

# OW(N)ING EXISTENCE

Human Meaning, Identity and Responsibility in Heidegger's *Being  
and Time*

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## Abstract

This thesis pays attention to the nature of human being that comes to light in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*. In particular, it attempts to show that his notion of authenticity allows for a distinctive and fruitful conception of ethical responsibility, albeit one that challenges us to rethink ethics and responsibility anew. I claim that if authenticity is 'owning' one's existence in a way that is properly fitted to Dasein's ontological way of being (as non-self-identical, ecstatic temporality), this ownership of self will necessarily be the stance of recognizing and responding to that which always already includes a network of relations involving world and others. On such an understanding, genuine existential care for oneself is also care for others in the most originary way possible. Such an ontological picture has been criticized by some commentators as being too formal, insufficiently historical, and lacking genuine mediation – in short, for being ineffectual as a normative force in real-life situations. The main contribution of this thesis is to argue against such an interpretation by showing that Heideggerian authenticity is a properly dialectical concept, capacious enough to account for the legitimate concerns raised by such criticisms, while also being productive for new articulations of what is really normative about human relations.

*For Arul Ta'fxkz Baliah*  
*Gadfly, friend*  
*Restless for heaven on earth*  
*Gone, but still biting*

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## Introduction

‘Attention is the greatest form of generosity’ - Simone Weil

Being human involves inhabiting a rather uncomfortable dwelling place between the world as we find it and as we would want it to be. This place is one where lived experience lays on us demands of a moral nature. Here ethical concerns arise and force us to identify reasons why we should want a certain kind of future world rather than another, and also to pursue measures appropriate to our time and situation that can carry us towards that desired future world.<sup>1</sup> Not every consideration of a philosophical issue need be ultimately reduced to its ethical or moral significance. But equally, no truly important or significant philosophical development can fully absolve itself from showing how it might serve or transfigure this vital domain.

Precisely this sort of tension often arises for sympathetic readers of Martin Heidegger, who sense a revolutionary potential within his philosophy for rethinking many fundamental problems but are often left with uncertainties concerning what resources remain within his framework for addressing the very real and pressing everyday ethical issues. The core of this difficulty arises because the very innovations that make his work so fecund and exciting – the dismantling of modern subjectivity, the assertion of calculating reason’s dependence on a more primordial pre-theoretical engagement with phenomena, and his critique of the metaphysical impulse to order all of reality in a chain of causality that assumes ontological sameness as the basic principle – also subvert those bulwarks that have been crucial to providing ethical theorizing with its structures of individuation, the obligatory force we take to be intrinsic to the character of an ‘ought’ and human responsibility. The pressing question

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<sup>1</sup> By ‘ethical concerns’ I simply mean to describe the kinds of questions concerned with interpreting what we owe one another in our relationships within various modes of familial, social, cultural and political life. I also mean what we owe ourselves in the pursuit of an individual life of meaning and satisfaction.

before us remains whether or not we can derive any sort of recognizably serviceable notion of responsibility from within his radical reframing of selfhood. This is the question towards which this present study is directed.

## 1. Heidegger and the Originary Matrix of Ethical Questioning

To begin to give Heidegger a fair hearing on these matters, it is vital for us to confront his own original and leading philosophical question and weigh its significance for ethical matters – namely, what is the meaning of being? For if one thinks that Heidegger has put his finger on something important at this foundational step, what coherently follows from it also deserves serious consideration.

From a Heideggerian perspective, what first needs to be clarified about the general question – how must one live? – are the silent assumptions it makes about existence. Most basically, human life involves existing, and this existence is rather more complicated than, say, that of a stone. The human being experiences its existence not as a *flat* given, but rather as something richly textured with alternatives that demand a response. Therefore, at bottom the question is always (whether it is thematically apprehended or not) one of *how one must exist* within an existence that is thrust on us without choice. When we gloss over the real nature of this kind of existence, we also skew the way we answer the question of how we should live. Therefore the question, ‘How must I/we exist?’, necessarily hangs on the more fundamental question, ‘How do I/we already exist?’ It is what *is* that must truly (in one way or another) show us what can or must be done.

Heidegger’s important positive contribution vis-à-vis the tradition he inherits is to show that what *is*, first and foremost, shows itself (when phenomenologically observed) as a web of interconnected significance. What *is* is a world of already meaningful things, and

what *is* is our participation in and responsiveness to that meaningful world. But this way of ‘being in meaning’ is also rich with the dynamic play between what is and the possibility of what can be, such that we can somehow be both less and more, both better and worse at the pursuit of being ourselves.<sup>2</sup> In a resonant description of our situation, Heidegger writes that ‘Dasein is ontically not only what is near or even nearest – we ourselves are it, each of us. Nevertheless, or precisely for this reason, it is ontologically what is farthest removed’ (SZ 15).<sup>3</sup> It is only once we have come back into reckoning with the being of human being as a tensioned space between the horizons of what is and what can be, that we can properly discern what norms are available for guiding further action, whether towards oneself or others.

## 2. Remarks on the Grounds and Horizon of this Project

In order to cope with the challenges of engaging a thinker of Heidegger’s complexity and breadth of philosophical erudition, I have tried to impose a few strategic limits on this project. Since these are of crucial methodological significance to the scope and tenability of this thesis, I will briefly identify them and clarify my reasons for adopting them:

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<sup>2</sup> Heidegger is very clear that with the term ‘possibility’ he does not mean a formal ‘empty, logical possibility’ (SZ 143). What he does mean is rather nicely captured by Charles E. Scott’s phrase ‘mortal possibility’ – that is, an existential sense of what is possible within the impossibility (in its impending death) that constantly hangs over and permeates every actual moment of Dasein’s being. Charles E. Scott, “Nonbelonging/Authenticity,” in *Reading Heidegger: Commemorations*, ed. John Sallis (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1993), 68.

<sup>3</sup> The ontic/ontological distinction is central to the fundamental ontology of *Being and Time*. As an ontology, what is being pursued is an understanding of what most basically *is*. The term ‘ontic’ refers to the way things are available to us such that they can be observed and ordered within the methods and results of the natural sciences. What is ontically available to us are entities apprehended by the traditional ‘categories’. The term ‘ontological’ refers to the structures of possibility that allow for ontic inquiry to be successful – the being of these entities which nevertheless cannot be thought of as another more basic entity-like being. Maintaining the distinction between ontic and ontological facts is a key imperative in Heidegger’s existential analytic of Dasein. And he makes Dasein his starting point for an inquiry into the general question of being because he claims Dasein is unique in being both ontic and ontological at the very same time. It is both an entity as well as a structure of possibility that sustains the being of other entities.

1. I have tried to limit the scope of my discussion to issues within Heidegger's landmark 1927 text, *Being and Time*.<sup>4</sup> Conceived primarily as a learning experience, this thesis aims to more clearly trace a few important and perennial philosophical problems (for example, of identity and difference, permanence and change, the 'is' and the 'ought') as they are formulated within this key text, and to explore the nature of their interconnections within a particular framework of questioning that pertains to the key Heideggerian concept of 'authenticity' in *Being and Time*. Since my thesis does take a somewhat sympathetic position with regard to Heidegger's thought, I take this critical enterprise to involve testing the concept against some important objections and attempting to give nuance to its interpretation in such a way that it comes to have greater expressive depth.
2. I have allowed the structure of my encounter with these issues to be explicitly shaped by my personal concerns – namely, how it can illuminate the nature of lived human experience, what it can show about the nature of human identity and the self, and finally, what its insights might contribute towards our notions of living well.
3. I have settled on the Heideggerian concept of authenticity as the focal point for development of these questions. At the very outset, it is important to justify (even if only in brief) this third decision, since the trajectory of the thesis rests on this beginning. I have two main reasons: (1) I start here because if there is anything close to a practical imperative to emerge from the positive results of an existential analytic of Dasein in *Being and Time*, it would arguably be the imperative of authenticity. Its status as a genuine imperative (typically construed) is obviously problematic, and that is one of the issues I will discuss in some detail. Nevertheless, I think that it is highly

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<sup>4</sup> All references and citations in this study are taken from Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996). To allow readers easier cross reference across English translations, or between the English and German, if necessary, all in-text citations of this work will henceforth carry the original page numbers (also replicated in both English translations) of Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1953).

unlikely that the whole enterprise of a fundamental ontology can be read as being unconcerned with praxis. In fact, such an ontology is itself practically motivated by the desire to ground our imperatives on a proper understanding of what really *is* for the *existing* human. And it is clear that Heidegger presents ‘authentic’ being as a potentiality for Dasein that somehow most fully answers to the structures of its ‘ownmost’ way of existing – it is something we *should* do; (2) This ‘ownmost’ authenticity is regularly interpreted as dismissive of ontic or concrete engagement, and as privileging individual self-assertion in a way that makes it difficult to integrate with genuinely mediated, other-involved forms of shared existence. Even where it is granted that Heidegger may be insightful in describing how a single person might go about her life of absolute self-concern, his framework is often thought to offer very little concrete insight on how two Heideggerians (each pursuing their own self-concern) might get along when their individual concerns come into conflict – as indeed they always do in real life. By making the concept of authenticity my point of departure, I hope to be able to root my thesis in the consideration of a centrally important ‘positive’ result of Heidegger’s description of what human existence is like – one that is generally not considered to be very illuminating for ethical and practical life – and to argue for its relevance in these matters.

### 3. Outline of the Argument of this Study

Whatever else Heidegger’s concept of authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) may involve, it certainly carries a heavy connotation of ‘ownership’. The concept articulates the potential relationship that human beings can take towards their most essential (or, as Heidegger frequently describes it, ‘ownmost’) way of being. Since the idea that one’s existence can be

claimed is, by and large, an uncontroversial aspect of the concept, I make it my launching pad for this study as the opening thesis: ‘One must own one’s existence’. The claim that we must own our existence, arguably represents the most basic and all-encompassing demand that can be placed on, and responded to, by human beings, since it purportedly describes the most basic thing that we as human beings already do and are capable of doing more fully.

But even at this early stage, a reader familiar with *Being and Time* will be suspicious of any claim that Heidegger asserts that one *must* be authentic or *must* own one’s existence. Nothing like a strong ‘ought’ presents itself in his description of human experience; he simply describes it as the retrieval of a primordial possibility for Dasein’s existence. Describing this ambiguity in Heidegger’s use of authenticity as a technical term, Taylor Carman writes: ‘the word plays two very different roles in *Being and Time*, one evaluative and the other not, though regrettably Heidegger conflates the two throughout’.<sup>5</sup> This alleged lack of clarity strikes many readers as especially problematic because, on the whole, Heidegger’s massive effort to arrive at an understanding of ‘authentic’ human existence hardly seems to be the exploration of a purely value-neutral end, despite his frequent disavowals that authenticity can be co-opted neatly into prevalent frameworks of value. We sense that he really is trying to communicate that there is a ‘better’ and a ‘worse’ way to go about our existence. Yet we are left to speculate on what value-commitments are to be attached to these modes, if not for the ones that structure our typical understanding of these terms. It may, in fact, be prudent to first parse out other primary interlocking themes in

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<sup>5</sup> See Taylor Carman, “Authenticity,” *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 285. I think Carman is right in asserting this, but unlike Carman I am not sure this is ‘regrettable’ in the sense that it represents some sort of oversight. Rather it seems to me that this tension is not something Heidegger can avoid because it is built into the thing he is describing—namely, existence. The main point here is that existence has its own norms. These are related to our systematic formulations of value, but they are not reducible to them. It is only when we have arrived at a better understanding of existence that we can make more sense of this tension between the strong ‘ought’ of traditional value systems, and the intrinsic norms of existence. I try to make clearer, over the course of the thesis, how and why Heidegger thinks this tension is characteristic of our being as humans.

Heidegger's treatment of human experience before further ascertaining the character of this 'must'.<sup>6</sup>

We can start by noting that the claim 'one must own one's existence' consists of a *who-ought-what* structure, with each point of articulation typically evoking a dominant philosophical understanding. Let us first lay out what may be thought to be traditionally assumed in such a 'who-ought-what' statement about ownership:

1. *The What* – No ownership is intelligible without the presence, self-identity and actuality of the 'to-be-owned'. On this count, the traditional way of conceiving this has been to model it on the substantiality of objectively present things.
2. *The Who* – No ownership is intelligible without an individuated 'I' capable of asserting a first-person perspective. The most obvious and preferred way of conceiving this has usually been through the positing of a pure subject in contradistinction to other subjects, as well as objects in the world.
3. *The Ought* – The notion of an 'ought' is generally taken to be intelligible only when it has a force that transcends those things that are subject to it. Its efficacy is taken to stem from its status as an undeniable, external imposition that binds things that otherwise have a kind of independence from each other. But an 'ought' also assumes the possibility of a fittingness between the things it seeks to bind through its claim on them. In the case of any ownership, ordinarily construed, we think that something of a norm-like call can stake its claim only because there is a fittingness or compatibility between the 'who' and the 'what'.<sup>7</sup> Traditionally, this 'ought' of relation between the

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<sup>6</sup> What we can note in passing here is that the 'must' is not posited as a question of value, traditionally understood, but rather as a question of an ontological structure that only a phenomenological ontology can envision and further clarify. If there is a norm that can come to light from this examination of human experience, it will have to be understood as an *existential* norm (though precisely what is meant in calling something 'existential' is also something that can only be clarified in due course).

<sup>7</sup> For example, the 'who' desires the 'what', the 'what' is available to be owned, there is social recognition of the 'who's' claim over the 'what', etc.

‘who’ and the ‘what’ has been taken to arise and to hold only on the basis of the intrinsic character of each of the relata.

I attempt to use this triadic structure as the armature for the thesis’ argument as a whole, by showing how Heidegger upturns the traditional understandings that underlie each of these three terms – with the result that the relationship between the ‘is’ (i.e., the ‘what’ and the ‘who’) and the ‘ought’ is radically reframed. The general, commonsense notion of ‘ownership’ implies that to own something entails exercising a claim over it that trumps (or at least insulates one from) anybody else’s rival claim. The whole argument of this thesis is quite simply to show that existence, as it comes to light within *Being and Time*, is not the sort of thing that can be ‘owned’, without also being ‘owed’ to others at the very same time. To show why and how this is the case for Heidegger, I focus on the character of *this* unique kind of ‘ownership’ in Chapters 1 and 2 (Part I) before explicating the nature of the responsibility that emerges from it in Chapters 3 and 4 (Part II).

In Chapter 1, I examine how the notion of ‘ownership’ at work in the concept of authenticity challenges traditional understandings of both the subject and the object of ownership. What is at stake in the case of the ‘what’ of human existence is not first and foremost a thing or a substance, but meaningfulness. Chapter 2 develops this insight along Heidegger’s chosen terms, allowing us to reshape our thinking about the fundamental ideas we bring to human identity and selfhood. When human meaning is recognized as being revealed through ontic beings while also being ontologically prior to them in some way, we are forced to rethink human being in different terms than the traditional categories, which fail to reveal this relationship adequately. These categories, Heidegger alleges, have completely covered over the difference between the never completely self-identical being of death-bound humans who are concerned about the meaning of their own finite temporality, and the being of temporally unconcerned, self-identically present and stable objects like tables and rocks.

Chapter 2 further explicates how a recovery of a more adequate view of human identity in fact also demands a re-conception of human interdependence and responsibility.

In Part II, Chapter 3, I elaborate on how authenticity as the ownership of existence might carry with it a certain normative commitment of care towards those aspects that constitute existence itself. In doing so, I also engage three vectors of challenge regarding authenticity's alleged inadequacy as a practically effective concept.<sup>8</sup> Briefly, those charges are:

1. That authentic Dasein's other-regarding obligations are purely formalistic structures, incapable of providing concrete ethical content.
2. That a Heideggerian characterization of authenticity demands an absolute tearing away from all 'thrownness',<sup>9</sup> thereby writing off any role for others *in* the moment of Dasein's authentic grasp of its existence.
3. That the individualizing principle at work in *Being and Time*'s notion of authenticity is itself shaped by a historically contingent story of alienation that need not necessarily be privileged as more definitive of human existence than alternative understandings of individual and communal life.

I argue that the complex phenomenon of the ownership of human existence that comes to light in the concept of authenticity is rich enough to accommodate these objections as valid cautionary considerations to be heeded in interpreting certain ambiguous aspects in Heidegger's thought, rather than being depleted or devastated by these charges. By arguing for this conclusion, I hope to show that the larger question of exploring the potentialities of Heidegger's framework for ethical concerns remains a live and fruitful option. In Chapter 4, which serves as the conclusion of this study, I attempt to offer an interpretative matrix of

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<sup>8</sup> Objections such as these can be found in Lambert Zuidervaart, *Social Philosophy after Adorno* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and others. I will treat them in more detail later in the thesis.

<sup>9</sup> This is the term Heidegger uses to describe Dasein's initial, and ongoing immersion in the world as it is structured, apprehended and determined by history, tradition, community values and other Dasein.

norms that emerge from within Heidegger's framework (as explicated by the previous three chapters), and which I suggest are of vital importance to any further thinking on what authentic human responsibility might involve.

#### 4. The Broader Significance of this Study

I take the critical import of Heidegger's framework to be available as a double gesture that clarifies in a crucial way what ethics might originally be about, while also challenging existing accounts of ethical reasoning (which are often interpreted as closed, systematic frameworks) to recover a receptive sensitivity towards the ongoing call of existence. If Karl Otto Apel's proposal that the authority of the ethical is generally grounded in a "subject-subject" relation is correct (and I believe it is), then Heidegger's great contribution to our consideration of ethical concerns is that he re-educates us concerning 'who' this subject actually *is*, and what responsibility could properly entail for such a being.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See Karl-Otto Apel, "The Community of Communication and the Foundations of Ethics," in *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*, tr. Glyn Adey and David Fisby (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998).

## Part I - Owning Existence: Authenticity

### 1 Human Meaning: The *What* of Existence

We are all familiar with the concept of ‘owning’ something.<sup>11</sup> But what can we possibly mean when we talk about owning existence? Why should we own it? Clearly existence isn’t simply a *thing* like other things. We might ask what it is, but we can’t even be sure it is straightforwardly accessible to a *what* kind of question? And, perhaps even more basically, we might ask what is this *is* that has arisen ever so innocuously in the question of the *what*? If existence is something we must lay hold of and make our own, we need some clarity on how it presents itself to us for this task. Do we already recognize existence in a way that allows us to straightforwardly reach out and own it? Or does it stay hidden from us, covered over, resisting us in some way that prevents ownership from being the default description of how we generally exist? If an owned existence is not plainly given, what markers can we apply to know that we have successfully grasped it and made (our) existence our own?

In this chapter, I will show how Heidegger arrives at the crucial insight that the ‘*what*’ of existence never comes into view properly until our search for the answer is freed from a mould of thinking that takes its entire schema to be determined by the objective presence of material things. To see how this paradigmatic shift can be philosophically warranted, we will

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<sup>11</sup> For example, any meaningful concept of ownership must entail some kind of individuation – for an *I* that can meaningfully assume ownership of the object in question. Then we need to be able to identify and differentiate, both perceptually and epistemically, the thing that is owned from other things that are not ours. Further, it is very often the case that ownership can only attain legitimacy when there is social recognition and affirmation of my claim to the particular thing. It is also frequently true that one’s ownership assumes the ability to care for and meet the intrinsic demands of sustaining the thing one owns. Also, we may observe that ownership is predicated on the availability or the presence (even if this is only occasional) of that which is owned. No doubt other assumptions could be named as well, and sometimes effective ownership seems to involve many or all of the things we have mentioned, while at other times it seems to suffice that a few of these criteria are satisfied. We also commend a musician for ‘owning’ his performance of a musical standard, or urge someone to take ownership of a situation, and so on. While we always seem to have a pre-understanding about what taking ‘ownership’ in these other circumstances might demand, it is in fact very difficult to specify precisely what this entails in common with, and in contrast to, our ownership of things or objects.

have to look more closely at our ordinary engagement with the world. I do this in three steps: the first examines the basic indeterminacies that are encountered in everyday human experience (Section 1.1); the second pursues this fact as evidence for a distinction to be made between things and meanings in our understanding of what basically *is* (Section 1.2); the third further clarifies the significance of positing meaningfulness as the true basis for a proper understanding of the human's distinctive kind of being (Section 1.3).

### 1.1 Human Experience

Questions about reality, i.e., questions regarding what *is* real, are often first stirred when we come to notice a very basic kind of indeterminacy to many aspects of our lives that we had in one way or another previously affirmed (whether consciously or not) as simple or settled. This awareness of disturbance in a previous settled-ness is simultaneously the explicit moment when we begin to notice that reality meets us with what we might here call *surfaces*, non-physical surfaces that we encounter as supporting practical confidence in our 'getting along with things'. These surfaces allow us to carry on with our everyday life in quite the same way as the hardness of the floor upon which we walk with 'thoughtless' ease and certainty. But just as this certainty only persists until something beneath us creaks or suddenly withdraws, as when the next step we implicitly expected to find is not there, these surfaces of practical surety can seem hard and clear at one moment only to mysteriously dissolve, recede or change contours at another. Such a falling away invariably seems to occur when some new point of view or a consideration of related significance has been uncovered or thrusts itself upon us.

Take, for example, the case of the child who has been taught by her primary caregivers that lying is wrong. This instruction is invariably assimilated by the child as

something definitive and general – an injunction that must hold true for *all*, in *any* situation (however roughly this might be understood). But over the course of her development and growth, the child will inevitably encounter circumstances that complicate this belief. It may be that she is faced with a situation where reporting the truth may result in the loss of something she wants; perhaps it will cause a friend to be punished or perhaps she will discover that merely reporting the facts of the situation ‘honestly’ does not capture the genuine significance the circumstance had for her, and so on. Suddenly, what was simple and obvious confronts her as having at least two or more *possibilities* that require sifting. The unity of a primal experience is shattered into a multiplicity of fragments; the flat has become spaced and layered. What was an automatic and straightforward way of comporting herself to the demands of reality is now experienced as an interpretative burden, even if she does not consciously reflect on her processing of the problem. Something like this structure of a basic initial confidence in reality, as well as its intervallic interruption and ensuing repair, remains true of all human experience.

This structure of our awareness is of the first importance to Heidegger. To him, it indicates that we inhabit a pre-theoretical comportment with reality that is always prior to any conceptual or thematic formulation of a problematic relation between subject and object. On Heidegger’s reckoning, unless we understand this initial togetherness or comportment out of which the possibility of dissonance or rupture emerges, our philosophizing always shows up one step too late. In the course of undergoing this kind of experience over and over again, it may not always explicitly strike one that these difficulties seem to cling to and multiply around certain kinds of questions or concerns rather than others. But this is in fact the case. The kinds of questions that seem amenable to settlement are those that involve establishing the ‘thingliness’ of things; the thing’s substantiality forces itself on us in a certain way, and

allows us a sense of finality in answering a question of fact.<sup>12</sup> Our hard sciences operate quite well in these contexts. But other kinds of questions, such as that of the wrongness of lying, are not of this kind. While this question certainly might involve a very specific situation and very specific objects, and while it can often be answered in those strict terms (for example, ‘Did this man, Jean Valjean, steal this silverware from you, Monsieur Myriel?’), we may nevertheless recognize that it seems to demand something of the respondent that is in excess of the bare facts – a kind of weighing of the importance of the question and its potential answer within a much larger network of concerns. Something like this is in fact going on with human beings all the time, though at varying levels of our awareness of their significance. Thus the basic phenomenological point which I want to secure here is threefold in its importance for us:

1. Our participation in ordinary life involves what I have called ‘surfaces’ of confidence, which rather strangely become visible to us precisely at the point at which they suddenly seem to fall away and leave us with the burden of accounting, interpreting and deciding on next steps.
2. These moments are invariably characterized by something more than a mere cognitive account that registers objects, things or states of affairs as isolated units of ‘stuff’ or atomic facts. While these moments are always concerned with objects and states of affairs, they are truly problematic only because they are tied up in and suggestive of issues that exceed the strict ‘thingliness’ of things – issues of meaningfulness or significance for the one who has encountered this disruption.
3. These issues of meaningfulness are characterized by an essential undecidability or paradoxical nature. And though the balance can shift in favor of one kind of confident, interpretative seeing rather than another kind of seeing that has less to

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<sup>12</sup> Certainly we are capable of mistaking things – straight sticks bent in the water or mirages in the desert sun – but in these kinds of case we are eventually able to adjust our perceptual position or our grasp of the appropriate social conventions of naming so as to settle on the matter in more or less certain or ‘well-grounded’ ways.

recommend it in the moment, no perspective of absolute security is achieved such that further shifting or falling is impossible. It seems assured that as long as we consciously find ourselves present to ourselves in this way, and engaged in the ongoing flow of this presence as it works itself out in relation to a world of things, practices and purposes, we have not seen the last of these upheavals.

## 1.2 Things and Meanings

How is such an experience possible? What would have to be the case about our world and our own selves for this sort of experience to be had? How must we pursue these questions methodologically, if we are to arrive at a convincing explanation of these phenomena? These questions are important for us because we are trying to understand *what* existence is. If existence is shot through with the reality of the indeterminacy – of surfaces emerging and withdrawing – as I have just described, any account of our ownership of it will have to reckon with what it really means to own this phenomenon of indeterminacy, which is so different from the solidity of things and the ease with which they permit us to grasp or own them.

It is worth pointing out that what is tacit and yet crucial in our practical certainties (and which comes to light in breakdown but is also prior to it) is our sense of having a measure of what is real, at least pragmatically speaking. A withdrawal of a relied-upon surface and the search for another one is a disturbance precisely because it has upset our comportment with what we took to be real – that is, with what serves adequately to sustain the purposes of carrying on with the ends and pursuits to which we see ourselves committed. In this sense, it seems that human beings are inescapably concerned with what is real. We cannot do without it. This dependence is revealed with a new intensity precisely when we

realize that what we thought was simply and gratuitously given ('reality') can in fact sometimes withdraw or hide from us.

Additionally, these situations of breakdown reveal that not all surfaces disintegrate or reestablish themselves for us in identical ways. The solidity and substantiality of things is felt to be real in a certain way that is different from something else more indeterminate, and yet no less real – what it all *means* to us. The fact that things matter to us, disturb us when they break down, and send us off in search of new arrangements of certainty marks us as being party to a reality that is not exhausted by the realness of substance alone.<sup>13</sup> We might even say that in making this distinction we have stumbled on a difference in the *being* of these encountered surfaces – the way they fundamentally *are* of different orders even within the broadly cohesive and unified way they give themselves to us through our experience.

Therefore, if we are to make honest work of owning our existence, we will have to distinguish these orders and examine whether they in fact lay very different kinds of demands on us. It is only once we understand the multiplicity as well as the interrelationship of these demands that our attempts to answer to them can move in the direction of being 'authentic' or 'proper'. This is why Heidegger's primary question regarding being – of how things *are* in their availability to us – must be treated as foundationally relevant to the issue of owning one's existence.

He makes a novel distinction between two modes in which things basically *are* available to us, and these correspond closely to the difference I suggested earlier in my descriptive account. First, some things seem to be present to us simply as objective, person-independent things amenable to natural scientific inquiry. Such things have the being of what he calls *Vorhandensein* (what has generally been rendered in translation as 'presence-at-hand'); things in such a mode occur as simply and solidly there. A second way that things *are*

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<sup>13</sup> Substance, of course, is a term with an incredibly long and complicated philosophical history. At the moment I will ignore this history, and simply use 'substance' to mean what is commonly posited as a distinct thing-in-itself, independent of any accidental properties.

there for us, is by way of their assigned roles within human activity (as a tool or piece of equipment such as a hammer or a guitar). In our everyday dealings, we never encounter these *as* a piece of iron with a wooden extension or as an oddly shaped wooden box with six steel wires stretched along it; they are seen as hammers for hammering nails, guitars for making music, and so on.<sup>14</sup> In addition to these two modes of reality, Heidegger also identifies another horizontal context within which the other two have their origins – he calls this human being or Dasein (literally ‘there-being’) whose distinct way of being (in contradistinction to all other things, and therefore as irreducible to thing-ish categories) is Existence (*Existenz*). This multiplicity of being in these three aforementioned distinctions and the original structural reasons for its manifestation in these ways occupy Heidegger’s abiding curiosity, and he maintains that if we do not pay heed to the fundamental significance of these differences in the being of what makes up our experience, all our other critical innovations will be built on an unclarified and possibly mistaken foundation.

So what is the question of being for Heidegger? The very first line of Division One of *Being and Time* reads: ‘What is primarily interrogated in the question of the meaning of being is that being which has the character of Dasein’ (SZ, 41). What is vital to register at the very outset is that, for Heidegger, the question of Being is actually the question of the *meaning* of being. At least within a certain longstanding and widely purveyed interpretative matrix, it is arguable that traditional metaphysics from Plato and Aristotle onwards has developed on the assumption that being or *ousia* is what makes things real and has typically tied this reality either to a form (*eidos*), energy (*energeia*) or essence (*esse*). Heidegger’s radical suggestion against his understanding of this tradition is that it forgets what our lived experience is really like – that is, it is first and foremost available as real in that it is meaningful to us. The fact of reality’s meaningfulness is not disconnected from the material

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<sup>14</sup> Heidegger’s word for this second mode is *Zuhandenheit*, which the Macquarrie and Robinson translation renders as ‘readiness-to-hand’, while the more recent Stambaugh translation simply describes it as ‘handiness’.

availability of substances, but it is not reducible or secondary to them. In fact, as Heidegger will argue through the book, reality's meaningfulness has an ontological precedence over substantiality.

This 'forgetfulness' on the part of the metaphysical tradition, according to Heidegger, has followed from equating the question of the meaning of being with the being of beings (or things). As a result we have the tradition's circular tendency to identify the ultimate source of all beings, indeed of all reality, in an entity like God whose own being is then understood in exactly the same entitative mode that derives from and trades on what we attribute to the being of things, in their solidity and objective presence. Heidegger's push to understand the *meaning* of being is therefore a seminal movement in attempting to break this circle.

To question the *meaning* of being, without conflating it with the being of beings as they are encountered in objective presence, is to think in a way that honors what Heidegger calls the 'ontological difference'. Meaning cannot be interrogated as some sort of abstract entity (but an entity nonetheless). For Heidegger this signals a move away from the primacy of objects and instead demands that we focus on the primordial fact of relationality.

Describing the historical significance of the break effected in this nuanced move, Thomas Sheehan writes that, in contrast to Aristotle's ontology, which took its material object to be the real (*to on*) and its formal focus to be the realness of the real (where *ousia* was understood as independent of the human subject), 'Heidegger's material object is the meaningful (*to alethes* or *to par-on*), and his formal focus is on the meaningfulness of the meaningful (the *aletheia* of the *alethes*, the *parousia* of the *par-on*) in correlation with human interests and purposes'.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See Thomas Sheehan, "Dasein," in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (Oxford, Blackwell, 2005), 196.

But what is the meaningfulness of the meaningful? Is this not a tautology? And even if it were a legitimate formulation, how might one even begin to articulate it?<sup>16</sup> Heidegger claims that we must go back and pay attention ‘to the things themselves’ (SZ 28). Here he seems to be in continuity with the tradition when he affirms that ‘[t]he character of being of natural things, of substances, which is the basis of everything, is substantiality.’ What he takes himself to be doing differently is pressing the further question, ‘What constitutes its ontological meaning?’ (SZ 63) Before we consider how the importance of such a question can be philosophically justified, let us quickly summarize the thrust of what we have said so far in three points:

1. The question of being can initially seem to be either a question about what *is* (in the way that stuff *is*), or otherwise an abstract ‘formal’ query over why our language cannot but instinctively interpolate an ‘is’ in order to convey to us things about the world in an understandable and mutually shareable way. As this second ‘formal’ sort of question, it does not seem to promise any concrete information about what the world is like, or what actually *is*. But Heidegger thinks that when we pay closer attention to our concrete experience, we are able to see that ‘stuff’ alone does not capture the fullness of what is going on in existence, and neither does the explanation that this is all somehow coming out of our own heads. There seems to be more that has to be accounted for – namely, a unified and yet articulated and distinct reality that we call ‘existence’. And it is only when we have something like this mapped out for us that we can begin to judge the appropriateness of our modes of participation in it.
2. Any attempt to describe the *what* of existence and of the way in which we own it cannot proceed to give us a ‘what’ that is similar to the answers we give regarding

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<sup>16</sup> Heidegger strenuously resists the alternative conclusion that meaning is only ‘psychologically’ real and therefore somehow entirely constructed by human beings, on the grounds that such a supposition would involve the unwarranted metaphysical assumption that meaning is produced by mental activity. The problem with such a claim is we can never actually verify that this is true without presupposing the conclusion as a premise.

‘stuff-like’ entities. If our answer to the ‘what’ of existence fails to grasp this hybridity in our experience, it also necessarily fails in describing what ‘is’.

3. What is revealed to be properly there, through yet irreducible to things, is the existential framework of ‘meaning’. We might provisionally say that the ‘what’ of existence is to be answered, first and foremost, with regard to meaningfulness. Thus to own existence will primarily entail owning meaningfulness. In order to better understand what this could mean, however, we will have to gain a clearer sense of how meaning connects things in the world and the experiencing center of the ‘I’ who finds the world to be meaningful in this way.

### 1.3 Meaning and Being

So how are beings, being and meaning connected to each other? In saying that we should go ‘to the things themselves’, Heidegger, like his early mentor Edmund Husserl, is committed to the fact that our perception of sensuous objects is foundational to anything we can say about meaning.<sup>17</sup> As sensible as this first step seems, it is also a rather complicated matter. Let us consider the case of my looking at a brown wooden table. It is available to me as a sensuous intuition (to rely on Kant’s language), and I am able to perceive it as an object with a certain color, texture, shape and so on. What is more, I experience its brown exterior, its grainy wood finish, its flat surface and its four legs as a unity. If we pay attention, however, something odd about the *unity* of this experience of the object becomes clear – it is not something that is presented to us in quite the same way as any of the other properties such as brown, wooden, and so on are, which, as Kant would have put it, are ‘real predicates’ of the object.

Additionally, the purely sensuous intuitions of these percepts such as ‘brown’ and ‘flat’

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<sup>17</sup> See Martin Heidegger, “My Way to Phenomenology,” in *The Phenomenology Reader*, ed. Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney (London, Routledge, 2002), 254.

would not be meaningful until there was some conceptual articulation. The thought 'table' already articulates these percepts – we know, for example, that the properties of this object strike us differently than the properties of what we might call a 'chair' or a 'bear'. But this one-word description of an object lacks the clarity necessary for the broader context of our everyday involvements and concerns, which depend on communication and cooperative action. So we further focus our experience in a way that basically takes the form, 'This (is a) table'. But this simple move instantly announces several kinds of articulation: it posits categories like location, quantity, substance, the noun 'table', and unites these seemingly independent concepts by the insertion of the copula *is*. And this is mysterious precisely because the unavoidable *is*, without which it seems no meaning can be had, was nowhere to be directly identifiable in the object (as was its brown color or wooden texture).

One influential philosophical position inspired by Kant has typically taken this categorizing function of the received intuitions to ultimately occur on the side of the subject. For Husserl and Heidegger, however, the allocation of such a function away from the things themselves is not a conclusion that can be justified with phenomenological warrant. Instead, the intelligibility of the table as a sensuous object is always already made possible by its articulation through the conceptual categories, even though the categories themselves depend on the object for their meaning; we have no way of cleaving them apart except in an abstract mode of ideation. In his influential discussion of the categorial intuition in the sixth investigation of his *Logical Investigations* (a section of the work that Heidegger credits with playing a key role in his own re-framing of the phenomenological project), Husserl argues that the sensuous intuitions themselves latently carry within them their categorial or formal structures, such that there is a non-subjective self-givenness or manifestness not just to the sensuous objects but also to our categories.

Drawing on this initial critical opening, which allowed him to see the structures of meaning as latent in the things themselves, Heidegger sees the possibility of an even more primordial line of inquiry. The question for him evolves into: ‘whence and how is it determined what must be experienced as “the things themselves” in accordance with the principle of phenomenology?’<sup>18</sup> In other words, what first of all allows things to present themselves *as things* in this meaningful way? Whatever it was that made this possible was not simply subject-imposed but rather was latent in or *playing through* things, even though it was also not to be understood substantially in the manner of ‘objectively-present’ beings. This *a priori*, pre-subjective meaning of phenomenal experience raises, for Heidegger, a question about the formal structures of articulation that allow meaning to be given. Therefore, while he does agree with the initial insight of phenomenology made by Brentano and solidified in Husserl, that all conscious experience is first and foremost characterized by intentionality or ‘about-ness’ as an essential structure, he does not think that it is the original one. In fact, this assessment is key to his claim (in the crucial methodological §7 of *Being and Time*) that the only way to do phenomenology is as ontology and vice versa.

For anybody who might wonder how an account of what *appears* can satisfactorily illumine the question of what *really is*, Heidegger simply suggests that the apparent incongruence can only arise within a framework that incorporates certain assumptions that he rejects. First, it can only arise on the presupposition of a representational view of mind that takes sensuous experience to be something like seeing a projection of an image on the inner mental screen representing something else in the world – a picture that Heidegger roundly rejects as phenomenologically ungrounded speculation. Second, it misunderstands the nature of what ‘appears’. Following the Greek philological roots of the word, he describes a phenomenon as simply the ‘self-showing’ of something in itself. In contrast, he describes an

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<sup>18</sup> Heidegger, “My Way to Phenomenology,” 254.

‘appearance’ as a special kind of phenomenon that indicates something beyond it that does *not* show itself (he gives the example of a symptom that appears as a showing that simultaneously announces an illness that is not shown). Thus ‘phenomena are never appearances, but every appearance is dependent on phenomena’ (SZ 30).

What is key to notice here is that phenomena are not a kind of flatness or ‘dead’ presence, such that all the capacities for distortion or correction can only inhere strictly on the side of the perceiving subject. The proper pursuit of a phenomenological ontology as Heidegger sees himself working out in *Being and Time* is therefore not a study of *the phenomenon in the ordinary sense* (as the object of perception), or even *the formal conception of the phenomenon* (as a mere concept that does not address specifically which beings are to become phenomena and what the nature of their being is), but rather *the phenomenological concept of the phenomenon* (that which is latent and unthematically shown and known both prior to and in what we commonly call ‘phenomena’). It is this third designation of phenomena that an adequate phenomenology must attempt to explicate thematically. What is especially interesting (and somewhat paradoxical) about this conceptual task of drawing out what is latent in things is that Heidegger characterizes it as an interpretative (that is, a hermeneutical ‘all the way down’) activity that is also at the same time strictly descriptive – *we* are reading, with all our assumptions in play, for that which is already *there!* Thus we are always asking our leading questions from a certain pre-understanding and situational limit, and we are attempting to clarify the relationship between things, what is latent in them, and Dasein in a manner that is circular rather than linear. This circularity arises from the fact that the clarification concerns distinct aspects of a total unified whole of experience. Thus we are never leaving behind where we start, even though we journey forward to meet what appears to us through our inquiry. And so Heidegger writes: ‘we are dealing with something “self-evident” which we want to get closer to’ (SZ 28). What

seems implicitly important to this claim is the insight that seeing the 'self-evident' cannot be taken to be a simple or easy matter. That this is the case with us also seems to indicate something crucial about *human* being.

But what is the relevance of all these somewhat technical points on Heidegger's methodological foundations for our concern to understand the nature of existence as something that must be owned? It seems to me that their real import lies primarily in the way they might bring into question our largely unchallenged assumptions about being subjects standing in relation to or in confrontation with objects out in the world. Our received patterns of thought often reiterate these entrenched philosophical notions and it is crucial that we evaluate how apt this way of slicing up experience might be for the question of existence.

If existence is not 'thing-like', then it might be erroneous for us to model our ownership of it in ways that make sense with regard to our ownership of cars, homes or grand pianos (although we may be mistaken about this kind of ownership as well). Additionally, if existence is fundamentally tied to meaningfulness, and this meaning is neither to be found strictly in the thingliness of things nor in the mind of the subject, then it is not at all obvious that the 'I' who is called on to own existence is as well-contained, self-identical and independent of the rest of reality as is often assumed. If our most basic faculty for being a human self is something achieved by being related to something that is not us, this suddenly complicates the question of *who* we are or *who* I am. Thus we see that the clarification of the 'what' of existence as the phenomenon of meaningful participation in things naturally moves us towards needing to explore the issue of human identity.

To conclude our inquiry of how *Being and Time* positions us to understand the 'what' of that which is to be owned in existence, we can summarize the things I take Heidegger to have given us as concrete results thus far in our inquiry:

1. We have brought to the surface and clarified the basic but often forgotten fact that ‘existence’ concerns a *who* kind of being, unlike any *what* kind of being (objective presence in the broadest sense), though the distinction between the ‘who’ and the ‘what’ also acknowledges a fundamental connection through the phenomenon of meaningfulness. The ‘what’ of existence is therefore not strictly a ‘what’ but a ‘who’ – more precisely a ‘who-what’ or ‘that things are meaningful’. This ‘who-what’ is decisively not a ‘substance’ traditionally understood, but rather a stretched relation that confounds any neat distinction between subjects and objects.
2. As that which encompasses both subject and object, meaningfulness is ontologically prior to that way of slicing up reality, and is to be understood not as another thing-like being, but rather as a *structure of participation*. What we need in order to further clarify this structure is an articulation of this ‘who-what’ that participates and its modalities of participation.
3. In attempting to understand this structure better, the most immediately suitable kind of being to be interrogated is human being. This is because it is ontic-ontological in its very essence – it is both absolutely thing-like and absolutely un-thing-like in its being.<sup>19</sup> On Heidegger’s terms, it is the only being we know that *exists*.
4. And finally, the method and conceptual language suitable to understanding existence will have to respect this fundamental (ontic-ontological) character that marks Dasein out as different from all other kinds of beings. The categories (as they have been handed down from Aristotle onwards) that work so well in helping us grasp the being of substance as a ‘what’ are only partially adequate to illumine the ‘who’ kind of (human) being. Heidegger writes that ‘[t]he “substance” of human being is... existence’ (SZ 117). As the paradigmatic being of the *who* sort, Dasein demands that

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<sup>19</sup> The way in which it is unlike things is definitively not to be understood here as some sort of spirit-type thing instead. Dasein is unlike a thing in the sense that its being is an issue for it.

its being be explicated appropriately – not in terms of the categories predicated of substance, but in terms of the *existentials* that articulate existence (SZ 44).

Rather than clarifying this ‘what’ of existence that I am claiming we must own, these results might, in a sense, be said to have made things more bewildering. For one, we now have a seemingly tautological idea that existence is to be understood in terms of existence itself. Also, while human being is the paradigmatic candidate to be examined for a further clarification of what existence is like, it has become clear that the structure called Dasein that is to bear the weight of all our inquiring is not anything like the kind of subject operative in commonsense understandings of the self or indeed in the dominant interpretations of the philosophical tradition. How can we claim to be making progress in clarifying existence if it is only ultimately answering to its own (externally uncorroborated) stipulations, and is to be carried out in the terms of a formal structure that is unrecognizable in any determinate, particular human being?<sup>20</sup> These are concerns that I will revisit in some form within Chapter 3, after Heidegger’s broader framework has been better clarified.

Here I simply want to make explicit what I take to be one key underlying philosophical problem at work in both Heidegger’s project and the objections of his critics – that of clarifying how identity and difference are to be understood within his ontic-ontological description of existence. Since we are questioning existence, and existence has been shown to be the matter of how things are meaningful, and because things are meaningful only in and through their relations in a web that is broader than individual,

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<sup>20</sup> Heidegger was very aware of this possible line of objection and took it to rest on a misunderstanding of the task of a ‘descriptive phenomenology’. He claims that it cannot be seen in the same way as the other branches of inquiry that designate an object and proceed to describe it in terms of its positive content, as in the case of theology or botanical morphology (both are his examples). Phenomenology’s methodological commitment to direct demonstration means that its tautological tendency is first and foremost to be understood as a ‘prohibition’ against all ‘non-demonstrative determinations’ (SZ 35). It seems to me that the key factor in deciding whether this is an adequate answer will be whether we judge that his phenomenological analysis of existence is not just ‘logically empty’ but also *meaningless* in what it describes. If we think it is meaningfully demonstrative but circular, we should not be too troubled by its circularity. As he writes in SZ 153: ‘But to see a vitiosum in this circle and to look for ways to avoid it, even to “feel” that is an inevitable imperfection, is to misunderstand understanding from the ground up... What is decisive is not to get out of the circle, but to get in it in the right way.’

atomically defined subjects or objects, Heidegger may certainly be seen to have invalidated the neat structures of identity and difference that are made available by maintaining such a distinction (between pure subjects and pure objects). He thinks that the model of distinguishing one being from another that is solely derived from the individuality and multiplicity we see as definitive of our experience with objects is not applicable to a more complicated kind of being who is primarily characterized by its investment in meaning-having and -making. Heidegger takes such a paradigm – defined by what he calls ‘objective presence’ – to underlie philosophy as metaphysics, as well as the ethics that derives from that metaphysics. Consequently, the ‘who’ and the ‘what’ that operate in those terms within much philosophy and ethical thought are similarly marked by a certain forgetfulness of what really *is*, how things really *are*. If we invoke ownership in that paradigm, Heidegger thinks whatever we end up ‘owning’ will be something other than our actual existence. At the most, it will be a shell of it.

As the being for whom meaningfulness is constitutive, human being becomes visible not first and foremost as a numerically or spatio-temporally identical being, but as the ‘between’ (SZ 374), the ‘open space’. Here presence and possibility (conceived not as a weak logical counterpoint to actuality, but a pregnant force quietly operative within it) together fertilize what is latent within things, allowing the concerned dealings of Dasein to flower into a demonstrative event of existential significance. I take this conceptual framework made thinkable by Heidegger’s hermeneutic-phenomenological matrix to lead up to the positing of one absolutely crucial, indeed foundational, insight that is of lasting significance for everything else that is at issue in this study – namely, that in some very real (existential) sense, *one is both oneself and not oneself*. The real significance of showing human being to be unlike the being of things (the work we have done in Chapter 1) is that we have regained a way to free that being from a false conception of its own existence as somehow simple, self-

identical, solidly present to itself, and therefore open to being grasped in the way that objects are. That is not the nature of our existence.

*The 'what' of existence that we must own meaningfully is ourselves as the strange beings that have the capacity to both be ourselves and not be ourselves.* This is admittedly a confusing and somewhat disconcerting claim which requires clear explication (and which I will take up shortly). But we can close our study of human meaning by reiterating the way this provisional result matters to the rest of this thesis: whatever else one's ownership of existence may come to, it is unlikely that it can be achieved through either a willed or unwitting ignorance of one's proper situation. The claim that one must own one's existence authentically is ultimately the claim that one must be responsible for oneself, first and foremost by understanding what properly attends 'being a self'. If selfhood itself is understood to be essentially participatory, surely neglecting its proper nature will also undermine how we discern one's proper responsibility towards another. Therefore, it is to a further development of this theme of human identity that I now turn to in Chapter 2.

## 2 Human Identity: The *Who* of Existence

The question of human identity has risen for us out of the explication of the ‘what’ of existence. In establishing this ‘what’ as meaningfulness we have seen that the ‘what’ is actually a ‘who-what’ – a stretched relation – as a structure of participation.<sup>21</sup> But no sense of ownership (over existence) can go far without an individual centre that answers to the first-person experience that marks our being human persons. To fail to account for this is to ultimately fail to account for the meaningful core that structures our sense of being ethically or socially responsible.

Given the results of Chapter 1, I take the task of clarifying the ‘who’ of existence in *Being and Time* to invite a fundamentally two-sided type of inquiry that in fact answers to a basic two-sidedness within human identity itself (as the kind of being that is both itself and not itself). On the one hand, the issue is one of understanding how wide-ranging our thought about the ‘who’ ought to be; that is, what are the aspects to be included in it *as its own* that may have been ruled out from the perspective of a pure subject? On the other hand, the issue is one of differentiating this ‘who’ and its ‘own’ from every other ‘who’ and its ‘own’, of tying it to its most proper being and securing its limits.

Therefore, I propose to approach the problem of human identity here in two movements which I will call ‘expansive’ and ‘conservative’. As I hope the terms suggest, I see the first as fulfilling a sort of ‘totalizing’ impulse within the concept of identity, and the

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<sup>21</sup> In his brief but seminal later essay, ‘The Principle of Identity’, Heidegger argues that the principle of identity as equality or sameness would be unintelligible without first suggesting a two-ness which is brought into equivalence. Thus the sameness and unity of identity is conditioned in its core by a ‘with’, such that the ‘key note’ to be heard in the relation *A is A* is the ‘is-ness’ at work as the basic question of the being of beings. Though not explicitly developed within *Being and Time*, this basic orientation to the problem of identity does in fact serve as a bulwark in its conceptual framework, and allows Heidegger to open up the counter-intuitive position that in the ontology of any relationship of beings, the *relata* must be recognized as obtaining their particular essence, first and foremost, from the fact of their being related, rather than on the basis of some metaphysically guaranteed principle of individuation. This leading idea is then developed with often startlingly illuminating consequences for our understanding of what human identity might be and also what it is not. Martin Heidegger, ‘The Principle of Identity’, in *Identity and Difference*, tr. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

second to achieve an essentially securing or limiting function, also intrinsic to any thinking of identity. The ‘expansive’ also emphasizes the relational thrust of identity, while the ‘conservative’ emphasizes its essentially exclusive and differential character.<sup>22</sup> As these aspects are further developed it should become clearer that they are to be thought of as two sides of the same coin, distinct but not essentially separate. *Thus, in describing one aspect we are also invoking the other.* This said, holding these aspects apart at least provisionally will bring clarity to the way in which Heidegger challenges us to rethink selfhood. It will also highlight the solutions he offers to the challenges that might be raised against this re-conception of human identity.

In the first movement (Sections 2.1 and 2.2 of this chapter), which details the ‘expansive’ tendencies of human identity, we will try to clarify the nature of this stretched relation through an exploration of the phenomena of world and of others. In the second movement (Section 2.3), which limns the ‘conservative’ impulses integral to a functioning notion of selfhood, we will trace the gathering-up or individuating forces that are at work through the ontological structures of care and time, which allow Heidegger to account for an ‘I’ who can be called on to own its existence. Without a firmer understanding of these phenomena, much about the nature of ‘ownership’ with regard to existence will remain unclear and unconvincing.

My argumentative goals for this chapter are three-fold: (1) to track the key aspects of human identity to emerge from *Being and Time*, aspects that exceed and reconfigure the traditional notion of who the ‘I’ is; (2) to show that there is a phenomenologically adequate, and argumentatively coherent, notion of self-individuation in Heidegger’s account; and (3) to secure the foundations of the claim that the self that thereby comes into view is a genuinely

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<sup>22</sup> To the extent that this relational thrust of the ‘expansive’ aspect of identity involves making that which is related into a whole that can be claimed as ‘one’s own’, I think we can see some intersection of the relational and the totalizing aspects of identity.

non-self-identical being, whose self-ownership demands a stance of indebtedness and openness to that which lies somehow beyond yet within it.

## 2.1 The Expanded ‘Who’

### 2.1.1 World

We start with Heidegger’s description of the structure of world, because it announces the basic sense in which human being might be seen to ‘spill over’, or exceed a narrowly conceived subjectivity. In Chapter 1 we concluded that the most primordial determination of what *is* for human beings is our immersion in meaningfulness. However, we did not pursue the question of ‘*how*’ and ‘*where*’ meaning comes from. We saw that Heidegger thinks that meaning is neither solely a construction of mind nor reducible to objectively present beings, even though they ineluctably are the bearers of meaning. In that sense we were already given a clue about meaning’s roots – it emerges in, through and as relations. Heidegger’s important insight regarding this is twofold: First, what is meaningful presents itself to us as somehow relevant or as something that matters. Second, this relevance it is never an atomic fact. The meaningfulness of the most immediately experienced object of intentionality is itself supplied with meaning by another layer of relevance, which in turn is sustained by another, and so on. What we find meaningful in the present instance is ontologically possible only through a web of interconnected concerns and practices that he calls ‘*world*’.<sup>23</sup>

In a terminologically dense but nonetheless illuminating articulation of this web, Heidegger writes: ‘The for-sake-of-which signifies an in-order-to, the in-order-to signifies a

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<sup>23</sup> Heidegger distinguishes between four senses of world: 1) The totality of beings encountered by Dasein within the world; 2) the being of this totality of beings other than Dasein; 3) a complex that is not opposed to Dasein, wherein it ‘lives’; and 4) the Being of this ‘wherein’. His fundamental ontology analyzes and works with the third sense (SZ 64-65).

what-for, the what-for signifies a what-in of letting something be relevant, and the latter a what-with of relevance. These relations are interlocked among themselves as a primordial totality' (SZ 87). Thus the meaningfulness of an immediate 'what-with' of relevance – say, my undertaking the determinate task of writing this particular essay (instead of doing other things I would enjoy on a warm spring day, such as walking in the park) – can only emerge from the 'what-in' of its relevance to completing my thesis, which itself would be meaningless if it were not made intelligible by the 'what-for' of my desire to pursue the next stage of graduate study, 'in-order-to' lay hold of an ongoing and future work-life that is existentially interesting, practically sustainable and communally valuable. But the only reason why these last three goals arise as important is because somewhere, at bottom, I am concerned with what I must do (that will be worth doing) with my life. This primary 'for-the-sake-of-which' cannot be accounted for in terms of anything else. It is simply and immediately grounded in my being a human being who is characteristically and unavoidably folded onto the question of my own life's significance, future possibilities and ultimate end.<sup>24</sup> In William Richardson's description, '[u]nlike the being of instruments which are ontologically structured as referencing beyond (being-destined), the being of Dasein is concerned with its own Being and therefore cannot be referred beyond itself'.<sup>25</sup> Therefore the Heideggerian answer to the question about where meanings come from is straightforward – they come from having a world, and having a world is part of the definitive being of Dasein.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The image of human being as a fold is a particularly resonant one because it visually captures something of the sense in which we encounter ourselves as the other who is yet also always us. In the context of world, the idea of a fold is useful to convey the way in which Dasein's network of concern expands outward to envelop other beings, but in a way that always curves back to refer them to its own relentless question about its individual significance. I owe this metaphor of the fold to John Russon's use of the image in *Bearing Witness to Epiphany* (Albany: SUNY, 2009), 43.

<sup>25</sup> William J. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 55.

<sup>26</sup> A critical question that can be raised about such a claim is that of how many worlds there are: does each Dasein have an independent monadic world or do we all participate in one single world? Frederick Olafson seems to pick up on this and reads what he takes to be Heidegger's failure to give an account of the mediating

Heidegger writes: ‘As that *for which* one lets beings be encountered in the kind of being of relevance, the *wherein* of self-referential understanding is the phenomenon of world’ (SZ 86, my emphasis). We can see, in this rather convoluted sentence, a twin sense in which Dasein *is* as its world – i.e., both as ‘for which’ and as ‘wherein’. As a meaning-constituting structure, world functions in *Being and Time* both as place and as relations, thus complicating any traditional assumptions we may bring to understanding Dasein as a simple ‘*who*’ of existence. Every term or metaphor that Heidegger uses to describe world assumes both static, intransitive and dynamic, transitive meanings. The world is both the *place* of meaningfulness and also the *placing* of things within meaningful contexts. Sheehan pithily summarizes it thus: ‘The world is the self “writ large” or “opened out,” with no “inside” where it might take refuge’.<sup>27</sup> The *who* of the ‘who’ kind of being is a stretched relation of concern that encompasses beings and orders them in uniquely shaped potentialities for encounter through the pull of its own existential disquiet and solicitude. It is a being who is constituted by the constituting of its world.

In his preliminary sketch of Dasein’s ‘world-ing’ in §12, Heidegger first introduces this stretched web of concern with the compound expression *being-in-the-world*. He stresses that it is an *a priori*, unified phenomenon that can be distinguished and further articulated through its three constituting elements: Being, Being-in and in-the-world. However, he also points out that the analysis of any one of these can never occur without simultaneously invoking the others, ‘each time seeing the whole phenomenon’ (SZ 53). The Being who is signified in this staggered expression is always already concerned with its own being in the

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role of plurality in the relationship between Dasein and world as central to the lack of a developed Heideggerian ethics. Frederick Olafson, *Heidegger and the Philosophy of Mind* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1987), 72. My view of this matter is that while Heidegger’s text is silent in certain areas, making it unlikely the issue can be resolutely settled, it does offer us clues. For example, Heidegger is clear that his use of the term ‘world’ cannot be construed as the kind of being of something objectively present. His term for such things that belong to the ‘world’ is ‘innerworldly’ (SZ 64). It seems to me that the worry over whether there is one world or many might still be too deeply invested in thinking along the lines and expectations of objectively present, numerically distinct, self-identical beings.

<sup>27</sup> Sheehan, “Dasein,” 200.

mode of an 'average everydayness'. That is to say, this being is already immersed through its daily striving in the business of querying after and positing its significance – invariably doing so within a network of inherited patterns. Dasein's way of being is that it is able to 'inhabit' its world. Heidegger clarifies that the distinctive character of this 'being-in' or inhabiting cannot simply be understood in the same sense as we might the fact that coffee is *in* a cup, or a car is *in* a garage.

Understood as an existential rather than a categorical description, Dasein's 'being-in' is marked by its capacity to 'dwell near... to be familiar with' what constitutes its world (SZ 54). Heidegger rather powerfully reminds us that, in principle, a chair can never *touch* a wall even if there is no space left between them (55). The familiarity that is touch – the sensitive orientation towards something else encountered – is not available to a 'worldless' object. But to be as Dasein is, always in-the-world, is to ceaselessly engage in this play of projection towards and reception of all that manifests itself to us through participation in our self-concern. Indeed, unlike the self-coincident presence of a material object, which can only stand passively, without any existential commitment to its environment, self-concerned Dasein is always occasioning more than an egoistic centre. As Dasein, we fold onto ourselves (in self-concern) in such a way that we enfold other things in the world and sustain them in an opened space that is both us and yet not us (in the sense of any narrowly conceived notion of subjectivity).

The phenomenon of world seems to further nuance the idea of ownership with regard to existence in at least one broadly significant way: we can no longer simply imagine that owning one's existence is a matter of fencing off and laying claim to some small piece of 'existential real estate', as if there were a closet of the pure 'I' outside of which all claims would cease to concern us. Whatever else owning existence is to mean, the phenomenon of world reveals it to be a task that cannot fail to touch every nook and cranny in the unity of

our experience. In this expansive conception of what it means to be a self, we can perhaps already see an indication of how Heidegger might be offering us a way to rethink the character and scope of our responsibility as human beings.

### 2.1.2 Others

The expanded, world-having ‘who’ that Heidegger brings to light is not only a stretched relation of concern, a dwelling near other things, it is also an intimate and always already familiar comportment with other Dasein. While the commonsense notion of what it is like for me to come across other Dasein might be that I first register another Dasein as an occasion of radical difference – an absolute ‘non-me’ – Heidegger claims this is actually not the original character of our encounters. Unlike our experience with non-human entities (who we don’t generally acknowledge to be folded in self-concern like ourselves), he claims that other persons are *not* primordially experienced as ‘everybody else but me – those from whom the I distinguishes itself. They are, rather, those from whom one mostly does not distinguish oneself, those among whom one is, too’ (SZ 118). He calls this primordial co-identification ‘Being-with’ (*Mitdasein*), and takes it to be a unique meaning-giving structure, equi-primordial with the recently described structure of being-in-the-world (SZ 114). To ‘be-with’ is to have woven into our own meaningfulness the significance of others as folds of self-concern, who in asking about their own being reveal themselves to be sites of an ‘en-worlding’ power that inhabits *my* world, but with the agency to shape it on terms that curve away from me, beyond me, and even against me. We in fact always already find ourselves to be recipients of a whole array of meanings formulated by others that we did not sort through or choose ourselves. Heidegger’s technical term for this prior and ongoing indebtedness of Dasein is ‘thrownness’. As a thrown being, my own, ordinary way of existing is already

constituted irreducibly and pervasively by the being of others – they are not a contingent addition to something that is already functionally complete in itself, like a *real* me.

The essential nature of this primordial togetherness with other Dasein is such that it is not only achieved when we are physically in one another's presence or in conversation. As an ontological determination of human being, it precedes any of these ontic instances and is what first makes them possible. Thus in talking, for example, Dasein is not expressing something that moves from 'the inside of one subject to the inside of another' (SZ 162). Rather as being-in-the-world Dasein is already outside any walls that a narrowly defined view of subjectivity might posit. '*Mitdasein* is essentially already manifest in its [Dasein's] attunement-with and understanding-with'.<sup>28</sup> Thus explicit expression is *not* how we *begin* to connect with each other, according to Heidegger. Rather it is only the ontic sign of the ontological fact of our being (already) outside or 'exposed as an open place' (SZ 162); speech succeeds only because a connection already exists. The expanded 'who' is not one which can be thought without the constitutive role of other 'who's.

Therefore, the individual 'who' of existence that comes to light in Heidegger's existential analytic may be seen, at least in some ways, to be an ontologically social being at its very core. He even goes on to claim that existent beings are only able to see themselves 'transparently' – that is, they attain a clear vision of who they are – when they are able to grasp and understand their immersion within and interrelatedness to all the factors constitutive of their existence as being-in-the-world. This he calls '*correctly understood* self-knowledge' (SZ 146). But this picture of the self's essential other-relatedness must be

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<sup>28</sup> Both 'attunement' and 'understanding' are technical terms that Heidegger introduces to articulate the 'there-being' of Dasein. They are described as equiprimordial constituents of Dasein's peculiar way of existing (SZ 133). Attunement involves our basic 'disclosive submission to world' out of which what is significant to Dasein is encountered (SZ 138). Understanding, on the other hand, is Dasein's orientation towards a 'for-the-sake-of-which', courting its potential for 'complete being-in-the-world' (SZ 143) – as that end which beckons it from the future. We should think of attunement as more or less focused on what lies behind us, at our back, as pushing on us in such a manner that it conditions our present disclosure, while understanding discloses our future potentialities in correlation with our current situation through a pressing inwards towards us from the outermost horizons of our finite life.

reconciled with another crucial aspect that comes to light in his ontology of Dasein's individual and social existence – namely, that this inescapable indebtedness also feeds into a mode of being that effectively blinds Dasein and prevents it from most fully being itself.

In insisting on this counterpoint to our deep interconnectedness, Heidegger seems also to be maintaining that something about our potential for meaningfulness is inevitably imperiled or shut down by our immersion in the modes of existence shaped by others. The average everydayness that characterizes much of our individual lives directly subsists on a general, widely shared web of life practices, values, proclivities and imaginative horizons that Heidegger calls 'the They' (SZ 114). And he takes the influence of 'the They' to be so antithetical to a properly owned existence that he even calls it a 'true dictatorship...' in which 'Dasein stands in subservience to others... It itself *is* not; the others have taken away its being from it' (SZ 126). Puzzlingly, it seems the very aspect that was recognized as constitutive also comes in for the harshest condemnation! How is this apparent contradiction to be understood?

The brief answer appears to be that he sees others as being irreducibly constitutive of the individual, even while the individual somehow always includes and exceeds others. On Heidegger's assessment, the 'who' that we take ourselves most immediately to be – an 'I' modulated in the register of 'the They' – is a levelled-down, indifferent mode of being which forecloses Dasein's real possibilities, and against which Dasein must struggle in order to properly find itself. Indeed, this is where the Heideggerian language of ownership begins to meet our ordinary sense of it. Existence must be claimed by a *somebody* who is not an 'everybody'.

To identify the proper sense in which an 'I' can be asserted, however, we must first free ourselves from entrenched but ontologically suspect variations of it. The first major insight into the 'I' that has now become available is that this 'I' is not exclusive of the

phenomena of world and of others, and cannot be posited in contradistinction to them. The desire to think them apart from each other is a vestige of an inadequate model of selfhood. In having made the (re)discovery of ‘world’ and ‘others’ and of the way in which ‘world’ and ‘others’ overturn the traditional conception of subjectivity, Heidegger himself faces a challenge – that of having to retrieve an adequate ground for individuation from within this ‘open space’. To understand how he negotiates this challenge, we will now turn to a consideration of what the positing of the ‘I’ means for Heidegger’s re-conceived notion of individuality in *Being and Time*, and how it ties into the basic ‘what’ of meaningfulness. Our focus hitherto, on explicating the ‘expansive’ impulse within a Heideggerian re-description of personal identity, must now be met by a description of its ‘conservative’ counter-force.

## 2.2 The Conserved ‘Who’

### 2.2.1 Saying ‘I’

Heidegger seems to have no qualms in maintaining that concepts like ‘authentic ownership’ or ‘proper selfhood’ remain unintelligible without the invocation of some sense of a unified centre or ‘closed region’ that lies at the base of all the changes and modes that characterize Dasein’s behavior and experience, as a sort of ‘*subjectum*’. He even grants that the first suggestion we have of this unified center in ordinary understanding is as a ‘presence’ with a kind of ‘substantiality’ (SZ 114). What he rules out of court is the option of thinking this self along the lines of a tacit reification modelled on the being of objectively present things, which would be to render an absolutely crucial aspect of human being invisible. It is one of Heidegger’s key insights in *Being and Time* that the quality of human existence is compromised by a mistaken understanding of what its proper actuality is: in this context, that

it is shaped by possibility in its very essence. To miss this in our articulation is to miss actuality itself. If our proper saying-I is a 'being-in-the-world', the average, everyday use of 'I' is erroneously positing something the 'I' is actually not. This average 'I' in fact 'shows itself as what is constantly and identically simple, but indefinite and empty' (SZ 322).

At the close of Chapter 1, I asserted that Heidegger's phenomenological commitments lead him to a place at which he is able to recognize that human existence is essentially the sort of existence in which one is both oneself and not oneself. We have seen that basic point reprised here, but it is a point that can seem unclear and even equivocal without some clear distinctions with regard to how Heidegger uses 'I' and 'not-I'. What does he mean when he asks, '[w]hat if the fact that Dasein is so constituted that it is in each case mine, were the reason for the fact that Dasein *is*, initially and for the most part, *not itself*?' (SZ 116) Is Heidegger really saying that human identity is the sort of thing that contradicts itself in a fundamental way? The answer is both 'yes' and 'no'. In interpreting portions of the text in which such claims are made, we should remember that Heidegger's own 'I/not-I' distinction is different from the 'I/not-I' of traditional subjectivity against which he takes himself to be working, and this demands watchful interpretation from his readers.

The 'I/not-I' distinction posited from the perspective of the traditional, commonly conceived 'subjectivity' is that of an ego opposed to that which lies 'outside' of it, that which is ontically determined as other things and people, and perhaps in some sense even my own body, a stance that Heidegger chides as being a 'miserable egotism' (SZ 116).<sup>29</sup> In contrast, the Heideggerian 'I/not-I' distinction is primarily ontological in its determination. The 'I' here 'means the being that I always am as "I-am-in-a-world"' (SZ 321). This is an 'I' that is constituted by world and others, but in such a way that two modes of existence (one authentic and another inauthentic) are possible for it.

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<sup>29</sup> These are Heidegger's comments on his own text (included in the Stambaugh translation).

When Heidegger refers to a ‘not-I’ in his ontological sense, he always means the inauthentic, ‘They’-immersed ‘I’. His ‘not-I’ is always within the ‘I-hood’ of Dasein. Thus, he writes, “‘not-I’ by no means signifies something like a being which is essentially lacking “I-hood,” but means a definite mode of being of the “I” itself; having lost itself” (SZ 116). To have lost oneself is to have fallen away from answering the call to ‘genuine selfhood’ rather than to have misplaced one’s self overall. Dasein is never actually presented as being more than its ‘I-hood’. However, what does make the Heideggerian ‘I’ ultimately more complicated is that its unity is itself posited as a kind of openness. And it is here that his view remains resolutely at odds with any traditional self-contained, self-identical ‘I’. But this clarification about the logical coherence of the ‘I/not-I’ only answers one, relatively punctilious objection to the thesis that has emerged about human identity in Heidegger’s existential analytic. The much larger concern in this chapter is over how ‘I-hood’ itself comes to be posited within the structure of ‘being-in-the-world’ and ‘being-with’.

Nonetheless, our quest for the ‘who’ that is capable of owning existence has gained crucial ground by determining that the direction of questioning must be one that answers to a fundamental modal two-sidedness within the ‘I-hood’ of individual Dasein. It appears that in order to deepen our ‘conservative’ countermovement we need a further determination of the meaning of Dasein’s being, to which both modes, authenticity and inauthenticity, are subject. In other words, we need greater clarity on what contextually holds these two modes together for Dasein. That is the task the next subsection aims to accomplish.

### 2.2.2 I-hood: Care and Time

Once the phenomenon of world has been recognized and made central to the question of any individuation of the self, we cannot expect ‘I-hood’ to be finally determinable in ontic terms

alone. The unique ground of one 'I' as distinct from that of another cannot simply be a matter of distinguishing one's brain or body functions from that of another. It is important not to undervalue the material facts of human identity – in the end our experience of finitude is inexorably rooted in them. World, however, is never exhausted by thingliness, even though it is always about it. What much of the work in this study has attempted to secure thus far is the fact that a far more primordial structure of existential concern pervades human reality and gathers or holds things together within an open field of meaning.

Heidegger's term of art for this articulated structure of unity that holds all things together for existing Dasein is 'care'. And he thinks that the 'holding together' of the self is primordially discovered and grounded in this uniquely human way of being. In fact, he describes care as the *meaning* of the being of Dasein. While the word 'care' may initially evoke for us everyday connotations of emotional interest or practical supportive action, these are not integral to what Heidegger wants to capture with the concept of care.<sup>30</sup> If anything, the commonsense apprehension of the word only registers something distantly derived from a more primordial phenomenon he has in mind. Care is, in fact, the foundation of Heidegger's radical conservation of the 'I', articulated from within the expansive self of Dasein as 'being-in-the-world' and 'being-with'. In being as care, individual Dasein finds itself set apart from everything else – both those things that do not have 'world' (and thus do not intrinsically have the capacity to be concerned about everything else), as well as other Dasein who are 'care' in distinct ways. Ultimately, Heidegger will find this individuating principle of care to lie in time. Thus it is vital for us to explore both these structures further. The real significance of articulating these structures for this study is two-fold. First, it is argumentatively significant in that we can finally square the 'expanded' self with the 'conserved' self who can be thought to be active and responsible in owning existence, and do this in a way that

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<sup>30</sup> It is clearly true, however, that Heidegger is connecting us to the common concept and its field of meaning in order to draw us into comprehending a far more technically articulated concept within his own thought.

accommodates this self's capacity to both be itself and not itself. Second, and perhaps of even greater importance, we are finally given a practical and substantial indication of that towards which self-ownership *is* directed; we will finally have a referent for what all this talk of being a 'self' is actually describing.

Conceived as an existential, care is 'being-ahead-of-oneself-already-being-in (a world) as being-together-with (innerworldly beings [that are] encountered)' (SZ 317). As with all of Heidegger's concepts, there is a hermeneutical circularity to the concept of care; it was already encountered when we described the phenomenon of world and its articulated structure. There we saw that the things that appear to Dasein and form the place as well as the relations of its meaningful milieu are in fact determined not by their sheer materiality, but rather by their significance in the arc of Dasein's self-concern. This overarching arc of enfoldment in which things and their relations appear as mattering is what Heidegger means by care. As an ontological determination, it does not refer to particular objects or relations, but to the structure that makes it possible at all for them to be related to each other and encountered in this way by us. As a basic determination of Dasein, care holds together both the equi-primordial structures of 'being-in-the-world' and 'being-with'. Thus there is a deep truth in asserting that '[o]ne is, after all, what one takes care of' (SZ 322). What may pass for most as a poetic metaphor is in fact something Heidegger takes to be the case concretely.

But what is the *oneness* of this one who is *in* and always *with* this static-dynamic web of objects, practices, persons and meanings? On this count, there is an additional point of articulation in Heidegger's definition of care that we have not quite encountered before – namely, 'being-ahead-of-oneself'. Here we may note a new inflection to the suggestion encountered before that Dasein can be both itself and not itself.<sup>31</sup> It would seem that Dasein's

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<sup>31</sup> We initially clarified this as the two possible modes of existence – authenticity and inauthenticity – though we have not yet been able to fully articulate what authentic existence is supposedly being authentic to. That is something we can finally secure only after we have a fuller picture of how human being primordially *is* (as care and time).

being is not only marked by a potential for some sort of privation, but that it is (in being itself) equally marked by a perennial leap beyond itself, to be ‘constantly “more” than it actually is’ (SZ 145). There is a level of confusion that threatens interpretation when these sorts of conflicting terms abound, and it is important to settle the more or less minor formal objections that can be raised, so that the value of Heidegger’s real insights are not lost. Two points can be made here: First, Heidegger is never asserting that a human being is factually not itself or more than itself.<sup>32</sup> Second, he wants us to see that the proper identity of human being is existential rather than logical, and therefore its unity as a self does in fact consist of far more internal play and difference than that which a flat, numerical concept of oneness can grasp.

That said, what clarification can we gain on this nevertheless puzzling idea that the essential identity of human being involves a ‘more’? A number of inferences can be teased out of this phrase. For one, it suggests that Dasein’s present dwelling amidst its world is never ‘all there’, and that what is there is essentially a pointing ahead. Its directional emphasis as a ‘being-towards-an-end’ is decidedly futural – this fundamentally projective aspect is connected to the nature of time. Furthermore, this ‘being-ahead-already-being-in-as-being-with’<sup>33</sup> bespeaks an impulse towards totality or wholeness. Such a totality is only posited as the holding together of actuality and possibility – what Heidegger calls a ‘possible being-whole of Dasein’. Care reveals that the ontological ‘I’ is not just constituted as a spatially stretched *who-what*, but also as the temporally stretched *now-not yet-has been*. Thus to really account for the meaning of Dasein as care, Heidegger has to move us to a consideration of time – more precisely, of temporality. If human identity resists the

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<sup>32</sup> Heidegger defines facticity or factual life as the way in which every Dasein *is* factually, i.e., the way in which it encounters itself as its own specific being for which it has to assume ownership and care.

<sup>33</sup> I have italicized the relational terms within the formulation to draw attention to this reaching out for the whole.

determination of things in the mode of objective presence, it is ultimately because of its unique relation *as care to time*.

As with his discussion of other common phenomena (such as care), Heidegger is interested in a deeper, more primordial meaning of time than that involved in the everyday, ordinary concept. He wants to break away from an understanding that takes it to be a series of moments occurring beside each other in a linear flow, such that one moment clearly and absolutely precedes another just as surely as it follows some other. This linear view assumes that an individual human existence begins at a certain point on this line and then travels down a unidirectional path along on a line of atomic moments placed next to each other in a row that always points to the future. Heidegger's objection to that picture of time is of the same order as his objection to the traditional 'subject' – he sees it as moored in the commitments that result from conceptualizing being in terms of objective presence. He claims that, by thinking about time in this way, we fail to notice the 'essentially ecstatic' character of our experience in time. Thus he writes, 'The phenomena of toward..., to..., together with... reveal temporality as the *ekstatikon par excellence*' (SZ 329).

But what is this 'ecstatic' character? We can begin to get a sense of Heidegger's point when we consider that time as a human phenomenon is distinctly projective in its very essence. While it is always encountered in the singularity of the present, or the 'now', that singular instant is always unstoppably leaning into the future, even though the future is in principle never actually given to us. We can never live in the future, even though we cannot help existing out of it. To be bent towards the future in this way is to experience both the pull of what lies before us and beyond us as much as it is also to feel the push of what is behind us, at our backs (something we already discussed in our description of thrownness). It is this 'unified phenomenon of the future that makes present in the process of having been' that Heidegger takes to be 'ecstatic' about temporality (SZ 326). And his radical claim in *Being*

*and Time* is that something absolutely essential about *existence* as the unique being of humans, and about the basic shape of human identity, is obscured when we fail to register our proper relationship to temporality.

Perhaps the most foundational aspect of lived human time that Heidegger wants to emphasize is that our ‘ecstatic’ experience of time is ultimately *finite*. The ordinary positing of infinite time is a logical abstraction entirely outside our concrete experience. All that we ever truly know, and experience throughout our lives, is configured and rendered significant by the fact that we are finite and that this finitude essentially marks a limit to the structure of *my* participation in reality. It is in the fact that I will die, and eventually cease to participate anymore in the world of meaning that I was always already immersed in; and even more, the fact that this end is one that I cannot but be aware of in every moment (even when I try to obscure it), which finally marks out the ‘I’ and sets it apart from everything else. Thus one’s *own* being-in-the-world and being-with others can never be taken over or fully shared with any other Dasein. It is this constant ‘ecstatic’ reckoning with finitude that ultimately permeates all of Dasein’s being and reveals it to be a uniquely present ‘who’ – present in an ontic way, but also as importantly, present always to its own potential absence. For Heidegger, this is the foundational reality of human being and identity; it is a reality that we can only properly register as an *existential*. Perhaps the most important point to stress here is the fact that this setting apart of individual Dasein is shown to be always concomitant with the participation of the ‘I’ in world and others.

Therefore the true import of envisioning care and seeing its roots in finite time, for our study, is two-fold. First, it offers a way to sustain the argument I have been trying to make for an expanded ‘who’ that is also conserved enough to account for proper individuation. Rightly construed, the explication of the conserved ‘who’, which we have been articulating through the sections on Saying ‘I’, and I-hood, also clarifies the character of the

expanded 'who' of world and others. That expanded self can only be properly understood when it is seen to be an expansion that is also conserved in this way of one's finite time. Though these broad movements of expansion and conservation had to be delineated separately to articulate their dialectic significance, they are ultimately a description of a unified way of being that is uniquely human.

Second, it shows that this conserved 'who' is unthinkable as a strictly simple self-identity – a point that has far-reaching consequences for any understanding of the proper ownership of existence and the potential vision of responsibility that might be appropriate to it. The true significance of recognizing this ecstatic character of time lies in the fact that such a recognition defines genuine self-knowledge, i.e., knowledge about the meaning of our being. If we need to know who we are, we are not going to achieve greater understanding unless we have a sense of how we are, as the 'I', constantly defined by the 'not-I', that which we will become or not become. To see ourselves as temporally conditioned beings whose essential nature is 'ecstatic' marks a radically different path with the problem of personal identity than that permitted by a model of thinking rooted in objectively present things considered in themselves. Heidegger spells out the impact of this point thus: 'Temporality is the primordial "outside of itself" in and for itself' (SZ 329). The vulgar notion of time, which levels down this ecstatic character, cannot help but also level down our understanding of the proper nature and horizons of human identity.

Therefore, to misunderstand time is to misunderstand our time-bound lives as human beings. We do not keep and use time as if it were a collection of coins, i.e., something decidedly outside of us to be taken up or disposed as we wish. We *are* our time in a basic and unshakeable way. We do not just meet our end at a particular point; rather, we live out our end over our entire lives. This is Heidegger's point when he writes that 'Care is being-toward-death... [Dasein] does not have an end where it just stops, but it exists finitely' (SZ

329). Our finitude, as the extinction of our individually experienced possibilities, thoroughly penetrates our existence and gives it its existential individuation.

In the ultimate analysis, it is temporality that reveals itself as ‘the meaning of authentic care’ (SZ 331) through its unique claim on us – a claim that we did not choose, but that constantly stands in need of our participation and responsiveness for its ‘completion’. It is in terms of care as the persisting structure of demand and response that Heidegger finally also locates the phenomenological ‘constancy of the self’, which has often been taken as evidence for ‘the supposed persistence of the subject’ as a pure, transcendental ego (SZ 322). Unlike that traditional notion, Heidegger’s subject is constantly projective and yet totally finite. All those aspects traditionally recognized to be crucial to selfhood are present and spoken for, but in a fuller, existential (and the decisive meaning here is ‘temporally-responsive’) context. This is why he asserts that ‘[c]are does not need a foundation in a self... the structure of care, conceived in full, includes the phenomenon of selfhood’ (SZ 323).

### 2.3 The Conservative and Expansive Self

Heidegger has tried from the very start to take seriously the essential unity between the human being and the world in which it meaningfully participates. But he has also been equally committed to articulating Dasein’s unique difference from everything else. Both these impulses may be seen to converge in his analysis of care and time. As such, they manifest aspects that are both expansive (that is, projective, relational, and holistic) as well as conservative (that is, finite, and securing) and consequently, they reveal the individuation of Dasein to be a dialectically and dynamically achieved event, rather than an analytic and settled predetermination. Thus Heidegger might be seen to offer us a rich philosophical account of a complex whole that holds Being, beings and human being together, even though

his ontological analysis witnesses to the special place of human being within this complex – this place is its own existence.

The real point of showing how Dasein is both itself and not itself, is that we can now see that individuation cannot simply stop at achieving one's 'I-hood', which in any case, is always already factually achieved. Rather, the individuation that actually matters for Heidegger, is the existential kind that both realizes Dasein in its relations to the whole, as well as in its unique and un-shareable relation to itself. As the open place that allows for the appearing and the holding together of being and beings within an articulated whole, Dasein's unique task is to remain as this 'open space' in the way that only it (as its unique care and time) can. The account of this remaining open that Heidegger gives us is not one of active doing or striving as much as it is one of actively maintaining itself in receptivity to the call of the entire complex. Thus he writes: 'the thing we are able to do is not a what, but being as existing... Dasein is not something objectively present which then has as an addition the ability to do something, but is rather primarily being-possible. Dasein is always what it can be and how it is its possibility' (SZ 143).

This 'openness' may be seen as a kind of gap or breach in reality that waits on Dasein to 'complete' it, one way or another. In this way, reality is always needing to be completed by human participation. And the quality of this participation and the mode of its completion (as either authentic or inauthentic) is of ultimate significance for human being as the being concerned about its own being. In facing up to what is its own, or to what is proper to it, the individuated human being is not returning to the comfort of holding something stable or simply identical. Rather, its ownmost and proper calling is to face up to the indeterminacy both within itself, as well as the indeterminacy of the demands that attend being the 'open space' that rightfully completes the complex. It is characterized both by recognition of what *is* and an appropriate time-sensitive response to its ongoing demands in the 'Moment'

(*Augenblick*).<sup>34</sup> Thus the ‘who’ that is capable of owing its existence on Heidegger’s terms, does in fact have a dual character of recognition and response intrinsic to it. It has been tacitly at work in our discussion so far, but we must now describe it more explicitly.

## 2.4 The ‘Who’ as Non-Identity

### 2.4.1 The Two ‘Whos’ of Existence

We can provisionally describe these twin aspects to the Heideggerian ‘who’ as two ‘whos’, though they are ultimately inseparable and must be seen as involved in a dialectic relationship, such that the real ‘who’ of human identity, properly understood, is the sum of both of them held in tension. When the nature of each is made clear, we will be able to see the full range of human existence captured in his vision of Dasein’s ‘ownmost’ or authentic selfhood. Additionally, such a clarification will give us a way of seeing how and why some of the general lines of criticism against the ethical significance of Heideggerian concept of authenticity may in fact be contestible (a task I will take up more fully in Chapter 3). I will call these two ‘whos’ of existence the *Ontologically Responsive (OR)* ‘Who’, and the *Ontologically Descriptive (OD)* ‘Who’.

Let us begin by considering the *Ontologically Descriptive (OD)* ‘who’. OD represents the more formal sense in which the structure of Dasein comes to be disclosed through the thematic analysis of care and time. With OD we are given a theoretical picture of how existence is meaningfully structured for Dasein – as the care-constituted, ecstatically-individuated, finite potentiality for being-a-whole. At the risk of oversimplification, we might

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<sup>34</sup> Heidegger is keen to distinguish this technical term, *Augenblick*, from the meaning of ‘now’ in the ordinary sense. He writes: ‘The phenomenon of the Moment can *in principle not* be clarified in terms of the *now*... We call the present that is held in authentic temporality, and is thus authentic, the Moment’ (SZ 338). The unique character of this present is that it is not forgetfully immersed in what is ontically closest to it, but is properly oriented to its current situation in relation to its futural potential and its past development.

say that the common ‘Who am I?’ asks both about a general ‘who’ and a specific ‘I’, and that OD is Heidegger’s answer to the question about the general ‘who’, while OR is his answer to the ‘who’ of the specific ‘I’. That is, OD refers to a general understanding of that to which an I as a ‘subject’ stands in relation, and OR refers to the peculiar significance that this general understanding has as a result of her asking it *as herself* and *for herself*. What we have been explicating, through the ontological structures of world, others, care and time, is ultimately Heidegger’s ontological description of what human being is like without exception. OD is an abstract and formal description that is universally applicable to all Dasein: Dasein is concerned about its own being and carries with it the sense that it will one day no longer exist (just as surely as it exists now).

As individuals, however, we *truly* live in the domain of the concrete and the particular, and can hardly be thought to own existence or be authentic if this did not involve actually grasping something ontic and situational. Heidegger acknowledges this demand through his analysis of the modes of our possible response to our situations – authenticity or inauthenticity.<sup>35</sup> I have chosen to call the ‘who’ of these modes of response the *Ontologically Responsive (OR) ‘who’*. OR is ultimately meaningful only when it is referred to OD. It is only once Heidegger’s ontology has revealed the fundamental structures of existing Dasein that authenticity and inauthenticity as modes of taking up one’s existence begin to make sense. To be authentic is for individual Dasein to be OR in the light of OD, while to be inauthentic is to fail to answer adequately to the significance of OD. In a real sense it is OR that can make any movement, because it is the ‘who’ that exists in time; it is the one who is faced with alternatives over how it will ‘complete’ the reality that it encounters and that invites its participation.

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<sup>35</sup> This modal distinction is an important primordial determination of Dasein, and Heidegger even says that the reason we have these modes in the first place is simply that temporality temporalizes itself in this way (which is to say, this is not a fact that can properly answer to a ‘why’ query; it is just the way it *is* and just the way a phenomenological ontology finds it).

### 2.4.2 Two 'Whos' as One

Whether individual Dasein recognizes the truth about its ontological structure, and whether it fails to respond to it authentically or not, the way reality *is* for it as OD and OR remains. By failing to pay attention to the way it actually is called on to respond dialectically in the mode of authenticity, it is squandering the capacity for fullness in its own existence. It is in this sense that authenticity as ownership is intelligible as a real rather than 'merely formal' demand on Dasein – the normative structure of OD hangs on OR for its completion in a particular context, in a specifically appropriate way. Together, they are the existential 'who' that one must *own*.

That completion is never secured, however, because the one who is called to complete it is herself never complete; she is always futural. This is the fact that is explicated for us in OD. Nevertheless, our acts of incomplete striving are themselves filling out and completing reality at every given moment. And while it is true that there is still a sense in which authenticity can be provisionally achieved when one understands oneself and relates to oneself as something existentially outstanding and beyond one's reach, this self-relation is itself in need of constant reinterpretation and response within the challenges and opportunities of the moment. To be authentic is ultimately to be authentic in the moment, and, standing at this place, it can be no comfort at all for Dasein that it may have managed to respond authentically before. Any hope of securing authenticity, which is always an attempt to rest in an enduring achievement of an authentic stance, is constantly undermined by Dasein's own temporal nature. This is the true force of what Heidegger calls our 'being guilty' – to be human is always to have something of yourself existentially unavailable, beyond your grasp. It is in this sense of being called on to be the 'completion' of reality (in a manner of speaking), and in finding its own being to be incomplete and also incomplete-able

except in death, that the two ‘whos’ in Heidegger’s account of existence come together and become intelligible as the same being – in the aspect of finitude.

But the unique finitude of human being, which sets it apart from the finiteness or limit of everything else in the world, is that it is also a transcendence. We have already gained an initial sense in which this is the case, though our consideration of Dasein’s ecstatic temporality. The ‘who’ of existing – being-in-the-world, being-with, being-possible – finds its identity *as* the existential holding together of difference. Dasein as the questioner of the meaning of its own being is the relation that ontologically connects being to beings. And the uniqueness of its being consists in the fact that it itself is essentially the (ontological) difference. It is a finite transcendence.

Heidegger’s framework allows us to understand and distinguish this transcendence of finite Dasein in two senses that correspond to our earlier distinction between OR and OD:

1. OD is a formal description of the way human being structurally transcends itself as ecstatic temporality. Conceptually speaking, it also transcends the particularity and contextual limits of OR and constantly stands above OR as a normative demand to which it must respond adequately;
2. But from the perspective of praxis, OR transcends OD as the one who actually recognizes OD as the other that is its own self within a concrete life situation and responds to its demands accordingly (that is, interpretatively). In this sense, OR is able to take a distance from and even objectify its own existence.

What I am attempting to show in making this distinction is that Heidegger’s articulation of the ‘who’ is layered and rich enough to account for the complexity of everyday experience. This ‘who’ *in toto* is not just a formal account of existence, as is sometimes argued. While the transcendence indicated in (1) is admittedly a formalistic account, it is the transcendence indicated in (2) that properly corresponds to the lived, ongoing, never-complete call on

Dasein's being. It is in the sense indicated in (2) that the universal or general 'facts' about human life meet the unique particularities of contingent, practical environments. This is what I take Heidegger to mean when he asserts that '[t]he question of the meaning of being is the most universal and the emptiest. But at the same time the possibility inheres of its most *acute* individualization in each particular Dasein' (SZ 39). This is the insoluble but interminably productive tension that Heidegger wants us to recognize when he writes: "Being and its structure transcend every being and every possible existent determination of being. Being is the *transcendens* pure and simple. The transcendence of the being of Dasein is a distinctive one since in it lies the possibility and the necessity of the most radical individuation" (SZ 38).

Heidegger's way of articulating this mysterious reality is by means of his notion of possibility. Dasein's authentic 'I', its proper individualization, is being-possible. Possibility is the existentially real 'essence' of our finite transcendence. It is in this sense that we can make intelligible his well-known claim, '[h]igher than actuality stands possibility' (SZ 38). While the endorsement of finitude is not problematic for most who think about the nature of selfhood, it is the notion of transcendence that has increasingly faced suspicion since Kant. The true ingenuity of Heidegger's account lies in his acknowledgement of transcendence through a radical opening up of the human 'subject' hitherto dominant in the tradition, but in a way that is also a decidedly immanentizing move. In rethinking human identity on his terms, we must confront the seemingly counter-intuitive notion that the essential difference lies inside the human being, not outside of it. It is the arc of my larger argument that such a reconfigured view of selfhood gives us an important foundation on which further questions of normativity and responsibility are to be negotiated.

## 2.5 Authenticity: Owning Existence

To conclude Chapter 2, and also Part I, I want to briefly review how our foregoing inquiry about human identity in Heidegger's *Being and Time* has positioned us to better understand the content as well as the interpretative potential of the concept of authenticity. In our preliminary attempts to understand better what this might involve, we noted that there was a *who-ought-what* structure intrinsic to the claim, 'one must own one's existence'. In discovering that the 'what' of existence is actually a 'who', and more precisely a 'who-what' as a stretched relation, we were forced to consider how human identity is to be conceived in existentially fitting terms, which was important because no functioning concept of ownership could do away with a genuinely valid sense of an 'I' who could assume charge and take responsibility. There I showed that Heidegger retrieves from the expansive concepts of being-in-the-world and being-with a 'conservative' movement towards an 'ownmost' self by way of a re-construal of what existential individuation is.

Unlike the numerically or logically coherent notion of identity that speaks of a rigid and stable sameness, Heidegger's existential analytic displays a framework of individuation that is phenomenologically meaningful only through the play between the seemingly contradictory impulses that I called expansive (emphasizing totality, projection, relations) and conservative (emphasizing finitude and constancy). The ultimate justification for this perhaps counter-intuitive picture of identity is derived from the nature of temporality as the ecstatic reality that characterizes human being most primordially. Not surprisingly then, Heidegger's technical articulation of the concept of authenticity as 'anticipatory resoluteness' is itself an obvious composite of the expansive and the conservative tendencies. As an existential characterization of its ownmost possibilities (what Heidegger calls 'the authentic potentiality-of-being-a-whole'), authentic Dasein is both anticipating what *is-not-yet* as well as holding resolutely onto all that primordially constitutes it and enables it to stand as an open place in which the call of the 'moment' can resonate with its fullest clarity. Thus Heidegger

writes, 'Dasein becomes "essential" in authentic existence that is constituted as anticipatory resoluteness' (SZ 323). This is the proper existential character of its stretched 'who-what' relation.

To be authentic is to own one's being-possible, and to own one's being-possible is precisely to accept the interminability of the demand that existence levies on Dasein until death itself brings final closure. It is also to own one's being-possible in the interim, without resorting to any illicit consolation that might be had from the privileging of one conflicting tendency over another. The inauthenticity of 'the They' is arguably inadequate because it is an inclination towards the comfort and security of constancy and false wholeness, which in fact dulls Dasein to the demands of its projective potentialities and of its unavoidably personal finitude. To authentically own existence is to bear fidelity to the two-fold tension of what *is* at the heart of Dasein's unique way of being – namely, that it is both itself and the call to be more than itself; or more succinctly described, finite transcendence.

### 2.5.1 The Who as Is-Ought

With this notion of authentic ownership of existence in hand, our main claim, 'you must own your existence', can be rearticulated in the following way: *you must own the meaning of your life in a way that is appropriate to the normative structures of your meaning-needing, meaning-seeking and meaning-shaping potential as human being.*

Admittedly, it is still not apparent how this exposition of existence and Dasein as primordially and inextricably linked together with other beings in meaningfulness thereby results in a generally understandable 'must' or an 'ought'. But given all that Heidegger has uncovered for us about human being, the key question now becomes: can we expect a typical 'ought' to follow (i.e., one whose obligatory force and standard is predicated on an original

source external to the 'I'), or must a more nuanced norm be sought? Could we concede that human existence is a stretched who-what relation, and yet expect that the 'is' and the 'ought' be radically separate? Does the identity-difference problematic that we have been reworking in the unique terms of human existence in fact allow us a new, existential foundation for rethinking the perceived tension between the normative and the descriptive?

If being as the meaningfulness of meaning is to be consistently kept from being submerged in the objective presence of beings and the framework of categories and substantiality, then it would seem that the typical notion of an 'ought' as a clear, determinate and timeless given may not be coherent or even helpful. What we can expect for the 'normativity' appropriate to Heidegger's grounding insights is *not* an objective, categorically derived norm, but rather an *existential* norm intrinsic to Dasein's ontological structures. Just such a norm becomes available through the unified and yet distinctive connection of the 'what' with the 'who'. It is a norm that comes by way of Heidegger's sophisticated retrieval of the original Aristotelian injunction to 'become what one is' – as it were, an *is-ought*.

Heidegger affirms this in the following way:

Because of the kind of being that is constituted by the existential of projecting, Dasein is constantly 'more' than it actually is, if one wanted to and could register is as something objectively present in its content of being. But it is never more than it factually is because its potentiality of being belongs essentially to its facticity. But as being possible, Dasein is never less. It is existentially that which is not yet in its potentiality of being. And only because the being of the there gets its constitution through understanding and

its character of project, only because it is what it becomes or does not become, can it say understandingly to itself: “become what you are” (SZ 145).<sup>36</sup>

It is important again to stress that, just because this is not an objective norm, it is *not* therefore ‘subjective’. As we have seen, the categories of ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ are precisely those that have been abandoned. The potentiality for both authenticity and inauthenticity is what human being *is* futurally. Therefore the *is-ought* which characterizes its being is not a *must* that receives its force, first and foremost, from circumstantial or metaphysical grounds; rather, it is an existential *must*, a self-called or self-raised demand towards securing the most meaningful stance with regards to one’s being. Perhaps we can reassert the main claim with a small caveat: *You must own your existence (if you want to fully exist, because your existence always already demands that you do)*. Nevertheless, there is no denying that such a claim does not offer a strong ‘why’. We should wonder, however, why we would need a strong ‘why’, and what conditions our desire or need for it. Is something like such a ‘why’ possible without certain kinds of abstract, metaphysical guarantees that in fact cannot be validated within a phenomenological line of questioning our concrete experiences?<sup>37</sup> Heidegger’s view seems to be that we do not need a strong, emphatic ‘why’ to move us unless we have lost all ability to hear the still, small voice of existence calling us to full participation. Unlike the strong ‘why’ that must come from the absolute outside (and whose ‘absoluteness’ is therefore always a question, if we can recognize it), the quiet whisper has the advantage of being explicable in terms of our concrete being in the world.

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<sup>36</sup> Heidegger’s own comments to his text, included in the Stambaugh edition, add: ‘But who are ‘you’? The one who lets go – and becomes’. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 136.

<sup>37</sup> I am not ruling out in principle that such a ‘why’ might be possible without the kinds of metaphysical guarantees to which Heidegger seems to be opposed. Jurgen Habermas’ broad project in the *Theory of Communicative Action* may be seen as one such major attempt in the post-war European context to develop a post-metaphysical philosophy that roots normativity in the concrete contexts of communicative deliberation. Nevertheless, I think it is arguable that despite the impressive gains to be had from his framework, Habermas is less than successful at showing how and why participants may come to be motivated to participate in more or less ideal discourse environments when these are not experienced as particularly convenient. I take this vital domain of the sources of one’s existential motivation, that which precedes us doing the ‘right’ thing and moves us to even see it as such, to be the one Heidegger is attempting to articulate for us.

In being thrown into one's existence without any choice – an existence that is characterized by the possibility of both being and not being oneself – one is always actualizing one or another potentiality. But precisely because Dasein is forever 'becoming', destined to reach beyond itself and also constantly to fall short of the perfection of 'being' as pure self-identity, it is, as it were, always behind the eight-ball of existence.<sup>38</sup> This is what Heidegger means by Dasein's 'being-guilty'.<sup>39</sup> It is precisely because the pull towards inauthenticity prevails both for the indifferent as well as for the authentically striving Dasein who nevertheless fails that it is coherent to read this structure as one that both engenders as well as reveals a notion of responsibility. It engenders this notion of responsibility because Dasein is always already guilty for failing to be authentic. It reveals it because Dasein is always already responsible to its intrinsic structural potential to rise above inauthenticity.

Authenticity as owning one's existence involves occupying a stance vis-à-vis one's existence that bears an ongoing fidelity towards the structural norms of one's ownmost potentiality for being. By 'ownmost possibilities for being' I do not mean to suggest ontically determinate situations waiting to be realized at some future point, but rather ongoing participation in sustained and potentially new meaningfulness that characterizes Dasein's care. In being what it ought to be when it fully is – a thrown project, striving to become itself, and 'perfectly imperfect' in its failure to ever fully arrive – Dasein is both finite and transcending all at once. And, as Sheehan pithily puts it, 'the outcome is meaningfulness'.<sup>40</sup> Unlike the static or formal/legal ownership of objects, the ownership of existence is therefore a dynamic fidelity to the call to constant response-ability. This sensitivity to existence and its

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<sup>38</sup> As Sheehan points out, '[m]ovement, in short, is the state of becoming, and in Aristotle's words, "becoming is the transition to being," indeed, "becoming is *for the sake of* being"'. See Sheehan, "Dasein," 203.

<sup>39</sup> According to Heidegger, this lagging behind, intuited in the common-sense apprehension of human responsibility, implies a 'lack in the Dasein of another' (SZ 282). This another is *itself* and always unavoidably constituted by world and others. The 'ought' is therefore first and foremost available to us as a *not* within Dasein itself. For him, this is the most basic answer available to the question "who says how we are guilty and what guilt means?" Ethical life as the domain of the 'ought' would simply not be meaningful to us without this initial and inbuilt 'lack'.

<sup>40</sup> Sheehan, "Dasein," 207.

constitutive elements demands both a holding and a letting-go, according to Heidegger.

So here, finally, we have a hint of how two Heideggerians might get along (even if the answer is not what one asking such a question might be happy to receive): their life together cannot be simply described or secured beforehand. It will depend on both of them undertaking the responsibility of ownership for their individual existence, which in fact projects them outward to enfold each other and everything else. They can certainly be given resources, and be guided and shaped (as indeed they unavoidably are) by all those validated 'norms' that have historically emerged as fitting for humans to pursue. But human reality is such that, in necessarily sharing the ecstatic structures of temporality in its very being, it cannot escape the unique existential moment that demands engagement, and this means that emergent, singular, practical, contingent situations need the interpretative leap of authentic Dasein to close the broken circuit between everything that was and everything that is to be. The 'ought' must come out of the future to meet the 'is', even though it already belongs to what *is* in a primordial (i.e., ontological) way.

Authentic responsibility is first and foremost futural, though Heidegger's thought pushes us to see this futurity as something also deeply related to and formative of the authentic 'has-been'. That is ultimately why he thinks we cannot have a fixed 'ought' or stable system of values. This leap is a launching into the unknown, and as such a thrust beyond security. One major contribution of Heidegger's existential analytic to any further line of ethical or moral questioning is that it shows us why the long road of risk is the only road to true responsibility. Whether this is a framework which can ultimately guide us in practical situations is a question that we will consider more closely in Chapter 3, 'Human Responsibility'.

## Part II – Owing One’s Existence: Authentic Responsibility

### 3 Human Responsibility

We began this study by attempting to unpack what was involved in Heidegger’s concept of authenticity, and to ask specifically whether it would be a profitable concept for guiding us in thinking about our lives as social beings at our present time. My approach in this regard has been broadly divided into two parts. In the first, I have sought to examine and affirm the opening claim that Heidegger’s existential analytic carries a kind of normative injunction, which can be summarized simply as ‘one must own one’s existence.’ In order to understand the character of normativity at work in such a ‘must’, we had to trace the distinctly articulated but unified phenomenon to which it applies and out of which it emerges – existence as ‘meaningfulness’ and Dasein as non-self-identical, finite transcendence. So far, our exploration of the *who-ought-what* structure intrinsic to this opening claim has revealed that both the ‘who’ and the ‘what’ that Heidegger has in mind substantively differ from typical ways of understanding these terms and their differences. Both are radically reframed by the way in which the issue of identity poses a unique conceptual problem within Dasein’s existence (as the individuated center that is nevertheless constituted by and in relationship to everything else). Towards the end of Chapter 2, I briefly pointed to how this reshaping of the ‘what’ and the ‘who’ necessarily entails a rethinking of the nature of any ‘ought’.

In this second part, I want to show that if this claim that one must own one’s existence can be granted to have some (appropriately qualified) normative force, it will, on Heidegger’s own terms, arguably also include the character of ‘owing’ our existence to, or having responsibility for it, towards all that fundamentally constitutes it – not in the least, other human beings. This understanding of human being itself as an ‘ought’ challenges much that

we take for granted in traditional moral or ethical thought: an ‘ought’ cannot be simply thought of as an external imposition on the human subject and as something invested with timeless stability by virtue of its separation from the vicissitudes of situated human life, and neither can the ‘subject’ of ethical action be conceived as one who stands in sharp contrast to nature and is in possession of some absolute kind of freedom with regards to everything else outside him (by way of his capacity for reason, etc.). Heidegger thoroughly blurs these lines. In doing so, however, does he thereby liquidate all resources for securing any human freedom and responsibility commensurate to the demands of genuine other-regarding concern – as he has often been charged by his critics?

As François Raffoul and David Pettigrew write in their introduction to *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*: ‘This charge might ultimately rest on a radical misunderstanding: one seeks to find in his work a classical problematic, does not find it, and concludes from this that Heidegger ignored the practical dimension of existence’.<sup>41</sup> I think Raffoul and Pettigrew are largely correct in this diagnosis. But I am also not sure that the classical problem can be entirely dismissed as failing to intuit something (at least partially) real and persuasive about human experience – something that Heidegger must be shown to account for satisfactorily, or at least not render unthinkable. At least three very basic presumptions within the classical problematic appear crucial to the meaningful sustenance of shared human life, and may not be jettisoned without jeopardizing it:

1. That ethicality importantly involves practical action;
2. That such action is carried out as a result of differentiating between better and worse ways of acting;
3. That this difference, and the means by which it can be secured, matters in some ultimate (i.e., norm-like) way.

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<sup>41</sup> François Raffoul and David Pettigrew, “Introduction,” in *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, ed. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), xiii.

Does Heidegger offer us ways in which to sustain these important intuitions at work in the classical problem, even if he reframes the terms in which they can be conceived? The rather tricky task before us is to interpret Heidegger's vision as sympathetically as possible,<sup>42</sup> while also exposing it to challenges from the 'outside', as it were. In this regard, I take my task in this chapter to be first to make clearer the character of human responsibility that emerges within the Heideggerian framework we have laid out so far, and then to expose it to three broad lines of criticism about its coherence and efficacy in meeting real-world ethical dilemmas.

### 3.1 The *Ought* of Existence

What is the meaning of human responsibility? We commonly take responsibility to involve a sort of obligation or answerability that rests on the one who is responsible and makes her vulnerable to the claim of someone else, with regard to whatever it is that she is being responsible for. We also understand responsibility as entailing a clear 'someone' who will take up the demand. There can be no responsibility worth speaking of where it is not clear 'who' is being held to account by the particular claim in question. In this sense, responsibility appears to require that a person both *owe* something to someone else, but also *own* this fact that she owes something. Everyday life is full of these sorts of demands, and they are often made intelligible to us by way of pre-given ideas about to whom one might be responsible (for example, the government or God), and who one *is*, as the one so held responsible (for example, a legal person with constitutionally guaranteed rights or a creature of God, and so on). In every case, we are given some definition of the 'internal' domain that

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<sup>42</sup> I take this to mean evaluating the soundness of his most basic premises and then attempting to interpret his further developments within his own framework as workings-out of those grounding insights.

is rightfully under our control as the 'subject' of this responsibility, and also given an 'external' source to which we must answer.

The issue of philosophical significance here is that of clarifying how and where this crucial dynamic is to be ultimately grounded, such that the normative foundations of responsibility are to be properly understood and secured. How, in the first place, do we come to be responsible in this way that both owns itself and owes itself to something beyond? A Heideggerian answer to this question of what most primordially and most properly constitutes human responsibility is discoverable in what he says about the existential phenomenon of guilt that we have already mentioned in Chapter 2: it is in 'being-guilty' as Dasein's own internal 'lack' that human responsibility is first meaningful. Thus he writes: 'The idea of guilt cannot be arbitrarily thought up and forced on Dasein. If an understanding of the essence of guilt is possible at all, this possibility must have been sketched out in Dasein beforehand' (SZ 281). Heidegger's dissatisfaction with framing human guilt and responsibility in traditional terms, as something that attaches externally to the subject, is not due to a denial of the fact that our actual obligations are negotiated in this way, but to the fact that nothing in this paradigm really explains why this lack is experienced, by the one who is 'responsible', as a lack in the first place.

Despite Heidegger's criticism of any 'lack' understood in purely ontic terms, he does grant that there is an existential 'not' that hangs over Dasein – a nullity at the very heart of Dasein's being. The basic case that Heidegger makes for this nullity is rooted in our inescapable finitude. Just like the perennial incompleteness Dasein experiences from living out its undetermined but certain death, a similar incompleteness characterizes its relation to its own grounding. As a ground it is always thrown, which is to say that it never has a say over its own being from the bottom up. It gets a start that it did not choose for itself, and yet it is

thrust with the unavoidable task of taking up this thrown existence as its own, and it is called on to be the ‘ground’ of its own being.

As the being who is always existentially incomplete with relation to its control over its own beginning and end – the very bookends of its being an ‘I’ – Dasein’s nullity arises simply by virtue of factual existence. The ‘ought’ as ‘not’ is human existence itself. Thus Dasein’s own non-identical structure as finite transcendence creates the spacing or distance that is necessary for the call and response intrinsic to our idea of responsibility and ‘oughtness’. As the one who is primordially and unavoidably constituted by world and others and yet individuated through its finitude, human being *is* itself the stretched difference that gives rise to both the call or expectation (that Heidegger terms ‘having a conscience’ (SZ §§56-7)) as well as the lack that fails to fully answer to it. The ‘beyond’ or the ‘externality’ that resonates in the normative demand, and that puts Dasein into debt, is its very own, distinctive way of being. Heidegger adumbrates the point clearly in this way: ‘Understanding the call, Dasein lets its ownmost self take action in itself in terms of its chosen potentiality-of-being. Only in this way can it *be* responsible’ (SZ 288). The circle of responsibility is Dasein itself.<sup>43</sup> While this seems internally coherent to Heidegger’s framework, we might legitimately still ask if a world like ours doesn’t in fact need a ‘stronger’ demand.

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<sup>43</sup> One way this reading of the ‘ought’ in Heidegger might be challenged is to argue that the self-constituting difference of Dasein is more accurately that between an ‘is’ and a ‘can be’, rather than an ‘is’ and an ‘ought’. Presumably, the force of such an objection would lie in claiming that an ‘ought’ carries more moral heft and color for us than a mere ‘can be’ as formal possibility. I think this is an interesting objection to my claim that there is an ‘ought’ to be found in Heidegger. However, I have three reasons for being unsure of the success of such a challenge. First, it can only be sustained from a perspective that presupposes the primacy of a strong ‘ought’, and this is exactly what Heidegger questions in his analysis and attempts to surpass by showing its grounding conditions in Dasein’s existentiality. Second, it treats the ‘can be’ in Heidegger as a mere ‘not yet’, when Heidegger is clear that possibility is an existential rather than a formal or logical category in his framework. It is always permeating actual human life through Dasein’s ecstatic relationship to itself, world and others. Third, this objection doesn’t make clear what the relation of an ‘ought’ is with regard to a ‘can be’. Surely, any ‘ought’ that does not coincide with a ‘can be’ gives us very little reason to be troubled about it. To the extent that an ‘ought’ carries moral force, it must show itself as realizable within life. One might be reminded here, of Hegel’s critique (in §§a-c of VI.C (Spirit) of the *The Phenomenology of Spirit*) of the antinomies in Kant’s ethical philosophy. Criticizing the gap between the moral ideal (as universal and necessary) and moral action (as particular and contingent), he writes, “Because the universal *best* ought to be realized, nothing *good* is done” (§619). In like vein, it seems unhelpful to maintain that the ‘ought’ and ‘can be’ are to be meaningfully held apart, and also unnecessary, if it is true that Heidegger’s ‘can be’ is more than just a

### 3.2 Strong ‘Oughts’ and Existential ‘Oughts’

A powerfully enduring perspective in moral philosophy has generally taken it that an effective ‘ought’ is intelligible only as a solid norm that has clear and binding force on the person who is accountable to it (and indeed on everyone else), and that is guaranteed by a certain transcendence over the interpretative whimsy of the persons who are supposed to answer to it.<sup>44</sup> Such an ‘ought’ – which I will call a strong ‘ought’ – seems absent in a Heideggerian stretched ‘is-ought’, because in Heidegger’s framework it appears that it really is up to Dasein to decide on what is to count as right or wrong, good or bad, worthy of action or not, within a given temporally determinate context. Whatever its thrownness can accommodate by way of shared deliberation on the particulars of its responsibility, there appears to be a crucial, non-relational moment where all pursuits of the ‘ought’ are essentially up to Dasein itself.

On the other hand, the immanentizing Heideggerian line does give us the advantage of being able to account for why an ‘ought’ can come to matter at all for the person who is responsible. Its elucidation of the ontological roots of responsibility at work in one’s own field of essential care allows for the development of a persuasive account with regard to why an obligation can be experienced as a *must* and not as a random and personally insignificant alternative. The Heideggerian line may not solve every conceivable problem with relation to the force and justification of the ‘ought’, but it has the merit of acknowledging and articulating a fundamental tension in human experience without attempting to solve or explain it away by appeal to a phenomenologically unwarranted ‘subject’ or a theological or

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formal, empty possibility. This of course is the real area of contention, and I will specifically engage it further along in this chapter.

<sup>44</sup> This is perhaps best represented by the way Kant’s categorical imperative has typically been interpreted.

metaphysical view of transcendence.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, in recognizing the constant indebtedness of the individual to its world and others, Heidegger may be seen as acknowledging the fact that the reality in which we participate is communicatively nourished and extended. It is an intrinsic part of our thrownness to hear others out and draw on their contributions to our individual way of being. But in also maintaining that this indebtedness does not preclude the interpretative precedence of the individual facing a unique, concrete situation, he puts communicatively achieved solutions in perspective vis-à-vis the practical demands on the individual in lived time. Thus by acknowledging the human being as both itself and more than itself, Heidegger attempts to renew the traditional problems by reshaping the traditional categories in which solutions are often proposed.

But what is the moral promise of a ‘strong ought’? Why do some judge them to be crucial to our practical situation? Perhaps the two most influential lines of criticism against Heidegger’s potential as an ethically fruitful thinker have been drawn in the phenomenological tradition by Emmanuel Levinas and in the Marxist vein of criticism developed by the Frankfurt School, most notably through Theodor Adorno. While Levinas accuses Heidegger of subjugating ethics to ontology, such that an encounter with the radical priority of the ‘other’ on us is effectively foreclosed, Adorno sees Heidegger as peddling an essentially non-dialectical vision of philosophy that pursues the ‘archaic primordially of Being’ at the cost of a blindness to the concrete material-historical contingencies that bring alienation, suffering and domination in the real world. He is also excoriating in his critique of the tautological tendencies in Heidegger’s ontology – a project he criticizes as ‘zero

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<sup>45</sup> It is not my intention to dismiss outright, either theological or metaphysical ways of thinking transcendence. Indeed there is a sense in which philosophy *is* unavoidably metaphysical and none the worse for it. It does seem that very many other factors play into how we come to consider some approaches of thought to be currently persuasive, while others have seemingly exhausted themselves. How this happens and whether these evaluations are justified are issues that lie well beyond the scope of this thesis. What I do find compelling in Heidegger’s portrayal of human existence is the desire to account for this transcendence in terms that are most immediate and easily recognizable about our everyday lives, irrespective of whatever our judgments may be about the theological and metaphysical interpretations of transcendence that have been influential in the long history of our thinking about reality.

dimensional'.<sup>46</sup> Adorno dismisses Heideggerian authenticity as 'jargon' with no significant referent beyond itself, and no potential to even think it, because it has denied any dialectical play between subject and object. The true danger of such word play as he takes Heidegger to be purveying is that, 'while the jargon overflows with the pretense of deep human emotion, it is just as standardized as the world that it officially negates; the reason for this lies partly in its mass success, partly in the fact that it posits its message automatically, through its mere nature'.<sup>47</sup> In short, the criticism appears to be that in conceptually stretching Dasein out to be 'who-what/is-ought' and then saying that it must be 'authentically' this, nothing genuinely critical or new about the human situation is offered or even possible.

Though both the Levinasian and the Adornian critiques come from different places and seek decidedly different alternatives to Heidegger's thought, they share a mutual distrust over the potential ethical outcomes from positing difference *within* Dasein itself. The idea that the 'ought' of existence emerges solely from the 'is' seems to them an effective relinquishing of any possibility for the emergence of a radical challenge to the status quo that could in some way come, so to speak, from the *outside*. I think it is true that such an external obligation may not be easily forthcoming in Heidegger's framework. But one way to counter Adorno's charge is to suggest that none of these criticisms make sense without presupposing the general human capacity to recognize any 'ought' at all, and it is precisely this capacity that Heidegger is concerned with articulating. In uncovering the broadest structures of human meaning and identity as finitude and ecstatic temporality, the existential analytic of Dasein does give us a norm of absolutely intransigent and binding force – albeit one that constantly leaves open the responsibility of interpretative action to the existing individual. In articulating the originary matrix of any 'ought' and the 'lack' that it evokes, Heidegger may be seen to be

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<sup>46</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, tr. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 114.

<sup>47</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Jargon of Authenticity*, tr. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 6.

revealing to us the soil without which no strong ‘oughts’ can either take root or bear fruit. We may call this a ‘weak’ or a ‘pre-ought’ – or perhaps more accurately, an *existential ought* – to contrast it from the traditionally conceived strong ‘ought’. But this putative ‘weakness’ or ‘pre-ness’ cannot be asserted as a privation until one has already presupposed that which allows us to take a strong ‘ought’ as *strong*. None of this discounts the need for laws or strong ‘oughts’ in various practical situations within economic or social life, and how these can be arrived at and grounded in our existential need for meaning remains an open and challenging question. That this is difficult or not easily apparent cannot of itself prove Heidegger’s basic insight is wrong-headed. If his fundamental steps are coherent and persuasive, the question must remain open to ongoing inquiry.

However, there are more specific interpretative reasons for why Heidegger’s framework has often been deemed ethically unproductive. A cogent and succinct formulation of these concerns is to be found in Lambert Zuidervaart’s evaluation of Heidegger’s existential authenticity in *Social Philosophy after Adorno*. Summarizing three aspects in which the concept of authenticity is problematic for social thought, he writes: ‘First, it turns a substantial concept pertaining to actual merits into a formal state of being self-related. Second, it transfigures a historically conditioned and destructive rupture in the fabric of modern society (i.e., “alienation”) into an ontological and authenticating encounter with one’s own finitude. Third, it turns a mediated process of disclosure into a denial of mediation’.<sup>48</sup> These concerns are in fact widely shared in one formulation or another by most of Heidegger’s critics and I think we can consider them more closely along the helpful lines of distinction that Zuidervaart draws. Taking forward my basic claim in this section – that Heidegger does offer us an ‘ought’, but an existential one – we must now make the

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<sup>48</sup> Zuidervaart, *Social Philosophy*, 84.

hermeneutical counter-movement and ask if this existential ‘ought’ goes as far in real life as goes our apparent need for it.

### 3.3 Are Existential ‘Oughts’ Enough?

Describing the ontological root of human responsibility in Dasein’s self-obligation through its ‘being-guilty’, Heidegger writes: ‘the idea of “guilty” must be formalized to the extent that the vulgar phenomena of guilt related to being-with others in the taking care of things are excluded. The idea of guilt must not only be removed from the area of calculating and taking care of things, but must be separated from relationship to an ought and a law such that by failing to comply with it one burdens himself with guilt’ (SZ 283). Critics of Heidegger respond to expressions such as this one by suspecting that Dasein’s authentic apprehension of its responsibility to others is so rarified that it has nothing recognizably in common with the markers of such responsible comportment in the world of hunger and thirst, economic inequalities, systemic injustices, or protest and mutually responsive dialogue. To many critics of Heidegger, this is an excellent summary of what is damningly wrong with taking him to be a resource for thinking morally.<sup>49</sup>

What Heidegger might actually be trying to say here may, of course, be open to greater interpretative play than is enacted by his less sympathetic critics. One possible way of mitigating its more negative connotations is to point out that for Heidegger, to be existentially unconcerned with actual laws is not to be practically unconcerned with them. While the

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<sup>49</sup> His own dubious political allegiances in the 1930s, as well as his stubborn silence thereafter with regard to that troubled period in world history, have continued to cast a shadow over Heidegger’s ethical vision, such that one cannot resist pondering if the obvious failings of so insightful a thinker could be accounted for as a merely unfortunate political naïveté, or if indeed there are important underlying resonances between his philosophical and political stances. That critical discussion, however, is far from reaching any consensus within Heidegger scholarship and must remain untouched here.

‘existential’ and the ‘existentiell’ are connected in real life, they are not mirror images.<sup>50</sup> To be ‘existentially’ concerned about laws, others and the demands of interpersonal life is to be oriented to those concerns in a much broader framework that acknowledges world and Dasein’s own ecstatic relationship to it as a temporal being. To translate this ‘existentiell’ is to always be focused on the particularities of the situation, but, importantly, in a certain *modified* way that is existentially authentic. Therefore, properly understood, Heidegger’s point here is not to deny the value of practical action and practical responsibility, but rather to safeguard it by securing the real grounds from which it can be approached. The baldest critical interpretation that sees Heidegger’s statement concerning guilt as evidence of his disdain for concrete life can only be sustained through a conflation of the domains of objective presence and existence within Heidegger’s analysis, when these are explicitly what he wants to hold apart. But this is admittedly only a temporary reprieve for Heidegger. It leads us to the key question that is at the bottom of all the interpretative disagreements over a functional Heideggerian concept of responsibility – namely, what does an existential norm, an existential ‘ought’, or an existential ‘responsibility’ have to do with changing, ‘actual’, ontic life? In other words, *where and how does the ontological rubber meet the ontic road?* How does existential reality finally leave an imprint on concrete, material life and history?

On this most critical of questions, I think interpretative integrity demands that one both acknowledge that Heidegger does offer an answer and yet also admit that this answer does leave a lot unanswered (and perhaps unanswerable). It is clear that the actual meeting-ground of the ontological and the ontic is only given in the ‘being there’ as an ‘open field’ of the singular, existing human at the unique intersection of its care and time. Because Dasein as existing being is ecstatic temporality whose being is primarily futural and conditioned by the

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<sup>50</sup> Heidegger uses the term ‘existentiell’ to refer the fact that existence as ‘being-possible’ is always the concern of *actually existing* factual beings (SZ 13). It is his way of acknowledging that existentiality (as the complex structure of human actuality and mortal possibility) is still always connected to ontic life and manifest within it, even though it is not reducible to it.

nullity of its beginning and end, nothing we can conceptually offer as a time-abstracted description can grasp or encircle the actual ‘where’ and ‘how’ of its stitching together existential reality and material life. But is this an entirely satisfactory and productive characterization of the character of meaningful human responsibility? My working orientation to this problem is to grant that it is not entirely satisfactory, while denying, in the main, that this necessarily makes it less productive. In most cases, Heidegger’s rarely matched apprehension of traditional problems and the sophistication of his nuances in translating them to a new landscape for thought demand that one go a long way *with* him before one can be confident that he has nothing more to offer on a particular issue.

In this spirit, I now turn towards a consideration of three broad objections that have been raised with regard to the compatibility of his framework for social philosophy. These objections, for the most part, run exactly along the lines of concern raised by Zuidervaart (who himself admits the prominent influence of Adorno’s objections on his own formulation of these concerns). I take them up in much the same configuration, since they seem to me to be a clear representation of the most basic and pressing questions facing the issue of Heideggerian authenticity from the perspective of praxis. I take these objections to Heidegger’s framework – I will call these the ‘Formal’, the ‘Mediation’, and ‘Historical’ objections – to be serious and important stimulants to a reconsideration of his individual and social ontology. It is my sense that, while they may indicate real dangers and potential eclipses within some possible interpretations of Heidegger, these objections do not have to be fatal for his framework itself. They can be integrated with fundamental insights that already arise from within it and can be further extended in keeping with their spirit.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> I am not claiming that Heidegger’s framework can adequately answer all the possible questions that can be raised out of the locus of these practical concerns. It may well be that his thought has to be developed beyond what he himself achieved or intended. Here I only seek to defend the claim that an important part of this work can be done by going along with Heidegger, rather than going against him.

### 3.3.1 The Formal Objection

Some have contended that Heidegger's usefulness to ethical or social philosophy is hamstrung by the fact that he only offers putatively 'empty' (that is content-less), formal answers to all practical questions. We are given powerful suggestions of how a single Heideggerian might hope to live in principle – that is, as one who authentically discloses reality through taking hold of her ownmost possibilities – but this, according to the objection, never actually tells us what to specifically do in a concrete situation. And though he also offers penetrating observations about human sociality throughout *Being and Time*, these insights about inter-subjective or collective life are sometimes thought to be treated, as Theodore Schatzki observes, 'only as a feature of individual life'.<sup>52</sup> What good is such a framework if it cannot give us clearer guidelines on how two individuals are to hold their individually authentic trajectories in place when their practical situation brings them into conflict?

This first objection is in fact critical to the incremental force of the following charges. Explaining this objection further, Zuidervaart writes that Heidegger's concept of authenticity seems to 'commend what is little more than a formal state of being self-related... the self to which one "relates" in resoluteness is little more than the possibility of a possibility'.<sup>53</sup> According to this objection, all the Heideggerian descriptors of being authentic, concerning having a conscience and having anxiety or being reticent, float free of real-world evidence and public authentication. This concern seems to dovetail with a further critique, that, 'because Heidegger's nonidentity is a purely formal difference between the actual and the possible, it cannot be a source of normativity'.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Theodore Schatzki, "Early Heidegger on Sociality," in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 233.

<sup>53</sup> Zuidervaart, *Social Philosophy*, 85.

<sup>54</sup> Zuidervaart, *Social Philosophy*, 90.

It is straightforwardly true that Heidegger's concept of authenticity lacks a *certain* kind of substantiality, but it may be that this is the substantiality derived from objective presence that he has labored so hard to avoid. To have avoided *that* substantiality is not to have therefore created a purely formal system, unless those are after all the only two options and unless all of Heidegger's explication of human existence as defined by the *existentials* of meaningfulness and possibility must still answer to the formal-substantial binary. It is my sense that Heidegger precisely resists this with the notion of 'possibility'. He writes: 'as an existential, the thing we are able to do is not a what, but being as existing... Dasein is not something objectively present which then has as an addition the ability to do something, but is rather primarily being-possible. Dasein is always what it can be and how it is its possibility.' He adds, crucially, that *the being-possible of Dasein is to be distinguished from 'empty, logical possibility'* as a modal category of objective presence, which simply means 'not yet real and not always necessary' (SZ 143).

It might help to recall that there are two distinct but related 'whos' operative in Heidegger's description of existing human being – in Chapter 2 they were presented as the *Ontologically Responsive (OR) Who* and the *Ontologically Descriptive (OD) Who* – that we have to consider *together* if we are to adequately grasp both actuality and possibility in our descriptions of the human person.<sup>55</sup> I have already pointed out that, while OD has a distinctly formal aspect to it, the fullness of the sense in which Dasein becomes authentic or inauthentic depends on a real-life contextual response to OD *as* and *through* being OR. The 'ought' on which authenticity is predicated is a constant practical demand on OR to meet the contingencies of the unique situation with a fidelity to the normative structures of OD. There is a dialectical relationship at work here – to the extent that OD is that to which OR seeks to

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<sup>55</sup> To recapitulate: OD describes the most basic structures of human being – as having world, being-with others, and being individuated through its ultimate self-concern (as a field of care made possible by finite time). OR is the potential mode of response to the recognition of these basic, indeed normative structures. It is OR that inhabits a concrete situation and can be either authentic or inauthentic in existential commitments.

be true in the situation, OD is the formal possibility of OR; and to the extent that OD demands the practical fidelity of a unique situational response, OR is the embodied possibility of OD. If this is true, it is hard to imagine that Heidegger's vision of authenticity can be easily dismissed as being purely formal and therefore practically toothless.

To read a little deeper, the real crux of this objection may be that this authenticity exceeds calculation and therefore rational criticism. This is a legitimate worry, but I think there is a sense in which such rational deliberation need not be completely excluded by Heidegger's framework. Very much about our thrownness and our ontic situation is describable, shareable and open to dialogue or criticism. There is no reason to think that Heidegger's view of thrownness excludes hearing out other people's opinions or societal or traditional norms or principles sympathetically. This is a part of OR that each of us as OD must take into account in order to make our unique situational engagement 'authentic'. What Heidegger is emphasizing is that no amount of sympathetic hearing or pondering of tradition will free us from having to make an interpretative choice over what *one* alternative to actualize out of the many possible options. Even choosing to follow a societal principle faithfully is a choice that individual Dasein has to make for itself. To accept the authority of something beyond me is to *give* my acceptance. I cannot loan out this moment and the responsibility that hangs on it to anyone else. By turning our attention to finitude, Heidegger takes himself to be offering us an explanation for why we cannot seem to loan it out, and how we begin to even understand the choosing as something that confronts us as individuals directly, unavoidably and constantly.

It seems to me that what Heidegger is attempting to bear witness to in *his* description of 'possibility' is the *unavoidable already not-yet* character distinctive of human meaning as it is *actually* had by us in our concrete comportment to the world. The phenomenon he is trying to name is not substantial, but is hardly unreal for it. Neither is it reified as some kind

of spiritual thing or reducible to a psychological concept. Here it seems to me that Heidegger has caught sight of something importantly true about human existence that must not be lost or covered up. The core phenomenon to which the existentials are supposed to testify is human being as ‘ecstatic temporality’. As a situated being who is concretely involved in ontic time and space, the formal-substantial binary certainly has an intelligible role in describing human life, but it is only half the truth of human being. The other half (as its ecstatic, transcending, non-identical self) is simply not graspable in these terms. The existential analytic is an attempt to tell the full story of human being as both ontic and ontological being, and this is why the charge of formalism does not and cannot be a full one.

Even if Heideggerian authenticity is rescued from the charge of suffering the practical powerlessness of a purely formal structure, it could conceivably be vulnerable to another, related criticism – namely that its demand for endless openness and indeterminate ‘living in possibility’ can only produce a ‘praxis paralysis’.<sup>56</sup> But this also ultimately stems from a not sufficiently careful reading of Heidegger. Such a charge is able to assume that existential authenticity means practical indeterminacy, or an escape from concrete engagement, only because it conceives of both existential and ontic kinds of being as of the same order – which is to say the order of ontic reality, where time and space impose definite limits on the things we can do. To take Heidegger’s analysis of existence seriously is to try to maintain the ontological difference rigorously. This precisely means not assuming a flat correlation between existential openness and practical openness. On the converse, it is Heidegger’s point that it takes tireless existential responsiveness (for Dasein as finite transcendence) to be able to commit to and actualize a single, unique, concrete practical possibility, in a way that is authentic to its ownmost way of being human. Ontically speaking, an escape from concrete action is impossible for Dasein, and Heidegger would be the last one to claim that it is or

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<sup>56</sup> See Gerry Stahl, “The Jargon of Authenticity: An Introduction to a Marxist Critique of Heidegger,” *boundary* 2, no. 3 (1975): 495.

must be. To the extent that Dasein is existentially authentic, that which essentially constitutes it through its thrownness (and this necessarily includes traditions, material history, systematized values, etc.) is reshaped by its absolute personal finitude and ecstatic temporality and is brought to bear on the situation at hand, in an unrepeatable moment of particular engagement.

In asserting this, one cannot pretend that the tension between existential and ontic reality, as well as the point at which they are knit together, disappears or is of no further consequence. However, what remains basically coherent about Heidegger's account is that human being uniquely instantiates this connection through its concrete engagement with the world. In this sense, no abstract 'theorizing' about it is going to be substantial enough to meet the critic's demand, unless what is offered up is a reified, stable 'ought' that suppresses the temporal dimension of being that Heidegger has made crucial to proper responsibility.

### 3.3.2 The Mediation Objection

The mediation objection takes the Heideggerian concept of authenticity to ultimately endorse a monadic self-assertive existence that denies any positive role for others in one's being authentic. In a significant way, the mediation objection gets its teeth from assuming the coherence of the formal objection. Since Heidegger's framework does make being-with primordial to his reframed concept of a self, the mediation objection can only carry its full force if it is assumed that such a concession to others is formal rather than substantial. If it seems reasonable to entertain that Heidegger is naming something not quite reducible to the formal-substantial binary (even though it is not independent of those aspects), perhaps a few further steps become available for our consideration.

We can, for example, entertain the idea that Heidegger's notions of interdependence and inter-subjectivity – “being-in-the-world” and “being-with” – may not easily be dismissed as lacking traction in real life. If its significance is not ‘merely’ formal, how then might we properly understand the scope of what is indicated when Heidegger writes, ‘[a]s being-with, Dasein “is” essentially for the sake of others. This must be understood as an existential statement as to its essence’ (SZ 123)? Interpretative caution demands that positively sanguine assertions such as these in *Being and Time* nevertheless have to be squared along with assertions such as ‘[r]esoluteness means letting oneself be summoned out of one’s lostness in the they’ (SZ 299), which seem to suggest that authenticity can only come through forcing a distance from ‘the they’.

Drawing a Hegelian line of critique against this supposed lionization of independence, Zuidervaart writes: ‘A Heideggerian authentic self can neither learn from social normativity nor contribute to it. This self is fundamentally asocial and therefore also ontologically impossible’.<sup>57</sup> The big-ticket question here is whether Heidegger’s framework ultimately allows for a concrete mutuality that includes others not just as one of individual Dasein’s ontological constituents in the they-self, but as reciprocal partners in forging authenticity itself. An unreservedly positive answer on this count does not seem forthcoming in Heidegger’s text, and so, in a sense, it seems that Zuidervaart is correct to conclude that Dasein’s self-disentanglement eventually wins out in its bid towards authenticity. However, I am not entirely persuaded that this ‘monadicity’ in Dasein spells doom for a positive Heideggerian social philosophy, for two reasons.

First, it is not clear that Heidegger himself intends such an extreme individualization, except as a structural point of articulation within a broader and more dialectical vision of authentic existence. The character of this allegedly monadic moment of authentic self-

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<sup>57</sup> Zuidervaart, *Social Philosophy*, 94.

assertion may not entail a cancellation of all Dasein's constituting mediations. Heidegger is very clear about 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 One as essential feature of existence' (SZ 130). Once again, much of the disagreement turns on how much of a modification this modification is. What is clear, at least for Heidegger, is that a modification is not predicated on authentic Dasein severing itself from world or others. But is there a more positive determination of what this connection-through-modification involves? Consider, for example, this claim, which appears on the page immediately preceding the claim that resoluteness involves a tearing away from lostness in 'the They': "As authentic being a self, resoluteness does not detach Dasein from its world, nor does it isolate it as a free-floating ego. Resoluteness brings the self right into its being together with things at hand, *actually* taking care of them, and *pushes* it toward concerned being-with with the others. The resoluteness toward itself first brings Dasein to the possibility of letting the others who are with it "be" in their ownmost potentiality-of-being' (SZ 298). In tending to itself on its innermost terms of authenticity, it appears that Dasein is doing something *for* other Dasein. Its 'letting be' of others is not a privative matter of flat indifference to others. It is a stance that seems to have positive significance for others in that it 'leaps ahead and frees' them (SZ 298). Whatever else it may mean, surely this does imply that other Dasein, pursuing their own authentic potentialities for being, are being positively aided in some way by this single Dasein's pursuing its authenticity.<sup>58</sup>

A second reason I am not persuaded that authentic Dasein's alleged 'monadic' is ethically or socially inimical is that it does not seem to me to be necessarily predicated on an

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<sup>58</sup> It seems to me that this description actually does ring true of concrete human relationships. Mature friendships (for example) develop their mutuality as much from what is done together as from what is made possible by virtue of each individual's own cultivation and development of her inner life. Of course, it is plainly true that one is never in a position to describe precisely what one has ever achieved strictly 'alone' in this way. But this hardly lessens the valid sense individuals have that their life and its potentialities heavily hinge on how they will take ownership for and care of it.

exclusion from conversations, traditions, or other streams of inter-subjective, social exchange. What Heidegger seems to insist on protecting is the insight that none of these engagements could ever be authentically assumed without Dasein being called on to take a self-authored stand on its interpretation of these interactions. In Hegelian terms, one might see this as something phenomenologically similar to the interpretative moment of conscience that cannot be abdicated.<sup>59</sup> As with the previous point, I think that practical experience bears out this fact as well. For even when we stress the need for public authentication of convictions, we are never demanding an ‘absolute’ publicness. This would be unintelligible because we understand that public interactions need people to both listen to and also offer judgments on what they hear. And these judgments are impossible unless we also conceptually and practically concede to a legitimate domain of individual interpretative priority. This is precisely what is enshrined in the commitment against coercion, even though the justification for this core democratic value in public communication is never simply, self-evidently available. Rather it is ultimately an existential conviction that is held onto for complicated reasons that tie into our deep, accrued sense of what it means to be a person capable of making judgments and deserving of respect *as such*. Thus it seems to me that a sympathetic reading of Heidegger’s concept of authenticity could in fact find common ground between the monadicity of individual Dasein and the interpretative prerogative granted to individual participants in a more democratic vision of social engagement rooted in non-coercive engagement.

Dasein, as we have already seen earlier, is *always already* outside itself, with others, and its pursuit of authenticity cannot undo this. It is because we cannot get out of our relational commitments towards one another that we ultimately cannot get away with living callously towards one another without also suffering for it ourselves. Heidegger’s model of

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<sup>59</sup> Hegel discusses the issue of conscience in the section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* called ‘Conscience. Evil, the Beautiful Soul, and Its Forgiveness’ (§§632-671).

authenticity, to my mind, does not endorse an other-privative self as much as a self that has returned to its constituting others through an individuated facing-up to its ownmost meaningfulness. As we just saw in his description of resoluteness, something in the arc of existence actually ‘pushes’ authentically striving Dasein towards other-concern. Could this not indeed be construed as a norm-like curve intrinsic to Dasein’s world?

It is true that this is often too weak a preemptive restraint to keep us from attempting to live oppressively or indifferently when it appears to suit us. But we might acknowledge a certain kind of evidence in experience here: *the true strength of this superficially ‘weak’ norm is revealed precisely in the fact that nobody who lives oppressively or indifferently is able to completely escape the deleterious effects of doing so.* The intrinsic normativity of existence (sustained by the proper mediation of its constituent elements) invariably makes us pay for ignoring our response-ability to these elements.<sup>60</sup> The fact that most societies develop and endorse principles like solidarity or justice as life-enhancing goods can only be ultimately explained by admitting that something within the natural order of things first suggests and also confirms their validity over time, irrespective of whether particular individuals are successfully made to pay for every irresponsible act or not.

### 3.3.3 The Historical Objection

The historical objection to Heidegger’s concept of authenticity is perhaps the most interesting and complex of the three vectors of counterargument I have chosen to consider in this study.

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<sup>60</sup> Thus a businessman who aggressively pursues the expansion of his interests without care for the justice and flourishing of others may certainly achieve some of the short-term financial rewards he desires, but he is never able to do this without marring the life-world that sustains his own true possibilities. Such a man cannot avoid suffering the loss of actualizing potentials for genuine human relationships, vulnerability, and mutual interdependence, which are as intrinsic to a full existence as the moments of inconsiderate self-assertion he privileges. Such a man would not be able to recognize or receive some of these gifts even if they were freely offered to him, because he is not prepared for them. Perhaps something about the reality of this state impresses Socrates when he asserts to Polus in the *Gorgias* that ‘a man who act unjustly, a man who is unjust, is thoroughly miserable, the more so if he doesn’t get his due punishment for the wrongdoing he commits, the less so if he pays and receives what is due at the hands of both gods and men’ (Plato, *Gorgias* 472e).

The broad criticism implied in this particular line of thinking is that Heidegger cultivates an ahistorical understanding of human existence that fails to adequately deal with the complexities of concrete life.<sup>61</sup> On this view, Heidegger's pursuit of the primordially of Being admits of a historical dimension, but only as something indeterminate – to be acknowledged only within the formal and universal structures of Being. Thus it is claimed that, while Heidegger takes historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) to be primordial and thus the real focus of ontological interest in pursuing the question of the meaning of being, determinate history is itself dismissed as the registry of poor facts. If objectively present facts are important for a Heideggerian ontology, their importance primarily lies in what lies latent in them. And since Heidegger's sight is transfixed on that which is supposedly latent (i.e., on Being), he manages to be shortsighted about the significances of material history and what they reveal about our concrete commitments and the oppressive practices they uncritically endorse or maintain through indifference. The intrinsic complexity of this objection raises a plethora of issues that are well beyond the scope of this project and the capacities of this writer. Nevertheless in having raised it, I want to narrow the range of issues awakened within this objection to two specific (and interrelated) concerns.

First, the historical objection contains within it the sense that, in positing the existentials as an order of categories entirely distinguishable from that pertaining to concrete life, the authentic Heideggerian self seems blind to the complex genealogy of 'subjectivity' that unfolds through a dialectical interaction with concrete history and which in fact positions Heidegger to be able to identify the existential categories and the ontological difference in the way that he does. The second sense in which the historical objection is sharpened vis-à-vis the specific concerns of this study is well-framed in Zuidervaart's point (quoted at the end of Section 3.2) that Heidegger transfigures a destructive tendency (i.e., alienation) by glossing it

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<sup>61</sup> This essentially Marxist line of critique, directed explicitly towards Heideggerian as well as other existential and phenomenological approaches, is probably best evident in Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* and *Jargon of Authenticity*, as well as in the work of others who draw from Adorno's central insights.

with the language of finitude. We can see how these two senses are related in the following way: if, as the first charge suggests, Heideggerian authenticity denies the concrete historical character of its formation, it supposedly also forecloses the possibility of acknowledging the historically primed faculties of comparative judgment that allow for a given formulation of the 'proper' or 'owned' life to be judged as destructive or life-affirming. The second charge appears to depend on the validity of the first, though the significance of the objection for moral or ethical discourse most clearly exhibits itself in the second. Taken together, they suggest that the concept of authenticity could in fact be extolling, as definitive for human significance, something (namely, finitude) that was not similarly felt or weighed as definitive in other times and places. The moment we admit that the significance of finitude is narratively shaped within a particularly contingent set of related concrete historical events, the entire, carefully balanced construction of Dasein threatens to unravel. How damaging are these twin charges for any attempt to link Heideggerian authenticity to genuine responsibility?

I am not sure there is any quick argument with which to refute or endorse either side on this point here, except in a way that fails to hear the true force of the tension signaled in the dialectical poles of Being's historicity and the material history of beings. The disagreement – which ultimately reduces to how much interpretative priority is to be given either to the ontological or the concrete, ontic side of things – appears to hinge on several other, complex issues. However, I think it must be straightforwardly granted to those making the historically motivated objection, that Heidegger's interpretation of finitude as the engine of individuation within human existence could not have always had the same force it appears to have in twentieth-century and contemporary Western society. The significance of death and dying has undergone a massive shift over the centuries, and it cannot be understood except in reference to the gradual loss of metaphysically and theologically guaranteed solace

and the cosmic harmony which was once thought to sustain the inherent meaning of human existence.<sup>62</sup> With the shifting of these grounds upon which the meaning of human being and its place in the larger scheme of things was typically conceived, a reconfiguring of the available concept of selfhood was surely inevitable (and indeed remains an ongoing dynamic in our own times). Further articulating this criticism, Zuidervaart writes: ‘The very notion of an interior self whose authenticity resides in public withdrawal and perennial impotence is itself the philosophical expression of a modern cultural tendency whose societal matrix lies in the development of a market economy, privatized family life, and a depoliticized middle class’.<sup>63</sup>

Certainly these aforementioned factors are powerfully alive in the ways we are allowed to interpret our selfhood in recent times. Nevertheless, it has been my attempt in this chapter to contextualize and question this charge that the Heideggerian vision of self is one that meaningfully resides in ‘public withdrawal’ and ‘perennial impotence’. Heidegger calls us to think withdrawal without interiority, and vice versa – our being is always participatory and yet always distinct. With regard to the historical objection, Heidegger could reasonably be understood as not denying the complexity of concrete historical developments as much as homing in on a constitutive aspect of human existence that simply resists being accounted for in the terms of material historical facts, even though it certainly accommodates them.

Once again, it might help us here to turn to the OD and OR distinction. Human existence involves the unique intersection of the general infrastructure of human experience (OD) with a distinct inhabitation of time and situation and the specific folds of meaning that are singularly given to it (OR). The actual character of authentic Dasein as finite transcendence is the dialectical relation of OD and OR. As a dialectical relation that uniquely synthesizes actuality and mortal possibility, the OD and OR ‘who’ has ontic aspects that are

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<sup>62</sup> See Charles Taylor’s magisterial *A Secular Age* for an impressive attempt at tackling this complex narrative.

<sup>63</sup> Zuidervaart, *Social Philosophy*, 88-9.

amenable to the practices of historical record-keeping, study and interpretation. But as an existential determination, it is so much more than any of these practices can register. As OD, Dasein is a formal determination that seems to float above history, while as OD and OR together, it is so concretely and singularly rooted in it that, while it can be identified through its ontic interventions, even the most sensitive historical analysis can never fully reconstruct the locus of its meaningfulness at any given historical moment. This tension is not something that can be defused, for it only mirrors the tensions of human being as both determinate and irreducible to determination, as both formally describable and yet never graspable any more than the 'now' is able to be grasped.

When Heidegger outlines Dasein's existence as conditioned by finitude, he is appealing to universal features of human life regardless of historical situation – birth, death, thrownness, ecstatic temporality, worldhood, and being-with others. In this sense, I would suggest that Heidegger's OD could be maintained as a description that is ahistorical, without suffering for being so. OD was as true of Socrates as it was of Genghis Khan or Mussolini; it is a formal structure that describes the meaningfulness of meaning and rests on the phenomenological concept of the phenomenon (SZ 31). I share these limits with all those human beings who have gone before me or who live alongside me.

But since human existence is about the actual meanings that people have in their comportment with a concrete historical experience (this is what Heidegger claims can be either authentic or inauthentic, and what I have called 'OR'), an authentic response will involve a unique intersection of OR through the contingencies of the historical situation, with its OD structures of possibility. Therefore, the way in which I respond within the field of meanings that are singularly given within my present situation, as a person of a certain socio-economic, ethnic, political, and cultural status (who takes these to be significant because of their long history), will be either 'inauthentic' or 'authentic' in Heidegger's sense, depending

on my willingness to responsibly interpret them vis-à-vis my most basic and inescapable limits for meaning-making. This equally involves the refusal of any evasion of a self-authored stance, as much as it is the recognition of what constitutes me from beyond me – even tradition, societal principles, and the evaluations of others – everything that sets me up to be able to choose how I will weigh their significance for myself.

Thus a Heideggerian perspective can simply concede that people may certainly have interpreted finitude very differently at different times, while still always interpreting *their finitude* – i.e., the unshakeable condition of having limited capacities and limited time. I doubt very much that the allegedly ‘alienated’, current interpretation of selfhood in the West receives any necessary warrant as being ‘authentic’ in Heidegger’s terms; it could as easily be condemned as a failure to acknowledge the intrinsic nature of human being as ‘thrown project’. We can certainly make much better sense of our present concrete situation by paying attention to its historical patterns and material conditions, and we can even experience a kinship with those who have gone before. But neither of these important facts can override the irretrievable, non-repeatable core to human meaningfulness that Heidegger wants to articulate for us. This is the lived center out of which everything that has been passed down and that has made sense for others through history comes alive as that which also makes sense or truly matters for me – i.e., as the one who was not always there, and will not always be there, but is here now. Because this is a center that is essentially structured by the singularities of an ecstatic temporality, material facts can go only so far in capturing it. This definitive sense of what it is to be a human being – as *myself* – is the one that Heidegger takes as crucial to the ways we are able to commit ourselves to ontic reality, and order all the other projects we take upon ourselves throughout our lives. This core of existence is where any systematized framework of value or any vision of ethical responsibility must ultimately find a home, if it is to have any power to motivate action in concrete events. And yet this entire

region remains invisible or only very partially visible to any historical analysis of facts. We are only able to acknowledge its validity, despite its relative insubstantiality, when we are open to the premises of a phenomenological starting point.

In attempting to consider the foregoing objections in the manner that I have, I must emphasize once again that I do not wish to suggest that Heidegger's framework has escaped or answered all the fundamental intuitions that underlie the nature of these objections. At the deepest level, I think the tensions signaled here trace back to the nature of human being itself as a stretched ontic-ontological being. It has been my goal to read and understand Heidegger *through* these objections. My underlying conviction has been that Heidegger himself has understood and grappled with many of these fundamental tensions in a deep and radical way, and has pointed us towards something within ourselves that we cannot afford to lose sight of, especially in our pursuit to articulate the nature and possibilities of our ethical and social obligations.

#### 4 Conclusion: Authentic Responsibility

In this thesis, I have focused on the Heideggerian concept of authenticity and shown that from it emerges a distinct way of conceiving ethical responsibility. It has been my claim that if authenticity is owning one's existence in a way that is properly fitted to Dasein's ontological way of being, this 'owning' of itself will necessarily be the stance of recognizing and responding to the call of one's self-responsibility. And because this self always already includes a network of relations involving others, genuine existential care for oneself is also care for others. Thus owning oneself is inconceivable without owing to others the sort of response that best answers to our mutually dependent existence. This is an unavoidably open-ended project of interpretation, but one whose main points of articulation, so far, can be summarized in the following:

- Heidegger's concern is to account for that which makes human responsibility possible at all. This is important because we have no grounds for ultimately insisting on the need to be responsible if we cannot be shown to have an intrinsic capacity to be responsible. This is also crucial because, in making practical decisions concerning what is to constitute our human responsibility, we need to know to which normative structures these decisions are ultimately accountable.
- In the absence of metaphysically or theologically guaranteed norms, we must locate a normative structure that is both immanent to human existence but also differentiated enough to account for failure or lack in the 'is'. This immanent normative structure, must also be differentiated enough to accommodate desire, potential and corrective movement as the possibility of an 'ought'.
- Heidegger's ontology reveals this to be possible because human being is both itself and more than itself. This is not a 'more' that can simply be exhausted by a formal-

substantial matrix. It is an existential ‘more’ that comes to light only when our starting point is the phenomenon of human meaning, when our methodology is phenomenological seeing, and our criterion is not modelled on that which is involved in the idea of objective presence.

- From this position of inquiry, human being and reality are revealed as inseparably and concretely interwoven into a fundamental structure of participation. There are no prior subject and objects, self and others. Everything is linked from the very start. This is the proper ground of our being responsible, and the basis on which all our specific strong ‘oughts’ have any sanction or can be evaluated for their soundness.
- This capacity to be responsible is made possible only because human reality is characterized by meaningfulness, which is structured as something which has always already called out to us, and is always already met by our individual interpretative response-ability within the whole. This capacity to recognize, weigh, and respond is always worked out amidst ontic facts, but it is not itself ontically determinable. This response-ability signals a non-relational moment, a tearing away that is predicated on all our connections and includes them, and this is an inescapable feature of our being temporal. Thus authentic responsibility is predicated on mediation that is not simply formal or substantial – it is existential, but always existentially committed to the singularity and concreteness of the particular moment.
- Practical action as the domain of ethics is always the outworking of Dasein’s existential concern. To that extent, any attempt to describe responsibility in concrete terms, without correlating it to the priority of existential concerns, is actually a misunderstanding of genuine responsibility.

This does not entail a dismissal of the concerns that a Heideggerian framework does not adequately engage with the complexities of concrete life and history. There are certainly

silences and tensions in this area of Heidegger interpretation that demand further attention.

Here I have only attempted to do the work of showing: (a) how Heidegger can be read as already accounting for the importance of many of these claims; and (b) that the thing to which he is trying to bear witness – the interpretative priority of a being who knows its limits – is a well-grounded and crucially important basis for the intelligibility of all human responsibility.

To bring this study to a close, I want to briefly enumerate some positive contributions to ethical and social philosophy that can emerge out of the Heideggerian framework I have been explicating. It is my sense that these openings are available not in spite of, but rather largely because of, the method and path that Heidegger adopts for his existential analysis.

#### 4.1 Existential Responsibility: Four Norms

Heidegger's perspective can offer us at least four norms in terms of which we may be able to concretely represent the nature of our obligations and to develop a sense of our answerability to the demands of shared life. I take these norms to be extrapolations of the framework I have tried to lay out over the last three chapters. These norms are: (a) the reciprocal nature of freedom; (b) the incalculability of our commitments; (c) the centrality of time to true ethicality; and (d) the unavailability of personal risk.

##### 4.1.1 The Reciprocity of Freedom

It is possible to understand Heidegger's primary concern with the meaning of being, to be his attempt to respond to the 'specter of nihilism' that threatened to evacuate the Western

landscape in the early twentieth century of any worthwhile meaning.<sup>64</sup> In making our fundamental and inescapable immersion in meaningfulness the starting point of his phenomenological framework, it is not unthinkable that Heidegger may be interested in an affirmation of life and its enhancement that fundamentally has to do with giving us back a freedom that we have lost as much through a forgetfulness of being, as also through the jaded cynicism that thinks that it has seen through the human situation all the way down to its fundamental emptiness.

While we have not explicitly dealt with human freedom as a philosophical problem over the course of this thesis, it has been constantly implied in our discussion of human identity and responsibility. It is doubtful that ethical and social life would be meaningful in the absence of some working notion of human freedom. Indeed, what appears to be at issue in the claim that authentic owning is also an owing to others is our operative concept of freedom. However, because of his fundamental commitment to the prior connection of human being to the world through the participatory structures of meaningfulness, Heidegger has a polyvalent concept of freedom; it is not opposed to nature, purely rational as opposed to affective, or even independently secured or sustained. Since Heidegger's concept of freedom does not make an atomic subject its starting point, he is not compelled to view freedom as that which can make sense only through a denial of all constraints. As he writes, '[b]ut freedom is only in the choice of the one, that is, in bearing the fact of not having chosen and not being able to choose the others' (SZ 285). In this very basic sense, any exercise of human freedom is always also an exercise of our un-freedom. In a deep sense, our finitude is not simply a description of the fact that we have a beginning and an end to our being, but that everything in between that we hope for, pursue, actualize, or pass over is itself limited in this way. To deny this, and to expect some sort of pure freedom with which to ground our ethical

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<sup>64</sup> This view is suggested in Michael Gelven, "Authenticity and Guilt," in *Heidegger's Existential Analytic*, ed. Frederick Elliston (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), 233-246.

responsibilities as ‘subjects’, is to conceal the basic reality of human existence and also the ethos of any possible ethical life.

By grounding one’s being as an ‘I’ in a participatory whole that includes other Dasein and things within a world, Heidegger opens us to a reinterpretation of our essential freedom as a reciprocal engagement that defies any characterization as a simple ‘zero-sum’ game. To be free is not to be free from connections, but to be free *through* connections. As Frank Schalow insightfully describes it, the true significance of what becomes thinkable by way of this paradigm shift is that ‘freedom ceases to be a capacity we have and instead becomes a power we receive’.<sup>65</sup> We may recall Heidegger’s own amendment to his claim (that we must ‘become what we are’) was, ‘But who are ‘you’? The one who lets go – and becomes’ (see Section 2.4.1). When control can be conceived as a letting go, and activism as receptivity, it becomes possible to see (at least in principle) that ownership can entail a relation to oneself that is congruent with owing it to others. It is in fact true that even Dasein’s ability to own itself is something that is given to it; its ownership is not completely its own, just as is the case with its meaning and its identity.

What this means in practice is not something that can be simply be described beforehand, because this reciprocity is a dynamic and ever-evolving phenomenon. Dasein, in its concern for itself and its own freedom, is unavoidably changing the world for other Dasein and things. This is why it matters normatively, for Dasein, whether it is authentic in its self-relation or not. In failing itself, it fails others, and in failing others it also fails itself. To the extent that human meaning is bound up with ‘mortal possibility’ rather than mere logical possibility, this failure is not simply a formal one. It matters to human existence, and ultimately structures what can become of current ontic life. Every choice Dasein makes is a rejection of other possibilities, and that personal choice in turn both activates and negates

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<sup>65</sup> Frank Schalow, “At the Crossroads of Freedom: Ethics Without Values,” in *A Companion to Heidegger’s Introduction to Metaphysics*, ed. Richard Polt and Gregory Fried (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 259.

possibilities within the whole, in obvious and subtle ways. This effect reverberates into the outermost periphery of its world, far beyond all its capacities to account for this effect – this is the reality of Dasein’s responsibility. To take up this freedom responsibly is an obligation Dasein can shirk, but it is not an obligation that Dasein can shake off. It is also a responsibility that Dasein can strive to bear, but never entirely succeed in bearing.

#### 4.1.2 The Incalculability of Commitment

In a point that seems to follow directly from the one we have just extrapolated, Heidegger’s framework also awakens us to the intrinsically incalculable nature of Dasein’s commitment to itself and others. This does not deny the place of clear, well-defined laws or directive principles in governing everyday concrete engagements in various systematically programmed domains of governance, production and consumption. Such laws and principles are, as a matter of fact, structurally unavoidable, and so we must work hard to formulate and maintain them. But to the extent that we desire to keep them accountable to the true needs of human existence, they will have to be made to answer to the dynamism and incalculability of our reciprocal responsibilities. In fact, it is only the genuine incalculability of human responsibility that can hold determinate laws and systems of values accountable to human being, rather than the other way around. The moment calculation becomes the grounding premise, something vital to and about human existence is obscured and disfigured.

It is Heidegger’s point that we can only maintain a strong ‘ought’ as something that serves human existence when we recognize its constant inadequacy and the responsibility it levies on us to honor it through our responsive, interpretative acts. What is ultimately dangerous about an uncritically negotiated public morality is that it allows us the false comfort of thinking we have been responsible when all we have done is reduce the demand

facing us to a caricature, to something paltry and manageable. This is what he criticizes about ‘the They’, whose instrumental rationality ‘knows only what is sufficient or insufficient with respect to handy rules and public standards’ and treats the call of existence as if it were a to-do list or a balance sheet - calculating infractions and attempting to balance them (SZ 288). To be committed to this view of human reality amidst the inevitability of determinate values, will mean maintaining at least the following sensitivities:

1. We will treat our laws as formally necessary structures, but as practically contingent and incomplete in themselves – as needing interpretation and completion within every unique situation where they are to be invoked;
2. We will recognize that responsibility is essentially located in attentiveness to the peculiar intersection of an ‘ought’ with its singular, emerging practical context.

#### 4.1.3 The Centrality of Time to True Ethicality

The reason our ethical commitments are incalculable has everything to do with the fact that we are temporal beings. It is in being ecstatically temporal that we are always incomplete with regard to any given moment. It is in our being-possible that we are never simply able to calculate and satisfy the demands of a concrete, actual situation as if it were a closed or finished state. Therefore the Heideggerian vision of what it means to be a human being significantly challenges any pretense that ethical formulations can be regarded timelessly. Being good or being responsible can often, at least in everyday understanding, be maintained as synonymous with executing *this* or *that* kind of determinately defined action. We think we can recognize or certify behavior through its correspondence to those kinds of action that were previously regarded as good or right or responsible; this is how we often go about trying to be ‘good’ or ‘civil’ or ‘responsible’. But if what we have described about human existence

in the last three chapters is true, such an approach towards being ethical must be seen as inadequate at best.

A Heideggerian perspective does not deny that such recognizable ontic characteristics may be valid descriptors of ethical action. It only rejects the idea that these characteristics are sufficient for determining that the good has been done or that responsibility has been assumed. By ascertaining the proper relationship of human being to time, we are also given to understand that being ethical is essentially not about certain patterns of behavior, as much as it is about maintaining a fidelity to human being as finite, transcendent time. When we are being responsible for others, we are first and foremost being responsible for their being-possible, as sites of ecstatic time. We are responsible for their existence (as a unique convergence of the actual and the possible), and this is what we are actually answering to when we involve ourselves with the ontic practices of, for instance, feeding the hungry, demanding equal rights in the workplace, rehabilitating the homeless, and so on.

The significance of the point I am making here about the proper relationship of ethicality and time is that we can never rest assured that our replication or endorsement of recognized patterns is actually truly responsible unless we are paying authentic attention to the demands of one another's existential time. It is only when we are able to do this that we are able to respond to the demands of ethicality in a way that *matters* to the being, human or otherwise, to whom we take ourselves to be responding responsibly.

#### 4.1.4 The Unavoidability of Personal Risk

Finally, from a Heideggerian perspective, authentic responsibility cannot eliminate personal risk. Individual Dasein never outruns its vulnerability to loss and failure simply because it strives to be authentic in its orientation. In the paradigm that Heidegger offers us, human

meaning, identity, and existence as a whole is not a closed economy in which strict mechanistic relations or instrumental forces can be efficiently mastered and manipulated for one's own ends with perfect success. There is an unpredictability in the world made possible by Being itself, which defies the narrow calculations of any niggardly human self-interest. Thus, it would seem that to be authentically ethical in the domain in which freedom is reciprocal, and in which one's commitments frustrate calculation, is also always to leap into the unknown, without the comfort of sure guarantees. We might even say that to bear fidelity to oneself (and thus others) is to walk, as it were, in faith, rather than in the clear sight of an assured outcome.

The real domain in which this risk is borne for Dasein is not simply the fact that certain 'bad' ontically determinate outcomes, such as physical hardship and suffering or emotional trauma, might still result from authentic engagement with reality. Certainly these are also possible and we are never able to find a way to exist beyond their potential reach. But in keeping with Heidegger's primary insight that human existence means being primordially immersed in meaning, we can see this personal risk as something more – i.e., the potential for that which matters most deeply for Dasein to suddenly be reconfigured, to fade, or to fall away in experiences that are existentially devastating. To recall and further nuance the earlier point that Heidegger challenges the nihilist by pointing to how inextricably we are entrenched in contexts of meaning, we might see Heidegger as describing our reality as impervious to an absolute conceptual nihilism, but not impervious to its constant existential suggestion. Authentic human responsibility never outruns or forecloses this possibility; rather it is a commitment despite this possibility.

#### 4.2 The End as Beginning

To the extent that Heidegger's vision of human meaning, identity and responsibility is taken to be persuasive, these norms (that I have just described as arising naturally from such a vision) are also descriptions of reality that all ethical thought has to take seriously. In the end, however, it has to also be admitted that Heidegger's framework is slippery enough for numerous double gestures, which allow for subtleties of emphasis to be made one way and another. But overall this is less a strategy for evading determinate and identifiable commitments as it is an attempt to cope with the complexity inherent in the phenomenon of *human being* itself.

In the *Zollikon Seminars*, delivered in the twilight of his life, Heidegger would put the matter like this: 'To stand under the claim of presence is the greatest claim made upon the human being. It is "ethics" [in the original sense].'<sup>66</sup> This view remains consistent with his much earlier claim in 'Letter on Humanism' that, precisely through undercutting more traditional subject-oriented humanisms and their ensuing ethical frameworks, his existential analytic of Dasein as a quest towards the truth of being could be seen as offering an 'original ethics'.<sup>67</sup> Despite the shifts in emphasis Heidegger's thinking took over his long and productive life of scholarship, this basic estimation remains the stable, far horizon against which he was willing to conceive of how his own philosophical project stood in relation to questions about ethical or moral reasoning. Thus, as Françoise Dastur succinctly summarizes it, '[f]or Heidegger, ethics is ontology itself'.<sup>68</sup>

Whether Heidegger thinks that everything that falls under the scope of our ethical concern must be answered in the terms of ontology alone is debatable. What is clear,

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<sup>66</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols–Conversations–Letters*, ed. Medard Boss (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 217.

<sup>67</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Harper Perennial, 2008), 258.

<sup>68</sup> See Françoise Dastur, "The Call of Conscience: The Most Intimate Alterity," in *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, ed. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany, SUNY Press, 2002), 87. A cognate point is made by Joanna Hodge who argues that Heidegger's ontology is most intelligible, despite its rejection of value-thinking, as a fundamentally ethical project that emerges at a primordial point where ethicality has not yet made the differentiation between judgment and action. See Joanna Hodge, *Heidegger and Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 202-4.

however, is that he believes that no understanding of the ethos to which ethical life is orientated can be properly secured outside of the clearing that is first accessible through an ontological inquiry. In closing *Being and Time*, Heidegger is willing to contemplate the possibility that his entire grand project and its methodological scaffolding could be challenged by an alternative: ‘Whether that way is at all the *only* one or even the *right* one can be decided only after we have followed it’ (SZ 437).

In this study, it has been my attempt to more clearly envision the nature of the basic phenomena that his ontology reveals – the finite-transcendent, non-identical essentiality of human existence. With that in view, I have argued that his framework of individual authenticity remains serviceable for sympathetic interpretations concerned with emphasizing the shared, fundamentally reciprocal character of any full human life. And, even more so, I have shown that this framework has the power to remind us that we can never rest in the comfort that such work has been satisfactorily done. Becoming what is beyond us is always the work of the present, because it is already within the present. Thus, for Heidegger, we only manage to live well in the uncomfortable gap between the world as it is and as it ought to be, when we are presently attuned to the *existential* moment of their convergence. This is where human responsibility truly starts – but, as long as we are in ontic time and space, this is not where it ends.

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