of a life lived responsibly.

\textsuperscript{200} The reader might disapprove of my decision to ‘slide over’ these issues so quickly, but a complete treatment of significant moral concerns is by no means possible here. The goal of this chapter is modest: I only hope to show that Heidegger’s account of the self and responsible action is not morally vacuous but rather affords us resources to account for certain ethical constraints on human action. My discussion of how these constraints fit into human life, then, must necessarily be brief and incomplete, as the goal is only to show that my responsible striving towards meaning \textit{must} entail ethical concern for the Other.
with uncertainty than the interdictions against the great violations of human freedom mentioned above. For the most part, the struggle of our moral lives consists in finding a way to live with the Other that respects her freedom. What we need, then, is not a decision procedure for discrete moments of choice but rather an account of a way to be with the Other that strives not to compromise her freedom. How am I to live ethically with the significant others whose presence constitutes the greatest part of the fabric of my life?

With these questions the significance of each individual’s particularity comes to the fore as a fundamental ethical consideration. In cases of patent disrespect of the Other’s freedom, the individual’s particularity is not usually a relevant consideration. One need not pause to consider how the Other understands herself in the world to know that there is an interdiction against murdering her. These blatant violations of the Other are often considered the subject of moral philosophy, because they are the actions that cannot be done to any other human being under any circumstances simply because she is a human being. They are categorical in the sense that they make no recourse to anything specific about the Other. And because of this, these acts, rightly, have a certain pride of place among our moral concerns.

Given my attention in the last chapter, however, to the significance of the satisfaction of the individual’s factual striving to become who he is, I would like to close by discussing what our reflections on the ethical constraints built into responsible action imply when it comes to dealing with the Other in her concrete factual particularity. After all, as I suggested above, although ‘categorical’ claims take pride of place among our moral concerns, in my everyday life, like that of any other average person, what is
primarily of concern for me is not whether I should murder my neighbor or brutally maim my colleague. The real challenge of my moral life, rather, is the question regarding how I can best respect the free anxious striving embodied in the unique individual – or the unique individuals – with whom I share my life. In this last section, then, I shall endeavor to synthesize the moral considerations of this chapter with the discussion of ‘becoming who one is’ in chapter six into a vision of how one can live ethically with the Other by striving to facilitate – and not to interfere with – her project of becoming who she is. This ‘vision,’ however, will only be a snapshot, as I do not have the space to develop a full account of these matters here.

In everyday life we regularly confront situations in which it is unclear how we ought to act in order to adequately respect the freedom and alterity of those we love and care for.\textsuperscript{201} It is a struggle in itself to strive to become who one is. Life poses challenges to our striving and our own mistakes lead to setbacks that force us to revise and rectify our sense of who we are and who we want to become. But when this already difficult task is coupled with the Other’s struggle to become who she is, or, even more difficult, when a number of ‘fates’ must co-exist together in a small community of individuals, matters become more complicated. How do I respect the freedom of the Other I live with and how can I facilitate her project of becoming who she is without compromising my own?

\footnote{To offer a quick fictional scenario in which respect is at issue and the matter of what one ought to do is not transparent: My wife wants to move to New York to study psychoanalysis but I have a tenure track position in philosophy in New Mexico. We have a two-year old daughter to care for. Moving to New York would substantially lower our standard of living, her studies would sink us into debt, and the move might jeopardize my career. And yet in New Mexico she feels like she is ‘dying’ and she ‘can’t take it anymore.’ Our marriage is beginning to pull at the seams and I’m beginning to contemplate the psychological impact of divorce on a two-year old, imagining flying her back and forth between New Mexico and New York. I love my job. But I want my wife to be happy, etc. How are we going to make this decision in a way that those involved can become who they are and not have that project killed by the relationship, while at the same time preserving the relationship? Turning to a decision procedure in such cases does not strike me as helpful.}
As I said, I will only offer a snapshot of the kind of resolute commitment to the Other that is required to live with her in a way that respects her ‘fate’ as I respect my own.

If the aim of my own responsible striving is the resolute holding fast to the project of realizing my unique distinctness and appropriating what I take to be my ‘fate,’ then, when my own project of becoming who I am is linked with the ‘fate’ of another individual, respecting her must be a matter respecting her right to become who she is – to strive to realize a life that is uniquely satisfying to her. In other words, if the self’s task is to realize a satisfying life, then living with the Other in a way that embodies respect for her freedom must entail a commitment to facilitating a space that will allow her to pursue this task herself. Respecting the Other with whom I live, then, is a matter of striving to provide and to avoid infringing upon the space in which she can take up this task.

Since ‘becoming who one is’ involves the difficult and complicated two-sided first-personal recursive process of reflection and action, the attempt to discern the contours of this process in the life of another person, in order to best facilitate a space in which she can succeed, presents what is perhaps life’s most difficult task. How does one negotiate the opacity of the Other’s mind, the unpredictability of her freedom, and the indeterminate content of her desires? Since the articulation and pursuit of one’s fate is a project to carry out for and by oneself, it is transparent that playing a role in the Other’s struggle to do so, while respecting her freedom, is rife with objective and normative uncertainty. But it is equally transparent that there are ways that we can treat the Other that facilitate this difficult process and ways that undermine it. Heidegger attempts to capture the essential difference between these two modes of relating to the Other with his distinction between ‘leaping ahead’ and ‘leaping in.’ Leaping ahead formally indicates
how one can treat the significant others of one’s everyday life with a respectful
recognition of their capacity for responsible action. And leaping in formally indicates
how one can utterly fail to do so. We shall first consider what constitutes failure in this
domain:

“It [the individual] can, as it were, take away ‘care’ from the Other and put
itself in his position in concern: it can leap in for him. This kind of
solicitude takes over for the Other that with which he is to concern
himself. The Other is thus thrown out of his own position; he steps back so
that afterwards, when the matter has been attended to, he can either take it
over as something finished and at his disposal, or disburden himself of it
completely. In such solicitude the Other can become one who is
dominated and dependent, even if this domination is a tacit one and
remains hidden from him” (BT 122, 158).

Recall from chapter five that resolute action constitutes a free commitment to a
way of life persistently endorsed over time, transparently and constantly, and tempered
by a humble appreciation of one’s finitude. Leaping in constitutes a failure to respect the
Other precisely because it strips her of this capacity for free commitment. It is an attempt
to rob her of the very possibility that could make her an integrated self. Leaping in shows
that one has no confidence in the Other’s ability to persistently carry out her own
commitments or that one is afraid of the consequences of her doing so. It is a transparent
statement that I do not consider the Other worthy of my trust or that I am not willing to
give it to her. The individual who leaps in usurps the Other’s ownmost sphere, taking her
responsibility away from her, thereby stripping her of the possibility of finding herself in
her own deeds.

Heidegger’s expression ‘leaping in,’ like all of his terms, must be understood in a
formally indicative and not a literal sense. I do not have to roll up my sleeves, push the
Other out of the way, and actually take over her projects to leap in. Leaping in, rather,
formally indicates a mode of being towards the Other in which I seek to gain control over her ownmost sphere – it is an effort to compromise and control her freedom. The crucial point in Heidegger’s description of leaping in, then, is that when one leaps in “the Other can become one who is dominated and dependent, even if this domination is a tacit one and remains hidden from him” (BT 122, 158). Such action is possible wherever there is a power dynamic in play, and it does not require actually taking over the Other’s projects by oneself – all it requires is a certain degree of control over the space in which the Other comports herself. Leaping in is a project of containment that targets the Other’s freedom.

This project of containment gets carried out in the war zone of wills in which what Kant calls the ‘diabolical vices’ and what Heidegger calls ‘distantiality’ reign supreme. Leaping in is a failure to trust and an effort to contain the Other, and it takes various guises: The jealous lover polices the Other’s comportment towards the opposite sex, and with the threat of violence or abandonment controls what she does in the public sphere. The manipulative and masochistic partner uses everything from suicide threats to persistent ailments to keep the Other always there, by her side, tending to her needs rather than pursuing his own projects. The self-absorbed thesis director makes it clear that the only acceptable views are those that track with his own, thereby preventing the Other from developing her own voice and stance towards the issues she cares about, etc. The shapes that leaping in can take are as manifold and plastic as the forms of physical coercion and psychological manipulation themselves. The motivation is always some sort of lack or impotence on the part of the one who leaps in, some inability to let the Other be who she is because one fears the outcome. One attempts to control the Other out of fear or paranoia that the consequence of not doing so would undermine one’s own security or
power, which attests to lack and impotence. It is the irresponsible agent’s attempt to sustain his own tranquilization – to preserve the false self-image that he is living a life according to the highest, most genuine, secure and fullest standards even though he has not taken the necessary stance to guarantee this security.

By rendering the Other incapable of responsible action when I leap in, I not only stifle her sense of responsibility for her life but I dull her ability to experience herself in her uniqueness. As I discussed in chapter six, pursuing one’s fate cannot be accomplished in a satisfactory way unless that pursuit is carried out responsibly such that I can experience my life as my own. It is precisely the Other’s sense that her life is her own that leaping in attempts to take from her, and this is why a protracted experience of this type of disrespect drags one into a downward spiral of dissatisfaction and despair. The protracted experience of such disrespect leaves the Other feeling that she is not in control of her own life and therefore she becomes estranged from it. She is not allowed to respond to the factual claims of the world in light of her uniqueness, because the one who leaps in forces her to respond as he sees fit. Thus, leaping in hijacks the Other’s responsibility for her life and along with it her ability to develop according to her own vision of who she is. In essence, it seeks to dominate the Other – to prevent her responsible striving to become who she is. At the heart of all such failure is a desire to crush or contain the Other’s freedom and a failure to care for the person she is in her unique distinctness.

On these matters, however, Heidegger is not an heir to Nietzsche but Kant, and so he does not claim that leaping in is the only mode of relating to the Other. Rather, there is an alternative mode that can be taken up after the ‘conversion’ or ‘rebirth’ of the self who
chooses to take up the project of being-responsible. The responsible individual will not leap in because, as we have already discussed, responsibility presupposes a respect for the Other’s freedom, and leaping in clearly constitutes a failure to respect her. Instead of leaping in, the resolute self, Heidegger argues, will “leap ahead” – a mode of relating to the Other in which one facilitates a space in which she can pursue the project of becoming who she is without being subject to coercion or manipulation:

“...there is also the possibility of a kind of solicitude which does not so much leap in for the Other as leap ahead of him (ihm vorauspringt) in his existentiell potencyit-for-Being, not in order to take away his ‘care’ but rather to give it back to him authentically as such for the first time. This kind of solicitude pertains essentially to authentic care – that is, to the existence of the Other, not to a ‘what’ with which he is concerned; it helps the Other to become transparent to himself in his care and to become free for it” (BT 122, 158-159).

The self who leaps ahead breaks with the competitive and destructive power plays characteristic of the ‘downward plunge’ and ‘distantiality’ of fallenness. And he makes this break for two related reasons: 1) he garners the insight from existential death that being-responsible entails an ethical moment and therefore recognizes that he must avoid the power-mongering of fallenness that so patently constitutes a disrespect of the Other’s freedom and 2) he, as we discussed in chapter two, is his own measure – he chooses the standards in light of which he chooses and sets himself the goal of integrity rather than struggling to measure up to the standards that das Man establishes as ‘highest, fullest, most genuine and secure.’ As his own measure, he no longer needs to ‘keep up appearances’ but can become who he is:

“Only by authentically Being-their-Selves in resoluteness can people authentically be with one another—not by ambiguous and jealous stipulations and talkative fraternizing in the ‘they’ and in what ‘they’ want to undertake” (BT 298, 344-345).
The resolute self lives his own life according to the standards he chooses, and so he feels no compulsion to keep the Other under his thumb; he does not need to coerce or manipulate the Other to act in a particular way to preserve a self-image that he does not actually embody. He does not feel impotent and insecure because he knows who he is. He does not need to be everything to the Other – the center of her world – because he is himself.

He has the constant and basic trust in himself that comes from genuine self-knowledge, recognizing that he is responsible for holding the meaning of his being to be certain, rather than trying to force the Other to help him keep up the appearance that it is. The resolute self is thus able to promote the Other’s freedom without fear of having his own self-image undermined. He can genuinely give himself to the Other and call out her freedom without placing any non-moral constraints on her becoming who she is. He feels no need to ‘take away’ the Other’s ‘care’ but rather ‘gives it back’ to her in the sense that he helps hold open the necessary space of action in which she can take it up. And he calls her to it not with pressure or coercion; rather, the resolute self, for the most part, discourses with the Other silently, reticently. He calls the Other to being-responsible by doing so himself and thereby providing a model for the Other of how to carry out a resolute existence without telling her what to do and taking her choice away from her. In this way he “helps the Other to become transparent to” herself in her “care and to become free for it” (BT 122, 158-159).

As I discussed in chapter two, mutual corruption is endemic to the fallen mode of existence, but this internecine struggle does not easily drag the resolute individual into its

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202 This refers to the self-knowledge discussed in chapter five – the hard won sense of knowing what one is up to and trusting oneself to negotiate the tension between life’s uncertainty and the project of being-certain.
eddy of moral ruin. A resolute individual among the fallen will not readily fall prey to these petty power grabs and manipulative tactics, because, again, he is his own measure. And his refusal to fall, as we saw in chapter two, is enough to undermine the self-image of his fallen significant others; thus, he does not need to engage in the war of the wills to have a sense of power in the world. He knows himself, he trusts himself to manage the paradox of existence, and so he does not need to ‘control’ others to win a sense of ‘security’ in life. He carries out his existence with a sense that it is proper that each person live in the truth of the life that belongs to him. And in a community of resolute individuals each person comports himself in this manner, making his own decisions and choosing the standards in light of which he makes them. Each resolute individual, then, engages in the project of becoming who he is and respects the Other’s right to do the same.

Moreover, the resolute self facilitates a space for the Other’s project of becoming who she is not only by modeling resoluteness for her and by letting her be but also by striving to know the Other in her unique distinctness in order to provide a space that is crafted for her. In other words, he seeks to facilitate the Other’s ongoing two-sided recursive process of reflection and action whereby she becomes who she is. And he can only do so if he takes care to know the Other in her uniqueness. Only then can he not only stay out of her way but also provide her meaningful aid and support. It should be

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203 He will not fall ‘readily’: of course, one of Heidegger’s consistent points in Being and Time is that there is no apotheosis of the self and we are always moving back and forth between truth and untruth, fallleness and resoluteness. I only mean to suggest here that a resolute self can put up a certain kind of resistance to the moral kryptonite of fallleness. But he is not invulnerable to it. No one is – fallleness is a constant temptation because of the burdensome character of responsibility.

204 In this section I am trying to maintain my focus on how we relate to the Others with whom we share our lives. Thus, I am not claiming that really knowing the Other in her unique distinctness is something for us to strive for in our relationships with everyone. Our obligations to humanity in general, as I argued above, can be determined by the categorical imperative or a neo-Kantian decision procedure based upon it.
noted, however, that certain moral dangers lurk in the project of knowing the Other and cultivating a space for her. If, for example, one treats this project as an opportunity to evade one’s own responsibility by emptying oneself into the Other’s life or by becoming the pure ‘servant,’ such ‘self-sacrifice’ can function as a manipulative style of leaping in – a way to exact a debt from the ‘master.’ And the master can fall prey to an exploitive mode of leaping in – knowingly taking advantage of the servant’s ‘self-sacrifice.’ There is a danger, then, of a collusion of different styles of leaping in; and this collusion is a breeding ground for resentment and dissatisfaction.

The servant resents having sacrificed her own projects to the master. Even if she recognizes that she only emptied herself into his life in a flight from her own responsibility, and even if he never asked her to do so, the master still knowingly profited from her ‘sacrifice.’ And her resentment grows with her burgeoning dissatisfaction in the face of aborting her own fate. Likewise, the master resents the servant’s indignation, for after all, he never asked for this ‘sacrifice.’ Yet he feels guilty for profiting from exploiting her freedom and suffers from the dissatisfaction associated with disrespecting her freedom. At the same time, however, he resents these feelings of guilt and dissatisfaction because he also feels used – what he took to be a sign of love was in fact a project of manipulation.

This kind of relationship, then, does not really represent any attempt to know the Other in order to cultivate a space for her to become who she is. Each ‘idealizes’ the Other rather than experiencing her as unique. The servant projects upon the master an image that is more than human – and his failure to be a demigod eventually disappoints. And the master sees the servant as a saint whose resentment comes as a shock and a
painful disenchantment of his love life. Neither person in such a relationship, then, makes the effort to know him or herself or the Other, and so each fails to treat the Other with respect, by recognizing him or her as a unique differentiated individual. They traffic in images until the real fully breaks in and exposes each person’s ‘knowledge of the Other’ as a pseudo-knowledge that has little to do with a real human being.

The project of cultivating a space for the Other, then, must always be balanced by holding onto one’s own project of becoming who one is – it is a de-centering of oneself that is only possible because one simultaneously maintains one’s own center. In other words, one keeps sight of the form of life towards which one’s own responsible striving is directed and cultivates a space for the Other to do the same. Genuine self-sacrifice requires self-knowledge; one must be able to appropriate it as one’s fate, take it up resolutely and find oneself in it, or, like any other denial of the factual claims of the world, it will lead to a basic existential dissatisfaction.

Another moral danger that lurks in the project of striving to know the Other is a lack of humility with respect to her alterity. Really knowing the Other is impossible in the sense that there can never be an unproblematic identification between her being and a set of propositions regarding the truth of that being. Who she is, like my own being, is a work in progress, a future-directed striving towards a goal that is itself a provisional commitment to an inner sense of who she wants to be. Thus, knowing her, and providing aid and support in light of this knowledge, is a matter fraught with uncertainty; this knowledge is constituted by provisional commitments that are persistently endorsed and yet always tempered by humility. In other words, when it comes to treating the Other with whom I live with respect, the matter of how I can best respect her freedom is never
settled, certain or transparent. And the matter is too malleable, specific, and often too opaque for a procedure like the categorical imperative to yield a straightforward answer regarding what I should do. The project of knowing the Other, rather, calls for resoluteness.

Since the task of respecting the Other with whom I share my life is a matter of facilitating her project to become who she is, and this project is one of self-differentiation according to the idiosyncratic style of her striving, facilitating this project exacts the task of coming to know the Other in her uniqueness. Only if one succeeds at this task can one help facilitate a space in which she will flourish. But does this project of knowledge, because the object is so uncertain, not always bear the stamp of an overweening paternalism? Can the task of knowing the Other really be taken up in a respectful way? Is a principle of non-interference, rather, not only real ethical option?

This question itself, I contend, can be understood as the form that the humility of resolute action takes in the project of coming to know the Other. Since knowledge with respect to the Other is something that we cannot in principle have, we must remain vigilant in our efforts not to presume to have such knowledge by dogmatically holding our commitments regarding who the Other is to be ‘the truth’ of the matter. Rather, we must always leave room for her voice and her action to bring about revisions, ranging from superficial to radical, in our sense of who she is. Recognizing that our own striving to become who we are is a recursive process, we have to respect her capacity to change direction, and reorient our commitments to our sense of who she is in light of these changes.

205 In other words, bearing this worry in mind can be understood as that which tempers my commitments in this domain with a ‘readiness to take it back.’
What we have learned from analyzing these two forms of ‘leaping,’ then, is that, in our everyday lives respecting the Other is primarily a matter of trust and striving to know her in her uniqueness. And as the being of the self is inseparable from the being of the Other, this trust for the Other is always tied to a capacity for trusting oneself. This should come as no surprise after our reflections on resoluteness. In chapter four, I argued that the analysis of resoluteness indicated that the task of becoming a self is ultimately a process of learning to trust myself by finding the confidence to exist in the tension between the world’s uncertainty and my capacity to hold the meaning of my existence to be certain. This basic sense of trust for oneself is fundamental to learning to trust the Other; because to trust the Other is to rely on the certainty of that which is most uncertain: the Other’s free commitment and her promise. This task, then, provides life’s greatest opportunity for growth in inwardness as one strives to become who one is.

Finally, just as being-responsible is always a possibility for the fallen self, changing one’s comportment towards others from a mode that leaps in to a mode that leaps ahead is also a constant possibility. Furthermore, as I have argued throughout, these possibilities, which are always already there for the individual to take up, are intimately tied up with one another. Becoming responsible will involve learning to respect the Other’s freedom to take responsibility for herself and so to give her the space to do that by leaping ahead. Failing to be responsible will entangle one in the internecine struggles of fallen sociality and will lead to practices of coercion and manipulation to maintain a false self-image.
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