

Death, Authenticity, and Metaphysics

in Heidegger's *Being and Time*

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Abstract

This master thesis is an in-depth study of Heidegger's notions of death and authenticity in *Being and Time*. Heidegger's existential notion of death is by many commentators considered to be radically different from the traditional metaphysical conception of death as the end of life. Disputing this view, I argue that Heidegger's notion of death is a composite between the existential conception of being-towards-death, and the metaphysical conception of death as the end of life. There is a growing interest for the idea that Heidegger's notion of authenticity is a descriptive, ontological foundation for a possible ethics. The notion of authenticity is too vacuous to have any ethical content. For authentic Dasein to become *ethical* Dasein, certain modifications of the existential web must be carried out. To establish the link between authenticity and ethics, I argue that the ontological status of das Man must be refuted, and that the temporal ecstasie of falling into the present must be understood differently as a movement of transcendence. The most important theoretical purpose of this thesis is to question the possibility of eliminating metaphysics. I argue that Heidegger's notion of death is metaphysical in accordance with his own understanding of the term, thereby trying to show that certain phenomena –and most prominently death - are metaphysically constituted.

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To Rune, in love and gratitude

Contents

Abstract	I
Acknowledgements	III
Contents.....	IX
Introduction	1
1. Death and method	5
1.1. The task of philosophy: fundamental ontology	6
1.2. Is death a phenomenon?.....	9
1.3. Death in the hermeneutical process	11
1.4. Leaping into the circle: death as a formal indication	17
1.5. Is death a ‘fluid’ concept?	19
2. Death in <i>Being and Time</i>	21
2.1 The existential web.....	22
2.2 The existential significance of death.....	24
2.3 The search for existential death	28
2.4 A ‘pure’ existential definition of death?.....	32
2.5 Death as possibility.....	36
3. Death and authenticity	40
3.1 Anticipation of death	41
3.2 Resoluteness and the Situation	43
3.3 Why be authentic?	47
3.4 Authenticity and ethics	50
3.5 Back to relational conscience?.....	56
4. Death and das Man	60
4.1 Das Man’s idle talk about death	61
4.2 Who is das Man?	64
4.3 Truthful ‘talk’ and immediate access to phenomena	69
4.4 The structural story of falling	73
4.5 Falling, rising, and transcending	77
5. Metaphysics and death	80
5.1 What is metaphysics?	81
5.2 ‘Metaphysical’ assertions about death	83
5.2.1 We are constantly dying	85
5.2.2 Death as certain and indefinite	87
5.2.3 Death’s finality and the possibility of an afterlife	90
5.3 Metaphysical death	91
5.4 Death’s full significance: a question of time and belief?	94
Epilogue	97
Bibliography	99

Introduction

This master thesis is about death. More specifically, it has three interconnected themes about death that run through it. The first theme is about the possibility of acquiring knowledge of death; the second is about death's significance for human existence; and the third theme is about death as a metaphysical concept. Why is death a philosophically relevant topic to discuss? Death is arguably the most universal aspect of our existence, in that all human and living beings eventually will face their demise. Death is also the most certain event in life.¹ These aspects of universality and certainty make death a natural candidate for philosophical discussion and analysis.²

In what follows, the philosophical relevance of three themes about death will be accentuated and elaborated through an in-depth discussion of Martin Heidegger's analysis of death and authenticity in *Being and Time*.³ What is the reason for choosing Heidegger's notion of death as the main subject of my discussion and analysis? Heidegger is clearly an important thinker to be engaged with, in that he is one of the most influential and controversial thinkers of the twentieth century. A more relevant answer to this question, however, is the fact that Heidegger's analysis of death in *BT* has stirred much confusion and bafflement, caused lengthy theoretical debates, and brought about stark criticism. These facts in themselves make Heidegger's notion of death into an interesting challenge for further philosophical analysis and discussion.

Many ingenious interpretations have been presented of the existential notion of death in *BT*. Heidegger's notion of death is notoriously difficult to grasp in itself, and it is puzzling why death holds such an important position for Heidegger in his overall philosophical project in *BT*. An important driving force in this master thesis is thus simply to try to understand Heidegger's existential notion of death in contrast to the

¹ Death is arguably even more universal and certain than birth. This is so, because every living being seems to be subject to the necessity of death, while birth is a contingent fact.

² Death has been an important and recurrent theme within the Western philosophical tradition, especially under the influence of religiously or metaphysically inclined thinkers. At the end of the nineteenth century, however, death was no longer considered to be an important philosophical theme. Death was going 'out of fashion', so to speak. This fact was due to thematic changes in the philosophical fields of interest. However, despite of such changes and of the general process of secularisation in the Western societies, a few philosophers throughout the twentieth century, most notably in the so-called continental or existentialist traditions, took a 'special interest' in death. Heidegger is one of those thinkers.

³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007). Future references to this work will hereafter be cited as *BT*.

traditional metaphysical conception of death. I will also try to explain why death holds such a significant place in Heidegger's answer to the question of the meaning of being.

Obviously, because of its extensive and complicated nature it is not possible to cover every aspect of Heidegger's analysis of death in this master thesis. Limitations of space have thus raised the question of where to put the line of demarcation regarding the content. In general, the three themes about death that run through my thesis altogether organise the content and the various topics that are brought up for discussion. More specifically, the first theme about acquiring knowledge of death is mainly located to the two first chapters. Here I examine how Heidegger's philosophical method of hermeneutical phenomenology is applied to establish an existential definition of death. In the first chapter several general questions and problems that pertain to Heidegger's method of hermeneutical phenomenology, are raised. The central question in this chapter is in what sense death can be approached as a phenomenon. In the second chapter, I discuss whether death in *BT* is purely existentialist or a composite notion of death. Many commentators argue that existential death is radically different from the traditional conception of death as the 'end of life'. I will argue that this view is not entirely correct, and that Heidegger's notion of death is rather a composite of the existential conception of being-towards-death and the traditional metaphysical conception of death.

The second theme about death's significance for human existence is located to the third and the fourth chapter. In these chapters Heidegger's notion of authenticity and its link to death and other elements in the existential web will be discussed. The main problem to be discussed in chapter three is whether the concept of authenticity has any ethical connotations. There seems to be a growing consensus amongst commentators that Heidegger's notion of authenticity can serve as a descriptive ontological foundation for a possible ethics. Disputing this view, I will argue that Heidegger's notion of authenticity is too empty or vacuous to have any specific ethical content. Furthermore, Dasein has inherent structural limitations, such as *das Man* and its idle talk about death. In order for authentic Dasein to become *ethical* Dasein, it is in my view necessary to make certain modifications in the existential web. In the fourth chapter I will thus present a lengthy argument for the refutation of the structural necessity of *das Man*. In this chapter I will also suggest an alternative way to understand Dasein's relationship to temporality and the ecstasie of 'falling' into the present.

There is a large tradition of commentaries on Heidegger's work, which roughly can be divided into two 'camps'. First, there are the 'Heideggerians', or those

commentators who mainly seek to defend the thrust of Heidegger's analysis of death in *BT*, thereby in many cases weakening their ability to identify its obscurities and weak points. Second, there are those commentators who – quite vigorously – criticise Heidegger's analysis of death, and accordingly tend to interpret it as a certain being reads the Bible.⁴

In this thesis I am not primarily concerned with either defending or criticising Heidegger's notion of death. My methodological approach is traditional in the sense that it consists of a close reading of the text, especially of the many relevant sections in Division II. Admittedly, I engage in some of the most relevant commentary debates, and for this purpose I bring in commentary voices that are either sympathetic or critical towards Heidegger. I do, however, have a higher theoretical purpose with this master thesis rather than simply to discuss, criticise, or defend Heidegger's notion of death within the confines of the established tradition of commentaries.

In twentieth century philosophy, and especially within the so-called analytical tradition, there has been an expressed ambition to abandon metaphysics as a philosophical discipline, and to restrict philosophy to merely conceptual and logical analysis. For analytical philosophers assertions are typically meaningless unless they have empirical content. And, if assertions have empirical content they belong to the empirical sciences. In many ways, Heidegger agrees with the idea that metaphysics must be overcome or eliminated. This task, however, can according to Heidegger only be accomplished by an engagement with the metaphysical past, and not simply by ignoring metaphysics. In other words, Heidegger shares the ambition of eventually eliminating metaphysics, but he is suggesting a different approach by thinking through the history of being.

The shared goal in modern philosophy of overcoming metaphysics defines the third thematic that runs through this thesis, which is death as a metaphysical concept. In *BT* Heidegger claims that his analysis of death is entirely non-metaphysical and 'this-worldly', in the sense that it is not concerned with the typical metaphysical questions about death. Typical metaphysical questions about death would be; the meaning of death (and life); what may come after death; and the evil of death, etc. In the fifth and final chapter I will examine Heidegger's understanding of metaphysics as historical

⁴ The picture is, of course, not as black and white as it is painted here. There are examples of commentators who mainly sympathise with Heidegger, but who at the same time are able to identify the weak spots in his analysis. Furthermore, there are philosophers who completely ignore Heidegger's work, often belonging to what is characterised as 'analytical philosophy'.

background understandings of being. Then, based on an analysis of some of Heidegger's assertions about death, I will argue that his notion of death is in fact metaphysical in accordance with his own understanding of metaphysics. The conclusion that Heidegger's notion of death is metaphysical is crucial for this thesis' fundamental theoretical purpose, which is to raise the question of whether metaphysics can ever be overcome or eliminated. In my view it is doubtful that metaphysics can be eliminated for good, or that this is a desirable goal for philosophers to accomplish. This doubt does not originate from a conviction that human capacity for knowledge and rationality is somehow incapable of a continued growth and expansion. Rather, it comes from the view that certain phenomena are constituted in such a way that they inevitably invite metaphysical speculation. Death is such a phenomenon.

1. Death and method

The guiding question of this chapter is whether there is a method through which we can acquire knowledge of death. In *BT* Heidegger explicates and analyses death as a phenomenon, he has seemingly found some kind of methodological access to death. According to Heidegger death is not only possible to describe and characterise from a phenomenological point of view; phenomenological approach to death is also the way to acquire an authentic understanding of death.

The general aim in this chapter is to investigate whether Heidegger's method can provide us with a new and improved understanding of death. What does it mean to characterise and approach death as a phenomenon? Furthermore, how can we distinguish the 'real' phenomenon of death from what is simply a semblance or an appearance of it? To answer these questions, we first need to look at the characteristic features of Heidegger's method of phenomenology, or what is also known as fundamental ontology.

One of the characteristics of Heidegger's philosophical method of phenomenology is that it is hermeneutical or interpretive. This raises several questions and problems that pertain to philosophical interpretation as such. For example, there is the problem of relativism and whether one interpretation of the phenomenon is just as good as another. There is also the problem of the truth and falsity of the interpretation of phenomena. Thus, how can we know that Heidegger's analysis of death is the 'best' available, or that it describes the phenomenon of death as it is? Finally, there is the problem of the circularity of hermeneutics, and the presuppositions and background assumptions that necessarily pertain to a circular understanding of phenomena.

For Heidegger, it is not possible to escape the interpretive circle; rather, what matters is finding the right entrance into it. Towards the end of this chapter I will thus raise the question if death in *BT* is a formal indication, which is a methodological tool applied at the beginning of a phenomenological investigation. If Heidegger's notion of death in *BT* is a formal indication, this might suggest that death is a 'fluid' philosophical concept in the sense that it is in constant transformation. Towards the end this chapter, however, I will argue that death, as it is in itself, is not a fluid concept.

1.1 The task of philosophy: fundamental ontology

Shortly put, Heidegger's philosophical method in *BT* is phenomenology. As a method, however, phenomenology is not a unified method shared by all phenomenological philosophers alike.⁵ What then characterises Heidegger's phenomenology? For Heidegger, as it was for his mentor Edmund Husserl, phenomenology is essentially a descriptive, and not a hypothetical or explanatory project. Moreover, 'early' Heidegger considered his version of phenomenology to be a science in its own right.⁶ However, Heidegger's conception of phenomenology also differs radically from Husserl's, both in terms of method and outcome. For example, Heidegger emphatically rejects Husserl's notion of the phenomenological reduction as the appropriate starting point for phenomenology. In Heidegger's view, phenomena are not the subjective content of consciousness, but rather objective structural elements of the human constitution. The difference between Heidegger and Husserl becomes even sharper knowing that, for Heidegger, the most important philosophical question to be asked is the question of Being. It is on the basis of this question that Heidegger articulates what he finds to be the central task of philosophy, and accordingly why phenomenology is the proper method for fulfilling such a task.

According to Heidegger, the question of being cannot be answered through a detached third-person study, so often applied in empirical science or in traditional philosophy. Instead, the place to begin to answer the question of being is *Dasein* or 'being-there', which is Heidegger's term for what we as human beings essentially are.⁷ Thus, Heidegger asserts:

With regard to its subject-matter, phenomenology is the science of the Being of entities – ontology. In explaining the task of ontology we found it necessary that there should be a fundamental ontology taking as its theme that entity which is

⁵ Heidegger's particular kind of phenomenology was developed in contrast to both empirical science and to contemporary philosophical movements, such as neo-Kantianism. It was specifically developed in contrast to Edmund Husserl's phenomenology. Husserl considered phenomena to be the strict scientific study of the subjective phenomena of 'pure' consciousness. That is, Husserl viewed phenomena as the inner contents of conscious experience, standing in representational relations to outer objects, making their appearance in and through them.

⁶ A turn (*Kehre*) occurred in Heidegger's thought around 1930 with his essay "On the essence of truth". 'Early' Heidegger is thus classified as his works before 1930, there amongst *BT*, which was released in 1927.

⁷ I have chosen to use Heidegger's original neologisms 'Dasein' and 'das Man' throughout this thesis. Other central concepts will be used in their English translation, whereas the original German term is put in brackets.

ontologico-ontically distinctive, Dasein, in order to confront the cardinal problem – the question of the meaning of Being in general.

(BT 37)

For Heidegger the central, most important task of philosophy is to perform fundamental ontology. What is it that distinguishes fundamental ontology from other forms of ontology? Or why is fundamental ontology more fundamental? In traditional philosophy, ontology is the study of the most general kinds of things, or the study of the things that exist ultimately.⁸ Fundamental ontology, on the other hand, is the study of the fundamental structural elements of Dasein, also called ‘existentials’. In other words, fundamental ontology is the analysis and the corresponding mapping out of the existential ‘web’ or network that constitutes the being of Dasein.⁹

The close relationship between fundamental ontology and phenomenology becomes evident, in that Heidegger thinks that phenomenology as a philosophical method inevitably expresses an understanding of the being of the phenomena it studies. That is, for Heidegger phenomenology is the *science* of being in the Aristotelian sense, i.e. as metaphysics. Thus, for Heidegger “ontology is possible only as phenomenology” (BT 35). However, this assertion raises the question of how phenomenology in the form of fundamental ontology is actually performed in order to acquire a direct access to phenomena. To this, Heidegger asserts the following:

The expression ‘phenomenology’ signifies primarily a *methodological conception*. This expression does not characterize the what of the objects of philosophical research as subject-matter, but rather the *how* of that research.¹⁰

(BT 27)

Phenomenology is a methodological conception that specifies not the ‘what’ (*das Was*), but rather the ‘how’ (*das Wie*) of philosophical research. Heidegger here introduces an

⁸ In the *Topics*, Book I, chapter 9 Aristotle listed different ontological ‘categories’ as those characteristics that can be predicated in things, for example substance, quality, quantity, relation, place, time, position etc. The Aristotelian conception of the categories is alluded to in BT §9, where Heidegger distinguishes categories from existentials. For Kant, the categories are the a priori concepts that provide the conditions of possibility for understanding and unifying the manifold of intuition, or the plurality of perceived items. Thus, the Kantian categories are the conditions of possibility for all human cognition. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B105-6. Through the structural development of existentials, Heidegger contests the Kantian account of the categories as the pure concepts of understanding.

⁹ Heidegger characterises the categories of fundamental ontology as ‘existentials’ because “the essence of Dasein is its existence”.

¹⁰ Later on Heidegger repeats and underlines this distinction, saying that phenomenology “neither designates the objects of its researches, nor characterizes the subject-matter thus comprised. The word merely informs us of the “how” with which “what” is to be treated in this science gets exhibited and handled” (BT 34/35).

important, but in my view problematic methodological distinction between the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of phenomenological research. This distinction will later be discussed; for now, it’s sufficient for us to simply grasp the formal meaning of phenomenology, which Heidegger designates as “to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself” (BT 34).

Heidegger explains that a phenomenon is something that shows itself as it is in itself and, accordingly, phenomenology as a method allows the phenomenon to be seen as such. But how exactly is this done? Is this, for example, a question of possessing a certain kind of perceptive ability? Matters get further complicated due to the ambiguity in Heidegger’s own characterisations of the phenomenon. On the one hand he asserts: “The expression ‘*phenomenon*’ signifies *that which shows itself in itself*, the manifest. Accordingly, the ‘phenomena’ are the totality of what lies in the light of day or can be brought to the light” (BT 28). On the other hand, Heidegger asserts:

Manifestly, (the phenomenon) is something that lies *hidden*, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself; but at the same time it is something that belongs to what thus shows itself, and it belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground.

(BT 35)

What are we to make of this seeming contradiction between the hidden and the manifest phenomenon? As Taylor Carman points out, Heidegger’s first characterisation of the phenomenon (as something that shows itself) is a mere preliminary placeholder for what he later supplements with a more substantive concept.¹¹ Thus, phenomena in the ‘real’ or robust sense are not self-evidently accessible to conscious reflection - as were the case with Husserl’s phenomena - but rather they are hidden aspects of what lies open to view, and as such they are in need of evocation and interpretation. But we need to ask: hidden aspects of *what*? The answer to this question is Dasein’s being. Phenomena are the deep existential structures of Dasein that altogether make up the complex patchwork of the ‘existential web’ in *BT*. I shall later return with an overview of the general outlines of the existential web. For now, it’s enough to know that Heidegger turns death into a phenomenon by making it part of the existential web.

¹¹ Taylor Carman, “The Principle of Phenomenology”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, second edition, edited by Charles B. Guignon, 97-119 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 100-101.

1.2 Is death a phenomenon?

Heidegger characterises death, “in the widest sense, as a phenomenon of life” (*BT* 246), and he is thereby telling us that death in principle can be studied or disclosed as a phenomenon in its own right. From his characterisation of death as a phenomenon, it is clear that Heidegger thinks that death is structurally embedded as part of Dasein’s being. But in what sense, we might ask, can death be studied as a phenomenon?

In *BT* §7 Heidegger presents his formal definition of the phenomenon as “what shows itself”. He then makes a threefold distinction amongst kinds of phenomena in this sense. First, a phenomenon can show itself either as it is in itself or as it is not; that is, falsely. Heidegger employs the term “semblance” for the latter, or what he calls the “privative modification of phenomenon” (*BT* 29). Examples of semblances include optical illusions, perceptual errors, etc. The second distinction is that some phenomena are *appearances*, examples of which include “indications, presentations, symptoms, and symbols” (*BT* 29). Although the appearance *y* is a phenomenon, *what* appears is not. In other words, all semblances and appearances are phenomena, but that not all phenomena are either semblances or appearances. Thus, Heidegger asserts: “Both appearance and semblance are founded upon the phenomenon, though in different ways” (*BT* 31). A third distinction is *mere appearances*, which Heidegger defines as those entities that are immune to the possibility of semblance, whereas *what appears* is defined as what is necessarily always beyond the reach of our experience. That is, a phenomenon *y* is a mere appearance (of *x*) if and only if *y* is an appearance of *x* and *x* can “*never*” show itself, i.e. must forever and “constantly” be “concealed” (*BT* 30).¹²

From Heidegger’s detailed distinction between phenomenon, semblance, appearance, and mere appearance, one problem naturally emerges. How can we be assured that Heidegger’s notion of death in *BT* is a fully disclosed phenomenon, rather than just an appearance or a semblance of it? In other words, how is it possible to distinguish the ‘real’ phenomenon from what is simply a distorted or false version of it? Several commentators have recognised the methodological problems in relation to turning death into a phenomenon. As Stephen Mulhall points out, such a procedure seemingly presents us with a constitutive resistance to Heidegger’s own philosophical

¹² The notion of ‘mere appearances’ here resembles the Kantian notion of ‘das Ding an Sich’. In his discussion of the phenomenon, Heidegger mentions Kant and his use of the term ‘appearance’. According to Heidegger, Kant uses this term in a twofold way: first, appearances are what show themselves as ‘objects of empirical intuition’. At the same time, an appearance is an emanation of something which *hides* itself in that appearance (*BT* 30).

method.¹³ The resistance stems from the fact that death cannot be experienced directly. We can, of course, observe death in a straightforward sense as it occurs to other living beings. However, when we reach our own end we are not there anymore to experience it. In this sense, *my own death* is not a phenomenon on a par with any other phenomena in the world. The fact that our own death is so alien to us is because it is virtually impossible to imagine what being dead would be like. Since death in this sense seems to evade all conceptualisation, then how can we possibly acquire a satisfactory knowledge or understanding of it?

At this point we seem forced to admit that death represent an exceptional epistemic, conceptual and methodological challenge. What makes it extraordinary as a phenomenon is on the one hand that death is indeed a visible and concrete part of human life: we do witness other people die, and we can easily infer from this fact that death eventually will occur to ourselves. On the other hand, death as it is in itself is not a tangible phenomenon that anyone can watch or grasp directly. Furthermore, even though it is possible to acquire knowledge of death in a narrower scientific sense, questions like the ultimate cause of death, why death is part of life, or what being dead is like, seems impossible to give definite answers to.

Given the space and importance Heidegger confers on to death in *BT*, he evidently seems to think that there is a need for an improved understanding of death. This brings up the question of what is wrong with the traditional understanding of death. According to Heidegger, death as a philosophical concept has been covered up and handed over to us in a wrongful and distorted fashion by the philosophical tradition. Because of this long-standing philosophical and scientific distortion, death needs to be reinterpreted and disclosed anew as a phenomenon. But in what way is death as a philosophical concept covered up? Heidegger explicates the different ways in which phenomena can be covered up. First, a phenomenon can be covered up in the sense that it is still quite undiscovered; it is thus neither known nor unknown. Second, a phenomenon can be buried over, in that “it has at some time been discovered, but has deteriorated to the point of getting covered up again” (*BT* 36). When a phenomenon is buried over it can be so in a complete way. Or, what has been discovered earlier may still be visible but then only as a semblance. The third sense of covering-up, is disguising. Heidegger

¹³ Stephen Mulhall, “Human mortality: Heidegger on How to Portray the Impossible Possibility of Dasein”, in *Blackwell Companion to Philosophy: A Companion to Heidegger*, edited by Hubert L. Dreyfus & Mark A. Wrathall, 297-310 (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2007), 298-299.

characterises the disguised phenomenon as both the most frequent, and as the most dangerous form of covering-up. This is so, because “here the possibilities of deceiving and misleading are especially stubborn” (*BT* 36).

In addition to introducing the different distinctions between the covering up of phenomena, Heidegger points out that they in turn have two possibilities. First, there are necessary coverings-up that are grounded in what the thing discovered consists in. Second, there are coverings-up that are accidental and as such contingent on the use of different philosophical approaches. Clearly, Heidegger does not think that the covering-up of death is entirely necessary due to the phenomenon itself, given his own efforts to disclose it as a phenomenon. The covering-up or disguise of death is thus a contingent fact that can be rectified by the use of correct method, which is phenomenology or fundamental ontology.¹⁴

1.3 Death in the hermeneutical process

We have so far looked at the characteristic aspects of Heidegger’s phenomenology as fundamental ontology. We have also seen some of the preliminary problems that pertain to approaching death as a phenomenon. However, there are further elements to be included in order to complete the methodological picture. Heidegger distinguishes the ordinary concept of truth (as “correctness” or “correspondence”) from truth as “unconcealment” (*a-letheia*). According to Heidegger, all ways of encountering entities involve unconcealment. The claim that unconcealment is the essence of truth is motivated by the recognition that we have to see truth in the broader context of Dasein and its ‘world of significance’. An assertion is thus true when it directs us to a state of affairs *as* that state of affairs in fact is. In other words, assertions and beliefs do not represent entities; they rather present them as ways of being oriented within the world so that a certain state of affairs can show up. The phenomenological analysis is an investigative process through which we can discover an assertion’s truth by being oriented to a state of affairs just as it is in itself. Accordingly, Heidegger says: “To say that an assertion is true, signifies that it uncovers what is, as it is in itself. It asserts, it points out, it ‘lets’ what is ‘be seen’ in its uncoveredness” (*BT* 154).

¹⁴ Any objection to treating death as phenomenon may rest upon a conception of death as simply ‘being dead’, that is, as an instance non-existence. In our ordinary everyday understanding of the term, however, the concept death has at least three distinctive meaningful applications: death as the process of dying, death as an event, and death as the state of being dead. When we refer to “death”, we thus implicitly refer to these three aspects, either separately or in conjunction.

In addition to his view of truth as unconcealment, Heidegger considers the task of fundamental ontology to be “the science of being” (BT 37). Thus, as a scientific method phenomenology consists in letting the ordinarily unseen or hidden dimensions of what is seen (phenomena) be seen. And, such ‘letting be seen’ is essentially an interpretive or hermeneutic effort: “The phenomenology of Dasein is a *hermeneutic* in the primordial signification of this word” (BT 37). Fundamental ontology is thus a circular process of using Dasein’s encounters of entities as the basis for explicit interpretations of its understanding of being, and then confirming or revising these ontological interpretations in the light of further concrete cases. Heidegger’s technical term for the elaborate process of unconcealment is apophantic interpretations, whose unique goal is *apo-phansis*; allowing entities to show themselves from themselves, just as they are in themselves.

The process of apophantic interpretation is better known as the hermeneutic circle. What is perhaps less known is that there is not just one single step, but altogether four hermeneutical circles in Heidegger’s phenomenology. These circles emerge from the fourfold sense of the unconcealment involved in apophantic interpretations.¹⁵ The first step in conducting fundamental ontology in the form of apophantic interpretation is phenomenological reduction, and it consists of making the entities’ ‘how-being’ into a phenomenon, i.e. to get it to show itself to us. Heidegger employs the term ‘formal indications’ to characterise the preliminary assertions found toward the beginning of an ontological investigation that are intended to get us to perform the phenomenological reduction. The theme in the phenomenological reduction is not being itself, but rather Dasein’s understanding of being. This first step of fundamental ontology thus involves the first hermeneutic circle between Dasein’s implicit understanding of being, and its explicit ontological interpretations of it.

The second step of fundamental ontology is phenomenological construction, which consists in making and confirming assertions about being, thereby bringing them out of concealment. From this aspect a second kind of hermeneutic circle emerges, between the meaning and comprehension of ontological assertions and the phenomena they indicate. Now, the aspect of phenomenological construction can be especially critical when it comes to the unconcealment of traditional philosophical concepts, such as

¹⁵ Edgar C. Boedeker Jr., “Phenomenology”, in *Blackwell Companions to Philosophy: A Companion to Heidegger*, edited by Hubert L. Dreyfus & Mark A. Wrathall, 156-172 (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2007), 160. Boedeker presents us with an overview of the hermeneutic circles of unconcealment in phenomenology.

death. Why is that? The danger here lies in the thin line between the construction that actually stems from the phenomenon itself, and the construction that is more or less projected onto the phenomenon by phenomenologist. In other words, there is always the question of how much is coming from the phenomenon itself in the analysis, and what is projected onto it by the phenomenologist. As we shall later see, part of the problem with Heidegger's notion of death is that this distinction tends to become more uncertain and blurrier the deeper we move into his existential-ontological analysis of death.

The third step of fundamental ontology as apophantic interpretation is phenomenological obstruction or destruction. This step in the hermeneutic process consists of ontologically 'illuminating breakdowns' which allows one to get the right sort of access to ontological phenomena, thereby allowing for the phenomenological reduction and construction to occur. For Heidegger, a primary example of obstruction is anxiety, which is a mode of the primordial existential 'attunement', as part of Dasein's 'facticity'.¹⁶ The mood of anxiety thus serves "a fundamental methodic function for the existential analytic" (*BT* 187). Ontological phenomena, as structures in one's own particular encounters of entities, can according to Heidegger only be glimpsed when something out of the ordinary occurs that disrupts the smooth flow of apophantic interpretations in daily life. Thus, we can see Heidegger's obvious break with the traditional ideal of scientific detachment and neutral objectivity in that he finds moods or affectivity to be necessary methodological tools.

The fourth and final step of apophantic interpretation is to unconceal being by removing the distortions of it that arise from the use of concepts inappropriate to it. Heidegger calls this methodological step phenomenological deconstruction of the history of ontology. The task of *BT* is to retrieve the question of being by 'destroying' the history of ontology. This task can only be accomplished by attending to the enigmatic character of Dasein's everyday existence, and thus by exposing the unnoticed metaphysical presuppositions that are concealed behind the ordinary. The purpose of phenomenological deconstruction is to keep ontology open to the possibility of progress through revolution or 'crisis'. Heidegger's insistence on the importance of deconstruction is closely connected with his view of ontology as a science. The purported consequence of deconstruction is to demonstrate the proper boundaries of traditional philosophical

¹⁶ An overview of further central elements of the 'existential web' will be presented at the beginning of chapter two.

concepts, so that they do not end up distorting the interpretation of ontological phenomena.

As we have now seen, hermeneutical phenomenology is an elaborate philosophical method, involving several interpretive layers and intricate circular movements. If Heidegger's notion of death is necessarily an interpretation of the phenomenon that emerges as a result of the hermeneutical process, this raises many questions. First, what happens to the traditional concept of death after being subjected to the process of apophantic interpretation? Is it completely destroyed or deconstructed, or are there traces of the old concept left in the new phenomenon?

In addition to these questions, there is also a group of more general methodological problems to be addressed. First, as a method, philosophical interpretation is often seen as threatened by the problem of relativism. If all interpretations of phenomena are relative to the interpreter's point of view, then how can we distinguish certain interpretations as 'better' or as more preferable than others? In particular, why should we accept Heidegger's interpretation of death? According to Heidegger, relativity to a standpoint does in fact not entail a relativism wherein one standpoint is just as good or acceptable as the other. Neither does it entail that we are cut off from access to the phenomenon itself. Rather, what we encounter through phenomenological analysis is a presentation of a phenomenon as it shows itself from a particular point of view. Every phenomenon has a different mode of encounter proper to it, and it is only when we let it encounter us in the right way that it can show itself as it is in itself.¹⁷ Certain existential phenomena, like death, can only show themselves to the one who is engaged with the world in the right kind of way. But, how can being engaged in the right way solve the problem of relativism? And how do we know which way is the right to be engaged?

Charles Guignon argues that Heidegger's recognition of the forever present relativity to a standpoint is in fact consistent with realism that affirms the reality of what shows up for us.¹⁸ In a similar vein, Mark Wrathall points out that assertions about things

¹⁷ Heidegger distinguishes between two kinds of interpretation in *BT*, *Auslegung* and *Interpretierung*. The first includes everyday phenomena of ordinary human skills, such as the primary examples Heidegger puts forth in Division I: hammering, driving a car, etc. The second form of interpretation is said to be a derived form of *Auslegung*, and includes discursive articulation and theorisation. Heidegger claims the status of philosophical *Interpretierung* for his analysis of death, in that it is a more reflective, articulated or explicit form of interpretation than the phenomenal activity of ordinary world interpretations. Philosophical interpretation is according to Heidegger not threatened by the problem of relativism because it is a case of the primary understanding of the world.

¹⁸ Charles B. Guignon, "Introduction", in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, second edition, edited by Charles B. Guignon, 1-41 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 14.

cannot be true unless there is way that things are; that is, unless they are real with essential properties.¹⁹ We might agree with these commentators that the way a phenomenon shows up for *me*, always contains a certain element of reality or truth. Thus, it is only possible for things to manifest themselves in themselves if there is a way that the world really is, and that it shows itself to us as it really is. But, we might ask; is it likely that every phenomenon will show up in this way? As we shall see, this seems to be a particular dilemma when it comes to death and how it shows up for us as a phenomenon. Part of the problem is thus that death shows up in many different ways, depending on our assumptions and on the circumstances. How can we then decide which way that is correct or 'true', so to speak?

Another question that has plagued hermeneutics is whether some phenomenological interpretations are true, while others might be false. As shown above, this problem is brought up in Heidegger's discussion of the phenomenon as appearance or semblance. Thus, there is the question of whether we should accept Heidegger's notion of death as a 'true' account of the phenomenon. It can be argued that the traditional philosophical obsession with the truth or falsity of interpretive claims is on the wrong track, and that the interpretive understanding of phenomena is better judged by different labels than true or false.²⁰ However, a pertinent question to ask of phenomenological texts is whether the description of phenomena is convincing or not.²¹ The credibility of the phenomenological analysis is indebted to the phenomena as they are in themselves, and not only on internal consistency. In other words, we need to ask whether Heidegger's description of death as a phenomenon is - at the very least - recognisable in that it essentially matches 'the thing in itself'.

A third problematic feature of hermeneutical philosophy stems from the fact that all understanding of phenomena is necessarily circular. The insistence on the circularity of understanding on Heidegger's part raises the problem of whether the interpreter of phenomena is necessarily always trapped within her own presuppositions and assumptions, and of whether there is some way to escape the interpretive circle.

¹⁹ Mark Wrathall, "Unconcealment", in *Blackwell Companions to Philosophy: A Companion to Heidegger*, edited by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, 337-357 (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), 349.

²⁰ David Couzens Hoy, "Heidegger and the hermeneutic turn", in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, second edition, edited by Charles B. Guignon, 177-201 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 188.

²¹ Anne Granberg, *Mood and Method in Heidegger's Sein und Zeit*, PhD-thesis (University of Bergen, 2003), 168.

Heidegger asserts that the term 'phenomenology' expresses a maxim that can be formulated as 'To the things themselves!' (*BT* 34). This phrase might suggest that there is a domain outside the circle of interpretation against which our beliefs and assumptions can be tested and evaluated. However, Heidegger's point is that beliefs and assumptions can only be checked or corrected against other beliefs and assumptions; understanding is thus necessarily holistic and includes a pattern of interlocking beliefs and skilful know-how. There is no radically independent outside of the hermeneutic circle, and thus no escape from it. Rather, for Heidegger what matters is to find the right entrance into the circle.

According to Heidegger, the possibility of neutral perception of present-to-hand objects, prototypical for detached scientific studies and characteristic of traditional philosophical thinking must be unmasked as a myth.²² Instead, the existential analytic of *Dasein* must provide an analysis of the conditions of possibility of understanding (*Verstehen*), which is what Heidegger calls the fore-structure of understanding.²³ What Heidegger means by understanding is not simply one form of cognition among others, but rather our most basic ability to live in and cope skilfully with our world. Understanding is thus a fundamental existential of *Dasein*, while explanatory knowledge and interpretation are derivative forms of understanding. For Heidegger, knowledge and interpretations presuppose a primary understanding of the world that runs through them. Furthermore, as features of our world are constantly changing, this requires us to change our interpretations and explanations of it. Thus, understanding of the world is always also a self-understanding, or *Dasein*'s interpretation of itself. Understanding involves, therefore, more than the discovery of facts about particular features of the world, which is characteristic of scientific research. Understanding is more primordially the disclosure of possibilities, or *Dasein*'s concrete possibilities in the world, which are never chosen arbitrarily or in complete freedom.

²² Heidegger thinks that we most of the time we do not approach or understand things in an objective or detached way. Thus, Heidegger distinguishes between different approaches we have to things in the world and to ourselves: we rarely approach things as mere objects or as present-at-hand (*vorhanden*). Instead, most of the time we treat things as 'available', or as ready-to-hand (*zuhanden*).

²³ Heidegger analyses the fore-structure of understanding into three components: "fore-having" (*Vorhabe*), "fore-sight" (*Vorsicht*), and "fore-conception" (*Vorgriff*). These three aspects of understanding (*Verstehen*) are the hermeneutic conditions of interpretation.

1.4 Leaping into the circle: death as a formal indication

As earlier mentioned, Heidegger employs the term ‘formal indication’ (*formale Anzeige*) to characterise the preliminary assertions, found toward the beginning of an ontological investigation, that are intended to get us to perform the phenomenological reduction.²⁴ As methodological tools, formal indications belong to the early steps of the hermeneutical process, and as such they are meant to represent a specific philosophical conceptuality that is to function non-objectifying. In other words, formal indications are meant to run counter to the theoretical or detached attitude that has haunted philosophy for centuries, and which Heidegger thinks conceals the most fundamental way in which human beings relate to the world.

According to Heidegger, what is to be analysed in phenomenology cannot be classified as ‘objects’. Rather, what is to be analysed is the relating-to (*Verhalten*) of factual life-experience. Thus, the task of hermeneutics is to make the ‘how’ of this experience explicit, and the task of formal indications is to lead the attention to how it is given. What a phenomenon is can only be ‘formally indicated’ by approaching the meaning of the phenomenon in both its ‘what’ and its ‘how’. A formal indication is thus supposed to draw the attention away from the given fact of experience, and towards the attitude in which it is experienced. Formal indications makes explicit that we always stand in a specific relation to that which is experienced. In other words, formal indication makes the subject matter accessible in such a way that its ‘how-being’ (*Wiesein*) becomes a definition of its authentic ‘what-being’ (*Wasein*). In addition to the relational aspect, the formal indication points towards a possible concretion (*Vollzug*) or enactment of the phenomenon. The formal indication only gives a certain direction for enactment, and it is the interpreter or philosophising individual’s concrete task to fulfil the enactment in application. Heidegger’s point is thus that a genuine understanding of a philosophical concept only can take place through application.

Granberg argues that death and other central philosophical concepts in *BT* are formally indicating in the sense just mentioned.²⁵ To the extent that Granberg’s view is

²⁴ Heidegger developed formal indications (also called *prinzipielle Definitionen*) as methodological tools in the 1920s in connection with his project of a hermeneutics of facticity. Formal indications are discussed in detail in GA 60/61, but they also appear in other writings from this period.

²⁵ Anne Granberg, *Mood and Method*, 24. Granberg argues that *Being and Time* as a whole can be seen as formally indicative in that it is an attempt to induce a certain mood (*Stimmung*) in order to effectuate the process of becoming authentic in the reader. See also Edgar C. Boedeker, “Phenomenology”, 165. Boedeker points out that one implication of the ontic basis of ontology is that what would appear to be

correct, it can certainly explain much of the debate, criticisms and downright confusions that have followed in the footsteps of Heidegger's analysis of death. Furthermore, it explains why death as a formally indicating concept seems to be so emptied of concrete content. This is so, because as *formal*, formal indications will not refer to any specific 'ontic' content; however, as *indicative* they are supposed to give a direction of the 'how' of enactment or application.

If death in *BT* is a formal indication in the sense suggested here, we should expect to discover the following after examining Heidegger's full existential definition of death. First, as a non-theorising concept, Heidegger's definition should mainly be about the 'how' before about the 'what' of death. Furthermore, it should be non-speculative and without reference to the traditional metaphysical conception of death.²⁶ We should also expect Heidegger's notion of death to be 'empty' in the sense that we are not told specifically how to relate to death. Also, there should be enough direction in the definition to guide us on the right path so that we can relate authentically to death. In other words, Heidegger's notion of death should be applicable in that it gives us guidance on how to act upon it. Finally, through an individual enactment of it, we should expect the existential notion of death to transform us in an existentiell (ontic) sense. In other words, such an enactment should contribute to make us authentic, and thereby open for considerable changes to take place in our lives.²⁷

As earlier mentioned, Heidegger's methodological distinction between the 'what' and the 'how' of phenomena is problematic. Based on the discussion of death as a formal indication, we are in a better position to understand why. If death in *BT* is formally indicatory, then its 'what' is in fact determined by its 'how', and as such the being of death is inextricably linked to how we choose to relate to it. In other words, the determination of what death is goes from the relational aspect to the material, rather than the other way around. Now, in my view this is not only highly contra-intuitive; I find it to be simply wrong. I think we can agree with Granberg in her view that some of the central

ontological *assertions* are also really imperatives, and that what Heidegger comes to mean by "indication" is just this imperative nature of ontological assertions.

²⁶ Granberg, *Mood and Method*, 165. Granberg points out that Heidegger does not merely demand a "first person perspective" on death; he appears to want to do away with all generality and universality whatsoever in relation to death. In other words, formalisation does not imply generalisation. Rather, "formal" in formal indication refers merely to the "how" of relating-to.

²⁷ Granberg, *Mood and Method*, 7, 25. Granberg argues that *BT* has a *maieutic* intent in that it presents us with a normative ideal for Dasein to become authentic. However, the problem is that this makes it very difficult to perform a critical reading of the work, in that it leads to a form of immunisation against critique.

philosophical concepts in *BT* are indeed formally indicative. This tendency is explicit in Heidegger's notion of anticipatory resoluteness, or the way that we can relate authentically to death. When it comes to Heidegger's definition of death, however, I will try to show that things are slightly more complicated.

1.5 Is death a 'fluid' concept?

One of the themes that run through this thesis is whether there is a method through which we can acquire knowledge of death. As we have seen, Heidegger denies that there can be any definite knowledge of death as a phenomenon outside the circle of interpretation. For Heidegger, knowledge in the traditional sense is a derivative form of the more primary phenomenon of understanding as a necessary aspect of being-in-the-world. It is because we already are in the world with a basic ability to live and cope skilfully, that we can acquire knowledge of anything at all. Thus, to have 'knowledge' of death is not know what death is in the traditional sense of acquiring knowledge of something. Rather, to 'know' death is to comport oneself to it with either an authentic or an inauthentic understanding of it.

Now, it is admittedly possible to acquire definite 'ontic' knowledge of death through the use of certain methodological approaches. A trained physician, for example, can identify the various causes of death, as can the coroner performing an autopsy. Because we observe the death of others, after a certain age most of us will 'know' that death is a part of our lives, and that everyone eventually will die. However, these are not the kinds of knowledge of death that is relevant for this discussion. Rather, what is sought after here is the general knowledge of what death is in the ontological sense.

In the previous section the question was raised whether death in *BT* is a formal indicator. Behind the methodological notion of a formal indicator lies Heidegger's view of the peculiar character of philosophical concepts. In contrast to the concepts of the positive sciences, philosophical concepts are vague, uncertain, and in a constant flux. According to Heidegger, this fluidity belongs to the essence of philosophical conceptuality as such. This is so, because to understand philosophical concepts is at the same time to be part of the 'world' in the form of factual life-experience.

Above we saw the many problems and questions that pertain to subjecting death to the hermeneutical process. Together with these general problems, there is thus an additional question to be taken into consideration. This question concerns how many interpretations it is in fact possible to have from death as a phenomenon. An endless or

large series of possible interpretations would suggest that death is a genuinely fluid philosophical concept in Heidegger's sense. As we shall later see examples of, death is indeed a 'fluid' concept in the sense that it has been understood and acted upon very differently throughout the history of the Western culture. Furthermore, as a consequence of cultural differences, death is currently understood and related to in very different ways throughout the world. In this cultural-historical sense, death is in fact a more fluid and transformable concept than Heidegger himself opens up for in his ontological explication of *das Man*, or the public interpretation of death.

The historical and cultural fluidity of death stems from deep changes in what Heidegger characterises as the background understanding of being. The historical and cultural fluidity of death, however, does not entail that death, as it is in itself, is in a constant flux. Rather, it is plausible that death as it is in itself is unchangeable and untouched by historical changes and cultural influences. This claim, however, brings up an inescapable dilemma: if definite knowledge of death is impossible to acquire, then how can we know what it is in itself? And, if we cannot know the being of death, then how can we possibly determine which way that is the best or most appropriate to relate to it? As we shall later see, there are not an unlimited number of possible interpretations of death. Rather, a few available interpretations emerge from different sets of background understandings of being, or what Heidegger calls 'metaphysics'.

2. Death in *Being and Time*

One of the fundamental methodological problems of reaching a phenomenological understanding of death arises because death in the traditional metaphysical sense as ‘end of life’ is not experientially available to us. Heidegger, however, claims to avoid this problem by redefining death as a phenomenon of life. In this chapter I will examine how, through the application of the method of hermeneutical phenomenology, Heidegger turns death into a phenomenon. I will, furthermore, examine how Heidegger finally arrives at his full existential definition of death. Is the redefining of death as being-towards-death a fully legitimate methodological move on Heidegger’s part? And, is Heidegger’s definition of death purely existentialist?

At a crucial point in the analysis, Heidegger internalises death into the existential web, thereby analysing it as an inherent part of Dasein’s care-structure. In what follows I will thus present an overview of the different layers and essential elements of the existential web. Next, I will discuss why death is brought into the existential analysis in the first place, and why it has significance for Heidegger’s philosophical project in *BT*.

A crucial premise for my thesis’ overall argument is to show that Heidegger’s notion of death is a composite rather than a purely existentialist notion. Thus, after first having followed in Heidegger’s methodological steps to see how he gradually redefines death, I will present several reasons for why I think that Heidegger necessarily ends up with a composite definition of death. On the basis of these reasons I will argue that Heidegger’s notion of death in *BT* is a composite of the traditional metaphysical understanding of death as ‘end of life’, and the existential understanding of death as being-towards-death.

One of the puzzling features of Heidegger’s existential definition of death is his characterisation of death as a ‘pure’ possibility. This characterisation has created much debate and criticism. Towards the end of this chapter I will make suggestion of what is the metaphysical background assumption is for the characterisation of death as a possibility, and thereby taking the first step in pointing towards the theme about death as a metaphysical concept.

2.1 The existential web

In *BT* Heidegger famously poses the question of Being. Shortly put, this question is about the “meaning of being”. Heidegger thinks that this question can only be answered through the fundamental ontology of Dasein, which is “the only being whose Being is an issue for it” (*BT* 12). Thus, hermeneutical phenomenology as practiced by Heidegger, is the effort of ‘wresting’ the phenomenon of being from Dasein. The guiding idea behind the question of being is for Heidegger the “idea of existence”, which he calls “the Being of Dasein” (*BT* 42). “Existence” as the guiding idea for the analysis, indicates the movement from Dasein’s particular experience of being-in-the-world, to the structural totality of Dasein.

In *BT*, the analysis of Dasein’s being consists of three structural ‘layers’, so to speak. Altogether these analytical layers constitute the existential ‘web’ of Dasein, which contains a large number of fundamental structural categories or ‘existentials’.²⁸ The existentials are interconnected both vertically and horizontally, and make up an intricate structural patchwork. They are portrayed as universal and timeless structures that pertain to Being as such, and thus they are not supposed to be relative to historical changes or to cultural variations.

Being-in-the-world is the structural concept that most clearly and explicitly indicates the vague familiarity we all have with Being. Thus, the structure of Being-in has three elements that are all part of Dasein’s disclosedness (*Entschlossenheit*); that is, how Dasein inevitably experiences its ‘world’. These three elements are: attunement (*Befindlichkeit*)²⁹, understanding (*Verstehen*), and discourse (*Rede*) (*BT* 160/161). Heidegger calls these three the ‘originary’ or ‘fundamental’ existentials since they structure our being in the world. Attunement, understanding, and discourse determine the whole of Dasein and show its inner structuring or articulation. In other words, Being-in-the-world reveals our understanding of being, and as such it constitutes the first structural layer in the existential web of Dasein.

The primary structural layer of attunement, understanding, and discourse or Being-in-the-world intersects with two other elements, thrownness and projection

²⁸ In contrast to the traditional metaphysical concept of ontological categories (for example in Aristotle), Heidegger calls the fundamental structures of Dasein ‘existentials’. This is because it is Dasein’s being that is analysed, and “the ‘essence’ of Dasein lies in its existence” (*BT* 42).

²⁹ There are many translations of Heidegger’s term *Befindlichkeit* or *Stimmung*, such as state-of-mind, mood, etc. I here use the translation ‘attunement’ because I find that it captures well the meaning of being-in-the-world as already attuned to it.

(*Geworfenheit* and *Entwurf*), which further articulate the totality of Dasein from a different angle. According to Heidegger, Dasein finds itself both “thrown into” the world and “throwing itself forward” (projecting) towards the world. It is attunement in the form of moods such as anxiety or boredom that reveals Dasein’s thrownness into the world. We are never free of moods, in that they indicate that things always matter to us, in one way or the other. Moods not only indicate thrownness, but that we *are* and *have to be*. Projection, on the other hand, designates the way Dasein relates to its being. Because of its projection, Dasein is always more than itself at any given moment. Dasein is the potentiality-for-Being, and in attunement, understanding, and discourse it makes its possibilities its own (BT 145).

The second structural layer in the existential web is care (*Sorge*), which Heidegger considers to be the ‘ground’ of Being-in-the-world. Care is thus more concrete, but also wider in scope than the first structural layer of the existential web. Thus, the first element of the care-structure, Being-already-in or facticity, encompasses attunement, understanding, and discourse. The second element of the care-structure is Being-ahead-of-itself or existentiality, and it signifies Heidegger’s notion of the self as a transcending process. In other words, for Heidegger the self is not like an entity or a spiritual substance. It is rather a process that - because Dasein is already engaged in the world - discloses Being itself. The third element of the care-structure, Being-alongside or fallenness, signifies Dasein as always already fallen or dispersed among other beings (tools, instruments, objects, and other people) in the world.

The third and deepest structural layer in the existential web is temporality, which Heidegger explicates as having three elements or ‘ecstasies’: future, having-been or the past, and present. For Heidegger, it is futurity that lies at the bottom of Dasein’s existence. Thus, futurity is the most important element of temporality, in that it is the condition of the possibility of projection. Having-been or the past corresponds to the care-structure’s Being-already-in as Dasein’s thrownness and facticity. The last element of temporality, the present or falling, corresponds to Being-alongside or the fallenness of the care-structure.

The above is a general and simplified outline of the existential web, and it is important to know that it contains many more elements that are not included here. The existential web is thus an extremely complex structural fabric with many overlapping

layers and intricate interconnections between the various structural elements.³⁰ The point of mapping out the general outlines of it here, is that Heidegger at the beginning of Division II defines death in terms of the care-structure:

If indeed death belongs in a distinctive sense to the Being of Dasein, then death (or Being-towards-the-end) must be defined in term of these characteristics. We must, in the first instance, make plain in a preliminary sketch how Dasein's existence, facticity, and falling reveal themselves in the phenomenon of death.

(BT 249)

Throughout the remaining parts of this thesis I will discuss Heidegger's notion of death with respect to the elements of the care-structure. Furthermore, there is one particular 'strand' in the existential web that is of higher interest for the discussion. This is the strand that 'originates', so to speak, in the temporal aspect of falling; continues through Being-alongside or fallenness of the care-structure; becomes explicit in Heidegger's structural determination of das Man; and, 'expires' in Dasein's dominant mode of being, which is inauthenticity.³¹

2.2 The existential significance of death

Death obviously holds great significance for Heidegger in his overall search for an answer to the question of the meaning of Being. Why this is so, is less obvious. The general view that death is of great importance for human life did of course not originate with Heidegger. This view has, for example, been shared by religions and spiritual traditions throughout the world-history.³² Despite its widespread acceptance, however, it is not a self-evident truth that death matters in any significant way for human existence. According to the Stoic view, "death is nothing to us" and thus contemplating it or the prospects of an afterlife is a waste of time.³³ Against the Stoic view of death's non-

³⁰ Reiner Schürmann, "Heidegger's *Being and Time*", in *On Heidegger's Being and Time*, edited by Steven Levine, 56-131 (New York: Routledge, 2008), 103. Schürmann points out that the inner articulation of the care-structure is so complex that it is that it is very difficult to map out the exact configuration of its various elements.

³¹ As mentioned, all the different elements of the existential web are interconnected. This is not an effort on my part to isolate the mentioned elements from the larger existential context. The point is, rather, to expose this particular 'strand' in the existential web as more vulnerable for critique and in need of modifications.

³² In some religions death is seen as one of the most important aspects of human life, in that it is viewed as a preparation and/or transition to the afterlife. This is the case in both Buddhism and Hinduism, and to a certain extent it is also the case in Christianity and Islam.

³³ This view was held, amongst others, by the ancient stoic philosophers Epicurus and Lucretius. I will return to the Stoic view about death in chapter five.

importance, it can be argued that the awareness and acceptance of mortality and finitude is one of the distinguishing traits of being human. Contemplating death and its inevitability can thus lead to a major rearrangement of the priorities in our lives because we, at the very least, begin to realise that our time on earth is limited. Thus, in the long-standing *Memento Mori*-tradition, reflections over death were instigated to make people realise certain essential facts about their lives, for example that nobody, not even the most fortunate or healthy person, is exempt from death.³⁴

In *BT* Heidegger is not arguing for the significance of death from a religious point of view. He is neither identifying himself as part of the *Memento Mori*-tradition. What is it, according to Heidegger that makes death existentially significant? Heidegger's analysis of death takes off with a reminder that "care is the basic state of Dasein" (*BT* 249). What is then the essential connection between death and this particular structural layer in the web? One way to answer the question could be that care is the basic state of Dasein, because Dasein is concerned about its being. Thus, care is Dasein's basic state because Dasein always is, and understands itself as, a mortal creature.³⁵

Heidegger further claims that death or the 'end' must be brought into the analysis so that the interpretation of Dasein can become primordial, and so that light can be brought existentially to Dasein's being in its possibilities of authenticity and totality (*BT* 233). What are the possibilities of authenticity and totality about? For a start, Heidegger thinks that death is what defines Dasein as a unity. In other words, death individualises Dasein, and thus it makes it possible for Dasein to become authentic. However, Heidegger immediately recognises the problem of how Dasein can ever become a totality in the sense of something completed or fulfilled:

As long as Dasein is, there is in every case something still outstanding, which Dasein can and will be. But to that which is thus outstanding, the 'end' itself belongs. The 'end' of Being-in-the-world is death. This end, which belongs to the potentiality-for-Being – that is to say, to existence – limits and determines in every case whatever totality is possible for Dasein.

(*BT* 233/234)

³⁴ As part of Christianity, the *Memento Mori*-tradition acquires a moralising purpose in Medieval Europe. The prospect of death serves to emphasise the emptiness and fleetingness of earthly pleasures. In this sense, thinking about death can teach us the lesson that we ultimately are all equal, and that it is pointless to spend one's life chasing after worldly goods and possessions. These awakening and liberating consequences is in essence why contemplation of death is important.

³⁵ Piotr Hoffman, "Death, time, history: Division II of *Being and Time*", in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, second edition, edited by Charles B. Guignon, 222-240 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 224. Hoffman points out that because death holds such an intimate connection to the care-structure, it holds an analogous position to the Cartesian Cogito Sum: death in *BT* is the Moribundus Sum.

Now, if there is always something outstanding in Dasein, then how can it ever become whole or a totality? Dasein is according to Heidegger not equivalent to a substance or to a present-at-hand object. Instead, the web of existential structures that constitutes Dasein is essentially non-objectifying. As Mulhall points out, the fundamental aspect of Dasein's being as care seems to resist the very idea of completeness, and thus brings out a structural paradox in Heidegger's analysis.³⁶ This is so, because the structure of care makes Dasein always be ahead of itself, projecting itself upon existential possibilities, to something that is not yet. Thus, as the temporal structure of care implies, Dasein's totality cannot be reified at any point in time. Yet, Heidegger's notion of Dasein's totality – as defined and secured by its 'end' – demands a whole that can be limited in some way. But, if Dasein cannot bring its own existence into view as a whole, then how can it produce an existential analytic of its own kind of being that might bring it into view as a fulfilled totality?

Mulhall argues that the dilemma of totality is reduced by the fact that human beings relate to themselves as subject to death, and that this relating-to-death constitutes a non-eliminable aspect of their self-understanding, and hence of their understanding as being-ahead-of-themselves. As certain conception of wholeness is thus inextricably involved in Dasein's conception of its existence as ahead-of-itself. However, my objection to this is that having a *conception* of totality is not the same as actually *being* a whole person. So far, the question of totality or unity seems to lead into perplexity; it is uncertain whether Dasein's death implies totality in the sense of fulfilment or completion. It is, furthermore, uncertain whether *any* kind of totality is possible for Dasein. Thus, at this point in the analysis Heidegger concludes that "for the most part, Dasein, ends in unfulfilment, or else by having disintegrated and been used up" (*BT* 244). Ending, in the sense of Dasein's end, does not necessarily imply human fulfilment in the sense of perfection or completion.

The quest for Dasein's totality raises several problems, and one of them is what it really means to be a whole or complete human being. Does being complete involve a personal fulfilment in the narrow sense, or does it also involve a moral dimension, that in

³⁶ Stephen Mulhall, "Human mortality", 298. Mulhall points out that when Heidegger tells us that the care-structure includes Dasein's being-ahead-of-itself, he alludes to what he elsewhere calls Dasein's existentiality – the fact that it projects itself upon existential possibilities and that its existence is a matter of its being endlessly delivered over to the task of actualising some particular possibility of its being. But this undeniably means that Dasein can never achieve wholeness, in that it will always be ahead of itself, essentially related to a possibility or to something that is not yet.

a wider sense includes other people and society? Furthermore, is this kind of morally 'perfected' completeness even possible to achieve for human beings? Apparently not, according to Heidegger's analysis. In addition to bringing about a possible totality of Dasein, the perhaps most significant function of death in *BT* is heuristic. The analysis of death is thus preparatory for revealing Dasein's temporality, and to make the temporality of being itself thinkable.

As earlier shown, the deepest structural layer in *BT* is temporality, consisting of the 'ecstasies' past, present, and future. For Heidegger, the primary 'ecstasie' of temporality is the future, or the 'not yet'. The future is thus the condition of the possibility of Dasein's projection. Now, because of its futurity, Dasein is necessarily incomplete. Since there is always something outstanding, Dasein can never entirely be itself, and hence it cannot be 'perfected'. As Taylor Carman argues, any ideal of self-realisation, self-actualisation, or completion is in principle impossible for an entity like Dasein.³⁷ What distinguishes Heidegger's image of Dasein is thus his radical rejection of any conception of a finished, integrated self, or a complete present-at-hand entity. Carman's view about Dasein's lack of totality seems to be correct, in that it corresponds with Heidegger's view that Dasein can never become fully authentic in a lasting, non-deteriorating sense.

In addition to the problems just mentioned about Dasein's lack of totality, there is also the question of the timeliness of death. Is there ever a right time to pass away, or is death always untimely and inappropriate?³⁸ If there is such a thing as a right or appropriate time to die, this seems to imply that human beings can be fulfilled or complete in the sense that there is nothing left for us to accomplish during this lifetime. Thus, a paradox seems to follow from Heidegger's analysis: on the one hand, death is always untimely in that for Dasein, there is always has something outstanding. On the other hand, death is what confers a possible totality on Dasein. In this sense, the question of a possible human fulfilment or completion seems to stand unresolved in Heidegger's analysis. I will later return to this question with a suggestion of how the structural explication of Dasein must be modified in order to make it permanently whole and authentic.

³⁷ Taylor Carman, "Authenticity", in *Blackwell Companions to Philosophy: A Companion to Heidegger*, edited by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, 285-296 (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2007), 287.

³⁸ The common sense view is that dying old is always preferable to dying young and healthy. But is this necessarily always the case?

2.3 The search for existential death

Since for the most part Dasein ends unfulfilled, Heidegger points out that it is urgent to find out in what sense death must be conceived as the ending of Dasein (BT 244). From this point in the analysis Heidegger tries out a variety of ways to find phenomenological access to Dasein's 'end'. He begins the search by giving examples of the type of ending involved in three domains of what-is other than Dasein (BT 245). These three endings are: the end or fulfilment of what-is in the domain of nature (as when a fruit is ripe), the end or disappearing of what-is ready-to-hand (as when the bread is finished), and the end of what-is present-at-hand (as when a painting is finished). However, in regard to these examples, Heidegger comments:

By none of these modes of ending can death be suitably characterized as the 'end' of Dasein. If dying, as being-at-the-end, were understood in the sense of an ending of the kind we have indicated, then Dasein would thereby be treated as something present-at-hand or ready-to-hand. In death Dasein has not been fulfilled nor has it simply disappeared; it has not become finished nor is it wholly available as something ready-to-hand.

(BT 245)

None of the above three endings, then, involve ceasing to be or vanishing from the physical world as an entity. In other words, these different domains of what-is have different appropriate ends, which let them be in a particular way as either nature, ready-to-hand, or present-at-hand. One might find it slightly peculiar that Heidegger mentions these endings of what is not Dasein. However, at this early point in the analysis he is simply trying to find a viable mode of access to death, which is why he canvasses a number of different 'ends' by asking whether Dasein's relation to its end might be figuratively represented.

After having dismissed the above endings as relevant for Dasein, Heidegger continues his search for the phenomenon. There is a crucial turning point in the text where Heidegger asserts the following:

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

(BT 245)

From this point in the analysis death is gradually understood as a *way of being*, as Heidegger turns away from the traditional understanding of death as an event that ends life. However, in section 49 Heidegger follows his earlier methodological strategy, in that he asserts that the ontological interpretation of death must be strengthened by bringing explicitly to mind what such an interpretation can not inquire about (*BT* 246). Heidegger now brings into the analysis different endings that are, more or less, applicable to Dasein. Carol White points out that the characteristic of these endings is that they “let Dasein be what it is, in that it takes a stand toward being”.³⁹ Which are the endings that apply exclusively to Dasein? First, because we as Dasein are human beings with ‘life’, we also confront the end of life, which is what Heidegger calls ‘perishing’ (*Verenden*).⁴⁰ All organisms will eventually perish, but according to Heidegger “Dasein never perishes” (*BT* 247). This is not because Dasein is immortal, but because it is not equivalent to a living organism in the biological sense. When people perish they instead go ‘out-of-the-world’ and lose their world as the context of significance.⁴¹

The next kind of ending that pertains exclusively to Dasein is ‘demise’ (*Ableben*). What is the difference between perishing and demise? Dasein, Heidegger says, “can demise only as long as it is dying” (*BT* 247). But what does this mean? As White points out, demise is a ‘crossbreed’-phenomenon between perishing and the distinctive end connected to Dasein’s ownmost being. Demise is then perishing understood in particular ways, as when we take a stance towards what it is to *be* as perishing. White contends that Heidegger calls perishing demise to indicate the end of life as it has been taken up in a particular understanding of being.⁴²

³⁹ Carol J. White, *Time and Death: Heidegger’s Analysis of Finitude*, edited by Mark Ralkowski (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005), 67. According to White, Heidegger distinguishes (at least) nine kinds of ‘ends’ in *BT*, whereof six of these are both distinctively human *and* applicable to Dasein. In addition to ‘perishing’ and ‘demise’, White distinguishes the other four endings as: first, ‘being-at-the-end’ (*BT* 245-46), which is equivalent to the traditional understanding of death; second, ‘dying’ (*BT* 247); third, ‘being toward the end’ (*BT* 250); and fourth, ‘the possibility of the impossibility of existing’ (*BT* 262).

⁴⁰ John Haugeland, “Truth and Finitude: Heidegger’s Transcendental Existentialism” in *Heidegger, Authenticity and Modernity: Essays in Honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus – Volume 1*, edited by Mark Wrathall and Jeff Malpas, 43-78 (Cambridge: the MIT Press, 2000), 66. According to Haugeland, ‘perishing’ is equivalent to the cessation of systematic biological function in an organism. However, Heidegger introduces yet another distinction to fully capture the biological sense of death, the medical concept of ‘*exitus*’.

⁴¹ The absolute distinction between animal and human life is controversial. It could at least be speculated if not certain animals, for example higher mammals, experience perishing, and perhaps even demise, in the Heideggerian sense.

⁴² White, *Time and Death*, 70. This is where views of life after death enter in, for example, as the gateway to heaven or hell, the cycle of karma, or the cessation of consciousness. See also John Haugeland, “Truth and Finitude”, 66. On this point there is also a disagreement amongst interpreters: whereas Haugeland

At this point we need to pause and ask ourselves the following question: what is the real purpose of distinguishing between perishing and demise? At a general level, Heidegger tries to distance himself from a metaphysical and naturalistic conception of death through all the different distinctions of Dasein's 'end'. Moreover, the traditional metaphysical and modern naturalistic conceptions of death are not possible to access as phenomena, in that death is determined as 'nothing' in the sense of being the end of life. The purpose of distinguishing between perishing (or exitus) and demise is thus to make clear that neither of these endings should be identified with existential death proper. In other words, Heidegger aims to show that there are many different ways of understanding and relating to death, but that none of these 'ontic' ways takes a stand towards being as such. The analysis that follows after the explication of perishing and demise thus seems to be the critical point in the analysis where Heidegger's notion of death departs altogether with the traditionally metaphysical, the scientific and the commonsensical views of death.⁴³

After having distinguished the existential analysis of death from other possible interpretations of the phenomenon (exitus, perishing, and demise), Heidegger sets out to give a preliminary sketch of the existential-ontological structure of death. He points to the necessity of interpreting the phenomenon of death as Being-towards-the-end, and in terms of the basic structure of care (*BT* 249-50). Thus, Heidegger asserts "Being-at-an-end implies existentially Being-towards-the-end (*BT* 250). At this point in the analysis death is 'interiorised' as a part of the existential web, and redefined as a way of being towards death.

The question arises whether this is a fully legitimate move on Heidegger's part. What theoretical justifications can Heidegger possibly have for redefining death in this way?⁴⁴ Critics claim that by redefining death as a way of being-towards-death,

characterises demise in a similar way as White as a social-cultural phenomenon, Hubert Dreyfus sums up demise as "inevitable terminal death". See Hubert Dreyfus' foreword to Carol J. White, *Time and Death: Heidegger's Analysis of Finitude*, xxxiv.

⁴³ Heidegger's many distinctions of death are confusing, but they are also helpful in that they may clarify the many possible ways of understanding death. For example, a medical scientist is most likely to view death mainly as a combination of 'exitus' and 'perishing', thereby emphasising the biological and physiological causes leading up to terminal death. A social scientist or an historian, on the other hand, will probably tend to approach death as 'demise', thereby emphasising the social-cultural factors involved in dying and death. Finally, a combination of 'perishing' and 'demise' probably come close to a widespread commonsensical view of death. Characteristic for all of these perspectives on death is that they in general tend to relate to death from an objective or detached third-person point of view. This 'present-at-hand' manner of relating to death is precisely what Heidegger tries to distance himself from in *BT*.

⁴⁴ Sean Ireton, *An Ontological Study of Death: From Hegel To Heidegger* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2007), 18-19. Ireton shows that Heidegger is not the only thinker who seeks to ground

Heidegger is not really analysing death as a phenomenon. For example, Herman Philipse argues that no new discoveries about death are made in *BT*, and that the methodological problems are not solved.⁴⁵ Heidegger instead simply confuses our attitudes toward our own death with death itself. Thus, in Philipse's view a phenomenology of death itself is impossible, because the only thing we really can study is our concern about our own death.

Can this criticism be countered? Mulhall points out that we cannot grasp Heidegger's account of death except against the horizon of his account of the ontological difference, that is, the division between the ontic and the ontological.⁴⁶ Thus, because death cannot be grasped ontically, it must be 'ontologized' as a part of Dasein's structural web. In other words, Heidegger's notion of death remains forever beyond any direct existential (and phenomenological) grasp. It is at the same time shown to be graspable essentially indirectly, as an omnipresent condition of every moment of Dasein's existence. In this sense, life is death's representative or a proxy through which death's resistance for being grasped is at once acknowledged and overcome. Death can thus only show up as a phenomenon in and through life, which makes being-towards-death as, essentially, a matter of being-towards-life.

How far does this perspective take us when it comes to the question of the legitimacy of redefining death? Mulhall's claim that life in the form of Dasein's existence is the only available option we have for acquiring phenomenological understanding of death is, I believe, on the correct path. Thus, if there is a way to approach death, the only option we might have is to do so indirectly through life. This solution, however, brings up a further dilemma. If life is death's proxy, much seems to depend on how we understand the notion of 'life'. As we have seen, Heidegger explicates Dasein's existence structurally. The validity of death as a 'phenomenon of life' thus seems to hinge on whether the existential web presents us with an ontologically correct image of the human constitution.

death ontologically. As Sean Ireton shows, Heidegger's efforts are rooted in a major trend of "ontological totalism" in German literature and philosophy. Ireton points out that by 'ontologising' death, Heidegger can be seen as reacting towards the rising trend of the denial of death during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

⁴⁵ Herman Philipse, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being: A Critical Interpretation* (New Jersey: Princetown University Press, 1998), 365.

⁴⁶ Mulhall, "Human mortality", 304-5.

2.4 A 'pure' existential definition of death?

A major part of Heidegger's efforts in trying to establish a new and improved interpretation of death as a phenomenon, is to 'wrest' the concept of death away from its traditional present-at-hand understanding. We have so far followed the steps of the hermeneutical process of redefining death from the traditional conception of death as the end of life to the existential conception of being-towards-death. The question that naturally arises at this point is whether Heidegger in fact manages to establish a 'pure' existential definition of death. The importance of this question stems, in part, from the many methodological considerations that were raised in the foregoing chapter. A pure existential definition of death seems to imply that the method of hermeneutical phenomenology is successfully applied, in that a 'new' phenomenon of death is disclosed, rather than simply an appearance or a semblance of the old concept. It further implies that the 'how' of death decides how we come to understand its 'what'. Finally, it implies that the metaphysical understanding of death as the end of life is no longer part of the existential definition.

Heidegger points out that in order to be fully existential or ontological, his notion of death must be "unaccompanied by any existentiell commitments". Thus, he asserts: "The existential problematic aims only at setting forth the ontological structure of Dasein's Being-towards-the-end" (BT 249). Here, the emphasis on the term "towards", seems to suggest that Heidegger believes his definition to be entirely about death in its 'how-being'. For the sake of the discussion of the nature of Heidegger's notion of death, I now take a big leap in the text to finally arrive Heidegger's full definition of death:

Death, as the end of Dasein, is Dasein's ownmost possibility- non-relational, certain and as such indefinite, not to be outstripped. Death is, as Dasein's end, in the being of this entity towards its end.

(BT 258/259)

This definition has several parts and distinctions, each of which will be discussed in detail throughout the following chapters. The prevailing view amongst commentators is that Heidegger's definition is entirely existential, and that it has nothing to do with the metaphysical understanding of death as 'the end of life' or demise.⁴⁷ This view is, of course, in accordance with Heidegger's own understanding. Thus, White argues that

⁴⁷ There are many different interpretations of Heidegger's notion of death that defends the view that it is entirely existential. I have chosen the following two examples because I find them to be 'clear cut' examples.

most discussions of Heidegger's notion of death - and in particular the critical interpretations of it - are based on mistaken assumptions.⁴⁸ The main widespread and mistaken assumption is that when Dasein dies, it ceases to be 'actual'; that is, it undergoes physical death or perishing. Another mistaken assumption - while based on the recognition of death as a 'way to be' - at the same time takes death to be a matter of a person's relationship to her physical death; that is, as a way of caring about one's demise or perishing. According to White these assumptions are mistaken because existential death is not grounded in the biology of our bodies, but rather in Dasein's relation to being. Accordingly, any criticism founded on one of these mistaken assumptions is bound to fail. The essence of White's view is that Heidegger has managed to establish a purely existential definition of death. She is not alone in arguing for this view, and according to Carman:

Heidegger's account of existential death therefore *departs significantly from commonsense beliefs and attitudes about death*, but he has not simply redefined the word in a wilful or arbitrary way. Indeed, Heidegger's conception of death as the essential finitude of projection and the constant closing down of possibilities arguably cuts right to the heart of what we find so disturbing and depressing about the prospect of our own death (my italics).⁴⁹

Carman's view is, in short, that existential death is a constant closing down of possibilities, and that it as such is far removed from any ordinary understanding of death. A fundamental structural element of Dasein's being is its existence, and as a thrown projection its existence consists of its possibilities. Thus, when Dasein dies, its possibilities accordingly run out. Carman's interpretation is focused on the individual level, in that existential death occurs when *a* Dasein is running out of possibilities. In this respect it differs from White's, which is far more radical and extensive. According to White, existential death is equivalent with the world-collapse that can befall entire cultural epochs.⁵⁰ 'Dying', on this account, is the strife to preserve the culture's understanding of being, while at the same time being ready to sacrifice it when confronted with anomalous practices that portend the arrival of a new cultural world. For White, existential death occurs when old worlds die and new ones are born, as when a

⁴⁸ White, *Time and Death*, 72.

⁴⁹ Taylor Carman, *Heidegger's Analytic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 283.

⁵⁰ White, *Time and Death*, 89-90.

change in the background understanding of being leaves old possibilities behind and lets new ones take place.

We have now seen two examples of interpretations that essentially defend the view that Heidegger's definition of death is purely existentialist, and as such not concerned with the traditional understanding of death. I find these interpretations, however, rather difficult to accept and in the following I will give reasons for why I think they should not be endorsed. The first reason emerges directly from Heidegger's definition itself, where death is characterised as "certain, indefinite, and not to be outstripped". If White's radical interpretation were correct, we would be left with an understanding of death as something like "a cultural world-collapse that is absolutely certain to happen, can happen any moment, and is not to be avoided". This not only sounds strange; it must surely be wrong.⁵¹ To see why, consider Hubert Dreyfus' claim that there is something special about the final collapse of being-in-the-world, in the sense that terminal death - unlike other forms of death - is not to be outstripped. Thus, according to Dreyfus there is indeed an essential difference between terminal death (perishing/demise), and all other forms of existential breakdown, in the sense that it is only the first one that seems to be necessary and inevitable.⁵²

I think we need to agree with Dreyfus that it is not necessary for an individual to experience death in the form of an existential breakdown of identity. It is neither inevitable for the members of a culture to experience a total cultural collapse. Furthermore, it is arguably only possible to experience existential breakdowns if the collapse in question is *not* the terminal one.⁵³ In other words, terminal death as perishing or demise is unique in the sense that it seems to be the only kind of death that is both certain and indefinite.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Iain Thomson, "On the Advantages and Disadvantages of reading Heidegger Backwards: White's *Time and Death*", in *Inquiry*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (February 2007), 103-120. Thomson points to the absurdity in White's interpretation of death, by claiming that the thrust of it is to eliminate the need to account for the difference in Heidegger's early and later views on death. Thus, Thomson thinks that White puts up an uncompromising, hyper-orthodox defence of Heidegger as a philosopher that never changes his mind about his main philosophical project – or, even worse: that he can never be mistaken in his views.

⁵² See Hubert L. Dreyfus' foreword to Carol White's *Time and Death*, xxxiv.

⁵³ Dreyfus, foreword to *Time and Death*, xxxi-xxxiii. On this point it is possible to trace a contradiction in Dreyfus' view, in that he first claims White's interpretation of existential death to be the most plausible. He concludes, however, by asserting that terminal death or demise must be what Heidegger was referring to all along.

⁵⁴ I will return with a discussion of death's certainty and indefiniteness in chapter five on metaphysics and death. There I will try to show that the question of death's indefiniteness is not so obviously answered.

What then about Carman's interpretation of existential death as a constant closing down of possibilities? On several places in *BT* Heidegger asserts that Dasein is "dying constantly"; a point that has created debate. Carman's account does indeed offer an answer to the question of how Dasein can be constantly dying, as an essential part of its own being. But again, Carman's interpretation is implausible because it does not account for the fact that Dasein's possibilities are also constantly opening up as a part of its essential being, and thus making Dasein's death impossible to attain.⁵⁵ As we can see, Dreyfus' remarks here make clear that Heidegger's definition of death in the end relies on the ordinary conception of death (as 'end of life') in order to make sense.⁵⁶

The second reason why Heidegger's notion of death should not be accepted as entirely existentialist stems from what is arguably one of Heidegger's overall purposes with his ontological analysis of death; namely to instil in the reader a transformation in her understanding of the phenomenon of death, and thereby bringing her towards an authentic understanding of being. Heidegger seems to think that there is something inherently distorted about the commonsensical or public interpretation of death. Thus, according to Heidegger, *das Man* has an essentially inauthentic way of relating to death based on certain wrongful views about it. Now, if it is part of Heidegger's project to provide an improved interpretation of death, and thereby informing us about the correct existential grounds by which we should relate to death, he must also be referring to the traditional interpretation of death as demise in his definition. Why? It is the traditional understanding of death as a future event that furnishes the ground for the acceptance of a new interpretation. Thus, Heidegger cannot present us with a totally new and unfamiliar existential interpretation without somehow appealing to the old, familiar understanding of death.

We have now seen the first two reasons for why Heidegger's definition of death is not a purely existential notion. There is, however, a third reason that further presses this point. This reason has to do with the internal logic of Heidegger's neologism 'being-towards-death', which is often used as the shorthand expression for his full definition of death. In order to avoid a complete circularity Heidegger must refer to death in the

⁵⁵ Dreyfus, foreword to *Time and Death*, xxi-xxii.

⁵⁶ Dreyfus, foreword to *Time and Death*, xxxv. In fact, Dreyfus suggests that in *Being and Time* Heidegger lays out *two* existential-ontological accounts of how to live in the face of death, that are in fact in tension with each other. Sometimes Heidegger is proposing a formalized account of the essence of existential-ontological collapse in *general* (as in White's interpretation), and sometimes he is giving an account of the *distinctively final* character of terminal death.

traditional sense, the last term 'death' cannot mean 'being towards death' as well, on pains of an infinite regress.⁵⁷ Hence, the shorthand expression being-towards-death is a composite of both the 'how' of death as being-towards-death, and the 'what' of death in the traditional sense as end of life.

I have now presented altogether three reasons for why Heidegger's analysis constitutes a composite existential conception of death. However, we need to reflect a bit more on why this has been such an important issue to discuss. On the general level, the disagreement and confusion that surround Heidegger's analysis of death demonstrate the immense difficulties involved in trying to establish a methodological access to death. More specifically, they tell us something about the difficulty to dispose of the traditional understanding of death (as perishing or demise), precisely because this understanding constitutes the necessary basis for the hermeneutic process of a reconstruction of the new phenomenon. Furthermore, the question of the composite 'nature' of Heidegger's notion of death raises the possibility that the relation between the 'what' and the 'how' of death is the opposite from what is the case if death is a formal indication. In other words, it is what death is that determines how we should relate to it, rather than the other way around. This, however, throws us right back into the dilemma of how death can be known or approached as it is.

2.5 Death as possibility

One of the striking features of Heidegger's definition of death - apart from its apparent complexity - is arguably its strangeness or unfamiliarity. Certainly, we can recognise and understand characterisations such as "certain", "indefinite", and "not to be outstripped". These phenomenological descriptions of death are seemingly uncontroversial, and thereby easily acceptable. When Heidegger characterises death as Dasein's "ownmost, non-relational possibility", however, things immediately become more complicated and confusing. For what are these characterisations referring to?

As we saw examples of in the previous section, one of the keys to an existentialist interpretation of death lies in the term possibility. Thus, Carman's existentialist interpretation finds support in Heidegger's claim: "Death must be understood as a possibility, it must be cultivated as a possibility, and we must endure it as a possibility"

⁵⁷ Philipse, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being*, 361. Philipse makes the point about circularity and regress, in that 'being towards death' would come to mean 'being-towards being-towards-death'. On this particular point, I find Philipse's critique to be quite pertinent.

(BT 261). According to Heidegger, the only way we can comport ourselves towards death is when it stands before us as a pure possibility throughout our existence. Death is thus the only pure possibility of Dasein insofar it is free of any admixture of actuality and necessity.⁵⁸ But here we are faced with an obvious puzzle: for how can death *remain* a possibility? Is death not rather a possibility that, after a certain time, turns into actuality by necessity whereupon it loses its character of possibility?

Heidegger asserts that regarding death's "*ontological possibility, dying is grounded in care*".⁵⁹ This means that in attunement, understanding, and discourse Dasein makes its possibilities its own. Furthermore, Dasein as a "thrown projection" designates the way Dasein relates to its own being. In other words, Dasein is always more than itself at any given moment, since it holds its own being before itself as a possibility; it is the potentiality-for-Being. Dasein *is* its possibilities, so to speak, in the sense that it constantly projects into further possibilities and is concerned with its future being. To explain how we should relate to death as possibility, Heidegger says: "*The closest closeness that one may have in being-toward-death-as-a-possibility, is as far as possible from anything actual*" (BT 262).

Critics point to what they find to be certain deep flaws in Heidegger's reasoning of death as a possibility. Philipse points out that when Heidegger characterises death as a possibility of Dasein, the word possibility must have a very different sense than when he claims that Dasein is its possibilities in the sense of being a thrown projection. This is so because death is clearly not a possible course in life that one might take or fail to realise.⁶⁰ Philipse thus contends that Heidegger misleadingly pictures possibility and actuality as scalar magnitudes, in that he seems to think that if we run *toward* a possibility, then we at the same time run *away* from an actuality.⁶¹ Heidegger seems to think that if something is not actuality, then it must be possibility; hence, he characterises death as the "possibility of the measureless impossibility of existence" (BT 263). Philipse argues that there are logical blunders to Heidegger's view of death as possibility, and we

⁵⁸ Possibility (*Möglichkeit*) is one of the key terms of the existential analysis of *BT*. Heidegger's understanding of this term is threefold: possibility; potentiality-to-be (*Seinkönnen*); and to render possible (*Ermöglichen*).

⁵⁹ Piotr Hoffmann, "Death, time, history: Division II of *Being and Time*", 363. Hoffmann points out that Dasein's basic state of care is *dependent* on Dasein's sense of being a mortal creature. Thus, if we were not threatened by death, our basic state would not be care. And vice versa, if our basic state were not care, our death would not be felt as threatening.

⁶⁰ Philipse, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being*, 363.

⁶¹ Philipse, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being*, 366-67.

must therefore conclude that there is no way that death can be a pure possibility, completely detached from actuality and necessity.⁶²

Is there a way to counter this criticism? One could argue that Heidegger's concept of potentiality must be distinguished from the logical use of possibility, as one of the categories of modalities in transcendental logic. It is thus only for things present-at-hand that possibility and actuality can be opposed. According to Heidegger, Dasein is not present-at-hand; it is rather a potential in the sense of projection into possibilities. However, as Mulhall points out, there is indeed no way that death can coherently be regarded as even a very unusual kind of existential possibility. This is so, because any genuine existential possibility is one that might be made actual by Dasein. Death cannot be the possibility of our own non-existence; it is rather an existential impossibility. Thus, we can only relate to death in and through its relation to what is graspable in its existence; that is, to those genuine possibilities that constitute it from moment to moment.⁶³

Notwithstanding its ingenuity, this solution does not quite answer the question of how death can remain a pure possibility. Is there any viable solution to this puzzle? There is an important, but largely overlooked aspect of Heidegger's analysis that might contribute to spread some new light on the discussion of death as a possibility. This is where Heidegger asserts: "Higher than actuality stands possibility" (*BT* 38). The subversion of the traditional metaphysical priority of actuality over possibility represents the thrust, so to speak, of Heidegger's project to 'destroy' traditional metaphysics. By defining our fundamental way of being-in-the-world as possibility, Heidegger intends to overcome the standard metaphysical definitions of existence in terms of 'presence'.⁶⁴ Heidegger proposes an ontology that, in contrast, will reveal time as a horizon of possibilities that 'possibilises' and grounds the present. In other words, Heidegger sees the possible as the transcendental horizon of Dasein. My suggestion is that we need to reach down to this theoretical level in *BT* in order to accept or refute the view of death as

⁶² Philipse, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being*, 362. The logical blunder is found in the following syllogism: a) Dasein is its possibilities; b) death is a possibility of Dasein; therefore, c) death is a mode of existing.

⁶³ Stephen Mulhall, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Heidegger and Being and Time*, second edition (New York: Routledge, 2006), 127, 304. This is essentially the same view as when Mulhall claims that death can only be studied by life "going proxy" for death. Thus, death is shown to be graspable essentially indirectly, as an omnipresent condition of every moment of Dasein's existence.

⁶⁴ Classical metaphysics has since Aristotle viewed time as an addition of present movements. Hence, the well-known metaphysical definitions of existence in terms of presence: *Ousia*, *Substantia*, *Res Cogitans*, etc.

possibility. We must, in fact, either endorse or dismiss the primacy of possibility over actuality. The primacy of possibility is thus the metaphysical presupposition that serves as ground, not only for Heidegger's analysis of death, but also for the whole of *BT*.

Time has finally come to gather the threads of this discussion. The main questions that have been raised in this chapter are, first, why death is brought into the analysis of Dasein's being, and second, whether Heidegger's notion of death is purely existentialist or not. We have seen that death is 'interiorised' into the existential web in order to make Dasein whole and authentic. We have also seen several reasons for why death in *BT* is a composite, rather than a purely existentialist notion. There are the unresolved dilemmas, however, of whether Dasein can become an authentic totality, and furthermore, what it means to be authentic. The problem of authenticity will thus be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.

Several methodological problems and questions were raised in the previous chapter, and some of these can now be resumed. First, there is the question of whether Heidegger's phenomenological descriptions of death are 'true' or correct. It is not really possible to decide whether Heidegger's assertions about death are true or false outside the context of background assumptions from which they emerge. This is the main reason for why Heidegger's notion of death is 'metaphysical', a theme I will expand on in the last chapter. Second, it was suggested that death in *BT* is a formal indication. By arguing that Heidegger's notion of death is a composite, I have already implicitly suggested that the relationship between its 'how' and 'what' is different from the typical formal indication. Thus, the 'what'-part of Heidegger's definition of death is more prominent than what commentators usually acknowledge. This conclusion is important for the overall purpose of my thesis, and in particular for the theme of death as a metaphysical concept.

3. Death and authenticity

The main conclusion in the previous chapter was that Heidegger's definition of death in *BT* is a composite of the metaphysical notion of death as 'end of life', and of the existential notion of 'being-towards-death'. This conclusion is important for this chapter's main purpose, which is to examine in greater detail why and how Heidegger thinks that death is significant for human existence. In this chapter I will thus probe deeper into the 'how-being' of death, by examining Heidegger's notion of authenticity.

To be authentic is a possible mode of Dasein's being, as opposed to being in its inauthentic or everyday mode. Heidegger holds the view that to face up death in a specific way is the key to Dasein's authentic existence. Thus, the way to attain authenticity is through the attitude of anticipatory resoluteness. What exactly does anticipatory resoluteness amount to, and how is this twofold way of relating to death attained and maintained? Furthermore, why is this necessarily the most appropriate way of relating to death? These are some of the questions that will be addressed in this chapter.

In *BT* Heidegger insists that authenticity is an ontological category without any ethical content or connotations whatsoever; when Dasein is authentic, it simply is its own self in a non-evaluative sense. The most fundamental problem up for discussion in this chapter is whether being authentic is a non-evaluative category, or whether it might have certain irreducible ethical dimensions to it. Can the notion of authenticity function as a descriptive ontological foundation for a possible ethics? This problem concerns the general thematic of death's significance for human existence. The question is, in short, how deeply death and our relationship to it can affect the quality of human life.

Based on a discussion of different perspectives on Heidegger's notion of authenticity, I will argue that being authentic does not necessarily have ethical bearings or connotations. This is so, because part of the problem with Heidegger's notion of authenticity is that it's too empty or vacuous to have ethical content. Another problem is the structural limitations that pertain to Dasein's being as such. The challenge that is raised towards the end of this chapter, is thus to find a way to modify the existential web so that authentic Dasein can become *ethical* Dasein.

3.2 Anticipation of death

The full formal concept of authenticity in *BT* comprises two distinct, but equally important elements: anticipation and resoluteness (*Vorlaufen Entschlossenheit*).⁶⁵ Since these are interconnected but yet separate aspects of authenticity, I will first discuss the attitude of anticipation and then move on to the notion of resoluteness in the next section. What are the distinguishing features of anticipation, and why is this the most appropriate attitude towards death?

As shown in chapter two, part of Heidegger's definition of death is its impending possibility. Thus, Heidegger's explication of anticipation as the appropriate attitude towards death arises as a direct consequence of his characterisation of death as an existential possibility. Since death is a pure possibility that is never weakened or turned into actuality, it should be constantly anticipated: "Being-towards-death, as anticipation of possibility, is what first *makes* this possibility *possible*, and sets it free as a possibility" (*BT* 262).

Except from anticipating death, what other possible ways of relating to death are there? According to Heidegger, when death is treated as an actuality or as a possibility that eventually will become actuality, we tend to relate to it by simply thinking about it, brooding over it, or by expecting it (*BT* 261/262). Heidegger claims that to wait for death to actualise, or to dwell or ponder upon it's when and how, are essentially inauthentic ways of being-towards-death. This is how everyday Dasein or das Man relates to death in ignorance of its true impending 'nature', by avoiding it as something that will become an actuality in the distant future. In contrast to this, anticipation of death as a possibility has the liberating effect in that it "does not evade the fact that death is not to be outstripped; instead, anticipation frees itself *for* accepting this" (*BT* 264). Moreover, Heidegger says that anticipation "discloses to existence that its uttermost possibility lies in giving itself up, and thus it shatters all one's tenaciousness to whatever existence one has reached" (*BT* 264). Heidegger claims that anticipation of death has a truly liberating effect on Dasein in making it face up to and accept the inevitable. Dasein will thereby stop clinging to its own existence, which it - at any rate - eventually will have to let go of. Thus, Heidegger seems to say that we should fully integrate the attitude of total acceptance of death as a permanent part of our mindset. Anticipation of death also has

⁶⁵ Some commentators translate *Vorlaufen* as 'forerunning'. I prefer to use the more common translation 'anticipation', because I think it better preserves the meaning of *Vorlaufen* as an attitude, rather than an action.

the function that it discloses for Dasein precisely that it is not itself, but that it is rather primarily inauthentic and lost in das Man's distorted interpretation of death:

*Anticipation reveals to Dasein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself, primarily unsupported by concerned solicitude, but of being itself, rather, in an impassioned **freedom towards death** - a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the "they", and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious.*

(BT 266)

As we can see, anticipation is the attitude that simultaneously reveals to Dasein that it has lost itself, but that it also has the possibility of finding back to itself again. Furthermore, Heidegger thinks that adopting the attitude of anticipation towards death is appropriate because this attitude discloses death as it is, and thus it holds death for true (BT 265). It is the liberating effect of facing up to one's own death as a possibility that das Man literally escapes from in fear. It thus seems as if anticipation is comparable to a complete directional change in one's attitude towards death: instead of running away from it in fear as most people tend to do, one turns around 180 degrees and faces up to it without doubt or hesitation. In Dreyfus and Rubin's description of the phenomenon, the transformation from an inauthentic to an authentic existence is comparable to a "gestalt switch", or a total transformation in Dasein's being.⁶⁶ That is, to anticipate or forerun into death means to project willingly or wholeheartedly into the double aspect of possibility and impossibility that constitutes (death as) an essential structure of existence.⁶⁷

Obviously, anticipation of death is problematic. First of all, it seems to be a very demanding, on the verge of exhausting, attitude to uphold. To confront death is what people ordinarily do for shorter or longer periods of their lives, especially when they for natural reasons are forced to do so. Thus, facing up to death is what usually happens when fatal illness strikes; when someone close to us dies; or, when we move towards the end of life. On such occasions, people usually face up to death in one way or another. It could thus be argued that the constant anticipation of death seems to be a somewhat laborious and unnecessary life-project. Moreover, 'thinking about death' in the sense of

⁶⁶ Hubert L. Dreyfus and Jane Rubin, "Appendix: Kierkegaard, Division II, and Later Heidegger", in Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-world: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge: the MIT Press, 1991), 317.

⁶⁷ Taylor Carman, *Heidegger's Analytic*, 297. Carman points out that the concept of anticipation is reminiscent of Kierkegaard's famous 'leap of faith', wherein one takes up one's personal commitments as irreducibly one's own, even though they may be irreconcilable with standard ethical norms. See also: Carman, "Authenticity", 291.

contemplating or meditating upon the fact that we are mortal, does not necessarily mean that one either expects it to happen or that one regards it as an actuality. As is the case in the *Memento Mori*-tradition, simply contemplating death without anticipating it can prove to be beneficial. This can be a both mind and heart-opening process in the sense that one becomes increasingly aware of the universal conditions and limitations every human being is subject to. It can, in other words, result in an increased feeling of interdependence and solidarity with other people, regardless of their cultural background or social standing.

Heidegger, however, thinks that contemplation of death is an inappropriate approach towards death. As Mulhall points out, being-towards-death is essentially anticipatory, because death as a possibility can *only* be anticipated. Thus, to live in the light of a proper awareness of one's mortality is to make one's choices in the light of an extreme and constant threat that emerges from one's own being.⁶⁸ This claim brings up the question of whether death in fact 'behaves' in this particular way, as a constant impending threat. Heidegger does characterise death as "indefinite" and as a "constant threat" (*BT* 265). But it remains to see whether these characterisations are correct. In other words, how we most appropriately can relate to death seems to be somehow contingent upon how death is constituted. Indeed, if death can strike at any moment, then the attitude of anticipation seems to be the appropriate to adopt. But if this is not the case, then why should we constantly anticipate death?

3.2 Resoluteness and the Situation

The other aspect of authentic-being-towards-death is resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*). Even though anticipation and resoluteness are distinct aspects of authenticity, Heidegger insists that there must be an essential connection between them. Why is that? Heidegger explicates anticipation as the ontological possibility of authentic-being-towards-death. But, as he admits, unless Dasein can in fact throw itself into the possibility of its own death, anticipation is nothing but a "fantastical exaction" (*BT* 266). Heidegger here seems to acknowledge the difficulty of maintaining an attitude of anticipation towards death. Thus, anticipation needs to be verified in a corresponding ontical potentiality-for-Being, which is the notion of resoluteness.

⁶⁸ Mulhall, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Heidegger*, 131.

At the beginning of Division II Heidegger's explication of resoluteness takes off with a reminder of his purpose for bringing death into the analysis: since Dasein in its everyday mode is essentially lost and dispersed in das Man's inauthentic attitudes and manners towards death, it is urgent that Dasein becomes a whole and authentic self. Heidegger claims that Dasein can only find itself and become authentic by listening to its own inner 'voice of conscience' (*Stimme des Gewissens*):

Conscience gives us 'something' to understand; it *discloses*. By characterizing this phenomenon formally in this way, we find ourselves enjoined to take it back into the *disclosedness* of Dasein. This disclosedness, as a basic state of that entity which we ourselves are, is constituted by state-of-mind, understanding, falling, and discourse. If we analyse conscience more penetratingly, it is revealed as a *call* (*Ruf*). Calling is a mode of *discourse*. The call of conscience has the character of an *appeal* to Dasein by calling it to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-itself; and this is done by way of *summoning* it to its ownmost Being-guilty.

(BT 269)

There are several elements to take notice of here. First, the call of conscience summons Dasein to realise its 'guilt' (*Schuld*), but what exactly does this mean? The traditional understanding of guilt is associated with contingent indebtedness and moral responsibility. Thus, we feel guilty when we have actually done something wrong, or because guilt is induced in us from outside sources, for example, from the norms in society. This traditional understanding of guilt is what the ordinary sense of conscience is ready to inform us about. However, existential guilt is not equivalent to sin or moral transgression, or to the sense of being obliged. Instead, Heidegger defines guilt formally by a 'not', as in "Being-the-basis of a nullity" (BT 283). Thus, ontological guilt refers to an inherent 'lack' in Dasein, in that Dasein *never* has power over its being from the ground up.⁶⁹ This 'not', Heidegger says, belongs to the existential meaning of 'thrownness' (BT 284).

As with the ontological notion of guilt, conscience has lost its traditional and deeply embedded social significance in Heidegger's analysis. As the term 'call' suggests, Dasein's inner voice of conscience is a mode of discourse – a form of communication

⁶⁹ Michael Zimmerman, "Heidegger, Buddhism, and Deep Ecology", in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, second edition, edited by Charles B. Guignon, 293-325 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 308-311. Zimmerman points out the affinity between Heidegger's notion of nullity and the Buddhist conception of nothingness, which is about the flux and conditioning of all phenomena, in contrast to their permanence and independence. Despite the ontological similarities between Heidegger and Buddhism on this point, there are also huge differences in terms of ethics and morality. In Buddhism, and especially in Mahayana Buddhism, an elaborate system of virtues and moral rules is developed in order to counterbalance the dangers inherent in the doctrine of nothingness, which is pure nihilism.

that tries to disrupt das Man's idle talk about death. Thus, rather than having an exterior source, the source of ontological conscience is Dasein's own self: "In conscience Dasein calls itself" (BT 275). Authentic Dasein calls to itself in discretion (*Verschwiegenheit*) and silence (*Schweigen*), and the call is devoid of content.

Heidegger's notion of resoluteness is inspired by, but not identical with the Aristotelian account of *phronesis* in book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁷⁰ Thus, by anticipating its death, resolute Dasein has a subtle understanding for the particular demands of its situation and how to deal with them. In this sense, resoluteness is the active counterpart of anticipation, and consists of a kind of focused engagement Dasein has with its own existence. Resolute Dasein has the integrity and insight to know what to do, and to make the right choices in the current situation. The 'situation' thus signifies resolute Dasein's choices of its own possibilities, which is its own distinct way of being-in-the-world.⁷¹ Furthermore, Dasein's situation entails facing up to its empty openness, or the 'nullity' that defines its very being. Resoluteness is thus essentially about acknowledging and accepting ontological guilt; that is, to take responsibility for the nullity that one is.

Heidegger claims that the authentic self is a state that is only attained by a project (*Entwurf*) of self-being. Heidegger's analysis must here be contrasted with Sartre's doctrine that 'man is what he makes himself to be' as a result of natural and spontaneous self-creation. Heidegger's notion of a project rather entails that most people are 'made' by their social environment rather than being completely self-made.

Heidegger calls the moment of resoluteness the *Augenblick*, literally translated as the glance of an eye or "the moment of vision".⁷² This is thus the specific moment of transformation from being inauthentic to being authentic. However, several problems emerge from Heidegger's notion of the moment of transformation. First of all, it is clear

⁷⁰ Franco Volpi, "Dasein as *praxis*: the Heideggerian assimilation and the radicalization of the practical philosophy of Aristotle", in *Critical Heidegger*, edited by Christopher Macann, 27-66 (London: Routledge, 1996), 27. Volpi gives a thorough discussion of the importance of Aristotle for Heidegger's thinking, wherein he argues that it is possible to trace the influence of Aristotle on Heidegger throughout the entire extent of his thinking.

⁷¹ Douglas Kellner, "Authenticity and Heidegger's challenge to ethical theory", in *Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments*, edited by Christopher Macann (London: Routledge, 1992), 203. Kellner points out that through his notion of the 'situation', Heidegger modifies the idealist or Kantian notion of the self as constituting the world. In contrast to this, authentic Dasein constitutes its own situation through its projects and resolves.

⁷² Dreyfus and Rubin, "Appendix", 321. Macquarrie and Robinson translate the *Augenblick* as "the moment of vision", but Dreyfus and Rubin points out it would be better translated as "the moment of transformation".

that this moment will not last (since no moments lasts), which again implies that Dasein's state of authenticity will not endure for very long. Second, the transformation from being inauthentic to being authentic is arguably a profound alteration of Dasein's being. Profound changes, however, do usually not happen momentarily with human beings. Rather, in most cases they seem to be time and energy-consuming processes that may go on for a lifetime. The relevant contrasting view here is Kierkegaard's notion of the *Oieblik*, which is the moment of an unconditional commitment that will transform the content of one's life. For Kierkegaard, however, making an absolute commitment is anything but momentary; it is rather experienced as a permanent or eternal commitment. This brings up a third problem. As Dreyfus and Rubin points out, the transformation to authenticity seems to entail a transformation only of the *form*, and not of the content of Dasein's activities.⁷³ This could turn out to be a problem for those who argue that Heidegger's notion of authenticity has ethical content.

We have so far seen that Heidegger's notion of authenticity amounts to the twofold structure of anticipating death, and the resolute choice of facing up to guilt in the form of nullity. We have further seen some of the problems that pertain to being resolute in the moment of transformation. However, a final problem now comes to the surface. This problem pertains to whether Heidegger's portrayal of Dasein as a thrown projection, and as 'guilty' in the form of being a nullity, is the ontologically correct image of human beings. It is clear that Heidegger wants to instil a new understanding of human beings as an essentially 'groundless' Dasein, in that it can never choose itself from the ground up. But why should this particular image be accepted as true or as ontologically correct?

Dreyfus and Rubin argue that existential guilt reveals what seems to be an essentially unsatisfactory structure definite of even authentic Dasein. Thus, even if Dasein has done nothing wrong, "there is something wrong with Dasein", in that its own being is not under its power.⁷⁴ For Carman, it is a mistake to construe Dasein's nullity as if there is something 'wrong' with Dasein, because this threatens to read something ontically contingent back into Heidegger's formal existential structure of guilt.⁷⁵ The point with existential guilt is thus that not even being the ground of its own nullity affords Dasein any fixed, positive metaphysical character. Because Dasein is thrown into the world, it has to take full responsibility for its situation, even though it is not

⁷³ Dreyfus and Rubin, "Appendix", 322.

⁷⁴ Dreyfus and Rubin, "Appendix", 306-307.

⁷⁵ Carman, *Heidegger's Analytic*, 288-289.

responsible for it in the ordinary sense. In my view, it is pertinent to bring up the question if there is something inherently ‘wrong’ with Dasein, in that this question further accentuates the problem of whether Heidegger’s structural-ontological determination of Dasein is correct. Is this a timeless and non-contingent image of human beings that is founded on a well-secured philosophical anthropology? As I will later suggest, it is both possible and necessary to make certain modifications in the existential web. Such modifications will alter the image of Dasein and its possibility for lasting freedom, and thus for being authentic and ethical.

3.3 Why be authentic?

So far, we have looked at the formal aspect of authenticity in the dual form of anticipatory resoluteness. The question now is whether anything substantial can be said about the experience of being authentic. In comparison to Heidegger’s rather elaborate descriptions of everyday inauthentic Dasein, he does not have much to say about the positive experience of being authentic.⁷⁶ In a concrete description of it, he asserts:

Along with the sober anxiety, which brings us face to face with our individualized potentiality-for-Being, there goes an unshakable joy in this possibility. In it Dasein becomes free from the entertaining ‘incidentals’ with which busy curiosity keeps providing itself – primarily from the events of the world.

(BT 310)

As we can see, at the heart of being authentic lies Dasein’s experience of freedom. By facing up to death with anticipation and resoluteness, Dasein can also experience an “unshakeable joy”. Freedom and joy are thus amongst the positive aspects of being authentic. Anxiety, however, is the most basic mood pertaining to the experience of being authentic: “Being-towards-death is essentially anxiety” (BT 266). As earlier shown, anxiety is a fundamental mood in that it uncovers Dasein as a radical thrown projection: “Dasein’s mood brings it face to face with the thrownness of its ‘that it is there’ (BT 265). Dasein’s primary form of disclosure is affective, and this affective disclosure reveals Dasein as thrown into existence. In short, anxiety reveals Dasein’s facticity, which is one of the three elements of the care-structure. Anxiety forces inauthentic everyday Dasein to confront the true structure of its existence, and thus it gives access to

⁷⁶ One reason for the lack of substantial description of the positive aspects of being authentic can be that Heidegger does not consider it to be a mode of being that is often achieved or maintained by anyone. Has anyone ever been truly authentic?

a single unifying articulation of Dasein's being. In short, it is not only death, but also anxiety that individualises and totalises Dasein.

Anxiety also has the function of disclosing entities (everything that is *not* Dasein) in a particular way. In anxiety, things show up for us as radically unfamiliar, as having an intrinsic irrelevance to our projects. Thus, anxiety constitutes a primitive element in Dasein's understanding of being, revealing entities as radically indifferent to its practices. Moreover, by confronting Dasein with itself, anxiety forces it to recognise its everyday existence as essentially 'fallen', or as completely absorbed in the world, with things and other people. Thus, anxiety discloses that Dasein is always in the midst of objects and events of daily life, but that it is typically 'lost' in them, in flight from acknowledging that its existence is always more than its present actualisations. Put in different terms, anxiety reveals Dasein's world as 'uncanny' (*unheimlich*), in the sense that Dasein is never fully at home in the world. Uncanniness or homelessness is thus the fundamentally threatening experience of Dasein's groundlessness and meaninglessness. Heidegger describes anxiety as the experience of coming face to face with the 'nothing', and hence there is an essential connection between anxiety, guilt, and Dasein's death.

As a general rule, I find that Heidegger is basically correct in thinking that human beings for the most part find themselves as having a mood. Thus, because we are thrown into the world and into a particular social environment, we experience moods that are somehow out of our personal control, such as anxiety, boredom, and aggression. This is simply a fact of life; hence it is part of Dasein's facticity. For Heidegger, there is no such thing as being *without* a mood, or completely detached from moods in the sense of being a mere rational observer to life. However, at this point it is crucial that we ask the following questions. First of all, is it not possible that socially conditioned moods can be modified and transformed over time and with a conscious effort? Second, why is anxiety necessarily the most basic mood for disclosure of Dasein's being? Why can't anxiety be transformed to, say, pure joy?

Being authentic implies the willingness of Dasein to resolutely face up its finitude and guilt in the form of its 'nullity', and in a permanent mood of anxiety, to experience the uncanniness of its world. Thus, being resolute opens for the experiences of freedom and anxious joy, and for the possibility of attaining moments of authenticity. However, at this point it becomes increasingly clear that the effort to be authentic is neither an easy attainable, nor a particularly enjoyable experience. The general impression is rather that this is a demanding and strenuous process, with few lasting benefits. This impression

raises the question of why anyone would strive for authenticity in the first place. Why should we embark on a project that constantly reminds us of the uncanny fact of our 'nullity', and of our inability to become whole and authentic?

The pertinence of this question is perhaps best illustrated by the use of literary analogy, in this case by comparing Dasein's situation to Joseph K.'s in Kafka's novel *The Trial*.⁷⁷ Anyone who is familiar with the novel will know that its main character, Josef K. is found guilty before an intangible court. His guilt, however, has no legal or psychological reality. Josef K. has committed no crime whatsoever, and yet he is found guilty despite his own repeated categorical denial of having done anything wrong. The inexplicable form of guilt that defines K.'s destiny, but which he still must take full responsibility for, is somewhat comparable to the uncanniness of Dasein's situation, in the sense that human existence is utterly ephemeral and uncertain.⁷⁸

In my view, part of the dilemma here lies in Heidegger's structural explication of Dasein's facticity. Heidegger's claim is, as we have seen, that Dasein always find itself attuned in a mood or affective disposition, and that moods furthermore disclose Dasein as thrown into the world. Attunement, moods, and thrownness are thus interconnected in bringing out the nature of facticity. But the question is: how determining is facticity as a fundamental structure of our existence? In short, given the demands and pressures of Dasein's situation; why would anyone choose to be authentic in the first place? Why not just remain inauthentic, since this seems to be the easier and more comfortable choice?

Mulhall argues that the point of being authentic is that it is only in this state that we can become properly attuned to the real modalities of human existence.⁷⁹ Authentic being-towards-death is in essence a matter of relating to one's life as utterly mortal or finite. It further shows us that there is no moment of our existence in which our being is not at issue. Thus, by being authentic we recognise the non-necessity of our life's continuance and furthermore, its thoroughgoing contingency. In other words, we should become authentic because this is the only way of stripping out false necessities from life.

⁷⁷ Franz Kafka, *Prosesen* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag A/S, 1992). It is probably no coincidence that Kafka's novel *The Trial* and Heidegger's *Being and Time* are published almost simultaneously, respectively in 1925 and in 1927.

⁷⁸ Peter Kraus, "Death and metaphysics", in *Death and Philosophy*. Edited by Jeff Malpas and Robert C. Solomon, 98-111 (London: Routledge, 2002), 104. Kraus points out that Dasein's recognition of its own intrinsic nothingness, as being-towards-death, is necessary for Dasein to persist in its authentic relationship to nothingness – and thereby to Being.

⁷⁹ Mulhall, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook*, 129.

But, we should ask, why are these necessarily the ‘real’ modalities of human existence, and how do we know this to be true?

Another way to put the point of being authentic is that when being inauthentic, Dasein understands itself out of the notion of present-at-hand or as something objectively given, and it remains dispersed in the world with other beings. Inauthenticity thus involves the willingness to believe, and to sustain the belief that one is identical with one’s present state. Authenticity, on the other hand, diminishes dispersion and enables Dasein to transcend what is given or factual. This is thus the point where authentic being-towards-death is connected to temporality, in that authenticity presupposes Dasein’s openness to time. Or, one could say that human existence most fundamentally is temporality, which is a self-transcending process. In other words, authentic Dasein understands itself as an ongoing ‘event’ or a ‘project’, and not as an object amongst other objects in the world. Death is thus the horizon of projection within which all projects are made possible, and as such it shows us that our being is at stake in whatever project we undertake in life.

3.4 Authenticity and ethics

We have just seen that being authentic is supposed to reveal our being as it actually is; as ‘ecstatic’ or as a self-transcending process in time. In other words, being authentic somehow requires that changes occur in our lives, and such changes presuppose the necessary freedom for change. Since freedom is a precondition for human morality, this brings up the question of whether there are ethical dimensions to authentic life-transformations. Do we, for example, become better or improved people by being authentic? Or, does authenticity entail moral conduct in any relevant or concrete sense?

Heidegger explicitly denies that the notion of authenticity indicates a ‘moral’ or ethical distinction. On the contrary, according to him the terms “*Eigentlichkeit*” and “*Uneigentlichkeit*” were chosen in “the strict senses of the words” (BT 43). Heidegger strongly emphasises this point when he asserts:

It may not be superfluous to remark that our own Interpretation is purely ontological in its aims, and is far removed from any moralizing critique of everyday Dasein, and from the aspirations of a ‘philosophy of culture’.

(BT 167)

According to Heidegger, the notions of authenticity and inauthenticity refer to whether Dasein finds itself in its 'ownmost' mode of existence or not. In other words, authenticity refers solely to Dasein's possible totality. Accordingly, many commentators hold the view that the notion of authenticity is an entirely non-evaluative and descriptive mode of Dasein's being. As such, they argue that Heidegger is not trying to give us moral advice on how to live our lives, but that he is rather trying to explain how moral perspectives can emerge in the first place from the basis of Dasein's universal ontological structures.⁸⁰

Underneath the interpretation of authenticity as a strictly descriptive-ontological category lies an effort based on respect for Heidegger's own view of his philosophical project as solely concerned with the ontological question of being. The question is, however, whether this view can be fully endorsed. As many commentators have duly noted, there is an unmistakably normative pathos in *BT*. Thus, Douglas Kellner points out that Heidegger's concepts have an unmistakable evaluative connotation if one takes them in both their ordinary signification and in their philosophical usages. Moreover, Heidegger's description of das Man seems to disclose a rather thoroughgoing condemnation of inauthentic everydayness.⁸¹ Heidegger's notion of authenticity thus seems to indicate that being authentic is an *ideal* he is recommending as a modification of inauthenticity. It can thus be argued that Heidegger wants his readers to strive for authenticity instead of being trapped within an everyday inauthentic existence.

There seems to be an inherent ambiguity in *BT* because many of Heidegger's chosen terms do double duty both as descriptions of neutral ontological structures and as names for the specifically negative manifestations of those structures.⁸² This ambiguity is especially acute when it comes to the terms authenticity and inauthenticity. As Carman

⁸⁰ White, *Time and Death*, 43. Carol White argues that Heidegger is strictly concerned with the 'question of Being', and not with ethical questions. See also Haugeland, "Truth and Finitude: Heidegger's Transcendental Existentialism", 62-63. Haugeland's translates authenticity as "ownedness" in order to preserve the etymological link to Heidegger's choice of the German term "*eigentlich*". According to Haugeland, the normative edge of the terms are removed in that "ownedness" and "unownedness" (inauthenticity) are viewed as different modes of Dasein's being, grounded in the fact that Dasein is defined 'in each case its own' (*Jemeinigkeit*). The only difference between authenticity and inauthenticity is thus a difference in modes of disclosedness: inauthentic defaulted disclosedness is the public idle talk of das Man, while authentic disclosedness is resoluteness.

⁸¹ Kellner, "Authenticity and Heidegger's challenge to ethical theory", 200-201.

⁸² Carman, *Heidegger's Analytic*, 269-270. When functioning as a technical term, 'authentic' plays two very different roles, where one is evaluative and the other not. Carman correctly points out, in my view, that it is not possible to come away from reading *BT* with the idea that it is completely value-neutral. What I find lacking in Carman's perspective, though, is an account of the deeper causes for Heidegger's ambiguity in *BT*.

points out, ‘authentic’ occurs throughout *BT* in both technical and non-technical senses.⁸³ Authenticity obviously functions as an evaluative term describing a desirable mode of existence: it is something good and thus worth striving for. Under this normative aspect of the term, Heidegger distinguishes altogether three possibilities: inauthenticity, modal indifference, and authenticity. Everydayness or indifference is a neutral form of existence, wherein Dasein is neither “owning up” to itself nor “disowning” itself. In contrast, to exist authentically is to own up to one self – wholeheartedly – in one’s existence.

It is difficult to disagree with the view that Heidegger’s concepts of authenticity and inauthenticity are essentially evaluative. This is in particular the case with Heidegger’s pejorative descriptions of *das Man*. However, the pressing question now is whether authenticity as an evaluative category can form the ontological foundation for ethics. Some commentators emphasise the ethical implications of authenticity, and even find this notion useful for a revision of modern ethical theory.⁸⁴ For example, Charles Guignon argues that Heidegger’s concept of authenticity is supposed to point to a way of life that is higher than that of average everydayness.⁸⁵ Heidegger’s description of authenticity thus points to certain character ideals, or what Guignon calls “meta-values”.⁸⁶ These include traits such as resoluteness, courage, integrity, and clear-sightedness about one’s life as a finite, thrown projection. Thus, the meta-values in Heidegger’s analysis provide basis for taking a meaningful stand on first-order moral commitments.

In a similar vein, Kellner argues that it is a mistake to characterise Heidegger’s notion of authenticity as either purely descriptive ontology or an evaluative ethics, because the analysis in *BT* cuts beneath that distinction.⁸⁷ In other words, a distinctive feature of authenticity is the interconnection of what is usually viewed as separate normative and descriptive disciplines. Heideggerian ontology can thus function as a court of jurisdiction that validates or criticises ethical theories according to whether they are in

⁸³ Carman, “Authenticity”, 285-86, 289.

⁸⁴ See, for example, Lawrence J. Hatab, *Ethics and Finitude: Heideggerian Contributions to Moral Philosophy*, 79-80. Hatab argues that a Heideggerian approach to ethics would challenge both everyday familiarities and traditional constructions by recommending a cultivated bearing of finitude. Hatab further suggests that there is a feedback loop between ontology and ethics.

⁸⁵ Charles C. Guignon, “Authenticity, Moral Values, and Psychotherapy”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, second edition, edited by Charles C. Guignon, 268-291 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 281.

⁸⁶ Guignon, “Authenticity, Moral Values, and Psychotherapy”, 285.

⁸⁷ Kellner, “Authenticity and Heidegger’s challenge to ethical theory” 206-207.

accordance with the being that is in question, as disclosed by the analysis of a well-grounded ontology. What is at stake is the question of the conditions of the possibility of ethics; the 'ought' (ethics) must thus be shown to be grounded in the 'is' (ontology). Kellner makes the point that Heidegger at the very least lays the foundation for a new type of ethical theory grounded in a well-secured philosophical anthropology.⁸⁸ This claim, however, goes straight to the heart of the earlier mentioned problem of whether Heidegger's ontological image of Dasein is correct or not. Thus, what kind of being can be moral, and what does it mean to be good?

In the first chapter of this thesis it was suggested that central philosophical concepts in *BT*, such as death, authenticity, etc, are formally indicative, and in chapter two I concluded that death is not a formal indication in the full-blown sense. The notion of authenticity, however, seems to fit well with the category of a formal indication. In other words, when it comes to decide whether authenticity as anticipatory resoluteness has ethical connotations, part of the problem with the concept is its vacuity: the empty, formal-ontological concept is given priority, but is at the same time devoid of any substantial content.

Even though authenticity and inauthenticity clearly are evaluative categories, this does not entail that resolute Dasein knows how to act morally in the situation. Being resolute means to openly face up the unique concrete 'situation' in which one finds oneself. Resolute Dasein is thus supposed to possess a subtle understanding for the particular demands of its situation and how to handle them with intelligence and finesse. However, it seems to me that even a bad person can develop such a skilful understanding of the demands of his or her situation. A bad or cunning person will understand which possibilities the particular situation has to offer, and thus which choices to make based on the overall objective for taking action.

What is it then, that is required for authentic Dasein to become a moral being? In general, the moral outcome of being resolute seems to depend both on the person's background, her motives in the current situation, and on her future goals and objectives. In other words, for Dasein to know how make the correct moral choice based on the possibilities in the situation seems to require far more than simply the ability to be resolute. More concretely, Granberg points out that if resoluteness is to give any ground for an ethics, then the *existential* definiteness – the how – must involve a relation to

⁸⁸ Kellner, "Authenticity and Heidegger's challenge to ethical theory", 211.

others.⁸⁹ Thus, the most basic ethical problem in relation to a possible morality based on resoluteness and choice is according to Granberg that Heidegger's image of responsibility and guilt does not transcend the circular relationship of Dasein to itself.⁹⁰

There is a definite truth to the claim that relationships with others are an important and necessary element of ethics. Indeed, one could argue that all moral conduct is essentially relational. It is not quite sufficient, however, to point out that Heidegger's analysis is lacking on this particular point. What is also needed is an account of *how* ethically binding relationships to others is established in the first place, and furthermore, how they are developed and continually affirmed. Such an account can in my view be found in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁹¹

In *NE II* Aristotle describes how the moral virtues and wisdom of the *phronimos* – the virtuous hero – become integrated as a result of gradual habituation and social conditioning from early childhood on (1095b1-9 and 1103a18-25). The particular decisions made by the *phronimos* based on the immediate range of alternatives in the situation, reveals her character, which again determines her basic values. As we can see, Aristotle's moral philosophy places great emphasis on the efficacy of moral training: as members of a society we must be well trained and habituated, under the guidance of the community's laws, customs, education, and the discipline of the family. Aristotle seems to think that the insight and knowledge of how to make the right moral choices in any particular situation, is in fact provided and secured by the right kind of social upbringing (1103a14 and 1179b24-35). There is thus a deeply ingrained *trust* in Aristotle's ethics to the positive aspects of being a member of a community.

There is a seeming theoretical distance between Heidegger and Aristotle on this particular point, in that Heidegger holds a far more ambiguous view on the public sphere of society and its negative influence on the individual. This ambiguity is especially acute when it comes to his explication of *das Man* and its idle talk about death. However, the first impression of theoretical distance might be premature, in that Heidegger develops

⁸⁹ Granberg, *Mood and Method*, 234. According to Granberg the relation between self and other, and that of sociality, is not really a theme in *BT*. There is rather an overall emphasis on self-sufficiency, wherein Dasein has all the necessary resources within itself to give birth to the authentic Self. Since Heidegger's analysis of guilt and responsibility is kept squarely within the intra-subjective frame, it becomes hard to see how ontological guilt can give basis for inter-subjective responsibility.

⁹⁰ Granberg, *Mood and Method*, 234-35. See also: Carman, *Heidegger's Analytic*, 301. In a similar vein as Granberg, Carman points out that Heidegger's account of selfhood is incomplete because it fails to describe our characteristically human understanding of ourselves *as* others understand us. In other words, it omits an account of the hermeneutic conditions for understanding oneself *as* another.

⁹¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. by Christopher Rowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

his notion of authenticity to include the resolute choice of one's authentic possibilities as a repetition (*Wiederholung*) of authentic possibilities from one's heritage:

Repetition is the explicit handing-down, that is, the going back into the possibilities of the human beings that have been. The authentic repetition of a past possibility of existence, the choosing of one's hero, is grounded in advancing resoluteness; for in resoluteness one first chooses the choice that makes one free for the struggle of loyalty and the struggling succession of the repeatable possibility.

(BT 385)

Heidegger here introduces the view of a culture's history as a source of superior possibilities. In other words, this passage might suggest that Heidegger has somehow integrated the Aristotelian perspective of the positive function of being a member of a cultural tradition, in the sense that the heritage confers authentic possibilities onto the individual. However, there are some unresolved dilemmas to this. For example, do authentic possibilities necessarily entail possibilities in the form of moral values? Moreover, as a member of a certain cultural heritage, how is it possible to truly distinguish that heritage's authentic from its inauthentic possibilities, and hence, that culture's moral from immoral values?⁹² Furthermore, to choose a hero from the cultural heritage one is born into could be explicated as a choice of a role model within that culture to guide one in one's life-projects. But, many different kinds of 'heroes' emerge from a cultural tradition, and how does one know which particular hero to choose as a true moral guide?

Obviously, an even deeper problem with choosing a hero from one's cultural heritage is that such a choice might turn out to be fatally wrong. In the twentieth century millions of Germans – including Heidegger himself - chose Hitler as their heroic leader.⁹³ This proved to be a choice with catastrophic and – I might add – severely immoral consequences. An even deeper and worrying problem for Heidegger's concept of authenticity is thus that a person like Hitler can in fact be considered as authentic, in the sense that he realised his ownmost potentiality for being by seizing upon his culture's

⁹² Dreyfus and Rubin, "Appendix", 331-32. Dreyfus and Rubin points out that Heidegger does not seem to ask himself whether the culture might become so conformist and media-dominated that no unlevelled heritage is left to repeat. In other words, the individual might find herself part of a cultural tradition where there are no authentic possibilities left or no true heroes to choose from.

⁹³ Several examples from the recent world history that points in the same direction: millions of Chinese chose Mao; the Russians choose Stalin and Lenin; and, more recently, the American people chose Bush as their president (twice!). All of these leaders have risen from their respective cultural traditions, and choosing them seemed like the right thing to do at that particular time in history.

distinctive possibilities at that point in history. In other words, authentic resolute Dasein can be seen as a deeply *immoral* individual.⁹⁴

Interestingly, the problem of distinguishing the authentic from the inauthentic possibilities in one's cultural heritage resembles the methodological problem that was brought up in the first chapter, about the disclosure of phenomena. We recall that this problem is about how one can tell the 'true' phenomenon from the false, the semblance, or the appearance of the phenomenon. Translated into an ethical language, the problem of truth and falsehood now becomes the problem of how we can tell the good from the bad in a wider cultural context. As I shall later argue, the ability to distinguish the good from the bad in a wider context takes an exceptional individual who is not only able to live with other people in a society, but who at the same time manages to see through and stay untouched by the society's negative possibilities and influences.

It follows from the above discussion that the prospects of a Heideggerian ethics are not very high. Being authentic encompasses Dasein's bad as well as its good possibilities; it offers destructive as well constructive ways of being within the confines of a cultural heritage. It seems, then, that what is required for authentic Dasein to become *ethical* Dasein, is some sort of modification of Heidegger's structural determination of Dasein. But which part of the existential web is the most appropriate to modify or change? Furthermore, can such modifications be performed without conferring drastic alterations to the being of Dasein?

3.5 Back to relational conscience?

Time has come to gather the threads and see where this discussion about authenticity has brought us. First of all, it is evident that Heidegger's explication of authenticity concurs with the view that death has great significance for human existence. For Heidegger, death's significance lies in the fact that it individualises and totalises Dasein. By anticipating death and resolutely facing up to its guilt or 'nullity', an authentic or self-owned existence is within reach for Dasein. Furthermore, death has the heuristic function of revealing Dasein's being as essentially temporal. Authentic existence is 'ecstatic' or

⁹⁴ Christopher Macann, "Who is Dasein? Towards an ethics of authenticity", in *Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments*, edited by Christopher Macann (London: Routledge, 1992), 242. Macann makes the interesting point that we can here catch a glimpse of a possible *philosophical* ground for Heidegger's major historical error. This is so, because Hitler did indeed succeed in realizing his ownmost potential for being. Now, if a person like Hitler can be conceived as authentic, this threatens to empty the notion of authenticity of any ethical content whatsoever.

‘outstanding’ in that it stands explicitly towards death and introduces death into every moment in our lives.

In this chapter I have examined different interpretations of Heidegger’s notion of authenticity and its relation to ethics. I have argued that even though authenticity is an evaluative category in the sense that it is a better mode for Dasein to be in, this is in itself not sufficient as an ontological foundation for ethics. Heidegger’s description of resoluteness as Dasein facing up the possibilities of its ‘situation’ is too empty and formalistic to secure a deeply embedded morality in Dasein’s being. As shown above, even a highly immoral person could be considered as authentic. The possibilities the individual chooses in the moment are arguably dependent on such factors as her established character; her life-project as a whole; and on the values she holds. Something in the direction of an Aristotelian theory of the development of virtues and practical wisdom thus seems to be needed in order to explain how morality becomes a permanently ingrained part of the individual.

A stable and unified sense of self is arguably one of the necessary elements for acquiring personal moral responsibility and fulfilment. Thus, wholeness in the sense of lasting state of authenticity seems to be a necessary element in a deep-rooted individual morality. As authentic, Dasein has the possibility for self-transcendence. However, Dasein can never achieve a lasting authenticity because it is constantly projecting itself into future possibilities, and is thereby never a finished project. Part of the problem for remaining in an authentic state thus lies in Dasein’s temporality. Moreover, Dasein will not remain authentic because of structural limitations pertaining to its own being, such as *das Man*. As Dreyfus and Rubin points out, there is a double contradiction in Heidegger’s notion of authenticity, in that being inauthentic seems to be both inevitable and incomprehensible.⁹⁵

Earlier in this chapter I pointed out – in contrast to Dreyfus and Rubin – that the prevailing state of being inauthentic is perhaps not that incomprehensible after all, given that attaining authenticity seems to be a demanding and strenuous project. The main dilemma here is thus the *inevitability* of being inauthentic, and not so much its incomprehensiveness. If being inauthentic is unavoidable, there seems to be an even lesser reason to think that the notion of authenticity can function as an ontological foundation for a possible ethics.

⁹⁵ Dreyfus and Rubin, “Appendix”, 334.

The question thus remains whether there are any prospects of an ethics based on the notion of authenticity. It was argued above that there is a need for some kind of modification of Heidegger's analysis in order to establish the connection between authenticity and ethics. The non-relational image of conscience that is presented in *BT* has made certain commentators suggest that the key to a Heideggerian ethics is to restore conscience back to its original relational meaning. As earlier shown, the function of the call of conscience is to call Dasein back to itself so that it can become whole and authentic. On this account, conscience has completely lost its traditional relational or social significance. In fact, Heidegger thinks that it is only when Dasein has authentically individuated itself through the call of conscience, "...it can become the 'conscience' of others" (*BT* 298). The condition for a collective authenticity or even a possible collective morality is thus the 'mineness' of individual conscience. Thus, Mulhall argues that the 'call of conscience' must be articulated by a third party, in order to constitute an external disruption of Dasein's self-reinforced dispersal in *das Man*. This would then be a way to recall Dasein to its own possibilities without requiring an incoherent process of 'internal bootstrapping'.⁹⁶

Simon Critchley suggests that the call of conscience can be retained as a voice within Dasein. Its source, however, is not really Dasein itself but another's voice that calls Dasein to respond. On this picture, conscience is the ontic testimony of a certain splitting in the self, which denies it from achieving self-mastery.⁹⁷ In other words, it is the failure of autarky that makes the self fundamentally relational. The relational experience of conscience calls Dasein to a responsibility for the other that might be considered as ethical. Thus, Critchley's ingenuous solution is that a relational and ethical experience of conscience only becomes possible by remaining *inauthentic*, or in a state of "originary inauthenticity".

It is not sufficient, in my view, to restore Heidegger's notion of conscience back to its original relational meaning in order to establish the ontological connection between authenticity and ethics. If Dasein's conscience is essentially relational and thereby developed in a social environment, we are immediately faced with the problem of *das Man* and its pervasive influence on Dasein. By portraying Dasein as predetermined to

⁹⁶ Mulhall, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook*, 144-145. Mulhall calls this third party "a friend".

⁹⁷ Simon Critchley, "Originary inauthenticity", in *On Heidegger's Being and Time*, edited by Steven Levine, 9-55 (New York: Routledge, 2008), 146. Critchley justifies this picture of conscience by use of the Freudian concept of the super-ego as the psychological imprint for a series of transference relations to the other.

being inauthentic, Heidegger is thereby missing out on death's full significance for human existence. Thus, in order to bring out this aspect I will in the following chapter suggest a different theoretical strategy that involves a deeper modification of the existential web. Rather than suggesting that the solution for a Heideggerian ethics lies in relational conscience or in ordinary inauthenticity, I will argue that what is needed is to refute the structural necessity of *das Man*. If it can be shown that *das Man* is not an existential or an ontological feature of *Dasein*, this can open up for the possibility that authenticity can be achieved as a permanent state.

4. Death and das Man

In *BT* Heidegger portrays Dasein as for the most part being in its everyday or inauthentic mode of being. A great obstacle for Dasein to attain a lasting and non-corruptive state of authenticity is thus that it is predominated by the inauthentic, levelling ways of das Man and its idle talk about death. Because of das Man, Dasein can never own up to itself fully and completely, and it can only achieve authenticity by a perpetual repetition of the authentic moment.

At the heart of the dilemma lies Heidegger's structural determination of das Man as an inherent and inescapable part of Dasein's being. By turning das Man into an essential structure of the human constitution, being predominantly inauthentic seems inevitable. There is, in my view, a deterministic fallacy in Heidegger's analysis that is particularly striking in his explication of das Man. If a lasting sense of being a whole self is a minimum requirement for individual morality, then it must be shown that Dasein is not predetermined to being inauthentic. My aim in this chapter is thus to scrutinise and question the ontological status of das Man. In what follows, I will thus argue that das Man is *not* an essential structure that belongs with necessity to the human constitution.

If das Man is not an essential structure of Dasein, then what is it? This is one of the important questions to be raised in this chapter. In order to answer this question, I will first point to some of the peculiar features of das Man's idle talk about death. I will then appeal to historical evidence of variations in the public interpretations of death. Finally, I will suggest an alternative view on the structural elements of 'discourse', and the primordial temporal element of 'falling'.

Based on a critical examination of the structural elements of discourse and falling, I will argue for the view that das Man is a phenomenon that has emerged as a consequence of certain historical and cultural contingencies. By questioning the structural necessity of das Man I hope to show that it is possible for Dasein to remain authentic despite the fact that it is also socially constituted. If this can be shown, a new and richer view of death's significance for human existence can emerge.

4.1 Das Man's idle talk about death

According to Heidegger, das Man “is constituted by the way things have been publicly interpreted, which expresses itself in idle talk. Idle talk must accordingly make manifest the way in which everyday Dasein interprets for itself its Being-towards-death” (*BT* 252). In Division I Heidegger shows how das Man manifests itself from the perspective of disclosedness, in the form of idle talk (*gerede*), curiosity, and ambiguity. Here we learn that Dasein becomes curious and ambiguous because it is constantly distracted by new possibilities, and systematically detached from its environment. In its inauthentic state, Dasein cannot distinguish genuine from false understanding, and it confuses superficial with deep a understanding of phenomena. This process happens automatically because Dasein is thrown into existence.

In Division II Heidegger further expands his analysis of das Man, and describes its idle talk about death in detail. Idle talk is the form of average intelligibility manifest in everyday communication. Now, all communication necessarily involves both an object and a claim about the object. Heidegger's point is that in idle talk, the concern for the claim itself eclipses the concern for its object. Thus, idle talk is shallow and groundless, and has lost touch with the object of the communication. In this sense, idle talk closes off the object instead of disclosing it. Das Man's impersonal and uprooted understanding of death dominates Dasein, and thus prevents it from becoming authentic.

What is the specific content of das Man's idle talk about death, and how is it expressed? In the public understanding, Heidegger says, death is ‘known’ as a mishap that is constantly occurring – as a ‘case of death’ (*BT* 253). The result of this wrongful understanding is that death remains in inconspicuousness, because:

The “They” has already stowed away (*gesichert*) an interpretation for this event. It talks of it in a ‘fugitive’ manner, either expressly or else in a way that is mostly inhibited, as if to say, “One of these days one will die too, in the end; but right now it has nothing to do with us”.

(*BT* 253)

We see from this that Heidegger obviously thinks that das Man possesses a fundamentally distorted understanding of death as an event that will occur some time in the distant future. In the public way of interpreting death, it is spoken of as a ‘case’ or as something ‘actual’, and thus its character of possibility gets concealed. Furthermore, the idle talk of Das Man is always ambiguous and “perverts death into an event of public occurrence” (*BT* 253). Das Man, Heidegger says, “gives its approval and aggravates the

temptation for Dasein to cover up its ownmost Being-towards-death” (BT 253). In this way, das Man provides Dasein with a constant tranquillisation about death, and in this “evasive concealment” Dasein is not permitted to have the courage for anxiety in the face of death. Instead, das Man concerns itself with transforming anxiety into fear of an oncoming event (BT 254). Finally, das Man’s cultivation of a ‘superior’ indifference towards death alienates Dasein from its ownmost non-relational potentiality, that is, from being authentic.

There are several peculiar features of Heidegger’s characterisation of das Man’s idle talk about death. First of all, Heidegger seems to present idle talk as a universal and inescapable aspect of how the public relates to phenomena. Second, as shown in the previous chapter, it is difficult to miss out on the evaluative tone in Heidegger’s overall description of the public’s relationship to death. Even though Heidegger insists that idle talk “is not to be used in a disparaging signification”, his choice of words and the pejorative tone suggests that these are not merely neutral, non-evaluative descriptions of an ontological phenomenon. In other words, if Heidegger thinks that authenticity is the preferable mode for Dasein to be in, it should not come as a surprise that he also reveals a denouncing attitude towards das Man.

A third striking feature of das Man’s idle talk is the lack of diversity and variety in its content, in that it boils down to a few assertions, accompanied by a few, but strong inhibitive actions directed towards Dasein. On Heidegger’s account, idle talk comes across as a singular, conformist way of relating to and talking about death. The lack of complexity in the public discourse is quite remarkable, in that there seems to be more room for diversity in the public’s relationship towards death than Heidegger’s account allows for.⁹⁸ There is, in other words, a need to examine the view that the public interpretation of death is necessarily always conformist, inhibitive, and alienating. There is also the need to question whether there is one single, identifiable motive behind the public way of relating to death. According to Heidegger’s description, das Man’s idle talk seems to be entirely about distracting Dasein away from an authentic encounter with its own death. But why can’t one of the driving forces behind it be love and care for the dying person, rather than just a ‘perverse’ turning away from the truth about death?

⁹⁸ Jonathan Dollimore, *Death, Desire, and Loss in Western Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2001) 122. Dollimore points out that theoretical generalisations about how people have related to death in any historical period can be challenged. For example, social historians have shown that social class and wealth has made a difference to how death was experienced regardless of period.

A final peculiar feature of das Man's idle talk is the ambiguity in Heidegger's description of it. On the one hand, Heidegger asserts that das Man "puts itself in the right and makes itself respectable by tacitly regulating the way in which one has to comport oneself to death" (BT 254). Furthermore, Heidegger asserts that idle talk is not about "consciously passing off something as something else" (BT 169). Thus, he seems to think that the pervasive influence of idle talk happens unnoticeably or without anyone really becoming aware of it happening. On the other hand, Heidegger's terminology (das Man "approves", "aggravates", "provides", "does not permit", "concerns and engages itself", "tempts", "alienates", and "tranquillises") seems to indicate that these are intentional actions that are actually performed by someone.

The many problematic features of das Man's idle talk that we have just seen raise the question of das Man's identity. Who or what is das Man? Who is it that tempts, tranquillises, and alienates Dasein away from its authentic being? Certain Heideggerians have taken great pains to defend the view that idle talk is a universal and inescapable of how the public interprets and relates to phenomena.⁹⁹ For example, Carman argues that idle talk is what makes a genuine sharing of meaning and understanding possible in the first place.¹⁰⁰ It is thus neither possible nor desirable to eschew idle talk anymore than it is possible to get rid of das Man, in that both are just aspects of the mundane authority of normality.¹⁰¹

As we have seen, the ontological status of das Man seems to hinge partly on the necessity of being levelled and inhibited by its idle talk. Heidegger insists on the necessity of such levelling, since there in his view is never a possibility for Dasein to extricate itself from the public interpretations. Heidegger presses this point further by asserting: "In no case is a Dasein, untouched and unseduced by this way in which things have been interpreted, set before the open country of a "world-in-itself" so that it just beholds what it encounters" (BT 169). The message here is that because we are not detached subjects who discover meaning and truth in isolation from our social environment, there is no way of escaping the influence of public interpretations. But, we should ask: is idle talk about anything at all, a necessary and inescapable element of the human constitution? As I will soon try to show, there is a possible middle ground

⁹⁹ Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 143. A notable exception to this is Dreyfus who points out that Heidegger's explication of das Man is the "most confused" part of his analytic.

¹⁰⁰ Carman, *Heidegger's Analytic*, 142.

¹⁰¹ Carman, *Heidegger's Analytic*, 143.

between the lonely subject's quest for knowledge and that of being completely lost in the distorted public interpretations of das Man.

4.2 Who is das Man?

In Division I of *BT* Heidegger explicates the essential structures of Dasein that make the shared intelligibility possible. Thus, he interprets the publicness of Dasein's understanding in terms of the existentials of being-with (*mitsein*), and Dasein-with (*mitdasein*). These two structures point to the fact that Dasein can be at home with entities in the world only because - at the very deepest level - it is in a "with-world" (*Mitwelt*). For Heidegger, being-with is "equiprimordial" with being-in-the-world, in that both are coordinated aspects of the single unified basic structure of Dasein's existence. Thus, human existence is socially constituted at its very core; our very being is characterised by being with others, even when we are alone or isolated.

Where in this picture does das Man fit in? Heidegger raises this question himself: "When Dasein is absorbed in the world of its concern - that is, at the same time in its being-with towards others - it is not itself. *Who* is it, then, who has taken over being as everyday being as everyday being-with-one-another?" (*BT* 125). Heidegger's explication of das Man is supposed to supply an answer to the question of the "who" of everyday Dasein, and it is clear that he explicates das Man as an essential existential; that is, as a "primordial phenomenon belonging to Dasein's positive constitution" (*BT* 167). His early analysis of the phenomenon shows that the elements of 'distantiality', 'awerageness', and 'levelling down' constitute the public character of das Man. In this sense, das Man is a permanent structural condition of Dasein that cannot be escaped or overthrown.

Many commentators accordingly defend the view that das Man is a structural determination of Dasein's being.¹⁰² Thus, Mulhall argues that das Man cannot be thought

¹⁰² See, for example Michael Zimmerman, *The Eclipse of the Self: The Development of Heidegger's Concept of Authenticity* (London: Ohio University Press, 1981), 48. See also: Theodore R. Schatzki, "Early Heidegger on Sociality", in *Blackwell Companions to Philosophy: A Companion to Heidegger*, edited by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, 233-247 (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 244. In general, I find that the problem of the "who" of das Man is unsatisfactorily handled by 'Heideggerian' commentators. Instead of being willing to radically question the ontological status of das Man, these commentators either openly or tacitly approve with Heidegger's analysis on this point. Zimmerman argues that the correct interpretation of das Man is to see it as an inherent part of each of us; it is not a group of 'real' people, but rather a way in which we as individuals exist. Schatzki emphasises that das Man clearly is an essential feature of Dasein's existence in that it is a singular space of disclosure into which different individuals are thrown. These interpretations emphasise the purely formal-ontological aspect of das Man, and it is thus clear that there is no release or permanent escape from it.

of as a group of genuinely individual human beings; neither does it constitute a sort of communal self.¹⁰³ Rather, das Man is comparable to a free-floating, impersonal construct, a sort of consensual hallucination for which Dasein gives up its capacity for authenticity. But how viable is this view, and why is it so important to hold on to?

It is well known that Heidegger is influenced by Kierkegaard in *BT*.¹⁰⁴ In some of Kierkegaard's writings there is an expressed concern with the 'levelling tendencies' in modern society. In *The Present Age* Kierkegaard criticises the so-called advanced cultures for having elevated the art of self-deception to its highest level as "mass-culture", in that the anonymous mass epitomises the dehumanisation of modern life.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, in *The Sickness unto Death* Kierkegaard argues that because of the decline of individual responsibility in modern society, the sense of sin and personal responsibility has disappeared from our culture.¹⁰⁶ When social functions take the place of authentic selfhood, the mass with its characteristic lack of responsibility and its refusal of commitment becomes "the truth". On this background, Kierkegaard asserts that the modern form of sickness is dread and despair. The modern individual is not "sick" in isolation; rather, he or she participates in the despair of an anxiety-ridden and sick society.

There is clearly a resemblance between Kierkegaard's criticism of the anonymous masses of modern society and Heidegger's description of das Man. The difference is that whereas Kierkegaard sees the mass-culture as a contingent sickness of his own age, Heidegger insists that das Man is an existential structure, and as such not identifiable with particular people, and not even with anonymous groups of people. Heidegger thus dismisses Kierkegaard's account of the public mass as a historical or 'ontic' phenomenon, while he portrays das Man as a timeless, universal, and inescapable structural part of Dasein.

The natural question to ask at this point is whether Heidegger's structural determination of das Man is sustainable. When assessing the ontological status of das

¹⁰³ Mulhall, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook*, 68.

¹⁰⁴ Dreyfus and Rubin, "Appendix", 299. In *BT* Heidegger refers to Kierkegaard in altogether three footnotes. As Dreyfus notes, Heidegger takes over from Kierkegaard much more than he acknowledges, for example Kierkegaard's understanding of the self. Dreyfus' general point is that Heidegger secularises Kierkegaard's account of Religiousness A.

¹⁰⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age*, trans. H. V. and E. H. Hong (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1978)

¹⁰⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, trans. H. V. and E. H. Hong (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1980)

Man, there are two important issues to be addressed. First, if Heidegger is correct in his existential determination of das Man, its chiefly negative influence on the individual should be questioned. Second, if the structural determination of das Man can be refuted, it must be possible to show how the individual can remain authentic, without having to completely extricate herself from the society in the sense of becoming non-social or a recluse.

In general, I think we need to agree with Heidegger that human beings are born into a society that has already settled public interpretations of various phenomena. It is also true that most people integrate such public interpretations more or less passively, without ever questioning them or being able to overthrow them when so is necessary or required. Thus, the passive and unnoticeably integration of public attitudes and norms is part of the explanation for how positive as well as negative cultural practices are sustained throughout the course of time. The problem, however, is that Heidegger presents us with what seems to be an overly deterministic image of the negative aspects of social conditioning. It is this image that must be adjusted in order to bring out the full potential for human growth and freedom.

Earlier in this chapter the process of examining the ontological status of das Man started off by pointing out the peculiar and problematic features of idle talk about death. This, however, is not sufficient to disprove Heidegger's structural determination of das Man. What is needed is more concrete evidence of historical variations in the public interpretation of death. As the cultural historian Philippe Ariès' research shows, from the Middle Ages up until the twentieth century essential changes have occurred in the Western society's view of death.¹⁰⁷ Ariès characterises death in the Middle Ages as "tame", whereas it in modern society has become increasingly unfamiliar, traumatic, and "wild". As the general trend toward secularisation in the West succeeded in diminishing the belief in evil and the afterlife, this contributed to the formation of an unfamiliar and untamed death. On Ariès' account, in the modern age death has been "driven into secrecy

¹⁰⁷ Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, transl. by Helen Weaver (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). Ariès has developed a socio-historical model of death wherein he tracks the mutations in our attitudes towards death based on four psychological themes: first, the defense of society against untamed nature; second, the belief in the existence of evil; third, the belief in the afterlife; and finally, the awareness of the individual. In addition to this, Ariès postulates five historical models, each of which varies in its respective emphasis on the above four motives: "tame death", "the death of the self", "remote and imminent death", "the death of the other", "dirty death", and "hidden death".

and dissimulation has become the rule”.¹⁰⁸ Invisible death, hidden death, and medicalised death – all of these labels designate the modern attitude toward what in previous ages of our culture had been a profoundly human and social experience, rather than an object of science and bureaucracy. Interestingly, Ariès characterises the modern change in the public attitude as a “lie” that everyone becomes an accomplice to, and he explains the public lie as stemming from a temptation to protect the dying person by leaving him in ignorance of his imminent end.¹⁰⁹ According to Ariès, Tolstoy’s story *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886) is the perfect illustration of the transition from “the public death of the past” to “the hidden death of the future”. Tolstoy’s moral tale thus heralds the age of medicalised death.¹¹⁰

There are two especially noteworthy things in Ariès’ empirically based study of Western man’s changing attitudes towards death. First of all, Ariès historical presentation of the specific modern attitude towards death fits remarkably well with of Heidegger’s description of das Man. This can, in turn, suggest that das Man’s idle talk about death is a phenomenon that has emerged from within the modern industrialised societies. This suggestion, again, has the possible implication that the portrayal of das Man as a universal, timeless, and structural phenomenon can be refuted. Second, Ariès’ study shows that there have been historical periods where people have related differently to death than in the modern way. This opens for the possibility that public interpretations of death can in fact ‘hit the target’, and that there can be positive or even truthful ways of relating to death in society at large. But, the question is, how much weight can be put on Ariès historical account in order to refute the structural determination of das Man?¹¹¹

It is important to acknowledge that Heidegger is not oblivious to the importance of history or to fact of historical changes. In *BT* §§72-5 he makes the distinction between history and historicity, whereupon he claims that no particular historical findings (such

¹⁰⁸ Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, 562. This has had the practical effect of removing or delaying all the signs that warned the sick person about his or hers forthcoming death, especially the staging of death as a public act.

¹⁰⁹ Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, 561-562. Note Ariès’ choice of the term “temptation”, which is exactly the same as in Heidegger’s description of das Man’s inauthentic stance toward death. There is no references whatsoever to Heidegger in Ariès’ work.

¹¹⁰ Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, 573. There is also a reference to Tolstoy’s story in *BT*.

¹¹¹ Jonathan Dollimore, *Death, Desire, and Loss in Western Culture*, 63, 121. Dollimore points out that Ariès’ study is silent about earlier historical epochs than the Middle Ages, and similarly about the development in other cultures. Thus, Ariès’ thesis is questionable in several respects; for example, Ariès is arguably more descriptive than analytic, and often he does not explain the changes he charts. Dollimore also finds the underlying argument that people in the West have moved from a healthy to a pathological relationship to death to be questionable. In any case, it is clear that Ariès exposes a preference for the attitudes to death allegedly found in the earlier ages.

as Ariès') will cast light on Dasein's historicity, which is the structural condition for the human capacity to explore the past. Heidegger here intends to bring light upon the temporal significance of Dasein's existence as a thrown projection by explicating it as historical. Is this distinction a problem for Ariès' account? Not necessarily. It is not Dasein's ability to explore its own past that is at stake here, but rather its ontological capacity for becoming whole and authentic.

Furthermore, there is room for 'ontic' variations in idle talk in Heidegger's analysis. Thus, he points out that the extent to which das Man's "dominion becomes compelling and explicit *may change* in the course of history" (BT 129). Such change and variation is thus what is disclosed in Ariès research. In other words, Heidegger's existential account of das Man does not necessarily predetermine "its various possibilities of becoming concrete". Notwithstanding this fact, there seems to few possibilities in Heidegger's analysis for positive or truthful public ways of relating to death. This is so, because:

Dasein is equiprimordially in the untruth. Anticipatory resoluteness gives Dasein at the same time the primordial certainty that it has been closed off. In anticipatory resoluteness, Dasein *holds* itself open for its constant lostness in the irresoluteness of the "they" – a lostness which is possible from the very basis of its own Being. As a constant possibility of Dasein, irresoluteness is *co-certain*.

(BT 308)

On Heidegger's account, Dasein is primordially lost in das Man and in the untruth as a matter of fact. Dasein's interpretation of death will thus always be distorted by the levelling of das Man's idle talk, even though the *strength* of its dominion may vary over time.

Whether we choose to accept all the possible the implications of Ariès' research or not, it at least shows that people throughout the history of the Western culture have changed profoundly in their understanding of death. Whether these are changes for the better or the worse is here besides the general point that public opinions about and practices towards death actually *do* change fundamentally. This opens for the possibility that the alleged universal negative impact of das Man's idle talk can be refuted. Moreover, it shows that society's current ways of understanding and of relating to death can change fundamentally again, in the future.

4.3 Truthful ‘talk’ and immediate access to phenomena

From the basis of historical evidence of radical changes in the public understanding of death, we begin to see that it is possible to question the ontological status of das Man as a permanent structure of Dasein. However, at this point we are forced to face an even deeper structural problem. This problem occurs because the levelling forces of das Man’s idle talk is a mode of the existential structure of ‘discourse’ (*Rede*). But what is discourse, and does it necessarily and always degenerate into idle talk?

As earlier shown, discourse is together with attunement and understanding, an element of Dasein’s ‘facticity’, which all pertain to the care-structure. In the same way as Dasein is always attuned to the world by being in a mood; and, in the same way as it always has some understanding of its world, Dasein is always ‘in’ discourse, too. Discourse is thus constitutive to Dasein’s disclosedness; it is a way in which entities show up and are intelligible for us, and as such it is a fundamental structure of being-in-the-world. Perhaps one could say that discourse is the way in which the world is articulated through expression and communication, in terms of how it makes sense to express our understanding and convey it to others. Discourse is thus essentially communicative, but not necessarily solely in terms of language.¹¹² Rather, discourse is the hermeneutic condition par excellence. Idle talk is thus an instance of the inauthentic mode of discourse, in contrast to Dasein’s inner silent voice of conscience, which is an instance of its authentic mode.

As a hermeneutic condition, discourse constitutes the bridge, so to speak, between the anonymous social norms of das Man and the concrete interpretive practices of individual human agents. This is one of the main reasons why authentic resoluteness can never be a stable or self-sufficient mode of existence, but rather is a perpetual struggle against the levelling forces inherent in discursive practices. Heidegger asserts that there are many things with which we become acquainted with through public interpretation, and that “there is not a little which never gets beyond such an average understanding” (*BT* 169). In Heidegger’s view, the way things are expressed or communicated is by conforming to the public and anonymous norms that govern our shared background

¹¹² Carman, *Heidegger’s Analytic*, 221-223. See also: Charles Guignon, *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), 118. Carman points out that Guignon advances an interpretation of *BT* wherein he attributes to Heidegger a “constitutive” view of language. Carman, however, argues that there is abundant evidence in *BT* that discourse and language are not identical; indeed that language is just one manifestation of discourse among others.

practices. Thus, discourse is always essentially shaped to the normative authority of das Man, with the inevitable result of Dasein being predominantly inauthentic.

Heidegger is correct in his view, I think, that human beings are essentially socially constituted from the outset of their lives. Put in structural terms, the self only emerges in Dasein's being-with (*mitsein*). Thus, we are not lonely, isolated Cartesian subjects from the outset, and for the most part we discover meaning and truth in a social environment, rather than on our own. The pertinent question to ask at this point in the discussion, however, is whether the interpretation of phenomena is always and necessarily subject to a levelling process. Or, put in different terms: can the public discourse move in the opposite direction and thereby disclose things and phenomena as they truly are? These questions are important, not only because what is at stake is the possibility for Dasein to become a fully, lasting authentic self. What is also at stake is the fundamental value of being part of a community, and whether this is basically a positive or negative condition for human development and growth.

As earlier shown, Carman is convinced that Dasein cannot escape the influence of das Man's idle talk about death. Just as idle talk gives us access to the public meaning and understanding in general, public interpretation is simultaneously subject to conformity and levelling. Carman calls this process the "generic drift of discourse".¹¹³ For Carman, interpretation is constantly subject to this generic drift; in this way das Man's anonymous and banal practices naturally tend to obscure the particularity of Dasein's unique situation. But, is it necessarily true that all interpretations are subject to conformity and levelling? To realise the importance of this question, we need to take a closer look at the thrust of Carman's argument:

What is intelligible is precisely what "one" understands. It is constitutive of making sense that one do so according to the standards of das Man. Interpretation has no choice but to accommodate and exploit the prevailing criteria of intelligibility, which means at least to some extent trading the irreducibility particularity of one's own factual situation for generally adequate, but always more or less loosely fitting means of expressing and communicating it. The effort to make oneself intelligible in discourse therefore tends to drift into ever shallower water, eventually bottoming out in sheer banality and cliché.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Taylor Carman, "Must we be inauthentic?", in *Heidegger, Authenticity, and Modernity*, Volume 1, edited by Mark A. Wrathall and Jeff Malpas, 13-28 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 20.

¹¹⁴ Carman, "Must we be inauthentic?", 21-22.

Now, there are three important points to take notice of here. First of all, in Carman's view, we have no other choice than to submit to das Man's interpretations. Second, and as already mentioned, Carman thinks that discourse is always subject to levelling mechanisms, which thus is a necessary and not a contingent process. As a third point, Carman adds that the only intelligible interpretations are those that to some degree accommodate the average or levelled understanding of das Man.

As a matter of fact, I believe that all of these points can be refuted or modified. Thus, what needs to be shown is; on the one hand, how the individual can evade the negative levelling aspects of public interpretation. In other words, an explanation is required for how it is possible for the individual to relate to phenomena as they are in themselves without succumbing to the corruption of public interpretation. Furthermore, it must be possible to show that even the public opinion can move close to a truthful, uncorrupted interpretation of phenomena.

As we have already seen, a society's attitudes and practices towards certain phenomena can change quite radically during the course of history. Ariès' study of the historical changes in our attitudes towards death is a strong testimony to that. However, Ariès historical research also shows that these changes occur very slowly, and that they emerge as a consequence of deep transformations in the Western culture's encompassing worldview. Put in Heideggerian terms, there have been fundamental shifts in the 'metaphysical' background assumptions that govern our understanding of being, and these fundamental shifts explain the 'ontic' changes in society's attitudes and practices. In the next chapter I will examine Heidegger's view of metaphysic in greater detail. The point of bringing this up now is to show that part of the problem with the changes in the historical and cultural interpretations of death, is the difficulty in determining which of these interpretations that approach death in the most truthful way. That is, how can we be sure that the modern attitude towards death is somehow more destructive or inhibitive than the attitude in the Middle Ages, when both attitudes emerge from a set of background understandings of being that is difficult or impossible to assess?

To refute the points in Carman's argument, we need a more concrete example of deep and enduring changes in the public opinion, which is also closer to us in historical time. A familiar example of radical alterations in the public opinion is how Western

people have changed in their relationship to smoking cigarettes.¹¹⁵ A few centuries ago, in the fifties in the United States as well as in Europe, smoking cigarettes was considered to be a both ‘cool’ and beneficial thing to do. (The harmful effects of smoking were not yet known, leading some medical doctors even to recommend their patients to start smoking.) Thus, the startling public norm at the time was that “smoking cigarettes is good for you”. Today, of course, the publicly accepted norm about smoking is completely reversed, in that almost everyone in society has incorporated the view that smoking is bad for health. This alteration in the public opinion has mainly occurred because the various long-term negative effects of smoking have now become revealed and accepted as part of our common knowledge. This, I believe, is an example of a public interpretation of a phenomenon that has furthermore moved in the right direction by being non-levelled and true.

However, the question remains: when the publicly conveyed norm is that smoking cigarettes is not harmful, how is it then possible for anyone to realise that in fact the opposite is true? Thus, how is it possible to ‘know’ the facts about smoking cigarettes *before* they start to materialise in either lung cancer or other related health issues? Part of the problem here is that Heidegger defines meaning (*Sinn*) as “that which is articulated in interpretation, thus even more primordially in discourse” (*BT* 161). On this account, there seems to be no other choice than to wait for a change in the public interpretation of smoking based on its long-term negative health-effects, before one can fully realise that smoking is in fact bad for health. Thus, what needs to be shown is how the individual can acquire an immediate access to the phenomena as they truly are. Is it possible that if not meaning, then at least ‘truth’ can sometimes be acquired directly from the ‘thing itself’? In such a case there would be no need for interpretation or for discourse when approaching certain phenomena.

In the above example about smoking, simply by inhaling a cigarette for the very first time, meaningful and ‘true’ information about the harmful effects of smoking is instantly conveyed. As such, all the information one needs in order to know the facts about smoking is directly accessible from the ‘thing itself’. Now, one might protest to

¹¹⁵ Heidegger is often criticised for not incorporating the human body in his analysis of Dasein. Heidegger does, however, use the ‘symptoms of a disease’ (*Krankheiterscheinungen*) as an example of an appearance of the phenomenon in his explication of the concept of phenomenon (*BT* 29). Symptoms of disease thus ‘indicate’ something which does *not* show itself, i.e. the phenomenon of the disease itself. I have chosen the above example about smoking partly because of its concreteness, and partly because I find that it exemplifies the problem of having access to phenomena.

this and argue that this is simply a banal, ontic example that does not hold for 'real' phenomena in the Heideggerian sense. Thus, one could argue that ontological phenomena are always subject to interpretation and discourse, and it is therefore a constant risk of levelling and distorted understanding of them. One might also point out that there are plenty of counter-examples to the above example about smoking, in that not every physical phenomenon is accessible in such a direct and naïve way.¹¹⁶ However, the general point holds, in that exposure to certain phenomena over a relatively short period of time can and will reveal its 'true' nature without the need for interpretation.

Again, it must be stressed that Heidegger is correct in his view that most publicly conveyed information subjects us to banal, flattened out, and levelled language. Moreover, the public interpretations of phenomena are often far removed from the truth, and it's a regrettable fact that most people never move beyond the grip of such subversive and untruthful public interpretations. A strong tendency is thus to be in the grip of such interpretations. This is a tendency that perhaps more than ever before in history prevails, partly because of the mass media's dominant influence on the minds of modern people. The point here, however, is that prevailing tendencies are not necessarily indications of ontological structures pertaining to the human constitution as such. Thus, when it comes to the difficult and important task of understanding the human constitution, I think that what must also be included in the analysis are the outer limits, so to speak, of what is in fact possible to achieve for humans in terms of authenticity and self-realisation.

4.4 The structural story of falling

So far, my efforts in trying to disprove the ontological status of *das Man* has arguably yielded some positive results, in that it seems to be possible for human beings to escape the negative, levelling force of public interpretations. However, a fundamental structural dilemma remains to be solved. Heidegger asserts that the evasive actions (temptation, tranquillisation, and alienation) of *das Man* are the distinguishing marks of the kind of being called 'falling' (*BT* 254). The existential falling is thus presented as fallenness into the everyday averageness of *das Man*. As shown in chapter two, falling is an element of the deepest structural layer in the existential web, which is *Dasein*'s temporality. This is where Heidegger lay out the three 'ecstasies' of temporality, past, present and future. The

¹¹⁶ For example, taking drugs for the first time will give an intense pleasurable sensation and tasting a bitter medicine.

ecstasie of falling is thus explicated as a movement of falling in the present moment, wherein Dasein becomes dispersed and absorbed into its world. Thus, falling is explicated as a mode of disclosure, that is, as an unquestioning and absorbed relation to the beings Dasein encounter. Thus, as part of the care-structure, fallenness is explicated as Being-alongside with other beings in the world. Together with existentiality as Being-ahead-of-itself, and facticity as Being-already-in, fallenness belongs to the human constitution as an inescapable structural element. On Heidegger's account, Dasein is constantly and inevitably part of a social levelling process which pertains to its own being, and as such Dasein is always and necessarily falling. It is because of this perpetual falling movement that Dasein for the most part exists in its inauthentic or everyday mode of being. Falling Dasein is thus unable to take an autonomous and critically investigating stance towards phenomena, as suggested in the earlier example of smoking cigarettes.

Now, it seems as though falling more than das Man is the deepest structural obstacle, so to speak, for Dasein to attain a non-relapsing state of authenticity. Why does Heidegger insist that falling into the present is a necessary component of human existence? There is no straightforward answer to this question. We may therefore first take notice of the resemblance between structural falling and the myth of the Fall, or to the Christian doctrine of original sin. According to this doctrine, human beings are the self-originating source of sin. Thus, at its core is the conception that human nature as such is tragically flawed or perverse, so to speak, in its very structure or constitution. In the traditional Christian account human beings are not only naturally capable of acting sinfully, but are always already turned against themselves, against the true and the good, by virtue of their very human constitution. Heidegger, however, explicitly denies that his structural account of falling has religious or evaluative connotations. Thus, he asserts:

We would also misunderstand the ontologico-existential structure of falling if we were to ascribe it to the sense of a bad or deplorable ontical property of which, perhaps, more advanced stages of human culture might be able to rid themselves.
(BT 176)

As we can see, falling is not supposed to portray Dasein as if there is something inherently wrong with it. Furthermore, falling does not refer to a 'fall' from a purer or higher state that Dasein can recapture in one way or another, for example by divine intervention or by somehow making efforts for self-improvement. Rather, Heidegger says that Dasein is already fallen into the world, as something that belongs to its very

being. Thus, whereas the Christian doctrine offers an explanation for man's fallen state by its account of original sin and man's disobedience to God, no such explanation is offered on Heidegger's existential account of falling. Furthermore, whereas the religious account offers redemption from our fallen state due to God's grace, there seems to be no graceful escape from structural falling. As Dasein we simply are thrown into the world and thus we *are* fallen and continue to fall throughout our existence as a matter of fact: "Falling is a definite existential characteristic of Dasein itself" (*BT* 176).

As we can see, Heidegger's version of falling emerges from certain inexplicable and unpleasant facts about the human condition. This, however, immediately raises the question of why Heidegger's structural account of the phenomenon falling should be accepted as more credible, 'true', or primordial than any religious myth.¹¹⁷ Moreover, commentators point to inconsistencies and a significant degree of terminological ambiguity in Heidegger's explication of falling. For example, Dreyfus and Rubin shows that there are two different accounts of falling in *BT*.¹¹⁸ First, in Division I Heidegger presents us with the structural version of falling which he attributes to the basic structure of intelligibility. Structural falling is what produces the constant 'pull' towards interpreting Dasein in terms of the world. This pull is the deepest cause of the generic drift of discourse, and it generates an abiding tendency in Dasein to flee in the face of death and anxiety. By contrast, the other version of falling that emerges in Division II is a motivational or psychological account. Here, 'fallenness' is the motivated *result* of Dasein's temptation to flee from its own nullity in the face of anxiety. Thus, what generates falling on the motivational account is Dasein's perpetual flight from itself, wherein Dasein resists listening to its inner voice of conscience.

As Christopher Macann points out, there seems to be an artificial contrivance about the structure of falling, and that this contrivance threatens to bring the basic ontological structures of *BT* into contradiction with themselves.¹¹⁹ The difficulties that follow from viewing falling as a structural part of Dasein is thus rather serious: if Dasein as itself ceases to be itself because of falling, then how can it ever *become itself* in the manner required by the theory of authenticity? Are there any solutions to these dilemmas

¹¹⁷ It is important to notice that there are other kinds of religious or metaphysical accounts of man's fallen state than the Christian myth presented here. For example, in Buddhism the Sanskrit term 'karma' (which can be good or bad) is supposed to explain why so many people suffer for seemingly no reason.

¹¹⁸ Dreyfus and Rubin, "Appendix", 334. The contradiction arises because of Heidegger's equivocation between the structural and the psychological accounts of falling.

¹¹⁹ Macann, "Who is Dasein? Towards an ethics of authenticity", 223-24.

other than straightforwardly admitting that Heidegger presents us with an inconsistent and rather confusing existential account of falling? Carman points out that Heidegger need not revert to the motivational account of falling in order to explain Dasein's fallenness, since he already has the structural account from Division I in place.¹²⁰ Thus, since structural falling is a condition of intelligibility as such, no motivational story is required to explain that Dasein has already fallen into the average everydayness of das Man. However, in my view, it is structural falling that is the real problem,

When Heidegger describes the 'movement' (*Bewegtheit*) of falling, he employs vivid imagery such as "downward plunge" (*Absturz*), and "turbulence" (*Wirbel*) (*BT* 178). More specifically, he says that as long as Dasein is what it is "it remains in the throw" (*im Wurf*), and "is sucked (*hineingewirbelt*) into the turbulence of das Man's inauthenticity" (*BT* 179).¹²¹ These images of falling are quite suggestive, and they seem to put falling on par with the powerful and sometimes violent forces of nature. Carman appeals to this imagery when he argues that the existential force of falling is comparable to the natural force of gravity. He thus promotes a view that exploits Heidegger's description of falling as a force or an ongoing dynamic tendency that constantly steers Dasein away from itself.¹²² Thus, in the similar way as we are constantly exposed to gravity as a law of nature, as socially conditioned creatures we are inevitably and with necessity falling.

By recognising the discursive conditions of interpretation and by comparing falling to the force of gravity, Carman argues for the existential necessity of falling. However, rather than solving the problem, this view reveals an even deeper dilemma. For, if Dasein's falling is understood as a case of inexplicable necessity on par with the laws of nature, this brings out what might be characterised as an enigma in Heidegger's analysis. This a priori enigma stems from the central claim that Dasein is a thrown

¹²⁰ Carman, "Must we be inauthentic?", 17.

¹²¹ Carman, "Must we be inauthentic?", 17. Macquarrie and Robinson translate the German term *wirbel* as "turbulence". However, Carman's alternative use of the translation "spiralling" is probably more illustrative for his argumentative purposes in the particular case of falling. Carman also exchanges the English translation "sucked" with "whirled".

¹²² Carman, "Must we be inauthentic?", 24-25. Carman argues that authentic existence is constituted by the very forces against which it has to push in its effort to grasp itself in its facticity: "Just as a good jump is at once conditioned and inhibited by gravity, so too authentic resoluteness consists in resisting the movement of falling from within the levelling process that is at work in all discursive idioms".

projection into the world.¹²³ The simple fact *that* one exists thus creates the philosophical riddle of the completely obvious. Furthermore, there's a deep ironic twist to this view: if Dasein is falling by necessity, this threatens to render it more of a present-at-hand actuality than a possibility. But this seems to be exactly what Heidegger wants to avoid by making the future into the primary element of Dasein's temporality, thereby breaking with the pre-eminence of the solidifying presence which is characteristic of traditional metaphysics.

At the heart of the dilemma lies Heidegger's explication of falling as a primordial structural element belonging to the temporal ecstasie of the present. When falling is presented as a primordial structure, this creates an inconstancy in Dasein's self, and it thus renders it impossible for Dasein to maintain a state of authenticity. Fallen Dasein is precisely not itself. But if Dasein is originally not itself, then what is Dasein restored to when it is restored to itself by being authentically resolute? One way to solve this dilemma would be to rearrange the primordial structures in *BT*.¹²⁴ If falling is viewed as a secondary rather than a primary phenomenon, this opens up the possibility that fallenness into *das Man* could be presented as an existential modification of an original authentic self. To be oneself, whole and undisrupted, would then be the ontologically primary phenomenon.¹²⁵

4.5 Falling, rising, and transcending

In this chapter I have tried, through various approaches, to refute the structural-ontological necessity of *das Man*. I started off by pointing out problematic features of *das Man*'s idle talk about death. Then, through a presentation of Ariès' account of historical variations in the Western society's public interpretation of death, it was suggested that *das Man*'s idle talk about death is a modern and contingent, and not a universal or timeless phenomenon. Next, I have tried to show that even public interpretations are able to disclose the truth about phenomena without necessarily relapsing back into false interpretations and levelled idle talk. I have also argued for the possibility that the individual in certain cases can approach phenomena directly, thereby circumventing the necessity of interpretation and discourse.

¹²³ Critchley, "Originary inauthenticity", 138. Critchley argues that the enigmatic a priori in *BT* creates a fundamental opacity that both seems to resist phenomenological description and is that in relation to which the phenomenologist describes.

¹²⁴ Macann, "Who is Dasein? Towards an ethics of authenticity", 221.

¹²⁵ Macann, "Who is Dasein? Towards an ethics of authenticity", 242.

Because of the complexity of the existential web, there always seem to be yet another structural obstacle that must be overcome in order to establish the possibility for Dasein to remain authentic. The deepest obstacle so far is arguably the temporal movement of falling into the world. With regards to this structural obstacle, it seems as though we are left with two options: we must either accept falling as an inexplicable and primordial structural element and thereby accepting that Dasein can never become fully authentic. This is, in essence, Carman's view. Alternatively, by embracing Macann's solution, we can view falling as a secondary phenomenon, thereby causing a rearrangement in the deepest structural layer of existential web.

Now, what Macann's solution fails to mention is what will happen to Dasein's temporality, and more specifically to the ecstasie of the present, if we choose to make this rearrangement. Does making falling into a secondary phenomenon entail that the present moment is somehow erased, or that being in the present is no longer possible? If this is the case, it would in fact threaten to overthrow Heidegger's most fundamental project in *BT*, which is to show that the 'meaning of being' lies in primordial temporality. Ecstatic temporality is primordial because it makes the past, the present, and the future to emerge simultaneously as three interwoven ecstasies, as opposed to the linear representation of time.¹²⁶ Instead of seeing the past and the future as extensions of the present moment, Heidegger presents the three ecstasies as co-originary, "equi-primordial", moments (*BT* 329). Thus, the ecstasie of the present must somehow be retained in order to not completely disrupt the deepest and most original point of Heidegger's philosophical project in *BT*.

What the discussion of falling shows above everything else, in my view, is the immense difficulties that pertain to analysing human beings as structurally and inescapably part *of* the world, while at the same time explicating them as temporally 'ecstatic' or potentially transcendent beings. According to Heidegger, the underlying structure of Dasein's world is a wide web of socially defined concepts, roles, functions, and functional interrelations. Thus, Dasein has no other choice than to understand itself in terms of the world, which is also why it is inevitably falling. But why must being part

¹²⁶ Schürmann, "Heidegger's *Being and Time*", 106-107. Schürmann points out that Heidegger breaks with the linear representation of time because he breaks with the pre-eminence of the present. Typical for the traditional metaphysical representation of time is that the now-moment is a point of intersection between past and future moments.

of the world, or being-alongside other beings necessarily be understood in terms of a falling movement?¹²⁷

In order to fully retain the temporal dimension in Heidegger's analysis we need to understand what *might* manifest in the ecstasie of the present moment differently. Rather than thinking that the present solely comprises the movement of falling, my suggestion is that it also opens up for a transcendent movement of rising *whilst* being with others in the world. Moreover, such a transcending movement can last in the sense of not relapsing back into inauthenticity, thus being continuous and non-corrupted by the negative aspects of the world. On this account it is not merely the future that opens up for Dasein's possibilities, but also the present.

Now, to transcend external or worldly limitations and negativities, as well as the inner the limitations that pertain to the human constitution, is after all what some people throughout the human history have tried to achieve. Furthermore, there are and always have been certain marginal practices available wherein the individual can resist the levelling forces of the society.¹²⁸ Such marginal practices are ways of relating to the world and to phenomena from a different background understanding of being than the currently prevailing. Most typically, various representatives from religious and spiritual movements have tried to transcend the world and its limitations by withdrawing themselves away from it. However, there are also examples of people who seem to be able to rise and transcend *while* remaining involved in the world. Whether anyone ever has truly succeeded in such an effort, is an empirical question that needs verification. I do think, however, that there are examples of this, both in the historical past and at the present point in history that can attest to the genuine possibility of a non-corrupted authenticity and a continuing transcending movement.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Stephen Mulhall, *Philosophical Myths of the Fall* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 52-53. Mulhall points out that Heidegger is profoundly ambivalent about Dasein's fallen absorption into das Man. Interpretative charity suggests that the ambivalence is corrected by consigning das Man and fallenness to the realm of the ontic, which is partly what I am trying to do here. Mulhall, however, rejects this solution.

¹²⁸ Dreyfus and Rubin, "Appendix", 329.

¹²⁹ Dreyfus and Rubin's chosen examples are Martin Luther King Jr., Jesus, and Florence Nightingale. To this I would like to add a few examples from other cultural traditions, such as Mahatma Gandhi and the current Dalai Lama. These people exemplify the possibility of becoming authentic within their particular cultural traditions. More importantly, they exemplify that being authentic

5. Metaphysics and Death

We have arrived at the last theme to be discussed in this thesis, which is death as a metaphysical concept. In *BT* Heidegger insists that his analysis of death is non-speculative in the sense of being entirely 'this-worldly'. My main aim in this concluding chapter is thus to scrutinise Heidegger's claim that his analysis of death is non-metaphysical. I will in fact argue that Heidegger's notion of death is 'metaphysical' in accordance with his own understanding of the term. However, it is first necessary to be clear about the meaning of the term 'metaphysics'. More specifically, there is a need to examine Heidegger's own understanding of metaphysics. In the first section I will thus map out Heidegger's complex view of metaphysics, which is developed in contrast to what he thinks is the problem with traditional metaphysics.

In the previous chapter I tried to show that certain phenomena are directly accessible just as they are in themselves, outside the circles of interpretation. This direct accessibility, however, is not possible with death as a phenomenon. We have earlier seen that on Heidegger's methodological account, death remains beyond a direct phenomenological grasp. Death can thus only be grasped indirectly, as an immanent but hidden part of Dasein's structural design. This opaque nature of death is what makes it especially exposed to theoretical speculations and methodological projections.

In order to bring out the 'metaphysical' nature of Heidegger's notion of death, I will analyse and discuss a few of Heidegger's assertions about death in greater detail, and thereby try to exhibit the metaphysical presuppositions and assumptions they emerge from. My main effort in this chapter is thus to show that Heidegger's analysis of death in *BT* emerges from different and partly incompatible background understandings of being. This is, in my view, the real cause behind all the commentary confusion and debate that surrounds Heidegger's notion of death.

Towards the end of this chapter I point out that even though it can be shown that it is possible to attain a lasting state of authenticity that is also ethical, this rarely becomes a reality for human beings. Part of the problem is worldly, factual limitations we are all subject to, and the obvious inequality in terms of resources and possibilities for reaching the full human potential. It thus seems to be a need for the belief in an afterlife, since in most cases there is simply not enough *time* to become authentic and morally fulfilled.

5.1 What is metaphysics?

In order to examine and evaluate Heidegger's claim that his notion of death in *BT* is entirely non-metaphysical, there is a need to be clear about the meaning of the term 'metaphysics'. However, to establish a definite understanding of metaphysics is difficult because it is an ambiguous term that can be defined in variety of different ways. Thus, metaphysics can be understood in a wide range from; a speculative constructed philosophical system dealing with the first principles; a science of supersensible or transphenomenal entities; an attempt to provide an absolute non-perspectival account of reality; an answer to the old question of *why* there is something rather than nothing; a mode of thinking founded upon the logic of binary oppositions; an attempt to answer the perennial questions concerning the meaning of factual human life; or, simply a systematic reflection on the nature of existing reality.¹³⁰

It is well known that in modern twentieth century philosophy, most of these understandings of metaphysics and their uses have acquired a very bad reputation. That is, most modern philosophers – especially within the so-called analytical tradition – shy away from engaging theoretically with anything that can be associated with systematic metaphysical speculations. The avoidance and dismissal of traditional metaphysics is thus arguably one of the predominant tendencies within modern philosophy.¹³¹

Metaphysics as a traditional form of Western thinking has been called into question not only by the so-called explicitly anti-metaphysical thinkers. Heidegger also believes in the need to criticise and eventually overcome the metaphysical tradition. In the introduction to *BT* Heidegger announces his project of 'overcoming' (*Überwindung*) metaphysics. As earlier shown (in section 2.5), one of the most salient features of this overcoming is the subversion of the traditional metaphysical priority of actuality over possibility. For Heidegger, phenomenology is the philosophical method that enables us to discover that our very being is possibility rather than actuality. Phenomenology is in this sense the 'first philosophy' that permits us to overcome the traditional hegemony of presence and actuality, which is characteristic of all earlier metaphysical systems. Thus, through phenomenology we discover ourselves as beings in time, continually moving

¹³⁰ See Dan Zahavi, "Phenomenology and Metaphysics", in *Metaphysics, Facticity, Interpretation: Phenomenology in the Nordic Countries*, edited by Dan Zahavi, Sara Heinamaa and Hans Ruin (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 14.

¹³¹ For the twentieth century logical-positivists and in general for thinkers belonging to the analytical tradition, assertions are meaningless unless they have some sort of empirical content. And, assertions that have empirical content belong to the empirical sciences.

beyond the actual givens of the present towards the future, but also towards the past. In this sense, Heidegger's thinking on the 'possible' represents a radical departure from traditional metaphysical theories.

Heidegger thinks, on par with many modern philosophers, that traditional metaphysical thinking must be overcome. However, the only way to do so, is by thinking through the *history* of metaphysical efforts to understand the being of what is. According to Heidegger, the history of the West consists in a series of ways in which the being of what is has been unconcealed to human beings.¹³² Metaphysics, in this view, affects much more than philosophy itself. In fact, all 'ontical' variations in the content of human history (thoughts, words, experiences, deeds, etc.) are determined by a background understanding, which shapes and constitutes the foreground activities. As shown in the previous chapter, the variations in the Western society's attitudes towards death, exemplifies such gradual shifts in the metaphysical background understanding and assumptions about being.

On Heidegger's account, metaphysics is the attempt to think and name the being of what is. In this sense, by doing fundamental ontology in *BT* he is trying to do the 'metaphysics' of metaphysics, so to speak. Heidegger sees the effort to restrict philosophy to conceptual or logical analysis, thereby ignoring or dismissing metaphysics, as a sign that modern philosophy is more subject than ever to the errors in the metaphysics of the past. Philosophy as a method of mere conceptual and logical analysis does not genuinely eliminate metaphysics; it simply ignores it.¹³³ Thus, in Heidegger's view one cannot simply stop treating metaphysics as a serious and worthwhile branch of philosophy. Eliminating metaphysics in this way will, in fact, only heighten our oblivion to the way our understanding of the world is based on a background understanding of being.

In light of what have just been said about metaphysics, what does it mean to say that death is a metaphysical concept? If we first consider Heidegger's view on the

¹³² According to Heidegger, the history of being which is traceable in the work of metaphysical thinkers, falls into four distinct periods: the Greek, the Medieval, the Modern, and the Technological. Throughout these four historical periods, being has become increasingly concealed in the sense that human beings have become increasingly oblivious to the fact that their 'ontic' activities are grounded in a background understanding of being.

¹³³ Rudolph Carnap, "The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language", in *Logical Positivism*, edited by A. J. Ayer (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1959), 80. In Carnap's 1932 essay he criticises Heidegger's writings for being utterly meaningless. Heidegger's response to Carnap, in a series of notes with the title "Überwindung der Metaphysik", is that Carnap's conception of metaphysics will prevent us from understanding that to which the metaphysical tradition has been a response, namely the background understanding of being.

subject, saying that death is metaphysical would mean that the way we understand and relate to death is always guided by a certain inescapable ‘metaphysical’ background understanding of being. That is, all theories and assertions about death – philosophical as well as scientific – refer to a background understanding of being that is being more or less acknowledged. Furthermore, as we can see, this should imply that even Heidegger’s notion of death in *BT* refer to such a background understanding.

Secondly, and put in general terms; saying that death is metaphysical entails that death is outside the reach of human epistemic capacities. In Heideggerian terms this can be translated to the inability to disclose death as it is in itself, which is why death as a phenomenon only can be approached indirectly. Finally, saying that death is metaphysical means that it as a philosophical concept is especially exposed to speculations and projections based on metaphysical background assumptions. This is probably why death always has been an essential part of speculative philosophical systems, such as in theological eschatology or in Eastern religious and philosophical systems, such as Buddhism and Hinduism.

5.2 ‘Metaphysical’ assertions about death

Heidegger insists that his analysis of death is not ‘metaphysical’ in the traditional sense.¹³⁴ That is, whatever is disclosed and explicated about death in *BT* lies within the confines of disclosure of (authentic) Dasein, and is therefore supposedly not based on any groundless or lofty metaphysical speculations. Heidegger asserts the following about the purely non-metaphysical character of his analysis of death:

But our analysis of death remains purely ‘this-wordly’ in so far as it interprets that phenomenon merely in the way in which it *enters into* any particular Dasein as a possibility of its Being. Only when death is conceived in its full ontological essence can we have any methodological assurance in even *asking* what *may be after death*; only then can we do so with meaning and justification. Whether such a question is a possible *theoretical* question at all will not be decided here. The this-worldly ontological interpretation of death takes precedence over any ontical other-worldly speculation. Finally, what might be discussed under the topic of a ‘metaphysics of death’ lies outside the domain of an existential analysis of death.

(*BT* 248)

¹³⁴ Joanna Hodge, *Heidegger and Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 176. In *BT* Heidegger refers to the notion of traditional metaphysics with quotation marks. As Joanna Hodge points out, the difference between ontology and ‘metaphysics’ is that ontology addresses entities in their relation to being, whereas ‘metaphysics’ fails to identify this relation and erases ontological difference.

This quote raises several interesting questions concerning death as a metaphysical concept. First, there is the question of whether phenomenology as a philosophical method is completely non-speculative in its approach to the phenomenon. Is phenomenology metaphysically *neutral* or without metaphysical bearings, or is phenomenology, on the contrary, a *form* of metaphysics itself?¹³⁵ Edmund Husserl describes phenomenology as a purely neutral investigation; the aim of phenomenology is thus to describe and understand the ideal structures of knowledge. In Husserl's view, the general task of phenomenology is to describe that which is given, exactly as it is given, rather than to get lost in metaphysical constructions. Heidegger, however, disagrees with Husserl in that phenomenology as a philosophical method can be performed entirely without presuppositions. Because phenomenology as a method is also hermeneutical it will always carry with it certain presuppositions and background assumptions. The essential question, then, is to what degree Heidegger's analysis of death carries with it 'metaphysical' background assumptions.

Second, Heidegger asserts that death must first be conceived in its full ontological essence, before the classical metaphysical question about the afterlife can even be asked with meaning and justification. But why, we need to ask, should death conceived in its full ontological essence necessarily brings us any closer to an answer to the question of afterlife? Heidegger briefly mentions what he considers to be the traditional metaphysical topics about death; such as how and when death came into the world, and what meaning it can have. He then asserts, correctly in my view, that these questions "presuppose an understanding of Being that lies outside the scope of Dasein's disclosure" (*BT* 248). However, the question is whether a complete this-worldly understanding of death is possible to achieve. Furthermore, is death in "its full ontological essence" non-speculative or metaphysically neutral?

These questions show of us why it is necessary to closely scrutinise Heidegger's claim that his analysis of death is entirely non-metaphysical. Furthermore, as I earlier argued in chapter two, Heidegger's notion of death is a composite of both a 'what' and a 'how'. The 'what' in Heidegger's notion of death thus refers implicitly to the traditional metaphysical understanding of death as the 'end of life'. What is the essential problem

¹³⁵ Zahavi, "Phenomenology and Metaphysics", 18. Zahavi raises the question of whether phenomenology as a philosophical method is metaphysically neutral or without metaphysical bearings. According to Zahavi, to argue that transcendental phenomenology is metaphysically neutral is to make it more lame and tame than it really is. The true paradox is that to hold such a view is exactly to give in to a certain kind of traditional metaphysics.

with this traditional understanding? Typical for the metaphysical model of death – which is by far dominant in the history of philosophy and theology - is that death is posited as a transition to a nonhuman form of reality, whether as physical corruption or metaphysical transcendence in the form of an afterlife.¹³⁶

Now, what I am suggesting is that the ‘what’-part in Heidegger’s definition is more conspicuous than acknowledged by the philosopher himself. Thus, Heidegger not only describes how we should relate to death in order to become authentic; he also determines the ‘how’ or the being-towards somehow in relation to the ‘what’. Hence, I argue that Heidegger’s notion of death is ‘metaphysical’ in accordance with his own understanding of metaphysics as a background understanding of being.

As mentioned, the perhaps most prominent metaphysical background assumption in *BT* is expressed in the assertion “possibility stands higher than actuality”. This background assumption is what constitutes not only Heidegger’s interpretation of death as a possibility, but also his view of Dasein as temporal thrown projection. In addition to this major metaphysical assertion, Heidegger expresses several other views about death that might be characterised as metaphysical. In order to expose the underlying metaphysical dimensions in Heidegger’s notion of death, I will in the following analyse some of his assertions about of death in greater detail.¹³⁷

5.2.1 We are constantly dying

Some of Heidegger’s assertions about death are particularly meant to disclose it as a phenomenon *of* life. First, Heidegger lets the term “dying” (*Sterben*) “stand for that way of Being in which Dasein is towards its death” (*BT* 247). In a similar vein, he asserts: “Factically, Dasein is dying as long as it exists, but proximally and for the most part, it does so by way of falling” (*BT* 251). Furthermore, he asserts: “Dasein, as thrown Being-in-the-world, has in every case already been delivered over to its death. In being towards its death, Dasein is dying factically and indeed constantly, as long as it has not yet come to its demise” (*BT* 259). The thread running through these assertions is the view that

¹³⁶ Ireton, *An Ontological study of Death*, 3.

¹³⁷ I am well aware of the danger of analysing Heidegger’s characterisations of death as isolated assertions taken out of context. This is a tactic often used by Heidegger’s critics, in order to expose weaknesses and logical blunders in the text. Paul Edwards and Herman Philipse, two of Heidegger’s perhaps fiercest contemporary critics, have in a similar way analysed many of Heidegger’s assertions about death, and rather violently tried to pick them apart. My intention here, however, is not first and foremost to criticise Heidegger’s ontological assertions about death, but to expose them as ‘metaphysical’.

death is not simply the end of life, but rather that we are ‘constantly dying’ as long as we exist.

The assertion that we are constantly dying has been severely criticised by certain commentators. Philipse argues that the assertion that we are dying all the time is nothing but a persuasive redefinition of the word “dying”.¹³⁸ Since the only sense in which death can be a mode of existing is death as “dying”, as opposed to death as being-dead, this yields Heidegger’s conclusion that we are dying as long as we exist. In Philipse’s view this conclusion is wrong, simply because Heidegger through his redefinition confuses our attitude toward our own death with dying itself. Moreover, as Paul Edwards points out, Heidegger’s doctrine that we are constantly dying certainly sounds like a new and spectacular discovery that appears to conflict with commonly accepted beliefs. However, this appearance is deceptive.¹³⁹ For Edwards, Heidegger is just playing out platitudes and verbal tricks on us; in reality he adds nothing new to our knowledge or understanding of death by asserting that we are constantly dying. On both Philipse and Edwards’ accounts the problem with Heidegger’s assertion that we are constantly dying seems to be a matter of both semantic and logical confusion.

It is quite obvious that Heidegger by this assertion does *not* mean to say that we are in a perpetual state of mortal illness, or that we are constantly dying in the permanent or irreversible sense, as in demise or perishing.¹⁴⁰ Rather, what Heidegger means to express is that we are constantly ‘dying’ in the existential sense. As we saw several examples of (in chapter two), there are several interpretations of existential death. In my view, Mulhall’s interpretation hits the mark when he interprets ‘dying’ as a matter of stripping out false necessities, thereby coming properly attuned to the real modalities of human existence.¹⁴¹ Thus, to be constantly dying is a way of relating to life, in the sense that there is no moment of one’s existence in which one’s being is not at issue. On this account, there seems to be a deep sense of urgency, as if every moment of one’s life counts with the utmost importance.

¹³⁸ Philipse, *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Being*, . Philipse concludes that by redefining the word “dying” Heidegger has not solved any of the methodological problems he has conjured up, and that it is not the discovery of a new phenomenon: death in life.

¹³⁹ Paul Edwards, *Heidegger’s Confusions* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 74-75.

¹⁴⁰ The irony here is that the assertion that we are constantly dying fits remarkably well with a scientific or physical view of the incessant processes of change and decay in the body. These biological processes start from the moment we are born; physical transformation and decay is thus one of the constituent elements of not only the human body, but of everything that exists physically.

¹⁴¹ Mulhall, “Human mortality”, 305-06.

Now, what kind of background understanding of being is expressed in the assertion that we are constantly dying? First of all, I think it can be argued that this assertion reveals a profoundly secular understanding of human existence. Why is that? Even though Heidegger in *BT* never explicitly expresses this view, he seems to think that human existence is utterly finite in the sense that there is no afterlife or no saviour God. Thus, since there is only one life and accordingly a limited span of time and possibilities, every moment of our finite existence is conferred with an immense importance. If this is correct, it not only explains what is meant by the assertion that we are constantly dying in the existential sense; it also tells us what Heidegger's critics are missing out on.

The assumption that we are utterly finite beings is what makes the assertion that we are constantly dying 'metaphysical', in the sense that it fits nicely into a secular worldview. However, what we need to ask is whether it is actually true that we are constantly dying. The irony here is that this assertion concurs with the scientific-biological view of the ongoing processes of transformation and decay in the body. These processes are initiated from the moment we are born, and physical change and decay are constituent elements of not only the human body, but of everything that exists physically. Thus, in the physical or biological sense we are indeed dying constantly as long as we exist. But is this also true of existential death? This question, I believe, can be answered both affirmatively and negatively. For the most part, Dasein is constantly dying because it is falling, and thus it has "...always decided itself in one way or another (*BT* 259). However, if my earlier argument to refute the necessity of 'falling' holds, then it is at least conceivable that a person will not, as a matter of predetermination, undergo a progressive closing down of possibilities during her lifetime. Rather, with a transcending movement, new and richer possibilities can progressively open up as long as one exists. This view implies that one can be more 'alive', so to speak, towards the end of one's life than at the beginning of it.¹⁴²

5.2.2 Death as certain and indefinite

The second of Heidegger's assertions that is up for analysis consists of two separate statements about death. On the one hand, Heidegger asserts that death is certain: "So far as one knows, all men die", and that death is "an undeniable fact of experience" (*BT*

¹⁴² Dreyfus, foreword to White's *Time and Death*, xxi-xxii. This is in essence Dreyfus' claim that the constant closing of possibilities could not be the kind of ontological dying Heidegger has in view. On the contrary, as Dreyfus points out, possibilities are also always opening up for Dasein as part of its constitution as a thrown projection.

257). Now, the question is; what kind of death is Heidegger referring to when he asserts that death is certain? The simple claim that demise or perishing is certain seems hard, if not impossible to disprove. Since there is no known example in human history to contradict it, we should expect this claim to be true with a very high degree of (at least) inductive certainty. Thus, Heidegger asserts “To be certain of an entity means to *hold* it for true as something true” (BT 256). However, Heidegger makes the point that even though death is probable in the highest degree for every man, it is not ‘unconditionally’ certain. Thus, ‘only’ empirical certainty may be attributed to death, but this fact, Heidegger adds, “is in no way decisive to the certainty of death” (BT 257).

There is according to Heidegger something inherently wrong with the everyday understanding of this certainty, in that *das Man* only “*knows* about the certainty of death, and yet is not authentically certain of one’s own” (BT 258). In this way, *das Man* covers up what is peculiar about death’s certainty, namely that it is possible at any moment. In other words, along with the certainty of death goes the indefiniteness of its ‘when’: death’s characteristic way of being certain is that it is possible at any moment.¹⁴³ Death’s character as a distinctively impending possibility is thus what *das Man* covers up and evades in fear.

The assertion about death’s certainty as indefiniteness shows, more than anything else, the composite or double nature of Heidegger’s notion of death. Because *das Man* holds a distorted view of death as an event in the distant future, this distorted view must also be what Heidegger tries to correct by pointing to death’s certainty as indefiniteness. This becomes evident when we place the assertion about death’s certainty as indefiniteness, together with the first assertion that we are constantly dying. If it is true that we are constantly dying in the existential sense, it would amount to a straightforward contradiction to say that existential death is also indefinite and therefore can happen at any moment. If something is already happening constantly as we speak, then it cannot also happen at any indefinite moment in time, simply because it is *already* happening. This is the main reason why the notion of death’s indefiniteness refers to the ordinary conception of death as the moment of demise.

Why is this problem so important to solve, and in what way is it related to metaphysics? First, as shown above, if Heidegger is not referring to two kinds of death (the ordinary and the existential), then the sum of his characterisations of death amounts

¹⁴³ Heidegger’s notion of death’s indefiniteness here resembles the old adage *mors certa, hora incerta*: “death is sure to come about, but its when remains indeterminate”.

to a contradiction. Second and more importantly, the fact that Heidegger refers to the ordinary conception of death as indefinite opens up for the possibility that *das Man* might be correct in its interpretation of death after all. To see why, we first need to inquire more about the ‘metaphysical’ background assumptions behind Heidegger’s view of death as indefinite.

Now, the authentic and true understanding of death’s certainty is that it is indefinite and thus possible at any moment. But is this really how death ‘acts’? A useful distinction can be whether it is logically or empirically possible that death is indefinite.¹⁴⁴ The logical possibility of death’s indefiniteness seems to entail that any person, even the young and healthy, are at risk of dying at every moment of their lives. Death thus strikes suddenly, without as much as a sign of warning. If we begin to contemplate the full implication of this view, however, we soon realise that it is not a self-evident or trivial truth about death. Rather, the logical possibility of death as indefinite is founded on a set of background assumptions that pertain to a specific worldview or outlook on reality. One such background assumption can be that things in life, such as illnesses, accidents, bad luck, but also fortunate events, happen randomly. On this picture death is thus the *ultimate* accident, striking blindly and randomly.¹⁴⁵

What about the empirical possibility of death’s indefiniteness? From an immanent human perspective people certainly die suddenly and for no seemingly explainable reason. Sudden deaths are particularly hard to explain when it comes to accidents or incidents that have seemingly no traceable cause or origin in the diseased person. We see this happen all the time, and the indefiniteness of death thus seems to verify itself repeatedly as an unavoidable part of how ‘reality’ is constituted. Interestingly, most of Heideggerian commentators seem to agree upon the view of death’s indefiniteness without hesitation, as if it were a self-evident truth. The seeming obviousness of this assertion, however, reinforces the possibility of it being ‘metaphysical’ in the sense that certain background assumptions of reality are taken for granted. As in the case of the first

¹⁴⁴ Philipse, *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Being*, 366. Philipse brings up the distinction between logical and empirical possibility of death in his critical discussion of Heidegger’s notion of death as a possibility. He argues that the logical possibility that we may die any moment is a trivial truth. The empirical possibility that we may die any moment is true or false depending on one’s background assumptions.

¹⁴⁵ James P. Carse, *Death and Existence: A Conceptual History of Human Mortality* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1980), 41-3. The historian Carse has made an interesting comparison between the Epicurean view of death (and life) and modern science. On the Epicurean view both life and death is random; death thus strikes as an accident and must be conceived merely as random dispersion of the physical body. As Carse points out, such a view of death is inimical to friendship and social bonds and creates in the person an isolating detachment from all that is of consequence of in human existence.

assertion, death as indefinite points to a background understanding of being that is profoundly secular.

It might be pointed out that Heidegger does not really mean to say that death can in fact strike at any moment. Rather, what he tries to show is how we should relate authentically to our own death by facing up to it *as if* it were a constant impending threat. Heidegger is correct in thinking that death should not be denied or evaded in fear, which is perhaps the most typical response to the thought of death. The question, however, is why we should relate to death as if it were a constant threat if this is not death's 'true nature', so to speak. If death is not really an impending possibility, but rather happens from a specific but perhaps unknown chain of causes, then why should we relate to it as if it could strike at any moment? My point here is that there might be a middle ground between the fearful evasion of death and the constant facing up to it as a possibility.

5.2.3 Death's finality and the possibility of an afterlife

As earlier shown, Heidegger insists that his analysis of death lies firmly within the scope of Dasein's disclosure, and that it as such has nothing to do with metaphysical 'other-worldly' speculations about death. In this respect, Heidegger remains silent on the most characteristic metaphysical questions, such as the meaning of death, the possibility of afterlife or survival, etc. As shown above, the first assertion point back to a secular background understanding of human beings as utterly finite. However, strangely enough, Heidegger also seems to be willing to leave the metaphysical question of an afterlife undecided, in that he asserts that death must first be conceived in its full ontological essence before there is any methodological assurance in asking about what may be after death. There thus seems to be a straightforward contradiction in Heidegger's thinking about death's finality and the afterlife.¹⁴⁶ Philipse argues that Heidegger stresses that death is a total extinction, in that death does not leave us any possibilities of existing *tout court*.¹⁴⁷ Thus, Heidegger asserts: "Death, as possibility, gives Dasein nothing to be 'actualised', nothing which Dasein, as actual could itself be. It is the possibility of the impossibility of every way of comporting oneself towards anything, of every way of existing" (*BT* 262). The contradiction arises, because Heidegger does not explicitly deny the possibility of an afterlife. Philipse contends that this is not only a major inconsistency

¹⁴⁶ See, for example: Edwards, *Heidegger's Confusions*, 117-118.

¹⁴⁷ Philipse, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being*, 370

on Heidegger's part, but that he also moves beyond the epistemic borders set by his own phenomenological method.¹⁴⁸

The critique raised against Heidegger on this point is not entirely unwarranted. It is simply contradictory to on the one hand hold the view that human beings are utterly finite, while on the other hand holding the view that there is a possible afterlife. It is also contradictory to hold the view that the moment of death is indefinite, while at the same time holding the view that we are constantly dying, and by that referring to the same death. These contradictory views about the 'nature' of death cannot simultaneously be true, in that they zero each other out. However, what Philipse's critique misses out on is why these contradictions arise from Heidegger's explication of the phenomenon of death. In my view, this happens because there seems to be a contradiction in terms of the background assumptions in Heidegger's analysis.

When referring to death's terminal nature, Heidegger can be interpreted as saying that death does not leave us any possibilities of existing *in this world* only. There might, however, be possibilities for a continued existence in another world or dimension, without us being able to verify or disclose them. Heidegger is, in my view, correct in keeping the possibilities of an afterlife open in that this is the most appropriate thing to do for him as a phenomenologist. Not until the day it has been completely verified that there is no such thing as survival of death *in any form* whatsoever, can this question be closed for good.

5.3 Metaphysical death

In the previous section I analysed some of Heidegger's assertions about death and tried to expose them as 'metaphysical' in accordance with Heidegger's own understanding of the term. With regard to most of Heidegger's descriptions and characterisations of death, I believe that they are meaningful as they stand. Some of these assertions can even come across as platitudes about death. However, the crucial point with the assertions that have been up for analysis is that seem to lead to an aporia, in that there is no way to decide

¹⁴⁸ Philipse, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being*, 371. Philipse argues that Heidegger has no right to pretend that his analysis of death is compatible with a doctrine of survival after death, and he thus seems to think that Heidegger's assertions about the terminal nature of death are entirely unqualified. Philipse, however, bases his critique on certain 'metaphysical' background assumptions that are unqualified in the same way. These are background assumptions about death that Philipse shares with most philosophers in the analytical tradition. Thus, his argument runs: "By studying our being in the world we can discover many conclusive grounds for rejecting the doctrine of an afterlife. Our mental life turns out to be dependent on bodily functions, so that, when our body rots away or is destroyed by fire after death, no possibility of mental life can remain".

whether they are ‘true’ or ‘false’ in isolation from the background understanding of being they emerge from. That is, these assertions about death can only be disclosed as ‘true’ from a specific set of metaphysical background assumptions.

In essence, the problem with Heidegger’s notion of death is that it refers to incompatible or conflicting background understandings of being. While the first two assertions referred to a secularised understanding wherein there is no room for a continuance of individual existence after death, the last assertion seems to leave the question of an afterlife undecided. How can Heidegger allow this to happen? Why does he not simply deny the possibility of a continued existence after the moment of death? As John D. Caputo points out, it is “clear to everyone” but the most fanatic Heideggerians that Heidegger is Hellenising and secularising a fundamentally biblical conception of the history of salvation.¹⁴⁹ Thus, the theological presuppositions of *BT* are unmistakable, and it turns on the existential motif of the call to personal conversion.¹⁵⁰

What we have discovered behind the scenes of Heidegger’s analysis of death is a fascinating, but also a rather confusing fusion of background understandings of being. On the one hand, there is clearly an ambiguous, almost hostile and demythologising attitude towards Christianity and theological thinking. At the same time, some of the deepest religious intuitions and ideas about the significance of death are being retained. Then, there is also the possibility of an afterlife kept open, or at least not explicitly denied. This happens because Heidegger clearly is inspired by different theological sources in *BT*, and because his thinking about death is inextricably involved in the Christian tradition.¹⁵¹ The composition or fusion of partly incompatible background understandings of being is, in my view, the explanation for why Heidegger’s notion of death creates so much confusion, bafflement, debate, and why it is so difficult to grasp or to accept.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ John D. Caputo, “Heidegger and Theology”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, second edition, edited by Charles Guignon, 326-344 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 336.

¹⁵⁰ See also: John D. Caputo, “People of God, people of being: the theological presuppositions of Heidegger’s path of thought”, in *Appropriating Heidegger*, edited by James E. Faulconer & Mark A. Wrathall, 85-100 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 87-88. Caputo here argues that Heidegger reads the texts of the ancient Greek philosophers *religiously*, or as texts that demand our self-transformation.

¹⁵¹ Ireton, *An Ontological Study of Death*, 261-264. As Ireton points out, it is only logical that Heidegger’s notion of anticipation of death has its origin in theological discourse, given his studies of Kierkegaard, Augustin, and Luther.

¹⁵² Hodge, *Heidegger and Ethics*, 172-173. As Hodge points out, the problem for many of Heidegger’s readers is the reluctance to accept the importance for Heidegger of the Christian tradition, and of the concepts and terms that Heidegger derives from it.

As earlier mentioned, Heidegger thinks that the problem with twentieth century analytical philosophy is that it tries to ignore metaphysics. It is not surprising then, that most of Heidegger's critics either have a strong affinity with, or belong to the so-called analytical branch of modern philosophy.¹⁵³ The contemporary analytical discussion of death has two characteristic features. First of all, they share many of the same background assumptions as with the natural sciences (such as naturalism, materialism, reductionism, and positivism), leading many analytical thinkers to, for example, simply presume that death is the final end of life on par with the Epicurean doctrine.¹⁵⁴ Or, when this conception is not simply presupposed, it is more often than not, argued for.¹⁵⁵ Contemporary analytical discussions of death are often explicitly anti-metaphysical, in Heidegger's sense of not acknowledging or recognising their metaphysical background assumptions. Typically, analytical thinkers tend to try to solve the questions and puzzles about death without touching upon the larger 'metaphysical' understanding they emerge from.¹⁵⁶

We have seen that Heidegger thinks that traditional metaphysics needs to be criticised and eventually overcome, and that this can only be accomplished by an engagement with the metaphysical past. This kind of engagement is what the analytical philosopher typically lacks. And, such an engagement is arguably what Heidegger attempts to carry out in his own analysis of death. The expressed goal of eliminating metaphysics brings us back to the reasons for why it has been important to expose the metaphysical 'nature' of Heidegger's notion of death. There is, in my view, reason to doubt that Heidegger has succeeded in 'destroying' the metaphysics in his own thinking. This is not only because there seems to be an unacknowledged contradiction in terms of different background understandings of being, but also because Heidegger claims that his

¹⁵³ Mark A. Wrathall, "Philosophy, thinkers, and Heidegger's place in the history of being", in *Appropriating Heidegger*. Edited by James E. Faulconer & Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 9-10. Wrathall presents the differences between Heidegger's and the analytical view of metaphysics.

¹⁵⁴ Philipse, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being*, 365. Being a typical example of this tendency, Philipse asserts: "Without a doubt, the best phenomenology of death was given by Epicurus".

¹⁵⁵ See, for example, Geoffrey Scarre, *Death* (Stocksfield: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2007), 15, 18. Scarre bluntly presumes that death is personal extinction, and that the various ethical and existential questions that the prospect of death raises are most profitably viewed from this perspective. Scarre also points out that most contemporary philosophy of mind is deeply inhospitable to notions of an afterlife, and poses challenges to the coherence and credibility of those notions that have not been, and seems unlikely to be met.

¹⁵⁶ See John Martin Fischer (ed.), *The Metaphysics of Death* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), for an overview of typical philosophical dilemmas about death within the analytical tradition: 1. The rational status of the fear of death; 2. The harm or evil of death; and 3. The tediousness of immortality.

analysis of death in *BT* is an entirely ‘this-worldly’ ontological explication of the phenomenon. My discussion has shown, however, that even the alleged ‘this-worldly’ assertions about death emerge from certain implicit metaphysical background assumptions. In other words, the concept of death is not metaphysical merely in the sense of causing the traditional metaphysical questions about what happens after the moment of death, the meaning of death, etc. Rather, the whole concept - from bottom to top - is metaphysical. Thus, every assertion made about death point back to and is intimately connected to metaphysical background assumptions about being. Furthermore, regardless of which methodological approach, death remains opaque; even the phenomenological approach leaves death in a cloud of mysteries. This raises the question of whether metaphysics can ever be ‘eliminated’ or overcome.

5.4 Death’s full significance: a question of time and belief?

The metaphysical ‘nature’ of death accentuates and reinforces the theme of death’s significance for human existence. The importance of this question becomes clearer when we take into reconsideration the possibility of death’s utter non-significance. Strictly speaking, the idea that death has any significance whatsoever for human existence may turn out to be pure nonsense. Thus, at one extreme end of the scale, death can be found to have no importance whatsoever. As the stoic philosopher Epicurus (340-270 BCE) stated over two millennia ago, death is ‘nothing’: “Accustom yourself to the belief that death is of no concern to us, since all good and evil lie in sensation and sensation ends in death. While we exist death is not present and when death is present we no longer exist”.¹⁵⁷ Epicurus denies the significance of death on the grounds that it is ‘nothing’ in a straightforward sense. The human soul is nothing more than an arrangement of atoms, which on death disperse. The agent of death is thus the very nature of the dispersal of matter itself. In this sense, the Epicurean doctrine of death shares many of the similar background assumptions as with twentieth-century scientific thought.¹⁵⁸

In contrast to the Epicurean doctrine, death has great significance for Heidegger as the key to Dasein’s authenticity. Death in *BT* also has the heuristic significance of revealing Dasein as a temporal and a finite being. Being-towards-death is thus a transcending movement of self-authentication. However, the moment authentic

¹⁵⁷ Epicurus, *The Extant Remains*, translated by Cyril Bailey (Oxford: Clarendon, 1926), 85.

¹⁵⁸ Carse, *Death and Existence*, 36, 44, 50. Carse points out the affinity between the Epicurean doctrine and modern science in detail.

transcendence does not last, in that Dasein can never completely transcend its own facticity or its worldly limitations. Here, beneath the understanding of the inescapable human limitations paired with the simultaneous quest for transcendence, we are again faced with the double nature and the ambiguity in Heidegger's analysis.

From a secular point of view, it can be argued that Heidegger is making too much out of death, by turning it into the focal point of human existence. When death is portrayed as the singular most important phenomenon, it is also being glorified and upheld almost like a fetish.¹⁵⁹ Death fetishism thus epitomises the heroic and single-minded way of facing up to the one essential fact that we are all eventually going to die. As a fetish, death is being converted into the meaning of life, or into the ultimate test of life. As mentioned, existential death can take on this over-dimensional significance because there is a fusion of different background assumptions in Heidegger's analysis. The religious idea of death's significance as the gateway to an afterlife is transformed into the existential idea that we are constantly dying, incompatibly paired with the view that death is a constant, impending threat. In Heidegger's analysis, it is thus not the moment of death or what happens after death that is the focus of attention; rather, for him every moment in life is a moment of death, which explains why death in *BT* is bestowed with such an immense analytical importance.

From the perspective of human capacity for transcendence it can, on the contrary, be argued that Heidegger is making too little out of death. By explicating Dasein as structurally predetermined to being inauthentic, a permanent state of authenticity is out of reach for it. As Heidegger points out, there are factual limitations to human existence, which can never be fully transcended. Thus, for Heidegger a complete freedom in the Sartrean sense of overthrowing all facticity is a mere illusion. However, as shown in the previous chapter, it is in principle possible for Dasein to attain a lasting state of authenticity if the following two conditions are met: first, that the structural necessity of *das Man* is removed; and second, that the ecstasie of the present or Being-alongside is understood as a movement of transcendence, rather than merely as a movement of falling. Now, based on these conditions, what is the full significance of death? In my view, death's full significance amounts to a complete ethical transformation of the individual within a single lifetime.

¹⁵⁹ Robert C. Solomon, "Death fetishism, morbid solipsism", in *Death and Philosophy*, edited by Jeff Malpas & Robert C. Solomon, 152-176 (London: Routledge, 2002), 162.

As I argued in the previous chapter, it can be shown that a lasting and non-deteriorating state of authenticity, paired with the possibility for moral perfection, is part of the human constitution. However, in the real world such a state is seldom reached. Only in extremely rare cases will a person manage to remain whole and authentic, uncorrupted and unlevelled, and thereby fully morally fulfilled, *while* being in the world with all of its negative influences and confusions. In most cases, there are simply not enough possibilities, resources, or freedom for us as human beings to reach or maintain such a state within this lifetime.

The undeniable ‘ontic’ limitations and inequality amongst human beings in terms of available possibilities, resources, and time for reaching their full human potential is, in my view, a plausible explanation for why there historically has been an urgent need for the belief in an afterlife. Thus, the religious doctrines of a continued individual existence, either as an immortal soul or as a reincarnated individual, are supposed to give some consolation by satisfying this need. Now, as earlier mentioned, from a phenomenological point of view Heidegger is correct in keeping the possibility of an afterlife open. To keep this possibility open is, in fact, the philosophically and scientifically pertinent thing to do as long as the opposite possibility – that of death’s absolute and non-reversible finality - has not yet been completely and definitely verified. There is, however, an even deeper reason for why the belief in a possible afterlife is best kept open. This is so, because without this possibility human existence and the worldly conditions we are all thrown into, comes across as a giant lottery with few lucky winners. Thus, the prospect of becoming a real, authentic person, who seizes upon life’s possibilities with wisdom and moral elevation, is not only based on the person’s wish and effort, but also in the final instance on a good portion of luck and fortunate circumstances.

In Heidegger’s analysis there is an apparent lack of consideration for these ontic limitations, in that he seems to think that the authentic moment wherein the individual Dasein can transcend its worldly limitations and become whole, is something that in principle is available for everyone. A contrasting view to Heidegger’s is Kierkegaard’s, who thinks that the self must make an absolute commitment in eternity in order to become authentic. Thus, the authentic moment implies the notion of eternity and the belief in a God. In this chapter I hope to have shown that there is a possible middle ground between these two philosophers relationship to time, or to finitude versus eternity. We might not need God or eternity in order to become authentic. The authentic moment of transcendence, however, can be extended and last for a lifetime.

Epilogue

This master thesis started off by introducing three interconnected themes about death. Through various approaches to Heidegger's notions of death and authenticity in *BT*, I have tried to accentuate and elaborate the philosophical importance and relevance of these three themes about death. I have also tried to show that all the themes are implicitly present in Heidegger's analysis of death.

As mentioned in the main introduction, the fundamental theoretical purpose of this master thesis has been to question the view that metaphysics can or should be overcome. In the final chapter I argued that because of the way certain phenomena are constituted – and amongst them, most prominently death - it is doubtful that a complete elimination of metaphysics is possible, or even desirable. Death is a phenomenon that has the interesting double character of being concretely present in the world, as something we can both perceive and relate to. At the same time, death is opaque, inaccessible, and impossible to acquire definite knowledge of. In these senses, death is both of and *out of* this world, so to speak. We all know about death, and we can watch it happen to other people and living beings. However, we cannot really know what death is in itself, despite the fact that death always has been, and will always be an inescapable part of our existence.

Furthermore, the way we relate to death, either in a conscious or in an unconscious and passive way, organise our lives more than we are usually willing to acknowledge. When the suicidal bomber prepares to die for what he or she thinks is a just cause, it is often accompanied with the strong conviction that such an act will bring about blissful immortality on his or her part. When the Buddhist monk or nun prepares for death through the rigors of a monastic life, it is accompanied with the belief that he or she will reincarnate into a higher existence, or attain nirvana, the state of full liberation from rebirths. In lives such as these, death and the way it is related to, has taken on a direct and straightforward significance for the choices that are taken and the actions that are made.

For most people, their life is more implicitly affected by death. For example, death plays a significant role in the life of the secular individual, or for the non-believer who thinks that there is only one lifespan available for him or her. For such a person, every moment in life might take on the utmost importance, due to the realisation that

there is a limitation of time and possibilities. Thus, due to the basic conviction that we are finite, it becomes urgent to make the most out of this single life. This then, seems to be the essence of the Heideggerian view of death's significance for human existence. In other cases, the non-believer's life might take on an absurd dimension wherein nothing seems to matter anymore, with boredom and depression as possible consequences.

When it comes to the question of death's significance and how it affects our lives, what is it that unites both the believer and the non-believer? In my view, what unites them is the fact they are both 'believers', so to speak. By this I mean to say that both the believer and the non-believer base their lives on certain deep, and in most cases unacknowledged 'metaphysical' assumptions about death. However, whatever *we* choose to think or believe about death will not change or affect what death is. Death is what it is, regardless of our beliefs or convictions about it. Furthermore, it is not possible for us to have it both ways. For example, the assumption that life is utterly finite and the assumption that there is an afterlife cannot be simultaneously true. Hence, the human need to *choose* a fundamental belief about death. To choose a fundamental belief about death is, in fact, what most people do based on their implicit background assumptions about being. This choice, however, is rarely given much conscious thought or consideration.

As readers may have noticed, Heidegger's characterisation of death as non-relational has not really been discussed in detail in this thesis. Heidegger describes death as Dasein's ownmost possibility and as non-relational, because for him, the process of becoming authentic consists in movement away from other people and from the levelling sources of society. I think that Heidegger, to a certain extent, is correct in making a connection between death and the process of individuation. By facing up to death, we can as individuals become more of that which we already are, so to speak. However, in this sense death is not merely non-relational, it is also deeply relational. Death is that phenomenon in human existence that we must all eventually face, and as such it unites us to a mutual human fate. Furthermore, as shown above, death unites both the believer and the non-believer in the sense that none of them really *knows* what death is, or what lies ahead of it. In this sense, death makes us all into believers. Finally, death leads all human beings to the same fundamental question. This question is, put in Heidegger's terms: what is the meaning of our being?

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