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Heidegger and the Problem of Modern Moral Philosophy

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by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation in loving memory of Naomi Altman and Norman Buben.

I must also make a special point of expressing my gratitude to my family for their selfless love, immeasurable generosity, and constant support. My Zayde, James, has instilled in me the meaning of my Jewish heritage and a sense of responsibility in belonging to that heritage. My parents, Heather and Ben, have taught me the importance of commitment and dedication, and my brother, Rudy, has kept me humble with his courage and bravery both in military and civilian life. This dissertation could not have been written without them. In addition, I am indebted to Carol and Craig Trudgen, whose genuine compassion and loving encouragement have contributed greatly to my recent philosophical endeavors. Finally, and most of all, there is an inexpressible debt of gratitude to Adam Buben. He, more than anyone I know, is an exemplar of what matters in life, living with a deep sense of responsibility and earnest commitment, confronting the inescapable limits and vulnerability of human life, accepting ambiguity and remaining open to difference. His steady presence has been the greatest gift in my life.

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ABSTRACT

The guiding question of this project is, "Why does it count as a critique of Heidegger that he does not defend a particular moral position?" A standard criticism levied against Heidegger is that, since he has nothing positive to say about post-Enlightenment moral theory, he has nothing to contribute to moral philosophy, and this marks his greatest shortcoming as a philosopher. Why is there a demand for Heidegger, or any other philosopher, to theorize about morality, when we do not have this expectation for, say, aesthetics, theology, or various other regional domains of human life? Why should we expect Heidegger to theorize about what humans must be like in order to care about and engage in moral thought? Answering these questions involves an extended discussion of ways of understanding ethics in Western philosophical thought, as well as, Heidegger's own view of ethics.

I begin with a detailed exposition of the paradigmatic shift from premodern ethics, as it is based on an understanding of *ethos* (a form of life with its practical and normative dimensions), to modern conceptions of ethics based on Enlightenment (1750-1850) individualism and the fact-value distinction. This account of the history of ethics in philosophy attempts to demonstrate that the transition to modernity is marked by a schism between Being (ontology) and Ought (ethics) which makes any post-Enlightenment justification of ethics impossible (and helps us see why Heidegger always scoffs at the project of working out an ethics). My primary goal is to prove that Heidegger's appropriation of Aristotle's thought not only challenges the underlying metaphysical assumptions of mainstream moral philosophy, but also shows us a way back to the

unity of ethics and ontology. My claim is that *Being and Time* is an ethics in the same way *Nicomachean Ethics* is an ethics: both are based on an understanding of the human *ethos* and attempt to show what is characteristic of a life that is structured by the "ought." This argument sets the stage for uncovering the underlying presuppositions governing two prominent objections raised against Heidegger: the existentialist and nihilistic critiques. I find that these critiques are grounded on the assumption of "ontological individualism." In contrast to this individualistic ontology of the social world, I argue that, for Heidegger, individuality is not an ontological or biological given; rather, it is a relatively rare accomplishment of members of a linguistic community. What is important, in Heidegger's view, is that the *ethos* is the ontological bedrock of ethics. The *ethos* does not offer us universal principles or morals rules of the kind modern morality seeks, but it does provide paths, ways of being, and possibilities for living meaningful lives. In the end, all we have are understandings of life in certain domains (art, religion, love, etc.) that provide character ideals that, together with meaningful goals and projects for the whole of our lives, make possible a flourishing *ethos*.

My secondary goal is to demonstrate that Heidegger undercuts the uncritical presuppositions of much of mainstream moral philosophy and provides an alternative account of ethics that picks up the stick from the other end. I formulate my thesis as an extension of the recent scholarship on Heidegger's work, arguing that Heidegger's emphasis on the human *ethos* puts forth a proper way of dwelling and Being-at-home within the current of the historical essence of a community. What is original about Heidegger's post-humanist ethics is that it denies the modern Being-Ought distinction and calls us to be ready and prepared to be claimed by Being. Refusing to give an absolute position to anthropomorphism, Heidegger's ethics serves as an attempt to specify what it is to be fully human in the sense of being a respondent who receives

an understanding of Being and has to own up to the task of being claimed by Being. If I am correct, then it is a mistake to judge Heidegger's ethics according to whether he succeeds at formulating a list of responsibilities, rights, and obligations of individuals. Whereas modern moral theory is concerned with providing impartial and value-free guidelines and principles for individual behavior, Heidegger is asking about the conditions for the possibility of transforming how one lives. This puts the burden of proof on those who think there is something important about moral theory. The onus of proof rests with those who want to claim that a right way to be human exists and that there is an absolute, unchanging, timeless ground for understanding the right.

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

Many commentators on the work of Martin Heidegger think that Heidegger neglects

ethics. The standard criticism is that, since Heidegger has nothing positive to say about ethics, he

has nothing to contribute to modern moral philosophy, and this marks his greatest shortcoming

as a philosopher. Two prominent criticisms of Heidegger's position in moral philosophy

motivate this standard criticism contending that the elements in Heidegger's project of

fundamental ontology that are anti-ethical or, at best, morally ambiguous. The first criticism

holds that Heidegger's phenomenological descriptions of everydayness and authenticity ignore

morally relevant details of the individual's obligations to others. On this view, Heidegger's

neglect of the obligations one owes to others precludes practical forms of moral responsibility.

The second holds that Heidegger's account of the conditions for the possibility of being an

authentic agent rests on an exceptional and eccentric condition that has been detached from the

social world. According to this critique, Heidegger is insensitive to the normative dimensions of

moral-political modes of existence.

The purpose of my investigation is twofold. First, I try to uncover the underlying

assumptions in these objections raised against Heidegger's attempt to put in question the

uncritical presuppositions of traditional ethical theories. Specifically, I find that most critiques of

Heidegger's ethics (or his lack thereof) depend on the generally accepted assumption in moral

philosophy that human beings are essentially self-encapsulated, rational subjects contingently

subject to the practices and normative guidelines of the social world. The demand for moral philosophy is to provide rules and principles that prescribe and proscribe the behavior of autonomous individuals in a way that is justified. Second, I try to show that Heidegger's appropriation of Aristotelian ethics not only provides a diagnosis of the pervasive individualism in mainstream ethical theories, but also offers an alternative conception of ethics as the condition for the possibility of ontology.

Ontology is the branch of traditional metaphysics that tries to clarify our beliefs about what it is to *be*. It is assumed that there is an underlying structure of beliefs, a framework of understanding that guides our thoughts and actions, enabling us to make rationally deliberate decisions and to act in a coherent way. Ontology attempts to clarify and articulate these basic assumptions in a more rigorous, systematic, well-grounded way. Ontology, defined in the broad sense of the question of Being, is the attempt to grasp the big picture, to understand why things are the way they are, and to get a handle on how things hang together. "[B]ecause the question of being, the striving for an understanding of being, is the basic determinant of [human] existence," Heidegger says, the question of what it means to be, which is at its core a question about the meaning of life, "is not arbitrary and not applied to man externally, but is more or less stirring in man insofar as he exists at all as human, and because human Dasein takes the question over, as it were, along with human existence, this question has, as a burgeoning problem, its own necessity."[1] Ontology can be seen as a rigorous, open-minded, and thoughtful attempt to ask the big questions. Who am I? What is the meaning of life? How should I live? Grappling with questions about what it means to be is a task, an issue that "grows from the soil" of the Being of Being-there (Dasein) in the midst of the dynamic unfolding of life. It "breaks out from human

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[1] Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* (henceforth abbreviated as "MFL"), trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984), 15.

Dasein," and presents itself as the "sole task" of being human (Heidegger MFL, 16). In other words, to be human is to care about what it means to be human. As we live our lives, we care about where our lives are going, what our lives surmount to, and what our lives have become. Ontology attempts to clarify that which determines and places into question the Being of human Dasein, who is the being that asks the question about what it means to be.

One thing ontology can do is make explicit the generally unnoticed all-encompassing sense of what it is to be shared by a socio-historical community. This shared and inescapable sense-making context, which Heidegger refers to as a "horizon," allows what-is to show forth as meaningful in some way. Stated in technical philosophical jargon, our basic understanding of what it is to be is determined by the Being of the totality of what-is, which defines *what* entities are (traditionally called "essence") and *that* entities are (traditionally called "existence"). In this sense, the Being of the totality of what-is determines what standards should be used in evaluating beliefs, practices, values, actions, and forms of life. For example, "scientists who study a certain field have to presuppose certain things about the Being of the entities they are studying. (Here we are using the word 'Being' where we might also use 'nature' or 'essence')."[2] Biologists ask about the nature of entities that are alive. Their research presupposes an understanding of what it is to be alive. Mathematics is a "regional science"[3] that takes as self-evident what it is to be a number, and physicists operate within a self-evident understanding of what it is to be real, what counts as reality. "Physicists *take it for granted* that time, space, matter, and energy exist, and have a certain way of Being. Physics as such does not try to clarify the Being of such entities— that task falls to philosophy" (Polt 1999, 32). The same holds for other sciences that study a particular region of Being, e.g. history, literature, morality, and so on, are regional sciences.

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[2] Richard Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), 32.
[3] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (henceforth abbreviated as "BT"), trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1962), 29.

Ontology, taken in the broadest sense, is the attempt to clarify and conceptualize our common sense assumptions about what it is to be anything in particular. Whenever we use the *copula* ("is"), which is a Latin noun that connects or ties together two different, we imply that something is. For anything of which we can say "it is," e.g. "pugs are playful," "Santa Clause is jolly," and "honesty is the best policy," the *copula* indicates that we have some understanding of what it is to be anything in particular. The totality of what-is (Being) includes abstractions such as hope, love, and fear, concrete objects, past events, future events, texts, space, and so on. To "make this understanding explicit, I can develop an *ontology*, a philosophical account of Being" (Polt 1999, 35). This is a possibility for me because "the question of Being is built into our very existence" (Polt 1999, 35).

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger insists that ontology is not an abstract discipline but is fundamental to being human. In fact, one of Heidegger's most profound contributions to philosophy is the shift created by his claim that before we undertake ontology in the broadest sense (which asks, "What does Being mean?" or "What *is* it to be?"), we need to be clear about our own mode of access to what it is that we are talking about. Heidegger thinks that, by focusing on the ways in which Being shows up for us in the course of our lives, in our concrete experience of our Being, we can grasp the "existential" structures that make it possible for anything to mean anything to us as Being. This is what Heidegger means when he says, "*fundamental ontology*, from which alone all other ontologies can take their rise, must be sought in the *existential analytic of Dasein*" (BT, 34). The central task of *Being and Time* is to uncover the meaning of Being, that is, to uncover the horizon of intelligibility that makes it possible for Dasein to have some understanding of what it is to be, for the various sorts of things we see around us to be ontological. Stated otherwise, fundamental ontology asks: what is the horizon of

intelligibility in which it is possible for us to understand the meaning of Being (BT, 192-94)? "We are looking for the meaning of being which we will find in the being that already possesses this meaning because it understands being by its very nature—Dasein. […] This is why the existential analytic—the analysis of Dasein's way of being, existence—is fundamental ontology—the basis on which we will conduct ontology or the inquiry into being."[4] Fundamental ontology, simply put, is a more rigorous version of that seeking and striving for clarity that we are always already engaged in and committed to in our everyday lives.

What is the connection between ontology and ethics? It is my position that in Heidegger's account of fundamental ontology there is no gap between ontology and ethics. This is certainly a controversial claim that requires justification. To that end, I should prepare the ground by saying that "ethics" is not synonymous with moral philosophy, defined as the study of morality. In general, there are two different kinds of inquiry into what is traditionally called ethics that do not entail a necessary relationship, but may very well be connected. On the one hand, there is an inquiry that examines the maxims and motives for acting well and doing the right thing. Considerations of this kind focus on identifying universal obligations we owe each other. Some reserve the term "morality" for this topic and I will call it "morality" and "moral philosophy." Whenever I use the term "morality" and its cognates, I am referring to the mainstream concerns with "*doing* right," which centers on universal obligations, the norms governing human behavior, and the rules and principles that ought to motivate human conduct. On the other hand, there is the inquiry where the issue is what kind of life one should live. It asks about the good life for humans, where "good" is understood in the sense of how I might be all that I can be, how I might do something meaningful with my life, and how I can stay true to my convictions and commitments when faced with serious adversity. Considerations of the good for human life aim

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[4] Lee Braver, *Heidegger: Thinking of Being* (Malden, MA and Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2014), 112.

at identifying the highest ideals of human life, which give us some insight into the necessary conditions for human flourishing and the virtues that enable one to live the most meaningful, fulfilling, and worthwhile life possible for humans. The paradigmatic source for this line of inquiry is Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. The term "ethics" is sometimes used in the broader, Aristotelian sense "to address the teleological concern with the development of an individual agent's character and the realization of the good life for that agent."[5] Whenever I use the term "ethics" and its cognates, I am referring to this seeking of the good life that centers on "*being* good," where this is understood as good character formation (*aretē*) and "living well and doing well" (*eudaimonia*)[6] as the fundamental characteristics of a well-lived life (*ethos*). Questions about what it is to be a good human, where good is understood in the moral sense of doing the right thing and having the right motives, are not obviously the same as questions about the good life for humans, where the good is understood in the ethical sense of living well and doing well.[7]

For most professional moral philosophers (influenced by Kant or utilitarianism), ethics just is a part of moral philosophy. The generally accepted view is that when moral philosophy attempts to discern the metaphysical, psychological, epistemological, sociological, anthropological, and semantic presuppositions and commitments of morality it is doing "meta-ethics." Meta-ethics asks: "What must humans be like in order to care about and engage in moral thought?" For instance, "the Benthamite conception of happiness" relies on a psychological thesis that "the only motives for human action are attraction to pleasure and aversion to pain"

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[5] John J. Drummond, "Introduction: The Phenomenological Tradition and Moral Philosophy," in *Phenomenological Approaches to Moral Philosophy: A Handbook*, ed. John J. Drummond and Lester Embree (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2002), 1-14, 2.

[6] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (henceforth abbreviated as "NE"), trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 1095b19-20.

[7] Stated otherwise, "Asking about the good life for humans is not the same—or is not obviously the same—as asking what is it to be a good human, where good is understood in the ethical sense of acting decently to others, doing the right things, and having the right motives" (Charles Guignon, "Introduction," in *The Good Life*, ed. Charles Guignon (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1999), vii-xv, vii).

and, therefore, "out of the alternative actions or policies between which we have to choose at any given moment we ought always to preform that action or implement that policy which will produce as its consequence the greatest happiness—that is, the greatest possible quantity of pleasure with the smallest quantity of pain—for the greatest number."[8] The crudest formulation of utilitarianism makes morality and rights a matter of cost-benefit calculations. This theory treats morality as a means to an end, saying that the right choice is the action that benefits the greatest number and produces the greatest amount of happiness, but it tells us nothing about what is worth pursuing, caring about, or *being*. Instead, "by trying to translate all human goods into a single, uniform measure of value, it flattens them, and takes no account of the qualitative differences among them."[9] On the other side of the same coin is Immanuel Kant, who grounds "the authority of the appeal to moral rules […] in the nature of practical reason" (MacIntyre 2007, 62). Kant (and Kantians) makes a sharp distinction between moral and non-moral value, thereby distinguishing between moral and non-moral practical reasoning. Moral practical reasoning employs categorical or "universalizable" imperatives of moral thought, which are altogether immune from the contingency and vulnerability of our practical lives. As Martha Nussbaum puts it, "No matter what happens in the world, the moral value of the good will remains unaffected."[10] According to Kant's definition of moral thought, I escape the dictates of the laws of nature and circumstance insofar as I act according to a law I give myself. The criterion of right action, on this view, is justified by the metaphysical property that makes human beings more than mere things subject to outside or external forces such as desires that I happen to have or circumstances that I happen to find myself in. By positing practical reason as the essential property of human

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[8] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame and Indiana: The University of Notre Dame, 2007), 62-63.

[9] Michael J. Sandel, *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009), 260.

[10] Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 4.

agency, Kantians prescribe a set of maxims and motives for moral thought in a way that is justified by the dictates of the moral law.

While on the surface ethics and morality might appear as analogous topics, closer examination reveals a gap between the former's seeking of the good life or "*being* good" and the latter's preoccupation with puzzle solving or "*doing* right." Charles Taylor describes this gap, saying, "Morality is narrowly concerned with what we ought to *do*, and not also with what is valuable in itself, or what we should admire or love. […] The idea that moral thought should concern itself with our different visions of qualitatively higher, with stronger goods, is never even mooted. Awareness of their place in our moral lives has been so deeply suppressed that the thought never seems to occur to many of our" contemporary moral philosophers.[11] Morality is narrowly focused on the means of human action, as what one ought to do in such and such a situation. Aristotle's *Ethics*, on the other hand, holds a broader conception of the significance of the study of ethics that includes moral and non-moral considerations for a well-lived life. It does not distinguish between moral and non-moral values, nor does it suggest a "universalizable" criterion for right action. The emphasis is on becoming good, not merely acting in a way that is justifiable by rules or rationalizations. Chapter two examines the intellectual and philosophical history of these differences in greater detail. For now I would like to highlight two differences between ethics and morality in order to demonstrate the significance of my thesis that, for Heidegger, ontology springs from and is answerable to ethics (broadly construed). *Being and Time* is dedicated to the realization of living a good life and being a good person, and Heidegger's account of ethics (broadly construed) can be seen as an attempt to transform us in such a way that we become what it is that we are (or were) looking for.

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[11] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 84.

One apparent difference between Aristotle's *Ethics* and modern morality is located in their ontological presuppositions and commitments. The Aristotelian conception of ethics rests on what might seem like an outdated understanding of nature as a meaningful, teleologically ordered whole. (The Greek word "*telos*" is the end or final cause that determines the development of the proper capacities and potentialities for beings of a certain type.) As Michael Sandel notes, Aristotle "thought that fire rose because it was reaching for the sky, its natural home, and that stones fell because they were striving to be closer to the earth, where they belonged" (2009, 189). Of course this view of cosmic functions and purposes sounds too mystical and superstitious for modern scientists and moderns in general. However, when we bracket the belief that the cosmos is intrinsically purposive, and think of *telos* as a movement with a projected consummation, we can start to see the plausible and compelling features of Aristotle's *Ethics*. The teleological account of "an event or process is not goal-directed because it actually achieves some result that might have been its goal."[12] Rather, Aristotle's claim is that "the nature [or essence] of a thing is its end," because "what each thing is when fully developed, we call its nature [or essence], whether we are speaking of a man, a horse, or a family."[13]

The main idea is that, according to Aristotle, to grasp the Being of anything, one must grasp it as a whole, but that whole is often underway, in process, moving toward a discoverable realization or consummation. The defining features of living beings in general must be seen in terms of an entire unfolding toward a proper realization, where this means that the end or final cause (*telos*) coincides with the origin or first cause (*archē*). This is because living beings are defined by their propensity for development. For example, rocks do not seem to develop, but an

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[12] T.H. Irwin, "The Metaphysical and Psychological Basis of Aristotle's Ethics," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 35-53, 39.
[13] Aristotle, "Politics," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 2: The Revised Oxford Translation* (1984), 1252a1-1342b34, 1252b31-1253a1.

acorn can be understood more than a nut because it has the potential to become an oak tree. Humans, although they are unique, are understood as a type of being with its own proper path of development, its own proper way of unfolding. "We begin an ethical treatise by looking at the characteristic functioning of humans—both its shared and its distinctive elements—because we want a life which includes whatever it is that makes us us" (Nussbaum 1986, 293). To discern the necessary conditions and defining features of *eudaimonia*, as the best life for humans, the *Nicomachean Ethics* "begins with an account of the specific and characteristic functioning of the human being, and, in effect, restricts the search for good functioning for us to a search for the excellent performance of these characteristic functions" (Nussbaum 1986, 293).

In contrast to the teleological account of what it is to be human, modern moral philosophers presuppose an objectified, mechanistic understanding of Being. On this view, the idea that we need to understand the existence of an underlying teleology or purposiveness to make normative and evaluative claims is pointless. According to Aristotle's teleological account of the Being of beings it is not possible to make a sharp distinction between our actuality, i.e. our current modes of life, and our potentiality, i.e., a reflective way of life that strives for excellence. This is a difference of degree, not of kind. Distinguishing between what one *is* and what one *ought to be*, for Aristotle, is not based on human evaluations, but is given in an understanding of Being as a teleologically ordered context with proper functions and ways of being. Modern science, however, is based on a distinctly anti-Aristotelian outlook that rejects teleological reasoning and insists on an objectified view of the world: "the ideal universe from this point of view is a mechanical one, without intrinsic purpose" (Taylor 1989, 82).

The modern scientific outlook conceives of Being as the constant presence of things. Accordingly, the world is an aggregate of enduring substances in causal, mechanistic relations.

This objectified understanding of Being makes a sharp distinction between two types of beings—subjects who form ideas and have thoughts about the external world and objects that occupy space in the material world. The idea that normative and evaluative claims can be derived from a cosmic order becomes senseless and almost laughable. One reason for this is that values and meaning are treated as subject-relative characteristics, merely products of human constructs based on our needs and desires.

From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century "'morality' became the name for that particular sphere in which rules of conduct which are neither theological nor legal nor aesthetic are allowed a cultural space of their own" (MacIntyre 2007, 39). Morality becomes a predicate or appendage of existence, something that can be tacked on to the factual "is." "The world *in itself* consists only of particles and energy; the world *for us* includes subjective values that we project onto things. Judgments about good and bad, beautiful and ugly, are 'value judgments' that merely reflect our own desires, instead of saying something about the world" (Polt 1999, 56). When we adopt an objective, detached attitude toward the world, it becomes difficult to believe in or assume the existence of ethical standards and values that are not merely transient, subjective constructs. They are contingent matters of preferences, customs, or personal choice with no binding force for us.

Our understanding of Being is correlated with our understanding of human agency. It shapes our self-understandings and profoundly affects what we may hope to strive for or become and our beliefs about the importance of social and political institutions for the achievement of meaningful ways of life. Another seemingly apparent difference between Aristotelian ethics and moral philosophy, then, lies in their understanding of human agency. Stated differently, ethics and morality involve an understanding of our Being as agents capable of making meaningful,

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deliberative choices and capable of seeing what is at stake in our chosen way of life. Our understanding of Being is linked with a particular understanding of how one should live and what enables a person to make life-defining choices.

Aristotle claims that in order to discern the good for human life, we have to identify a way of life that enables individuals to develop their distinctive human capacities and virtues to fully realize our highest good. He identifies language (*logos*) as the proper function of human life (NE, 1098aff.) Human language is not merely a means for communicating pleasure and pain, but discourse and conversation are necessary constituents of a well-lived life. As the proper function of humans, language is "about declaring what is just and unjust, distinguish right from wrong. We don't just grasp things silently, and then put words to them; language is the medium through which we discern and deliberate about the good" (Sandel 2009, 196). The actualization of our potential for discourse and deliberation depends on our being members of a political community. For this reason, "acquiring virtue is bound up with being a citizen" (Sandel 2009, 196). Political membership is a necessary condition for human flourishing because, according to Aristotle, the political community exists for the sake of enforcing laws that promote the cultivation of habits that inculcate good character and providing ethical education (*paideia*) that encourages virtuous feelings and dispositions to act virtuously. Since the end of a *polis* is the good life, the institutions and organizations of a *polis* are means to that end. This is why the study of ethics is preparatory for the study of politics. The proper development of an individual agent's character depends upon the background social practices and political institutions that articulate what is right and good for an individual. Just as what it is to be a doctor is determined by the practices and virtues of the medical community, so too what is right and good for an individual agent is informed by the meaningful practices and institutions that structure a political community.

On this view, then, the life of the citizen enables us to learn through *paideia*, engage in conversation about the right and the good, to be engaged in friendship and cultivate other virtues, as conditions for the realization of the good life. It also requires practical wisdom (*phronēsis*), which Aristotle defines as being "able to deliberate finely about things that are good and beneficial for [oneself], not about some restricted area—about what sorts of things promote health or strength, for instance—but about what sorts of things promote living well in general" (NE, 1140a26-28). Practical wisdom is a virtue that attends to what is changeable and particular. It is oriented to seeing situations that call for a decision and a course of action. Practical wisdom concerns the ability to see the situation well, where this means being the kind of person who does the right thing "to the right person, in the right amount, at the right time, for the right end, and in the right way" (Aristotle NE, 1109a28-29). It is important to note that, for Aristotle, there is not "a single best human way of life" (Nussbaum 1986, 305); instead, he insists that there are multiple pathways for human flourishing, which have been carved out by the guidelines and laws of the *polis*. "Practical wisdom, then, uses rules only as summaries and guides; it must itself be flexible, ready for surprise, prepared to see, resourceful at improvisation. This being so, Aristotle stresses that the crucial prerequisite for practical wisdom is a long experience of life that yields an ability to understand and grasp the salient features, the practical meaning, of the concrete particulars" (Nussbaum 1986, 305). For this reason, excellent activity is based on a firm and stable character (Aristotle NE, 1105a35). Putting this all together we can say that Aristotle's *Ethics* sets forth a description of what it is to be a person of good character and practical wisdom, where political membership and engagement are essential to the good life. The "laws of the polis inculcate good habits, form character," and orient us toward the good life, and "the life of

citizens enables us to exercise capacities for deliberation and practical wisdom […]. We become good at deliberating only by […] being citizens" (Sandel 2009, 199).

In contrast to Aristotle's vision of citizenship, modern moral philosophy is based on a radically different understanding of the relation between the individual and the political community. There is a tendency in the modern outlook to hold a naturalistic assumption that scientific descriptions of the world are based on interpreting the world as a mind-independent reality. In order to have absolute, objective knowledge of the world, Francis Bacon argues, "men [must] pledge to abstain for a while from notions, and begin to get used to actual things"[14] The proper way to discern objective facts is to bracket or set aside prejudices and biases such as our social background and subject-relative characteristics that affect the judgments we make about the things we perceive. On such a view, humans are, at the most basic level, discrete, self-contained centers of experience and action with no definitive relation to the world. To varying degrees, modern morality holds the view that the human self is at the most basic level a nuclear self, that is, human agency is ontologically prior to our Being as social beings.

For instance, it "is often said that morality embodies a claim to 'objectivity.' […] In the context specifically of moral obligation, a common idea is that whether a person has a moral obligation does not generally depend on that person's subjective desires, aims, ends, interests, and the like—or, as we may collectively call these, the person's 'motives.'"[15] In other words, an agent's reason(s) for performing some particular action and what an agent *ought* and has reason to do, where this refers to responsibilities, rights, and obligations, are mutually exclusive. "A further claim is that moral obligations are objective in virtue of being normatively authoritative"

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[14] Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, ed. Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 40.
[15] Simon Robertson, "Reasons, Values, and Morality," in *The Routledge Companion to Ethics*, ed. John Skorupski, (London and New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2010), 433–43, 434.

(Robertson 2010, 435). Mainstream moral philosophers commonly refer to this topic as "normative ethics." Normative ethics examines the grounds or justifications for regarding certain actions as right or wrong. The claim is that "moral obligations do entail reasons to act […], and that the reasons entailed by moral obligation are reasons the person has irrespective of his motives" (Robertson 2010, 438).

As we can see, these two key differences between moral philosophy and ethics (broadly construed in the Aristotelian sense) suggest that the main issue centers on the relationship between "*doing* right" and "*being* good." The former presupposes a sharp distinction between ontology and ethics, but the latter assumes an inextricable connection between ontology and ethics. Stated otherwise, Aristotelian ethics is about living a good life and being a good person, where "ethics" is understood in relation to "*ethos*," a form of life with its practical and normative dimensions. Mainstream moral philosophy is about doing the right thing, looking for principles to guide actions, and examining the grounds or justifications for regarding certain actions as right or wrong.

It is my argument that, on Heidegger's view, ethics includes the practices and forms of life of members of a linguistic community that is prior to and a condition for the possibility of individuality and being an ethical agent in any sense. His sense of living a good life depends on coming to terms with what one is. Heidegger's understanding of ontology provides the scaffolding of basic assumptions in which the distinction between simply living and a reflective way of living that strives for clarify and critical self-reflection makes sense. In opposition to the presuppositions underlying modern moral philosophy, my thesis is that Heidegger's account of ethics is broadly construed in an Aristotelian manner where the holistic context of the social

world and the possibility of being an authentic individual constitute the ontological conditions that make ethical agency possible.

In the second chapter, I sketch out the philosophical history of the complex issues involved in putting forth a foundation that connects these ethics and ontology. I find that pre-modern ethics have resources to establish this connection that are not readily available in post-Enlightenment ethics. Specifically, post-Enlightenment ethical theory lacks a teleological understanding of existence and its form of mathematical reason fails to capture the normative and practical dimensions of human existence. Drawing on the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, Bernard Williams, and Charles Taylor, I try to clarify two metaphysical assumptions built into modern moral philosophy that not only account for these vast difference between pre-modern and post-Enlightenment views of ethical life, but also problematize the standard criticism that Heidegger neglects ethics (in the modern sense). I argue that Enlightenment individualism and the fact-value distinction make any post-Enlightenment justification of ethics impossible.

In the third chapter, I discuss Heidegger's confrontation with the modern fact-value distinction and offer a preliminary sketch of how he attempts to undercut this metaphysical dualism. In so doing, I give an account of the Aristotelian strain of Heidegger's thought. So whenever I refer to Heidegger's "ethics," one should note that I am always referring to the Aristotelian-Heidegger view of ethics broadly construed. In the second and third sections of this chapter, I try to uncover the underlying assumptions in the objections raised against Heidegger's fundamental ontology project (as discussed above). I will argue that their conceptions of the nature of ethics are grounded on the assumption of "ontological individualism," which holds that individual existence has a primary reality and society has a second-order, artificial reality. In contrast to this individualistic ontology of the social world, I argue that, for Heidegger,

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individuality is not an ontological or biological given; rather, it is a relatively rare accomplishment. The *ethos* is an ontological given. It is the ontological bedrock of the Being of human agency. I believe that Heidegger holds an ontological teleology for all living things generally and especially for human beings. The basic idea is that, for Heidegger, there is no escaping the practices and forms of life of the community. This means that one cannot detach or escape from the practices and normative guidelines of the social world. Heidegger stresses the point that, since we can never achieve an absolute distance from the common intelligibility of our linguistic community, we have to make our lives from the normative and practical materials around us. Hence, the world does not offers us universal principles or moral rules of the kind that modern morality seeks, but it does provide paths, ways of being, or possibilities for living meaningful and fulfilling lives.

In the fourth chapter, I consider some of the most fruitful and comprehensive accounts of the normative and sociological dimensions in Heidegger's thought. Drawing on the work of Lawrence Hatab, Eric Nelson, Lawrence Vogel, Julian Young, and Irene McMullin, I argue that not only is Heidegger critical of any form of ontological individualism, but there is also a certain kind of radical anti-individualism in *Being and Time*. To be clear, I do not consider Heidegger's anti-individualism in terms of the liberal-communitarian debate, where the former posits an unencumbered self and the latter holds a socially constructed view of the self. Instead, I focus on the ways in which Heidegger's contextual examination of the human condition, including the narratives, functions, projects, and social roles of the life of a *polis* (moral-political community) reveals that the "I" is always subordinate to the "us." Individualism, on Heidegger's view, is not a biological or ontological given, but rather is one way of being that is carved out from and responsive to Being-with-others. In the second part of the chapter, I return to Heidegger's

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intensely critical position on the modern fact-value distinction. Drawing on the scholarship of Lawrence Vogel, Julian Young, and other like-minded scholars, I argue that the potentiality-for-Being an authentic individual is a regulative ideal, where this is understood as a second-order stance that regulates, governs, and organizes our first-order activities and desires. The chapter ends by arguing that Heidegger's account of authentic historicity tries to show what a life is like that is structured by a sense of "the ought." Seen in this light, authentic individuality should be understood as preparatory for the possibility of an authentic community.

In the fifth chapter, I formulate my thesis as an extension of the scholarship presented in the fourth chapter that attempts to articulate ethical dimensions in Heidegger's fundamental ontology project. In so doing, I suggest that, from the sociological standpoint, it is difficult to see how we get from the "is" to the "ought" and then back from the "ought" to the "is." It seems to me that the authors in the fourth chapter are sensitive to these issues, but they do not fully develop the post-humanism in Heidegger's thought, where this refers to Heidegger's refusal to give an absolute position to anthropomorphism. What is important, in Heidegger's view, is that Being makes a claim on us. As Heidegger famously puts it, in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, "'Being and Time' means not a book but a task that is given. The authentic task given here is what we do not know; and insofar as we know this *genuinely*—namely *as* a given task—we always know it only in *questioning*."[16]

In the end, I conclude that the post-humanist character of Heidegger's thought denies the modern is-ought distinction and radically undermines modern moral philosophy by rejecting the presupposed individualism that underlies both. If I am correct, then it is a mistake to judge Heidegger's ethics according to whether he succeeds at formulating a list of responsibilities,

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[16] Martin Heidegger, *Introduction To Metaphysics* (henceforth abbreviated as "IM"), trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 220-21.

rights, and obligations of individuals. Whereas modern moral theory is concerned with providing impartial and value-free guidelines and principles for individual behavior, Heidegger is asking about the conditions for the possibility of transforming how one lives. Understood as the study of moral conduct and moral standards, mainstream ethical theories attempt to discern universal rules that tell individuals how to behave, formulate values that impose our expectations and standards on beings, and duties that dictate individual's obligations to other autonomous beings. However, on Heidegger's "original ethics,"[17] one is left undecided about answers to the questions of traditional ethical theories. This does not mean that *Being and Time* is not an "ethics." It is an "ethics" in the same way that the *Nicomachean Ethics* is an "ethics": both ask about the ontological conditions for the possibility of dwelling in and inhabiting a form of life. For Heidegger, ethical agency is not a matter of being the moral law or obeying the dictates of calculative rationality; rather, what it is to be an ethical agent is to be an active and responsive recipient of Being. That is, to throw oneself into the world and the task of making something of one's finitude. Since there is nothing that conditions or dictates our responsiveness to Being, ontology is the condition for the possibility of ethical life.

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[17] Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings* (henceforth abbreviated as "BW"), ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 216-265, 258.

CHAPTER 2:

THE QUESTION CONCERNING HEIDEGGER'S ETHICS

Many commentators on the work of Martin Heidegger are inclined to think that

Heidegger neglects ethics. If "ethics" is understood in the modern sense as a part of mainstream

moral philosophy, then I would say that Heidegger adamantly 'neglects' ethics. Again, if ethical

theory were to be cashed out in terms of objective moral codes or subjective value systems that

justify the behavior of self-encapsulated individuals, then I would claim that Heidegger

conscientiously 'neglects' ethics. There are a number of philosophers (such as Alasdair

MacIntyre and Bernard Williams) who have problematized the assumption that any moral

philosophy could reasonably be expected to provide an ethical theory. "This assumption looks

less evident if one realizes that the same claim is never made with respect to aesthetics: nobody

would expect that a philosophy of art should provide us with a theorization of the aesthetic

content."[18]

In any case, Heidegger's neglect of ethics is not a form of negligence that skirts the

subject matter or ignores the contextual significance encompassed by the particular and regional

domain of inquiry. For, insofar as Heidegger's thought arises out of the wellspring of the

practical life-world of human affairs, his investigation of the meaning of Being is deeply

entrenched in the normative and value-laden context of human existence. The problem, for many

commentators and critics, seems to be that Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology

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[18] Here Arnold Burns is summarizing part of Williams' reason for rejecting ethical theory. Bernard Williams, "Seminar with Bernard Williams," in *Ethical Perspectives* 6, no. 3–4 (1999): 243–65, 246.

radically challenges the self-evident and calcified assumptions of modern moral philosophy, but, without offering an alternative moral theory or systematic way of resolving the ethical puzzles that arise throughout his investigation, moral questions are left unanswered, without conclusion.

Furthermore, some critics[19] claim that the aporetic character of Heidegger's ethical thought is an inevitable consequence of the self-professed violence of Heidegger's phenomenological method. In order to come to grips with the tension that arises when trying to find a place for ethics in Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, I need to take a brief detour from the topic of Heidegger's supposed neglect of ethics so that I can present, in simplest terms, the motivational basis and method of Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology. In circling back, I hope it will be clear why Heidegger's ethical *aporia* is problematic for modern moral philosophy.

The guiding question of *Being and Time*, the question of Being (*Seinsfrage*), and Heidegger's mode of inquiry create a profound upheaval in the tradition of Western metaphysics. Reaching back to Plato, the traditional discourse of the nature of beings (*das Seiende*)[20] functions according to the rules and methods of regional or positive sciences such as mathematics, psychology, biology, and theology. Heidegger refers to the regional scientific discourses as "ontical" modes of analysis that investigate the so-called facts and properties of entities.[21] For instance, the science of society (sociology) is an ontic investigation of the social realm of

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[19] See Francisco J. Gonzalez, "Beyond or beneath Good and Evil? Heidegger's Purification of Aristotle's Ethics," in *Heidegger and the Greeks: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Drew A. Hyland and John Panteleimon Manoussakis (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 127-156; and Jacques Taminiaux, "The Interpretation of Aristotle's Notion of *Aretê* in Heidegger's First Courses," in *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, ed. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 13-27.

[20] *Das Seiende* is a German neologism that is best translated as meaning "that which is." *Das Seiende* is not a count noun and, even though it is commonly translated as "beings" or "entities," it should not be thought of as a thing or an item. Rather, *das Seiende* refers to anything of which we can say that it is, e.g., numbers, ideas, love, dreams, etc. (See Michael Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary* (MA: Blackwell, 1999), 26-27.)

[21] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (hereafter abbreviated as "BT") Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1962) 31.

existence, which attempts to discover and explain quantifiable facts of human behavior. The traditional ontic discourse of regional sciences, as Heidegger points out, carries certain presuppositions and assumptions about the nature of the beings under investigation, and these ontological presuppositions govern the analysis and to some extent determine what can be discovered. So, in regards to the previous sociology example, the study of the "facts" of human behavior presupposes what it is to be a human being. According to Heidegger, the problem of the traditional philosophical inquiry of ontology, i.e., the branch of metaphysics that deals with our beliefs about the existence and essence of beings, is twofold: first, regional ontologies operate without a clear understanding of what Being is, where Being in the broadest sense refers to that which makes what-is the kind of being that it is, and second, in this uprooting there has been a loss of groundedness from which regional ontologies emerged. Regional sciences function with a degraded and fragmented sense of the Being of what-is, which has given rise to various pseudo-problems in the Western intellectual tradition, e.g., mind-body dualism, the subject-object dichotomy, the fact-value distinction, and the free will-determinism debate.

To circumvent and perhaps eliminate the pseudo-problems of regional ontologies, Heidegger argues, we need to be clear about our own mode of access to what it is that we are talking about. Not only have we forgotten what it means *to be*, but we have also forgotten that the meaning of Being itself is even a question. Since we do not "have an answer to the question of what we really mean by the word 'being'," Heidegger's aim is to "raise anew *the question of the meaning of Being*" (BT, 20). To ask about the meaning of Being is to engage in what Heidegger refers to as fundamental ontology. The ambitious goal of Heidegger's project is to identify the conditions that make it possible for anything to mean anything to us as Being. And since the question of the meaning of Being is also a question of how Being is intelligible to *us*—

the being for whom "Being is an *issue*" (Heidegger BT, 32)—Heidegger begins by asking about the conditions for the possibility of understanding or intelligibility. In a nutshell, the question of fundamental ontology shifts from the traditional, ontic discourse of regional ontologies to the question of the conditions for the possibility of asking about the meaning of Being. The question of *Being and Time* is: What is the Being of *Dasein* ("being-there") as the being that asks the question of Being that allows it to ask the question of Being? In other words, what or who is Dasein?

Before returning to the discussion of how Heidegger's view of ethics is a supposed by-product of his project of fundamental ontology, I should offer a few clarifying remarks about Heidegger's notion of Dasein and what he refers to as the violence of hermeneutic phenomenology. First, throughout the examination of Heidegger's ethics, one should keep in mind that "Dasein" does not mean "human beings;" rather, it means humans insofar as they have an understanding of Being. "Human" is an anthropological or regional scientific concept that carries certain assumptions about the nature of being human, and Heidegger goes to great lengths to avoid reawakening the question of Being from an anthropological, psychological, or a biological point of view (see BT, ¶10). As Heidegger notes, human "ways of behavior, its capacities, powers, possibilities, and vicissitudes, have been studied with varying extent in philosophical psychology, in anthropology, ethics, and 'political science,' in poetry, biography, and the writing of history, each in a different fashion" (BT, 37). Heidegger wants to avoid such assumption-laden and contrived interpretations of what human beings are. His proposed solution is to describe what is "given" in our skillful, ordinary comportment in the world. Heidegger's descriptions of our Being as agents caught-up and engrossed in the midst of daily life try to catch a glimpse of the way things show up for us as relevant in relation to our undertakings. The basic

idea is that such phenomenological descriptions of ourselves in this undifferentiated mode of "Being-in-the-world" indicate or point to the wellspring of understanding.

Second, this "existential analytic of Dasein" is not a purely descriptive phenomenology of the Being of Dasein, meaning that it does not merely attempt to describe what-is. It would always be misleading to take an ontical or "existentiell" interpretation of Dasein and treat it as ontological. In fact, it is precisely this kind of reduction that characterizes the tradition of metaphysics, which Heidegger claims, is a forgetfulness of Being (BT, 42-3). To avoid falling prey to the forgetfulness that lies at the heart of the philosophical tradition, Heidegger emphasizes the ways in which phenomenology is hermeneutical: it is an interpretive and "self-critical" phenomenology that challenges the traditional assumptions circulating in Dasein's average everyday mode of existence (BT, 61). In other words, the method of hermeneutic phenomenology is to look at what ordinary, everyday people say about things, and to then question and challenge the calcified understanding of things that is passed around in a crude and unreflective way.

Third, there is a dual process of destructuring and restructuring operating in Heidegger's examination of the ordinary, familiar understanding of things, which adds a level of difficulty to his phenomenological analysis. This dual movement is occurring at each stage as he simultaneously examines some commonsense idea and then rejects the ordinary understanding of things, and yet, at the same time, sees some insight and truth in that ordinary understanding. "Existential analysis, therefore, constantly has the character of *doing violence* [*Gewaltsamkeit*], whether to the claims of the everyday interpretation, or to its complacency and its tranquilized obviousness" (Heidegger BT, 359).

In light of the purpose and violence of Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, both commentators and critics of Heidegger's view of ethics continue to wrestle with the fact that he explicitly rejects traditional ways of approaching the question of Being that are based on moral systems, and refuses to recover any kind of deeper ontological insights in our conventional practices that furnish material or structures for building a new system of morality. In other words, morality appears to be a dead end in Heidegger's attempt to recover an appropriate interpretation of what it is to be Dasein. Given Heidegger's emphasis on the distinction between fundamental ontology and regional ontologies, one should expect that Heidegger would refrain from assuming the uncritical presuppositions of modern moral philosophy. And we can understand why, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger points out that the formal definition of Dasein is "purely ontological in its aims, and is far removed from any moralizing critique of everyday Dasein" (211). Again, when asked about the relationship between ontology and ethics twenty years later, in the *Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger reaffirms this position, stating, "What is said in *Being and Time* (1927), sections 27 and 35, about the 'they' in no way means to furnish an incidental contribution to sociology. Just as little does the 'they' mean merely the opposite, understood in an ethical-existentiell way, of the selfhood of persons."[22] Heidegger's opposition to constructing a moral theory out of *Being and Time* raises the question, what is it about ethical inquiry that is so off-putting and disconcerting for Heidegger? Why does he always scoff at the prospect of working out an ethics (in the narrow sense)?

The standard criticism is that, since Heidegger has nothing positive to say about ethics, he not only has nothing to contribute to modern moral philosophy; and his greatest shortcoming as a philosopher this refusal to defend a particular position with respect to morality. I would like to

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[22] Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" (henceforth abbreviated as "LH") Trans. Frank A. Capuzzi and J. Glenn Gray, in *Martin Heidegger, Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 213-265, 221-22.

call into question some of the implicit motives and presuppositions governing any investigation of Heidegger's ethics. This task is twofold: first, I shall inquire into the demand for the project of constructing an ethical system or position, and, second, I shall expose the ethical insights of Heidegger's project. In this chapter, I begin with the former inquiry, which provides me with a point of entry into the latter, which I shall take up in the following chapter.

In this chapter, my goal is to discern some of the basic presuppositions influencing (and uncritically governing) the standard criticism that Heidegger neglects ethics. In an effort to define the parameters of my investigation, I have formulated the following guiding questions. Why should we expect any philosopher to have something to say about ethics? Is there something implicitly significant or relevant about the discipline of ethics, i.e., modern moral philosophy that demands our attention, say in contrast to aesthetics or any other branch of human science? In an attempt to grasp the significance and relevance of the question of the meaning of ethics properly, I am going to focus on clarifying the modern conception of morality in contrast to the broader premodern view of ethics. To this end, I begin with an exposition of the Aristotelian approach to ethical inquiry.

After describing some defining characteristics of the premodern moral outlook, in the second section, I try to show that, in the transition to modernity, the modern world has kept the language of ethics but these words have lost their meaning. My position is that moral theory, in the narrow and distinctly modern sense, is a symptom of the breakdown in normative and religious dimensions of human existence, and the moralist's attempt to justify universal rules or values and binding obligations for the modern individual only perpetuates the illness. In order to clarify the shortcomings of the modern view of morality, I focus on two distinguishing features

of modern moral philosophy: the fact-value distinction and "ontological individualism."[23] Given the vast array of literature on the history of moral philosophy, I should note that, in my attempt to expose the fragmented framework of modern moral philosophy, I am following the lead of Robert Bellah, et al. (1996), Hans-Georg Gadamer (1999), Charles Guignon (1999 and 2004), Alasdair MacIntyre (2007), Charles Taylor (1989; 1991; 2004), and Bernard Williams (1972 and 1993). As we shall see, the general consensus is that, if ethics "is to be vindicated against modernity, it will be in *something like* Aristotelian terms or not at all."[24]

In the third section, I offer a two-part response to the modern demand to justify ethics and the standard question concerning Heidegger's ethics (or lack thereof). First, I suggest a general criticism of the demand itself. I argue that, after the Enlightenment, the question of "how do you justify ethics?" no longer makes sense. Second, I suggest that Heidegger is doing something quite different from modern moral philosophy. Though this argument certainly requires more explication than I can give at this time, the essential difference is that modern moral philosophy tries to identify key aspects of being human that, in turn, justify values and obligations of autonomous individuals, but Heidegger is trying to identify ways of being human that make it possible to be an ethical agent, that is, to choose a life worth living. If this is the case, then I must ask, why does it count as a critique of Heidegger that he does not defend a particular moral position?

My general thesis is that, with the rejection of the Aristotelian teleological picture of ontology and the rise of modern individualism, ethics has been detached from the framework in

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[23] Robert Bellah and his colleagues coined this term to refer to the view that the ultimate basic realities of the world are individuals, and society is an artificial or second-order construct. See Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 334.

[24] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame and Indiana: The University of Notre Dame, 2007), 118.

which it makes sense. On the Aristotelian approach, the purpose of ethical inquiry is to "consider in what the good life consists and how it is to be acquired."[25] The ethical understanding of the good life, on this premodern view, is understood in the broad sense of a choiceworthy and fulfilling life. In contrast to traditional ethical considerations of the good life, modern moral considerations are confined to the intentions and behavior of rational agents, where good is understood in the narrow sense of "acting decently to others, doing the right things, and having the right motives."[26] To clarify, this is a distinction between ethics broadly construed to include normative demands and ideals of members of sociohistorical communities and morality narrowly confined to the obligations of self-encapsulated individuals. The difference is exemplified in the etymology. In general, 'ethical' and 'moral' refer to an admirable disposition or custom; however, as Bernard Williams points out, "one difference is that the Latin term from which 'moral' comes emphasizes rather more the sense of social expectation, while the Greek favors that of individual character."[27] Individuality, on the premodern Greek view, is an ethical accomplishment that rejuvenates and carries forward the deepest convictions and commitments of a community. The goal of Aristotelian ethics is to critically examine the common political basis of these shared ideals in order to clarify the conditions in which one can become an

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[25] Aristotle, "Eudemian Ethics" (hereafter EE), in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 2: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1214a1-1249b25, 1214a15. Throughout my discussion of Aristotle's *Ethics*, I reference the collected works (*Eudemian Ethics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*) interchangeably without distinguishing between the two. This is not an uncommon practice, but I thought I should take a moment to mention the relationship between Aristotle's ethical works. "The *Nicomachean Ethics* consists of ten 'books' of roughly equal size, transmitted to us by ancient manuscripts from a time when its standard editions occupied ten papyrus rolls, or 'books'. The *Eudemian Ethics* consists of seven 'books', of which the last is sometimes divided into two. Three of these books are exactly the same as three books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. […] The *Eudemian Ethics* (including the common books) is the earlier work, according to most recent scholars, and the *Nicomachean Ethics* (excluding the common books) transmits a later version of Aristotle's ethical thinking; but the differences between the two are relatively minor." (D.S. Hutchinson, "Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 195-232, 197-98.)

[26] Charles Guignon, "Introduction," in *The Good Life*, ed. Charles Guignon (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), vii–xv, vii.

[27] Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), 6.

individual who takes responsibility for the direction of his or her life. In short, the function of Aristotelian ethics is to identify and promote the conditions in which Athenians can become fulsome moral beings. Part of my thesis is that, insofar as the modern conception of morality is severed from the practical and normative dimensions of social existence, the demand for a philosopher to justify a common basis of social bonds and moral obligations is to request that he or she engage in a misleading and vacuous project.

Premodern Ethics

The premodern moral outlook that is characteristic of Greek and biblical traditions is distinctively *teleological*. Whether it is a cosmic, divine, or political moral order, on the premodern worldview, there is a teleology that is essential to understanding any type of thing. On this view, the *telos* (end or consummation) of existence is revealed in and oriented toward a shared and holistic context of understanding. That is, there is a natural order of things that, when left to themselves, will unfold in their own essential way. On the Aristotelian view of natural movement (*kinēsis*), there is a natural course of development in which every form of life has its own potential and is directed towards its complete form. This seems to be what Aristotle means when he says, "What has nothing outside it is complete and whole. For this we define the whole—that from which nothing is wanting, as a whole man or a whole box. …Nothing is complete (*teleion*) which has no end (*telos*); and the end is a limit [*peras*]."[28] In other words, the end is that which structures and binds together the various aspects of an entity into a coherent fullness of being.

According to what is commonly referred to as Aristotle's "biological metaphysics" (MacIntyre 2007, 148; and Taylor 1991), which is presumably based on empirical observation,

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[28] Aristotle, "Physics," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 1: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 184a-267b26, 207a10-5.

the totality of what we find in the world is made up of entities that are capable of change and are often in the process of becoming what they *can be* or what they are in *potentia*. The function or characteristic activity (*ergon*)[29] of any type of thing is grasped in relation to the culmination of this event of self-formation. For example, an acorn is not merely a nut or collection of particles; rather, it is understood in relation to its potential to become an oak tree. To say that the being of an acorn is fully realized or completed in the oak tree is not to say that the acorn had a purpose; it means that it is the completion or coming to fulfillment of what it is to be an acorn, namely, the growth into an oak tree. So an acorn is defined by its propensity for development. The basic idea is that, on Aristotle's teleology, the proper function of things is grasped within the parameters of a unified movement unfolding from the origin to the end. Generally speaking, the function of an acorn is defined within the parameters stretching from its origin, e.g. an actual oak tree, to its end, e.g., its potential to be an oak tree. The success and quality of its development is measured by its position in relation to completedness. It is also helpful to note that *ergon* is the root of the Greek word *energeia* (actuality), so a more precise translation of *energeia* conveys the idea of types of things in the process of becoming what they are, each with their own proper way of unfolding. Jonathan Barnes helps to clarify the unified movement from actuality to potentiality: "This is now *actually* a fine oak tree. It was once, when it was only an acorn, *potentially* an oak tree; so that in its history, potentiality preceded actuality. But that acorn was produced by an *actual* oak tree; so that before any potential oak tree there was an actual oak tree."[30]

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[29] There are several different interpretations of the Greek word "*ergon*," which are context-dependent. Terence Iriwin provides a helpful list of the different uses: "(1) process of production, or productive task to be undertaken; (2) product, result of the process; (3) achievement, not involving any product; (4) action, more or less equivalent to activity [i.e., *praxis*]; (5) contrasted with *logos*…; hence 'facts,' 'what we do'; (6) function, characteristic task, activity, and end" ("Glossary" in Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter abbreviated as "NE"), 2nd ed., trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), 315-54, 331). I shall follow the standard translations of "function" or "characteristic activity" unless noted otherwise.

[30] Jonathan Barnes, "Metaphysics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle* (1995), 66-108, 95.

On this teleological view of life, directedness toward an end is described as a way of being towards completion and completedness. The function of an entity is connected with its essence and its end. As Aristotle argues, "the nature [or essence] of a thing is its end," because "what each thing is when fully developed, we call its nature [or essence], whether we are speaking of a man, a horse, or a family."[31] For instance, the essence of an acorn is oak tree-ness. If something does not have the functional propensities necessary for being an oak tree, then it is not an acorn. At the same time, something can have the potential to be an oak tree but, for a number of reasons, it can break down in its ability to develop properly. The teleological description need not entail a teleological explanation of all of the possible ends of an entity. In other words, on the teleological account, "an event or process is not goal-directed because it actually achieves some result that might have been its goal."[32] Rather, the claim is that the function refers to the potential for being; whether or not an entity succeeds at actualizing its potential does not diminish the fact that its essence is a task (*ergon*) *to be* something. So long as something is in the process of becoming what it is, it has the potential to be fully formed, but it is not yet its complete form.

This metaphysical teleology is exemplified in Aristotle's *Ethics*, where Aristotle attempts to clarify the completedness of being human. The origin of human life is the *polis* (i.e., the state or political community) and the proper *telos* of being human is the good toward which human life is directed (see Aristotle *Politics*, Bk. 1-2). The highest good of human life, Aristotle argues, is a complete and self-sufficient end. He says, "an end that is always choiceworthy in its own right, never because of something else, is complete without qualification," and "the same

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[31] Aristotle, "Politics," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 2: The Revised Oxford Translation* (1984), 1252a1-1342b34, 1252b31-1253a1.

[32] T.H. Irwin, "The Metaphysical and Psychological Basis of Aristotle's Ethics," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 35-53, 39.

conclusion…also appears to follow from self-sufficiency" because "we regard something as self-sufficient when all by itself it makes a life choiceworthy and lacking nothing" (NE, 1097a34-5 and 1097b7-16). The question of the good life for humans is a question about the meaning and purpose of human life. Aristotle's formal answer is that the good life is a life worth living for its own sake, not for the sake of any other end, and it is a life that is chosen for its own sake.

Our highest goal in life is what Aristotle refers to as *eudaimonia*, which is often translated as 'happiness' and 'flourishing.'[33] I tend to avoid referring to *eudaimonia* in terms of 'happiness.' Even though I want to preserve Aristotle's emphasis on the formal characterizations of the good life, I think that 'happiness' is too open-ended and confused with pleasure. To identify our highest goal in life as 'happiness' seems to suggest that the good life is filled with pleasurable experiences and passionate moments. Though this could be true to an extent, I find it hard to see how these fleeting moments are enough to make a life worthy of choice. Moreover, Aristotle is at pains to avoid this kind of hedonism. He rejects sensual pleasures as definitive of the good for human life. Aristotle argues that *eudaimonia* is not a single-minded pursuit of pleasure (or any other external good for that matter), because those who pursue the "life of gratification…appear completely slavish, since the life they decide on is a life for grazing animals" (NE, 1095b19-21). At the same time, Aristotle does not agree with the anti-hedonist

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[33] *Eudaimonia* may also be translated as 'blessedness.' 'Blessedness' does call attention to Aristotle's claims that our *telos* is connected with the most divine element in us and that the good life "is beyond the power of the autonomous will to achieve unaided" (John Cottingham, "Partiality and the Virtues." In *How Should One Live?: Essays on the Virtues*, ed. Roger Crisp, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 57-76, 66). On the other hand, I think that the theological connotations of 'blessedness' seem a bit outdated and do not resonate well with our secular age. I am not trying to rule out the religious dimension of human existence. On the contrary, I want to preserve it in a way that avoids strict adherence to dogmatic principles of faith. Furthermore, Aristotle argues that blessedness is not synonymous with the *eudaimonia*. The argument is that since blessedness is subject to the whims of chance, our fortunes and misfortunes are out of our control, but *eudaimonia* is an achievement of human life. It is misleading, then, "to take our cues from someone's fortunes," because "his doing well or badly does not rest on them" (Aristotle NE, 1100b8-9). The eudaimonic life is a consistent and steady activity that is not "prone to fluctuate," and this is why we can say that Priam lived a good life but he was not blessed (1101a9). For the purposes of my project, I am not interested in the whims of chance that Aristotle is talking about in regards to the blessed life, but I am trying to bring to light the things that are in our control. (These are often the least interesting parts of a life.)

view of pleasure (see NE, Bk. 2, Ch. 3 and Bk. 7, Ch. 11-14). Pleasure is an important part of *eudaimonia*, but since pleasure and pain can mislead us into incontinence, that is, a failure to act on our better judgment, Aristotle says that our pleasures require moral education and habituation. For these reasons, I prefer to discuss *eudaimonia* in terms of flourishing and well-being, which resonates well with the Aristotelian paradigm of ethics that focuses on "living well and doing well" (NE, 1095a19-20).

So far we have seen that the eudaimonic life is an unqualified good that is intrinsically worthwhile in the sense that it is pursued for its own sake regardless of how things turn out. Living well and doing well is worth the effort even if one fails at being good. Notice that Aristotle begins with a basic outline of the *telos* of human life that is content-less insofar as it identifies the proper path of development for human existence. Combined with my previous discussion of the essence and end of an entity, we can say that our highest good in life are the virtues that enable us to live well and do well. That is to say, "Aristotle takes the *telos* of human life to be a *certain kind of life*; the *telos* is not something to be achieved at some future point, but in the way our whole life is constructed" (MacIntyre 2007, 175). Aristotle's task in the *Ethics* is to make clear the formal structure of the good life, which will provide us with a framework for understanding what is involved in the proper fulfillment or realization of being human. As MacIntyre clarifies, "Within that teleological scheme there is a fundamental contrast between man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature. Ethics is the science which is to enable men to understand how they make the transition from the former state to the latter" (ibid., 52). This transition is going to involve a self-transformation of sorts that is a modification of an already established moral outlook (*ethos*), which will require a person to

choose and make his or her own path in life. The available paths are not limitless, but are bounded by the possibilities available within the parameters of the *polis*.

The notion of self-transformation brings us to the other key aspect of Aristotle's teleology in the *Ethics*, which is that the proper function of being human seems to be life according to right reason (*kata ton orthon logon*, NE, 1138b25), where reason refers to life in a linguistic community (c.f. MacIntyre 2007, 152-53). By grounding human life in the linguistic soil of the *polis*, Aristotle is able to claim that to be human is to have the potential to form good, as well as, evil and destructive habits or character traits. The human function or work (*ergon*) is to cultivate the virtues that will enable us to be participants of a particular sort in a community. On the Aristotelian view of the being of a human being, *logos* constitutes a shared world that is prior to, and a condition for, being a moral agent in any sense of the word. This is why young people are not allowed to study ethics; they have not fully developed their potential to be responsible agents capable of acting on the basis of their own decisions (see Aristotle NE, 1095a2-13). Individual agency requires one to already be socialized into the appropriate ways of being human in a *polis*. By including the *ethos* or accustomed way of being human, Aristotle's approach to ethics assumes that one has had the proper moral education (*paideia*) to be a decent and productive member of society. From this sociological starting point, Aristotle identifies the ethical virtues that, if properly cultivated, will realize our human potential to take ownership of the direction and purpose of our lives. To this end, Aristotle discusses the virtues that are commonly held as praiseworthy and practical character traits of being human in Athenian society.

On the teleological view, the normative goods and ends of the public world give us some sense of what kinds of criteria can be operative in making choices. One is not born knowing how to function in the world; rather, the *polis* provides various social roles and functions that teach us

how to be conscientious and skilled participants of the social world. As Aristotle says, no one is born a builder or a harpist, but "we become builders…by building, and we become harpists by playing the harp," and we become good builders and harpists by building and playing well (NE 1103a35). To say that building well is the end of the process of building is to suggest that the range of work and skills involved in building have the function that they do because that function advances the production of buildings. In learning the techniques and skills of building, one also cultivates a common view of the end and purpose of building, which is to produce a stable and sturdy edifice. A good edifice is not what builders "*do* want to make; it is what they *should* want or aim to make if they are to be good at doing what in fact they are doing."[34] That is to say, not all builders strive for excellence in their work, but we distinguish a good builder from a bad builder on the basis of the quality of their work. The completion of this and various other social functions depends not only on knowing the proper techniques but also on applying these techniques in the right way, at the right time, and for the right reasons.

Aristotle argues that at the most basic level the development of our character is analogous to the development of our social functions. "For what we do in our dealings with other people makes some of us just, some unjust; what we do in terrifying situations, and the habits of fear or confidence that we acquire, make some of us brave and others cowardly" (Aristotle NE, 1103b14-7). The virtues are those admirable character traits that enable us to be generous, trustworthy, witty, and courageous persons. The ethical virtues are the practical and normative dispositions to act that enable us to be competent and capable members of a social system just as building virtues lets us build well. Terence Irwin clarifies the social nature of the virtues when he says, "We have some conception of the sorts of actions that we expect from people in different

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[34] Gabriel Richardson Lear, "Aristotle," in *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed. Hugh LaFollette (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013), 348-362, 350.

social roles, and the virtues are the tendencies that reliably produce such actions."[35] From this

perspective, ethical virtues are manifest in actions that have a political basis, serve a social

function and are other-directed.[36] Given the ways in which the virtues are relative to persons and

their social positions, it would be a mistake to define the virtues as passions or faculties or any

other natural capacity (*dunameis*). "That is, whereas we possess natural capacities innately,

virtuous dispositions develop at best only gradually, and only given repeated engagement in

virtuous acts."[37] Insofar as our engaged and involved dealings with the world shape our ethical

outlook in life, these functions also contribute the formation of our character; which is why,

Aristotle's virtue-oriented approach to ethics focuses on proper undertakings and habituation

(*ethismos*). Even though both social roles and ethical virtues are acquired through processes of

habituation, the latter is a feature of self-directedness of human existence that goes beyond

training and practice. The point that I am trying to make is that being a good person requires the

cultivation of capacities that go beyond or are outside of the parameters of ethical education. The

virtuous person is not simply good at making things or following instructions. She is someone

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[35] Terence Irwin, "The Virtues: Theory and Common Sense in Greek Philosophy," in *How Should One Live?: Essays on the Virtues* (2003), 37-55, 38.

[36] In fact, the Greek word for honor (*timē*) refers to that which is paid in token of worth, value, or price, which indicates that being a good person is a disposition worth cultivating. That being said, Aristotle astutely points out that honor is not the proper *telos* or goal of being human, because "it seems to depend more on those who honor than on the one honored, whereas we intuitively believe that the good is something of our own and hard to take from us" (1095b25-7). His claim that the performance of a good deed is not the same as being a good person fits well with the conception of the good life as a consistent and unified mode of being human. The former shows that one is capable of following instructions and doing what is expected, but the latter goes beyond the limits of our social functions. To clarify why doing just acts is not the only condition for being a virtuous person it is helpful to look at Aristotle's distinction between the continent person and the virtuous person (NE, Bk. VII). The continent person is someone whose actions accord with what the virtuous person does, but he or she lacks an understanding of why these actions are mandated or even virtuous. "Take, for instance, Neoptolemus in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. For he is praiseworthy for his failure to abide by (his promise to tell the lies) that Odysseus had persuaded him (to tell); (he breaks his promise) because he feels pain at lying" (Aristotle NE, 1146a20-1). In this example, the actions of the continent person, Neoptolemus, spring from the immediacy of his first-order desires, which is an unstable source of action. Both continent and prudent characters "are capable of forethought about their own life" (NE, 1141a29). The difference is that, whereas the continent person fails to take hold of this capacity and, therefore, lacks a firm and steady character, the virtuous person has not only made a decision about his or her life but also continues to stand by this decision.

[37] Tom Angier, *Technē in Aristotle's Ethics: Crafting the Moral Life* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 106.

who has not only received proper ethical guidance but has also made a decision about her own life and is not easily swayed by counter-pressures. As Aristotle says, virtue is a disposition "that decides, consisting in a mean, the mean relative to us, which is defined by reference to reason, that is to say, to the reason by reference to which the prudent person would define it. It is a mean between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency" (NE, 1107a1-3).

The person of practical wisdom (*phronimos*) acts at the right time, with the right objective, towards the right people, for the right reasons, and in the right manner. In other words, the virtuous person transitions from *ethismos* to *phronēsis* (see Angier 2010, 105-25). The person of practical wisdom has made a decision about his own *eudaimonia*, and he continues to live and stand by his decision. The *phronimos* is defined as the paragon of virtue whose way of life not only embodies the goals and projects of the *ethoi* (or shared moral outlooks) of Greek society, but also adapts them to his own ethical being. This seems to be part of Aristotle's reason for saying that "we cannot be fully good without [practical wisdom], or [practically wise] without virtue of character" (NE, 1144b31-2). According to Aristotle, practical wisdom is not a one size fits all virtue; rather, we have the same resources given that to be a human being is to grow out of the many (*hoi polloi*) and to be an ethical being is to have a life of one's own to live. If we think of the good life as a task (*ergon*) to live out our lives and to make something of our lives, then we can see that this is a personal endeavor and social achievement. No one is born a *phronimos*, that is, there are no moral prodigies, but there are paths of moral guidance for members of a community. One becomes a *phronimos* "by impersonating a virtuous person, and in that impersonation, through the process of habituation," one exemplifies in one's own actions what the *phronimos* would do.[38] Even though the literal translation of *phronimos* is the 'person

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[38] Louis Aryeh Kosman, "Being Properly Affected: Virtues and Feelings in Aristotle's Ethics," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (1980), 103-116, 112.

of practical wisdom,' I prefer to refer to the *phronimos* as a role model or moral exemplar, because I think the latter translations capture the social and individual aspects of human agency. Because, in choosing your role model or moral exemplar, you are also defining what that person is like regardless of what the person was really like.

That said, it is important to understand that "the good life and its indisputable conditions are not identical" (Aristotle EE, 1214b16). The maintenance of political life, that is, the various communities and structural components of human life, is not the same as the pursuit of the good life. The political conditions "are, of course, necessary to the good life, but they play an infrastructural role in relation to it. You can't pursue the good life without pursuing life. But an existence dedicated to this latter goal alone is not fully human."[39] Given Aristotle's sociological framework of ethics, one must be a law-abiding citizen in a good *polis* in order to be a functional member of society and one must participate in the normative practices of social life in order to have the potential to flourish. Insofar as ethical considerations are drawn from and respond to the holistic context of patterns of life in a linguistic community, the resources and means for understanding the ideal form of human life are given in attunement with the larger context that one finds oneself in. For these reasons, "to be a good man will on every Greek view be at least closely allied to being a good citizen" (MacIntyre 2007, 135). Furthermore, on the Aristotelian view, it is the nature of human beings that we find ourselves in a world where we have a task before us, which is to be self-constituting beings. In the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle refers to this character-building activity as "the choice of life" (1216a15). It is because there can be a gap between us and the good life that Aristotle suggests, "we must enjoin every one that has the power [*exousia*] to live according to his own choice to set up for himself some object for the

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[39] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 211.

good life to aim at (whether honor or reputation or wealth or culture), with reference to which he will then do all his acts, since not to have one's life organized in view of some end is a mark of much folly" (EE, 1214b6-11). For the Greeks, freedom (*exousia*) "is not the legal status of a free citizen as opposed to a slave. It is derived from *exeinai*, 'to be open, possible,' and indicates the condition of someone who has options" (Irwin 1999, 330).

The freedom to live according to one's own choice assumes that one has a clear understanding of what options are worthwhile and has reached a point in life where he or she can make good choices. By identifying the practical and normative conditions that make moral agency possible, Aristotle does not simply tell people that they have the potential to be an individual agent, but actually tries to motivate them to make this life-defining choice under these conditions. That is to say, on Aristotle's virtue-approach to ethics, the ultimate *telos* is to be self-constituting, to constitute one's self in a virtuous way. I hope to make clear Aristotle's argument that this ultimate choice not only determines how we stand in relation to our own end (that is, our life as a whole), but also imparts continuity to and focuses our lives because our other choices will depend on this ethical stance. "To organize our lives around a complete end is to introduce some structure into our lives and our ends. …so that our life is not just a series of unco-ordinated pursuits of different ends. When we live 'coherently', we have found a conception of our lives that makes our different ends fit together in some rational structure" (Irwin 2003, 41). From this perspective, we can see how *eudaimonia* refers to a life that is structured by a coherent vision of the good.

Recall that, on Aristotle's teleological view of human existence, *kinēsis* (becoming) is always directed toward a *telos* (end), which for humans is the *agathon* (good). Human existence, when understood as an event or process, is directed first and foremost at the world and thereby

with others. Our view of the good is guided by the intellectual virtue of *technē* or craft

knowledge, which is based on the *poietic* (productive) mode of human existence that is directed

toward the ends of our practical dealings with the world and others. For example, in *poiēsis*,

writing a paper is grasped in relation to an open range of possible outcomes or accomplishments

of this activity, e.g., earning a degree, finding a job, making money, and so on. In *poiēsis*, one

makes something that is separate or distinct from oneself. Once that product has been produced,

one no longer needs to have anything to do with it, because the goal in this activity was just to

achieve something (see Aristotle NE, 1094a5-14). Insofar as the merit or value of *technē* is

justified instrumentally, the good is subordinate to the quality of a product that is separate from

the activity itself, which seems to depend more on social standards than the one's own efforts or

goals.[40] In *poiēsis*, the value of one's work is determined by social expectations and

preconceptions, and so one strives to receive praise and approval from others. However, as

Aristotle says, if you try to be all things to all people, your life will lack consistency and integrity,

and your character will be like that of "a chameleon, insecurely based" (NE, 1100b7). In other

words, since the end of *poiēsis* is means-ends calculative, concerned with 'getting' rather than

'being,' this mode of human existence is too unstable and incomplete to provide a basis for

ethical agency.

There is another mode of human existence that underlies our *poietic* dealings with the

world, which Aristotle refers to as *praxis* (self-making). Whereas *poiēsis* has its end or goal

outside itself, the goal of *praxis* is in the action itself. In Aristotle's words, "production has its

end in something other than itself, but action does not, since its end is acting well itself" (NE,

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[40] "Aristotle rejects the single-minded pursuit of honor, since he takes happiness to include goods that depend on the agent himself, not on other people's attitude to him. But he also rejects the extreme view that honor is unimportant and irrelevant to happiness. He devotes iv 3-4 to the virtues concerned with the proper attitude to honor" (Irwin 1999, 334).

1140b7-8). *Praxis* is a self-directed goal or *telos* that is part of the "for-the-sake-of-which" (*hou heneka*) that is built into every action. According to Aristotle, *praxis* shows us how the ethical virtues contribute to the flourishing of human life (*eudaimonia*), because it gives us an idea of how a life of *poiēsis*, which would generally be unstable and fragmented, can still have something that binds it together into a whole. For example, in *poiēsis*, a doctor is trying to make sick people healthy, and the outcome or fulfillment of this possibility is not necessarily dependent on her agency. At the same time, however, the practice of medicine is also a self-making activity (*praxis*) in the sense that the doctor practices medicine for-the-sake-of being a person of a particular sort, e.g., a person who is skilled, contentious, caring, etc. This is what Aristotle means when he says, "practicing medicine or healing is not [a matter of] cutting or not cutting, giving drugs or not giving drugs, but doing all these things in a certain way" (NE, 1137a25). In practicing medicine, the doctor is doing two things simultaneously. She is producing a state or product that is distinct from her agency, and, at the same time, she is forming her identity as a human being of a particular sort. Insofar as the ethical virtues "involve characteristic patterns of desire and motivation," they "are more than mere skills" (Williams 1985, 9). As Aristotle says, "questions about actions and expediency…fall under no craft or profession; the agents themselves must consider in each case what the opportune action is, as doctors and navigators do" (NE, 1104a3-10).

Ethical agency calls for *phronēsis* or practical wisdom in being able to see life as a whole, not in the instrumental sense of having filled in all the area of it, but in the teleological sense of an overarching undertaking. On Aristotle's teleological description of moral agency, human life is an ongoing event that is always underway moving toward a culmination that is not a product, but is to have constituted your identity. Taylor discusses this teleological view of self-

constitution in terms of the "direction of our lives" in which the ethical issue concerns "our most fundamental motivation, or our basic allegiance, or the outer limits of relevant possibilities for us, and hence the direction our lives were moving in or could move in" (1989, 46). Self-formation is not directed by craft knowledge or *technē*, but is a mode of being a person that orders and unifies practical and social activities, which is why Aristotle says that moral agency is guided by the virtue of *phronēsis*. *Phronēsis* refers to the rational capacity for *poiēsis* to be regulated and given order by the standpoint of *praxis*. Since *phronēsis* is a "disposition of character to choose or reject actions because they are of a certain ethically relevant kind," *praxis* is a self-oriented mode of human existence (Williams 1993, 8-9). To have practical wisdom is to know who you are and how you stand in a situation, and to be clear about the situation itself. As Gadamer clarifies, *phronēsis* "depends on one's coming to a decision in the particular formation of one's own moral being (*hexis*)" (1999, 74).

By now it should be clear that *poiēsis* and *praxis* are forms of an *ethos*. Insofar as the world shapes our moral outlook in life (*ethos*), *poiēsis* and *praxis* are two modifications of the *ethos*. One has to be a participant of a community in order to be human, and one has to have a direction in life in order to live a fulfilling and meaningful life. Both modes of human existence are possibilities for members of a community. Moral agency, on the Aristotelian picture, is shaped by and responsive to an established and shared view of the good life. To live according to one's own choice is to impart unity and constancy in one's life by taking a second-order stance on our first-order desires and motivations.

I should take a moment to consider the methodological characteristics of Aristotle's *Ethics* that appear to conflict with the modern project of constructing an ethical system. To be sure, this is a hurried consideration of the issue, but I do not want to lose sight of the purpose of

this exposition of the traditional Aristotelian approach to ethics, which is to provide a basis for understanding what it means to justify ethics. By bringing attention to the differences between traditional and modern forms of teleology, my aim is to highlight the strengths of Aristotle's method of justification. To this end, it is important to understand that "within a teleological vision of life, there is no characteristic modern gap between *is* and *ought* or between fact and value. Questions about how we ought to live are answered through insight into the meaningful current of existence itself, a current directed toward a shared human Good."[41] In the *Ethics*, Aristotle tries to identify projects and activities worth pursuing and to promote the conditions in which people can be participants of a certain sort in a community. Insofar as the highest *telos* or good of human life is concretely observed and realized in the virtues specifically having to do with taking an active part in the community, the good life is an "achievement of character and community" (Guignon, et al. 1999, 30).

With its emphasis on the individual and social dimensions of the flourishing life, Aristotelian teleology is not consistent with utilitarian or duty-based methods of justification. Utilitarianism is a modern form of teleology that begins with a quantifiable conception of the good, as the maximization of happiness, and justifies actions on the basis of the good.[42] The principle of utility holds that since everyone's desires and happiness have equal weight, the agent cannot give more weight or consiferation to herself or anyone else. On the utilitarian view, ethics means the ability to neutralize and universalize one's motives for the sake of a universal duty to others. In the utilitarian's attempt to devise a mathematical formula to answer all moral questions, he or she strips away the dimensions of human actions that concern moral character and living-

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[41] Charles Guignon, Blaine J. Fowers, and Frank C. Richardson, *Re-Envisioning Psychology: Moral Dimensions of Theory and Practice* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 31.
[42] See, for instance, John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ed. George Sher, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001).

well. This consequentialist approach to ethics focuses on rules and universality, not human agency. It seems to me that utilitarian forms of teleology fail to grasp the individuating components of moral virtue, namely *praxis* and *phronēsis*. The importance of the virtues, for the utilitarian, is secondary when motive or duty is defined in terms of the results and consequences of actions.

If my reading of Aristotle's *Ethics* is correct, then his account of the virtues is not teleological in the modern sense where the means are instrumentally justified by a pre-given end. As we previously saw, in Aristotle's argument concerning the differences between *technē*-evaluations and *phronēsis*-evaluations, the former "essentially values only the *ergon* of an activity, thereby instrumentalizing the motivations that underlie it…thereby undermining the strong value we intuitively attach to the latter" (Angier 2010, 49). From an Aristotelian perspective, in the case of action (*praxis*) the ethical mean is relative to us, which means that "for any given choice" the mean "is determined by all the moral and material circumstances relevant to that choice" (Angier 2010, 89). This is why Aristotle claims that the best course of action is what the *phronimos* would characteristically do in the particular circumstances. As John Cooper clarifies, although Aristotle "does hold that virtuous action is a means to *eudaimonia*, or human good, *eudaimonia* is itself not specified independently of virtuous action; on the contrary, *eudaimonia* is conceived of as identical with a lifetime of morally virtuous action (together with other activities as well)."[43]

On the duty-based approach, ethics means being able to universalize the motives of one's actions. On this view, an agent's reason and motive for acting are one and the same: the reason is that the action is the morally right thing to do. For instance, when I visit my dying friend in the

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[43] John M. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1986), 88.

hospital, I am acting in a morally correct way so long as I am visiting my friend out of duty, not out of friendship or love. This is because the ethicality of actions resides in universal principles of reason, not dispositions of character.[44] Aristotle might argue that this form of duty-based ethics seems to lead to a distorted vision of the good life, because love and friendship are experiences of fundamental importance for members of a community (see, e.g., NE, 1170b8-14).[45] Even though Aristotle might agree with the duty-bound ethicist "in rejecting maximization schemes of all kinds in favor of a definitely structured life, he does not think of moral constraints themselves as imposed on persons without regard for (and even despite) their own good, as Kant (together with most of his modern opponents) tends to do" (Cooper 1986, 88). Rather, for Aristotle, the ethical virtues contribute to the agent's own *eudaimonia*, which is a self-chosen way of life that includes both moral goods, such as, friendship and family and adequate kinds of non-moral goods, such as, health and wealth.

My point is that, in general, modern ethical considerations are confined to morality, which is "a particular development of the ethical" that focuses on the social expectations of others (Williams 1993, 6). The good of modern morality refers to the social obligations and

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[44] I have in mind Immanuel Kant's duty-based ethics, but this is not the best time to get into a discussion of Kant's ethical theory. Kant's categorical imperative and conception of the moral law are discussed in the second section of this chapter, and, in the fourth chapter, I discuss Kantian ethics in relation to the development of Heidegger's thought. For the time being, I will limit myself to the following general, albeit crude, remarks. First, Kant and Aristotle have different starting points, which lead them to different conceptions of the ethical. Second, for Kant, moral duties override personal desires and preferences. If I do something because I want to, then I am not acting morally, according to Kant. Personal preference is a morally neutral category.

[45] My ideas about this issue concerning the tension between moral and prudential motivations are derived from Michael Stocker's essay on "How Emotions Reveal Value and Help Cure the Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," in *How Should One Live?: Essays on the Virtues* (2003), 173-190. Though I will elaborate on this issue in the second section of this chapter, at this time I would like to note that, according to Aristotle, having the right emotions is a crucial component of being a good person (c.f. my previous discussion of the difference between a continent person and a prudent person). That is, one has to have things that one cares about in order to be human in the most robust sense, and one has to be a moral agent in order to make a choice as to how to properly care for these things. As we previously saw, to live a life according to one's choice is to establish priorities for oneself and to take responsibility for this life-defining choice. Given this connection between moral and prudential considerations, Aristotle does not distinguish between the two forms of motivation. Modern moral theories, on the other hand, "see no need for values to serve as motivations, and they hold that motivations are irrelevant to the value of what is done or even intended" (Stocker 2003, 173).

conventions that sustain the functional conditions of communal life. For this reason, modern forms of morality try to formulate decision procedures for making practical choices. As we have seen, "the other-directed virtues raise the question of whether it will always be in the agent's interest to do what the virtues require" (Irwin 2003, 38). On Aristotle's view of ethical being, to be a functional member of society is good insofar as we are able to coordinate our activities and get along to some extent; however, to ground ethics in impersonal social obligations of the practical life-world is to neglect the question of personal responsibility for one's own choices in life. By focusing on the social expectations of how one should act and ignoring the deeper issues of how one should live, there is a tendency for the moral system of modernity to be disconnected from the lived-experience of "the interconnected networks of honor and mutual respect which bind the citizens of a community" (Cottingham 2003, 60).

To support his claim that the good life is a configuration of the non-moral and moral goods of human life, Aristotle begins from the normative facts and values of the social world and justifies ethics in relation to other areas of human life. Remember that Aristotle does not begin from a general conception of *eudaimonia* and end up with virtues that justify or provide reasons for accepting the pursuit of the good life. To do so would be contradictory because it would go against Aristotle's argument that you cannot codify ethics (see NE, Bk. I-II). Since Aristotle focuses on clarifying 'what sort of person I should be' rather than 'what I ought to do,' it would be a mistake to think that the fundamental aim of ethicists is to identify rules for human behavior. More importantly, it should be clear by now that Aristotle's *Ethics* is not an exercise in mediocrity or blind social conformity. When understood as a study of virtuous character, Aristotle's *Ethics* is much more focused on the self rather than what we expect from others. Suffice it to say that Aristotle "is not attempting the task so many moralists have undertaken of

recommending virtue to even those who despise it: his lectures are not sermons, nor even protreptic argument, urging the wicked to mend their ways. …Rather, he is giving a course in practical thinking to enable someone who already wants to be virtuous to understand better what he should do and why."[46]

We are now in a position to understand why, according to Aristotle, ethics is preparatory for politics. As we have seen, the traditional Aristotelian paradigm of ethical inquiry presupposes an *ethos*, that is, "a common basis of obligation on which are grounded all customs and forms of social life."[47] Ethical considerations encompass the practical and normative purposes that govern and structure human life. This is why Aristotle discusses common concerns and interests ranging from family life, friendship, and moral education to aesthetic, economic, and political practices. The *ethos* identifies a whole frame of reference or understanding of human life that is based on our having been enculturated into the practices and forms of life of a certain community. That is to say, as members of a community, we have been socialized into a shared moral point of view that has become second nature to us (see Aristotle NE, 1103a15-b7). It is not so much a consciously formulated view as it is a pre-reflective understanding that is embodied in our *poietic* (productive) habits or patterns of life. As Gadamer clarifies, the *ethos* expresses "not just individuals' attitudes and their system of social life, but the system of social institutions that rule human beings' common life in the social structure" (1999, 143). The world is full of normative purposes and obligations that are fundamental for shaping our ethical orientation toward our own life. And, in turn, the *teloi* of the *ethos* are the basis for justifying our view of choiceworthy pursuits and our selection of admirable and praiseworthy dispositions. Furthermore, our justification for the best and most praiseworthy ways of being human provides us with an ethical

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[46] M.F. Burnyeat, "Aristotle on Learning to Be Good," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (1980), 69-92, 81.
[47] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Aristotle and Imperative Ethics (1989)," in *Hermeneutics, Religion, and Ethics*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 141-161, 146.

basis for clarifying the best political system for inculcating virtue. As Aristotle says, political inquiry "is devoted to the character of the citizens, to make them good people who do fine actions" (NE, 1099b31-2). And insofar as "correct habituation distinguishes a good political system from a bad one" (NE, 1103b6-7), we must try to identify the ways in which the habits and ideals of our *ethos* are concretely realized in the "moral-political" community (Gadamer 1999, 146). The key idea is that Aristotle shows how ethics hears and listens to the *logos* of a *polis* to move toward belonging to a *polis*.

Throughout my description of the traditional Aristotelian approach to ethics I have not stopped to consider objections to either (my interpretation of) Aristotle's *Ethics* or Aristotle's conception of *eudaimonia* and the virtues in relation to his predecessors. At the beginning of the next section I consider some of the drawbacks of Aristotle's *Ethics* in relation to our modern moral framework, which will serve as a response the common objections against Aristotle's elitist and misogynistic tendencies. Even though questions concerning Aristotle's predecessors are outside the scope of my project, I would say that Aristotle's virtue ethics is a prototype of the premodern view of the good life. If we think of the premodern project of ethics as a way to respond to the sophist's question of "why be moral?" then we might be able to see the strength of the conceptual structure of Aristotle's argument. Since the *polis* makes us what we are, to take responsibility for our moral being is to take hold of the direction of our own lives and to make explicit what we are in *potentia*. To not want to realize our own potential is to not want to live our own lives. And "it would be absurd," Aristotle argues, "if [one] were to choose not [one's] own life, but somebody else's'" (NE, 1178a4-5).

Since I have covered a lot of terrain in this section, I should conclude with a summary of the three key claims to be gathered from this exposition of the premodern ethical outlook, which

will prove to be of assistance in understanding our modern moral situation. First, ethics, broadly construed, must be understood in its relation to the *ethos*, a form of life with its practical and normative dimensions. The *ethos* operates as "the 'background picture' lying behind" our pre-reflective judgments, beliefs, desires, and motivations (Taylor 1989, 8). Recall that, in the *Ethics*, Aristotle not only provides clues as to what is the right course of action, but he also points out that it all has to be derived from the *hoi polloi* (the many) (see NE, 1095b4). Insofar as it starts from the observed beliefs and articulated facts of human life, Aristotle's *Ethics* can be understood as inquiry that tries to clarify the implicit normative "background we assume and draw on in any claim to rightness, part of which we are forced to spell out when we have to defend our responses as the right ones" (Taylor 1989, 9). On the Aristotelian picture, as members of a linguistic community, our modes of interacting with the world are always based on using the public norms and customs we get from the *hoi polloi*. Therefore, as Aristotle says, we have to start from shared beliefs and social practices, but now and then we need to go deeper to see what underlies and motivates our customary ways of life (NE, 1145b4-8).

The second key claim of the premodern conception of ethics is that ethics is primarily a proscriptive practice in gaining insight into the constitutive features of moral agency. Aristotle claims that the good life involves a self-transformation from social habituation (*ethismos*) to *phronēsis*, but he does not provide a rulebook or how-to-guide for the achievement of *eudaimonia*. All he says is that the teleology justifies our selection of the virtues. Aristotle's arguments and descriptions have the force that they do because he offers them as correct articulations of "the understanding among people that they always have by reason of their life and their life together" (Gadamer 1999, 148). Modern readers find Aristotle's equivocation between teleological explanations and ethical advice a bit unsettling, because it seems as if

Aristotle transitions from the neutral position of an objective observer of human phenomena to the authoritative position of an instructor of moral life without even mentioning the fact that he is wearing two different hats. Irwin clarifies the supposed contradiction in Aristotle's thought: "sometimes he appears to think that everyone has a conception of the final good, sometimes to advise people to acquire it, without realizing that he is making different claims."[48] However, it is important to keep in mind that Aristotle "is not out just to understand and explain human action" (Irwin 1980, 48), but he is trying to identify the normative conditions that provide the possibility for the achievement of *eudaimonia*, i.e., a self-chosen mode of human existence. Insofar as any account of what it means to be a human being emerges out of a common background of meaning and intelligibility it will to some extent direct and constrain human behavior. But this prescriptive element is a derivative function of ethics when viewed from the Aristotelian perspective.

The third and last key claim to be gathered from this section is that the *telos* is not the end of the line in a sequence of events; rather, since we are first and foremost social beings, moral agency is "the first cause and the last things to be discovered" (Aristotle NE, 1112b19-20). "For each of us," Aristotle argues, "stops inquiring how to act as soon as he traces the principle to himself and within himself to the guiding part; for this is the part that decides" (1113a5-7). The good life requires personal responsibility and commitment in constantly making oneself into a person of a particular sort. "That is why it is hard work to be excellent. …getting angry, or giving and spending money is easy and everyone can do it; but doing it to the right person, in the right amount, at the right time, for the right end, and in the right way is no longer easy, nor can everyone do it" (Aristotle NE, 1109a25-9). The purposive and flourishing life (*eudaimonia*) is an

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[48] Terence Irwin, "The Metaphysical and Psychological Basis of Aristotle's Ethics," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (1980), 35-53, 47.

extremely demanding and high ideal at the farthest end of the spectrum of imaginable

possibilities and it may not be a possible form of life that could ever actually be achieved.

However, on the Aristotelian picture, one cannot be a moral agent without this ideal.

Thus far I have shown that, within Aristotle's teleological framework, the premodern

moral outlook is gathered from and justified in relation to other areas of political life. In doing so,

Aristotelian ethics critically engages the background of understanding that forms a community's

sense of meaning and purpose. By grounding the good life in a political context of moral agency,

Aristotle's moral ontology "serves as the paradigm of an approach that tries to base ethics on

considerations of well-being and a life worth living" (Williams 1993, 34). In addition, the

premodern self is experienced as inseparable from its place in the political community. This

extended and interconnected self-understanding is indicated in Aristotle's argument that "he who

is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must either

be a beast or a god: he is not part of a state" (*Politics*, 1253a27-30). However, I have yet to

consider how the communal standards of the ancient world are systemically sexist, oppressive,

and patriarchal.

The ideals and virtues contained in Aristotle's ethics do not map on to our (Western)

modern political context or our modern forms of individualism. Many critics and defenders of

virtue ethics have argued that Aristotle's characterization of *eudaimonia* is inherently sexist and

elitist, as it is situated in the sexist and aristocratic context of ancient Athens. In "Feminism,

Moral Development, and the Virtues," Susan Okin argues that even if we follow MacIntyre in

rejecting Aristotle's metaphysical teleology (which I previously described as the view that living

things have built into them a life process that unfolds from an *archē* or origin towards a *telos* or

end) and replace it with a form of social teleology (see MacIntyre 2007, Chapter 14, esp. 197-

203), we are still left with a list of androcentric and exclusionary virtues.[49] "Whatever such

virtues are, and however pervasive such functionally defined virtues may have been throughout

history," Okin writes, "no such account of the virtues can free itself of sexism, racism, and

assumptions about the naturalness of social hierarchies" (216).[50]

The Fragmentary *Ethos* of the Enlightenment

Recall the guiding questions of the first part of this two-part investigation of the motives

and presuppositions guiding any demand for a modern justification of ethics. Why should we

expect every philosopher to have something to say about ethics when we do not have this

expectation for, say, aesthetics or any other branch of human science (*geistewissenschaften*)?

And what does it mean to have an ethics? The purpose of the following discussion of the key

movements in the history of modern moral philosophy that culminated in the collapse of ethics

and ontology, i.e., the fact-value distinction and ontological individualism, is to clarify and

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[49] Susan Okin, "Feminism, Moral Development, and the Virtues," in *How Should One Live?: Essays on the Virtues* (2003), 211-230.
[50] It is worth mentioning that I have chosen Okin's articulation of the drawbacks of the contextual nature of Aristotelian virtue ethics not because I think there can (or should) be an assumption-free virtue ethics. It is my position that ethical inquiry can and should function in a critical and transformative manner. Mainly it is because asking existential questions about the meaning and purpose of life will challenge common sense morality. And insofar as "the study of ethics ought to transform us in some way," it can neither begin from nor end in an ahistorical context (Gordon Marino, "Introduction," in *Ethics: The Essential Writings*, ed. Gordon Marino (New York: Modern Library, 2010), ix-xiv, xiv). I am taking a cue from hermeneutics when I say that the proper starting point for ethics is within a given background of understanding and assumptions, because that shared moral outlook, or what Heidegger refers to as "tradition" (BT, §6), is the medium in which we live and as such constitutes our initial access to questions concerning the good life. As I see it, we can reject and revise the ordinary understanding of human agency and virtue, but there is no escape from the historical tradition that we find ourselves in. Rather than focus on the indefensible details of Aristotle's views on the nature of women and slaves, I think it is more productive to see how the drawbacks of Aristotle's ethics help to shed some light on the concerns and limits of modern moral philosophy. Moreover, the Aristotelian framework does not require us to hold the same views of women and slaves (Williams 1993, 35). That said, Okin's positive argument, that a virtue ethics for the modern world would most likely require a "radical and extensive revision [of] traditional accounts of the virtues" (229; quote modified), speaks to the situation that I refer to as modernity's moral predicament. In what follows, I plan to show that the modern view of morality is marked by sudden transitions in the religious and social milieus of the Western world. In the transition to modernity, the breakdown of religious and normative life in the Western world creates what appears to be an incommensurable gap between ontology and ethics.

support my defense of Heidegger's supposed neglect of ethics, which is that no post-Enlightenment justification of ethics is possible (MacIntyre 2007).

The fragmentation in modern moral philosophy can be brought to light by examining the structural changes in our ethical constitution and social fabric. Two socio-historical transformations set the stage for and culminate in the Enlightenment (1750-1850). First, the scientific revolution (identified by the achievements of Bacon, Galileo, Descartes, Boyle, and Newton) posited an objectified, mechanistic universe comprised of material, quantifiable objects in push-and-pull causal relations void of inherent meaning and purpose. Second, and in conjunction with the rise of modern science, the economic order of objectified reality supplanted the shared moral order of the premodern *polis*.[51] In contrast to the premodern extended self-understanding embedded in a web of relations, the Enlightenment age of science founds a nuclear self-understanding that promotes rugged individualism and fosters an *ethos* of consumerism. The upshot of these changes is that, in our modern world, it has become much harder to believe in, let alone justify, a binding and shared vision of ethical meaning and purpose.

One disclaimer that needs to be kept in mind is that my description of the historical development involves sweeping generalizations. I do not pretend to think that political, moral, and scientific changes and developments manifest in congruent, linear fashions. However, in order to maintain the parameters of my project as a whole, the historical narrative I am offering here moves from antiquity to early modernity by passing over Hellenism, late antiquity, and scholasticism and their respective appropriations of Aristotelian philosophy. With that said, the Roman-Christian appropriation of Aristotelian thought contributed to the rise of modern science and the distinction between ethics and ontology. In my effort to accurately portray the

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[51] I am drawing from Taylor's way of framing this issue in the fifth chapter of *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004).

development of modern moral philosophy, I should comment on some of the significant

consequences that the Roman-Christian appropriation of Aristotelian teleology has for the

modern conception of morality.

Some thinkers see the "Word of God" as the foundation of ethics. Medieval philosophers

such as St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas transform Aristotle's teleology of movement

(from actuality to potentiality) to a teleology of actuality. As we have seen, teleological

explanations of Being do not distinguish what something *is* from what something *is for*. For

Aristotle, the key to understanding existence is movement—"in Greek *bios*…means always

'(mode of) life'" (Cooper 1986, 160), and modes or ways of life are grasped in terms of their

function (*ergon*), of moving from potentiality to actuality. For Aristotle, the *telos* is built into the

essence of what it is to be a human being. There is a slight change in the traditional Aristotelian

ethical framework when Aristotle's biological teleology is replaced by the "Christian-based

teleology of the created world."[52] Medieval philosophy's teleology is based on a conception of

divine creation and order that is not found in Aristotelian ontology. On the Roman-Christian

picture, God, as the creator of all that *is*, establishes order and purpose in nature. It may be more

complex than this, but a divine command theory is part of Augustine and Aquinas' metaphysics:

the purpose of our worldly existence comes from the "Word of God." In essence, revealed

religion answers Plato's *Euthyphro* question of whether the gods love the good because it is good

or the good is good because of the gods' love.[53] The answer is that "it is their divine origin that

distinguishes good principles from evil, they are in accordance with a law given by God to nature

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[52] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Ontological Problem of Value (1971)," in *Hermeneutics, Religion, and Ethics* (1999), 58-75, 59.
[53] Plato, *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*, ed. John M. Cooper, trans. G.M. A. Grube, 2nd/revised ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), 2a-16a, 9c-d.

and to man, the summit of his creation."[54] The received "Word of God" is made good and binding by an appeal to the nature of God. Within the framework of rational theology "even [its] most rationalized form," Arendt writes, "the *obligatory* character of the good for man lies in God's command" (755).

The vision of the good life engendered by the Christian teleology introduces concepts that do not make sense within Aristotle's teleological framework. One difference alluded to in the paragraph above is that Aristotle's *Ethics* does not include Judeo-Christian virtues such as mercy, hope, charity, forgiveness, love, chastity, or repentance (MacIntyre 2007, 174). This is because there is no conception of the biblical fall from grace, sin, or redemption. As MacIntyre notes, "the notion of a final redemption of an almost entirely unregenerate life has no place in Aristotle's scheme; the story of the thief on the cross is unintelligible in Aristotelian terms" (175). Whereas the Aristotelian *telos* refers to "the way our whole life is constructed," the medieval *telos* refers to the climax, point, or motive of one's life, where life is thought of as a journey or quest. "The end which [one] seeks is something which if gained can redeem all that was wrong with his life up to that point" (MacIntyre, 175).[55]

In addition, whereas Aristotle's *Ethics* is oriented toward the political community and the good life of its citizens, the Christian-based *ethos* is oriented toward the religious individual's will and the nature of his or her commitment to the laws of God.[56] Religious life deals with the

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[54] Hannah Arendt, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy," in *Social Research* 61, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 739–764, 755.

[55] Stated in different terms, ethics of an imperative nature do not fit within an Aristotelian framework. The virtues are not "laws prescribed to nature by divine reason" (Arendt 1994, 754); rather the virtues are character dispositions that enable us to flourish as citizens of the *polis*. The concepts of duty, command, and should are not found in Aristotle's *Ethics*. Gadamer points out, "We find the word δέον in association with ἀγαθόν, the good, in the phrase δέον καὶ ἀγαθόν ('good and binding'). δέον means the binding, the obligatory. It refers less to a demand that is made binding on single individuals than to a common basis of obligation on which are grounded all customs and forms of social life" (1999, 146).

[56] This characterization of the difference between Aristotle's and Christianity's teleological conceptions of the virtues does not assume that it comes down to the Christian incorporation of the divine. We saw in the previous

individual's own inner conditions of faith, where faith refers to an intense inner feeling of devotion to God. In contrast to the premodern extended self-understanding that is experienced as inseparable from its web of relations to others, religious individualism emerges in terms of a nuclear self-understanding that centers on the will. This is seen in St. Augustine's *Confessions* when, in his quest for the good life, he experiences an incommensurable division in his will. He has intellectual certainty of the good and God's existence, he wants to turn his life around to serve God's law, but he is unable to break free from the chains of habit. He says, "By now I was quite certain; but I was still bound to earth.... I was held down as agreeably by this world's baggage as one often is by sleep; and indeed the thoughts with which I meditated upon You were like the efforts of a man who wants to get up but is so heavy with sleep that he simply sinks back into it again."[57] In St. Augustine's account of his moral conversion, we see that to reach his *telos* St. Augustine must release himself from his worldly attachments—habits and desires—and be resolute in his commitment to God's law. In other words, the good life is understood as a quest or journey that requires ascetic practices that will enable the individual's "powers" (or *virtus*, which is the Latin translation of the Greek *aretē*) to reach his or her *telos*. With the emphasis on faith, the will, and ascetic practices, the virtues are displaced from the Aristotelian framework and emerge as means or dispositions that "will preempt the will to move in one direction or another" (MacIntyre 2007, 168). This turn inward is what MacIntyre refers to as the "interiorization of the moral life":

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section that the divine does hold a special place in, but is not the center of, Aristotle's *Ethics*. For Aristotle, the divine "is the imperishable and immortal, and he too thinks that man's highest virtue, precisely because he is mortal, consists in dwelling as much as possible in the neighborhood of the divine" (Arendt 1994, 754). But the good life is not ordained or commanded by the divine. One could say that the Aristotelian God (unmoved mover) is ontologically necessary, but is not available for religious or ethical purposes. As Arendt clarifies, "The whole question turns around the 'good life,' which way of life is best for man, something obviously up to man to find out and to judge" (754).

[57] Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. by Michael P. Foley, trans. F.J. Sheed, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006), 148.

…it is always open to the will to assent or dissent from these promptings. Even the possession of a vice does not necessitate the performance of any particular one action. Everything turns on the character of the interior act of will. Character therefore, the arena of the virtues and vices, simply becomes one more circumstance, external to the will. The true arena of morality is that of the will and of the will alone. (168)

So far we have seen that the theological appropriation of Aristotelian teleology transforms some of the basic concepts of ethics. On the Christian-based teleology, the virtues and the good life are of secondary importance to intentions, desires, reason, and purpose. For Aristotle, on the other hand, the former are constitutive of the latter. Another way to state the difference is that, whereas Aristotle's *Ethics* focuses on the constitutive aspects of moral agency, the ultimate standard of moral conduct for Christian-based ethics is the will's obedience to God's law. Given all these differences, Aristotelian and Christian-based teleology are structurally the same. Both assume a two-tiered conception of life. The good life is understood as an ethical ideal that requires character-building virtues or ascetic practices that enable us to live fuller, richer lives. Accordingly, there is no way to access the proper course of human development without understanding life processes in teleological terms. On both views, the quality of the final cause, understood as that future state that determines the progression of events in which a person becomes what she is in *potentia*, provides a sense of what humans must be like to have an ethics.

Yet, at the most basic level, we can see that the interiorization of the moral life and the Christian-based teleology of the created world "contributed to the rise of mechanism" and the fact-value distinction: "the ideal universe from this point of view is a mechanical one, without intrinsic purpose" (Taylor 1989, 82). This is partly due to the fact that what is of primary importance within the framework of Christian teleology is the sovereignty of God and the inner condition of individual faith (see Taylor 1989; St. Augustine 2006). The other part of the story

has to do with the rise of modern science. It is against this background that the anti-Aristotelian and anti-teleology movements emerge.

Aristotle's biological teleology, which is based on empirical observation, dominated science for over a millennium, but it was blasted out of the water by seventeenth century metaphysics and epistemology. "Between 1605 and 1644 a series of books appeared in rapid succession in England, Italy, and France, which laid waste to Aristotelian natural philosophy in the universities. The authors were Francis Bacon, Galileo, and René Descartes. The only conspicuous matter of agreement among them was that Aristotelian natural philosophy was not good philosophy."[58] Despite their differences, Bacon, Galileo, and Descartes reject Aristotelian teleological causality and insist that the natural world is best understood in mechanistic terms. This idea is expressed in famous words of Galileo's *The Assayer*:

> Philosophy is written in this grand book, the universe, which stands continually open to our gaze. But the book cannot be understood unless one first learns to comprehend the language and read the letters in which it is composed. It is written in the language of mathematics and its characters of triangles, circles, and other geometric figures without which it is humanly impossible to understand a single word of it; without these, one wanders about in a dark labyrinth.[59]

Here we see that teleological causality is only an illusion. It is not some mysterious or potential future state that determines the chain of events in nature. Contrary to Aristotelian natural philosophy, Galileo argues that the world operates according to mathematical procedures and mechanistic causal laws, meaning that all natural movement is the result of causes wherein the causes precede and are separate from the event.

These ideas are displayed in Bacon's "Aphorisms on the Interpretation of Nature and on the Kingdom of Man" (1620) where he writes, "Human knowledge and human power come to

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[58] Stillman Drake, *Galileo: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.
[59] Galileo Galilei, "The Assayer (1623)," in *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo*, ed. and trans. Stillman Drake (New York: Random House/Anchor Books, 1957), 231-280, 237-38.

the same thing, because ignorance of cause frustrates effect. For Nature is conquered only by obedience; and that which in thought is a cause, is like a rule in practice" (2000, 33). The ideal of the scientific method pioneered by Bacon and Galileo is that it is necessary to bracket our initial experience of things—or what Bacon refers to as "idols" or false appearances, that is, various epistemological obstacles—in order to view the world from a disengaged point of view. In order to have absolute, objective knowledge of the world, that is, "to introduce men to actual particulars and their sequences and orders," Bacon argues, "men [must] pledge to abstain for a while from notions, and begin to get used to actual things" (2000, 40). In other words, objective facts are value-neutral, non-subjective facts of reality. The proper way to discern objective facts is to bracket or set aside prejudices and biases such as our social background and subject relative characteristics that affect the judgments we make about the things we perceive. The basic idea of objectification is that it must be possible to explain the world as it is in itself, i.e. reality, without any subject relativism. To accomplish this goal, the scientific method creates a methodological grid of sorts that presupposes a bifurcated conception of the world wherein the objective mechanistic world is quantifiably distinguished from the subjective realm of experience.

In a similar anti-teleological and anti-Aristotelian vein, Descartes argues that, in conjunction with the mechanistic laws of nature, reason is instrumental. In the *Meditations*, Descartes acknowledges as much when he says,

> [S]ince I now know that my nature is very weak and limited, whereas the nature of God is immense, incomprehensible, and infinite, this is sufficient for me also to know that he can make innumerable things whose causes escape me. For this reason alone the entire class of causes which people customarily derive from a thing's 'end,' I judge to be utterly useless in physics. It is not without rashness that I think myself capable of inquiring into the ends of God.[60]

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[60] René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, 4th ed., trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1998), 82.

As we can see, there is no room for teleology in the mechanistic ideal. On the push-and-pull model of the universe, reason is no longer an insightful or moral capacity, but it is matter of procedure. As a faculty of the human mind, reason is an instrument or tool that enables us to discern the most efficient means to achieve or produces things, but it does not grant us insight into the final cause or end in itself. In other words, it is "the kind of rationality we draw on when we calculate the most economical application of means to a given end. Maximum efficiency, the best out-put ratio, is the measure of success."[61] Instrumental reason is a process of abstraction that leads to the conclusion that all that can be counted as real is what is quantifiable.

The programmatic assumption that the natural world has a mathematical reality eliminates a huge portion of what we commonly consider to be part of reality such as love, beauty, value, desires, intentions, ideals, and purpose. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century "'morality' became the name for that particular sphere in which rules of conduct which are neither theological nor legal nor aesthetic are allowed a cultural space of their own" (MacIntyre 2007, 39). Morality becomes a predicate or appendage of existence, something that can be tacked on to the factual "is." "The world *in itself* consists only of particles and energy; the world *for us* includes subjective values that we project onto things. Judgments about good and bad, beautiful and ugly, are 'value judgments' that merely reflect our own desires, instead of saying something about the world."[62] Enlightenment reality consists of material, quantifiable substances. Secondary and tertiary values do not exist in the world. Rather, subject-relative characteristics such as feelings, intentions, motives, and purposes exist only in the mind of the perceiver. The Enlightenment's individualistic view of reality opens up a logical (or, more

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[61] Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 5.
[62] Richard Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), 56.

precisely, a metaphysical) gap between the "is" and the "ought" that has long-lasting repercussions for value-laden dimensions of existence such as morality, aesthetics, and religion.

In contrast to the premodern teleological justification of the virtues, the Enlightenment receives from its 17th century predecessors a leveled-down conception of life wherein nothing of value, meaning, and purpose exists in the external world of objective facts. Rather, morality, aesthetics, and religion are human creations. The point is that, once (moral) ontology is detached from the Greek or Christian teleological framework, it becomes impossible for moral philosophy to address matters concerning how people decide which ends to choose and what goals people should pursue. In MacIntyre's words, "Detach morality from that framework and you will no longer have morality; or, at the very least, you will have radically transformed its character" (2007, 56). Without some kind of teleology, the archetypes of the good life that were traditionally gathered from the normative life-world are seen as raw materials at hand for our disposal—merely things on hand for us to use—but this does not allow for the archetypes to have any authoritative influence because they are merely instrumental. What remains when the shared values and ethical virtues that served as a common basis of civic membership are "not justified by any wider framework of purpose or belief" (Bellah et al. 1996, 6)? The answer I would like to suggest is that without teleology there is no way to justify virtues and ethical ideals.

The age of science dispelled any illusion of moral authority that extends beyond subject-relative characteristics, and all we moderns are left with are fragments of a once coherent, unified understanding of ethics. One way of understanding this situation is to see that the Enlightenment inherited incoherent fragments of what was once a unified framework of ethics and attempted (unsuccessfully) to put the pieces back together. As MacIntyre points out, within the teleological framework there is a fundamental distinction between what a person "happens-

to-be" and what a person "could-be-if he [or she]-realized-his [or her]-essential-nature," and

"ethics is the science" that "enables [people] to understand how they make the transition from

the former state to the latter" (2007, 52). Without teleology, there is no hierarchical ordering or

essential ethical ideals of what a person could be-if he [or she]-realized-his [or her]-essential-

nature. Enlightenment moral philosophers inherit the ontological remnants of the 17th century

view of "untutored-human-nature-as-it-is" as well as "a certain content for morality: a set of

injunctions deprived of their teleological context" (MacIntyre 2007, 55). However, the value-

neutral facts of human nature do not tell us anything about the best quality of life that a person

can life, and this is why Williams says that "morality should be understood as a particular

development of the ethical" (1993, 6), a system of rules, injunctions, and principles of human

behavior. The Enlightenment's attempt to put the pieces of ethics and ontology back together is

what MacIntyre refers to as "the Enlightenment project of justifying morality." "Its key premises

would characterize some feature or features of human nature; and the rules of morality would

then be explained and justified as being those rules which a being possessing such a nature could

accept" (MacIntyre 2007, 52).

Eighteenth century moral philosophers unsuccessfully attempt to discern a logical or

rational bridge from the "is"—the facts of human nature—to the "ought"—the duties and rules of

human behavior. In the words of David Hume (1711-1766), "the end of moral speculations is to

teach us our duty."[63] To justify our duties, a philosopher must be able to provide a shared, all-

encompassing foundation (i.e. source or cause) that is valid and acceptable for all human beings

(Williams 1993, 243). In *A Treatise on Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the*

Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects, Hume argues that moral philosophy

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[63] David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 2nd edition, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), 166.

cannot and should not be expected to provide an external justification of intentions and motives, which are internal reasons of action. Hume correctly sees that the justification of morality is a question of moral motivation and moral judgment. What imparts motivation to follow moral rules such as promise-keeping, honesty, and allegiance? According to Hume, the motivating principle, where principle refers to the antecedent cause or source, of human behavior lies not in human reason but in the passions. The "impulse" to act benevolently and kindly toward others "arises not from reason, but is only directed by it."[64] This is why he says, "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them" (415). Against the moral rationalist, Hume recognizes that morality concerns social customs and habits, which are useful (that is, practical) and agreeable. Since utility and agreeableness concern "relations of ideas" and not "matters of fact," practicality and sentiment do not give us any reason to follow normative conventions. As Hume famously argues, no "ought," which concerns a relation of ideas, can be logically derived from what-is, which refers to matters of fact. "Hume in effect rejects both the notion of a good in itself and the notion of our possessing a faculty able somehow to detect it."[65]

Even the rationalism of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), another prominent figure of the Enlightenment, acknowledges that there is a fundamental and incommensurable distinction between the "is" and the "ought." At the risk of oversimplifying the profound insights of Kant's moral philosophy, I merely want to point out that he upholds the Enlightenment fact-value distinction, which in Kant's ethical framework is regarded as the distinction between the laws of

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[64] Daivd Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature (reprinted from the Original Ed. in 3 Volumes)*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, England: The Clarendon Press, 1789), 414.
[65] James A. Harris, "Hume," in *The Routledge Companion to Ethics*, ed. John Skorupski (London and New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2010), 122-132, 127.

nature and the moral law of freedom.[66] The laws of nature do not tell us anything about how we ought to be living our lives. That is, there is no freedom or chance in the universe, everything is determined, but morality has to do with freedom and agency. The laws of nature are "so to speak obligatory: I follow a law of nature when I die, but it cannot be said, except metaphorically, that I obey it" (Arendt 1994, 759). Kant argues that a "pure" moral philosophy is that which is "fully cleansed of everything that might be in any way empirical and belong to anthropology."[67] Understood as a law of freedom, moral obligation is binding, universal, and inescapable (Williams 1993, 177), and so knowledge of the "ought" cannot be derived from the contingencies of empirical observations or anthropology. Instead, the foundation of morality comes from "the moral law within me," that is, "my invisible self" that "presents me in a world…which can be discovered only by the understanding, and I cognize that my connection with that world (and thereby with all those visible worlds as well) is not merely contingent, as in the first case, but universal and necessary."[68]

For Kant, since everything hangs on intentions, it is necessary to distinguish between the moral ought and the "good will". The latter non-moral judgments are "hypothetical imperatives" that are not, and cannot be, universally binding, because they serve as means to our particular, contingent ends that we might happen to have at any given time. The moral ought, on the other hand, is a "categorical imperative" that is universally binding, because it is an unconditional

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[66] Kant's moral philosophy and its impact on Heidegger's thought are discussed at length in the fourth chapter. Although I focus on the Aristotelian strand of Heidegger's ethics, there is no question that Heidegger is also indebted to Kant's insights. This passage from Morchen's transcription of Heidegger's lecture course on the *Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy* (henceforth abbreviated as "BCAP"), which he prepared while writing *Being and Time*, captures Heidegger's high regard for Kant. "Decline of Greek philosophy; this high level of research could not be upheld. In the modern period, Kant became a Greek of the first rank, if only for a short time" (trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), 230).

[67] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and trans. Allen W. Wood (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 5.

[68] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 133.

command or obligation of reason that dictates or prescribes an act as good in itself.[69] Contrary to Hume's argument that the good lies in the utility and practicality of actions, Kant asserts that the moral worth of an action does not rest on conforming to the moral law, but "it must also happen *for the sake of this law*" (2002, 6).[70] This represents, for Kant, the purity of intentions, as it is independent from the fleeting inclinations of the passions and non-moral self-serving motives.

On this framework, what imparts motivation to obey the moral law? Kant's answer is freedom, which is revealed by the moral law and understood as self-sufficient reason. This is a complicated matter, but I think the following passage from MacIntyre captures the essential points of Kant's justification of the moral law:

> It is the essence of reason that it lays down principles which are universal, categorical, and internally consistent. Hence a rational morality will lay down principles which both can and ought to be held by *all* men, independent of circumstances and conditions, which could consistently be obeyed by every rational agent on every occasion. The test for the proposed maxim is then easily framed: can we or can we not consistently will that everyone should always act on it? (2007, 45)

Kant's justification of the moral law provides an all-embracing foundation that grounds a criterion that dictates one choice over another. He seems to be successful in the Enlightenment project of justifying morality, because the will, understood as self-determining freedom, to obey the moral law is founded on the nature of rational agency. The difficulty is that once you strip out all of the content of moral motivation, rational agency starts to look vacuous. It is not clear that there is a binding moral law that I can uphold independent of any of the concrete things that I care about (see Williams 1993, Chapters 4 and 7). The impartial foundation of moral agency seems to cancel out that which brought us to the question of moral justification in the first place.

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[69] I am drawing from Thomas E. Hill Jr.'s description of Kantian ethics. See "Kant," in *The Routledge Companion to Ethics*, ed. John Skorupski (London and New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2010), 156–167.
[70] Gadamer points out that "Kant juxtaposes the concept of absolute or intrinsic value—which constitutes the worth of humanity and gives it the character of an end in itself—with the value concept that originates in English economics of the eighteenth century" (1999, 60).

The Enlightenment project of justifying morality cannot access and fails to address the holistic context of moral agency. Instead of asking about the good life and what sort of person one is to become, "the primary question from their standpoint has concerned rules: what rules ought we to follow? And why ought we to obey them?" (MacIntyre 2007, 118-19) It is generally agreed this is a distinctive shortcoming of modern moral philosophy. This dilemma is the outgrowth of the assumptions presupposed by the Enlightenment fact-value distinction, which calls for "moral impartiality" and opens the door to problems of subjectivism and moral relativism.[71] The impetus for ethical theory to have an impartial, absolute foundation of moral authority is derived from the Enlightenment ideal of the view from nowhere (discussed earlier in this section). The idea is that we can get an absolute foundation of moral rules and principles from a disengaged and detached view of morality. This is one reason why ethical theories of the Enlightenment distinguish between moral or "non-self-regarding" obligations and prudential or self-oriented motivations (Williams 1972, 68). The assumption is that a human being is a self-contained center of will and experience, so all interactions with others are based on decisions and judgments. The key to developing an ethical theory is to construct a ground plan that tells an individual how she should or ought to interact with, think about, and care for others. If this system is not grounded on an impartial, value-free foundation, then it cannot apply to all individuals in all circumstances at all times, and it falls prey to the contingencies of changing social systems and subjective preferences and tastes.

As we can see, the Enlightenment fact-value distinction lies at the heart of the is-ought distinction (Williams 1993, 128). Modern moral philosophy, understood as a product of Enlightenment naturalism, maintains the distinction between objective, quantifiable facts and subject-relative values (see Guignon et al. 1999, 265). On this fragmented and iseemingly

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[71] See Bernard Williams, *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

incoherent view of human nature, on the one hand, and morality, on the other, practical

recommendations—the "ought"—cannot be logically derived from the facts of the objective

world—the "is." The is-ought *impasse* creates a demand in moral philosophy for the fact-value

distinction. Prescriptive conclusions require value judgments, but, as we have already seen,

values do not exist in the world. Robert Bellah and his colleagues point out, "When science

seemed to have dominated the explanatory schemas of the external world, morality and religion

took refuge in human subjectivity, in feeling and sentiment. Morality and religion were related to

aesthetics, the realm of feeling par excellence" (1996, 46). On this watered-down view of reality,

nothing of value, meaning, and purpose exist in the external world; rather, they are merely

constructions and products of the human mind.

The main function of moral philosophy, on the modern view, is to make people more

effective at achieving the values people want. However, the claim that the moral agent is an

individual and should be choosing his or her own values is a value-laden claim (Guignon et al.

1999, 265). This brings us to the other difficulty facing modern moral philosophers. The

Enlightenment project of "providing a rational vindication of morality" (MacIntyre 2007, 50) is

further complicated by the political and religious tides of change spreading throughout the

Western world during this time. There has been a dominant way of thinking about the self in the

Western world for the past two hundred years, which is "individualism." In *Democracy in*

America (1835), Alex de Tocqueville introduces the word "individualism" to refer to the

tendency for people to withdraw into their own desires, interests, and so.[72] It is not only the case

that "the expulsion of Aristotelian teleology from the moral world" makes it virtually impossible

for the Enlightenment moral philosophers "to provide a shared, public rational justification for

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[72] Alex de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America*, trans. Gerald E. Bevan (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

morality" (MacIntyre 2007, 119 and 50 respectively). The other roadblock on the modern path to constructing an ethical system is the view that the ultimate basic realities of the world are individuals and individuals can contractually bind together.

As we have seen, this is what Bellah and his colleagues refer to as "ontological individualism." Interestingly, Bellah notes, the emergence of ontological individualism "owed little to either classical or biblical sources." "Rather, it consciously started with the biological individual in a 'state of nature' and derived a social order from the actions of such individuals, first in relation to nature and then in relation to one another" (Bellah et al. 1996, 143). Along with the Protestant Reformation and Industrial Revolution, the seventeenth century's rigorous pursuit of individual rights and freedom helped to "release" much of the Western world from the chains of political and religious bondage. The revolutionary and liberating movements that loosened the grip of political and religious forces also gave way to a uniquely modern form of individualism that pits the life of the individual against its dependence on and place in society.

The ontological primacy of the individual is seen in Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Émile* (1762). He writes, "Whether my pupil be destined for the army, the church, or the bar matters little to me. Before he can think of adopting the vocation of his parents, nature calls upon him to be a man. How to live is the business I wish to teach him. On leaving my hands he will not, I admit, be a magistrate, a soldier, or a priest; first he will be a man. All that a man ought to be he can be…"[73] In this passage, Rousseau describes selfhood not only as the primary reality of human existence but also as fundamentally distinct from political and social obligations. The idea is that one should be a self prior to entering into social life. The responsibilities and obligations that accompany social existence only distract from the business of living. Modern individualism stands in stark contrast with the premodern sense of self. For the latter, the self is

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[73] Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, trans. Eleanor Worthington (Boston: D.C. Heath & Company, 1889), 13-14.

defined in and through its web of social relations. The idea of a self ontologically distinct from

its social roles and political ties would not make sense in the premodern moral vision.

The modern understanding of agency is based on the Enlightenment ideal of absolute

freedom, that is, freedom *from* economic constraints and social conventions (Bellah et al. 1996,

25). Accordingly, freedom and obligation are valorized against each other. The basic point is that

our social existence takes away our freedom; it enslaves and impedes our ability to be

individuals. Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Self-Reliance* (1888) eloquently captures the defining

features of modern individualism. First of all, "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the

manhood of everyone of its members."[74] To be an individual, then, one "must be a

nonconformist" (15). Furthermore, "What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people

think" (18). The "expressive individualism" (Bellah et al. 1996, 143) of romanticism involves

embracing one's own "freedom from" and living without the illusion of there being something

more significant or authoritative than the individual's own self-worth. Self-reliance "is harder,

because you will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know

it. It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our

own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the

independence of solitude" (Emerson 1908, 19). On this understanding of the self, a morality

based on obligations is a source of discontent for us that constrains our freedom and impedes on

human agency.

The Question of Heidegger's Ethics

For better or for worse, the modern idea of the self as distinct from society and even

antithetical to morality, has become dominant in the Western world. The reduction of ethical life

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[74] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Essay on Self-Reliance* (New York: The Roycrofters, 1908), 14.

to moral values and the "modern invention of the *individual*" (MacIntyre 2007, 61) create an impossible situation for any post-Enlightenment moral philosopher. Modern ethical theory cannot justify morality due to the fact that it is closed off to the normative dimension of the human life-world.

To recap, we saw earlier that an Aristotelian framework of ethics broadly covers the social, practical, and normative dimensions of the human life-world. The social dimension of ethics captures the "dialogical character" of human relationships, "as a process of engaging each other's interests, needs, prospects, and actions."[75] The practical aspect of ethics covers "actions and modes of living." And the normative dimension of ethics "involves preferences and estimations of better and worse ways of living, along with the shaping of an 'ought' as a measure or guidance for such evaluations." Ethics, broadly construed, is "(1) action-guiding (What should I do?), (2) action-judging (Did I act well?), (3) value-disclosing (What is good or worth desiring?), and (4) life-shaping (What kind of life should I/we lead?)" (Hatab 2000, 3). On the Aristotelian paradigm, the first two issues are addressed and justified by the last two. In other words, the normative conditions (or teleology) of ethical life determine the social and practical function of human behavior.

The Aristotelian project of working out an ethics is twofold. First, Aristotle tries to give an account of the norms and practices "that will explain and justify the common beliefs" of how one can live a meaningful and fulfilling life (Irwin 1999, 323). Second, as an inquiry of the good life, Aristotle's *Ethics* is supposed to provide the groundwork of political philosophy because "the 'good life' of the citizen is the *raison d'être* of the *polis*" (Arendt 1994, 754). However, with no human essence or proper function of human society that dictates the proper or

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[75] Lawrence J. Hatab, *Ethics and Finitude: Heideggerian Contributions to Moral Philosophy* (New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 3.

constitutive end (*telos*) of normative practices, how do people decide which ends to choose or what goals to pursue? In "Objectivity and Understanding in Economics," Max Weber (1864-1920) answers this question in a distinctly modern way. He says, "From our point of view, 'purpose' is the conception of an *effect* which becomes a *cause* of action."[76] In contrast to the premodern conception of reason as an insightful and moral capacity of understanding that can drive us to living purposeful and meaningful lives, in the mechanistic world reason becomes strictly utilitarian and fails to say anything about ends themselves. Reason is defined in instrumental terms as a matter of technique, and effective moral agency is seen as a calculative skill that is useful for achieving personal values and desires.

Ethical theory, in the modern world, has a radically different character. By the nineteenth century, science already has a long history of treating reality as something that is factual and value-free; the "ought" of morality cannot be explained and evaluated in the mechanistic and value-free language of modern science. Moral philosophers of the nineteenth century try to account for the "ought" in the fact-value language of human science (*Geistewissenschaften*) in terms of value theory. The problem for an ethics of value, which Gadamer discusses at length in "The Ontological Problem of Value," is "how to reconcile the relativity of values with their claim to be absolute and unconditional" (1999, 66). Value theory is unsuccessful in its attempt to uncover phenomenological evidence that establishes or grounds the connection between the concrete *ethos* and the subjective realm of values. In a short time, moral philosophy is taken over by economic theory and meaning and value are defined instrumentally in terms of worth and evaluated along cost-benefit lines. The following passage from Weber captures the shift from the normative "ought" to subjective "value" to economic "worth" (*Werte*).

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[76] Max Weber, "Objectivity and Understanding in Economics," in *The Philosophy of Economics: An Anthology*, ed. Daniel M. Hausman, 3rd ed., (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 59–72, 65.

> The question of the appropriateness of the means for achieving a given end is undoubtedly accessible to scientific analysis. …We can…provide the acting person with the ability to weigh and compare the undesirable as over against the desirable consequences of his action. Thus, we can answer the question: what will the attainment of a desired and 'cost' in terms of the predictable loss of other values? …To apply the results of this analysis in the making of a decision, however, is not a task which science can undertake; it is rather the task of the acting, willing, person: he weighs and chooses from among the values involved according to his own conscience and his personal view of the world. (Weber 2008, 59-60)

In short, the main function of moral philosophy is to make people more effective at achieving the values they want, but it remains silent about what ends are worth choosing.

The consequences of the Enlightenment fact-value distinction are far-reaching. First, since the normative dimension of the human life-world is inaccessible to modern moral philosophy, ethical theory is confined to understanding and explaining the social and practical aspects of human behavior. That is, it is a human science focused on the "small portion of existing concrete reality [that] is colored by our value-conditioned interest," which Weber identifies as significant because "it reveals relationships which are important to us due to their connection with our values" (2008, 61). Second, moral agency is treated as a biological given and the primary task of modern ethical theory is to uphold the primacy of the individual. In this narrow framework, "albeit paradoxically, individuals are seen as both radically self-interested and obligated to respect and advance the freedom and rights of all people" (Guignon et al. 1999, 49). Whereas for premodern ethics, being a productive and functioning member of the moral-political community is a necessary and sufficient condition of moral agency, modern ethical theory is charged with the utilitarian task of positing the social and practical obligations of individuals and aggregates of individuals. All that is required to live the good life is that

individuals fulfill the basic economic obligations of social existence.[77] On this bleached-out

picture of human life, the good life is the isolated, risk-free, non-committal life of the "economic

man" merely getting by with no strings attached.

Recall the guiding question of the chapter: why does it count as a criticism that

Heidegger does not defend a particular position with respect to the morality of modernity? First

of all, as we have seen, the question of "how do you justify ethics?" no longer makes sense, so I

do not think it makes sense to fault Heidegger for not formulating an ethics. After all, we would

not blame a contemporary scientist for not writing a book on alchemy or phrenology, so why

should we blame a philosopher for not writing a book on ethics? Second of all, given the

contentious and individualistic framework of modern morality, formulating a table of universal

rules and values seems more like an attempt to evade and neglect ethics, rather than a way to

recover and re-appropriate the bonds of moral-political existence. But this is a topic of discussion

for another time. To be clear, the post-Enlightenment paradox of vindicating morality does not

fully address the issues surrounding Heidegger's ethics, but it does help us see why Heidegger

always scoffs at the project of working out an ethics. Furthermore, it opens up and shifts the

inquiry of Heidegger's ethics. Instead of demanding that Heidegger defend a particular moral

position with respect to morality, we can begin anew and try to see if Heidegger has anything to

say about our current moral-political situation. As I previously mentioned, I think Heidegger is

doing something radically different from modern moral philosophy. This should not be

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[77] In his 1935 lectures on the *Introduction to Metaphysics* (henceforth abbreviated as "IM"), Heidegger scrutinizes the concept of values and the pervasiveness of the fact-value distinction. He writes, "because the expression 'value' is starting to look worn out, especially because it also plays a role in economic theory, one now calls values 'totalities'. […] In 1928 there appeared the first part of a collected bibliography on the concept of value. It cites 661 publications on the concept of value. Probably by now there are a thousand. All this calls itself philosophy" (*Introduction To Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 213).

surprising given the fact that Heidegger goes to great lengths to distinguish his work from modern moral philosophy, ethics of value, and economic theory.

In fact, Heidegger regards the modern distinction between ontology and ethics as one of the most disastrous developments in Western thought. I think his most damning attack against this distinction is contained in the "Letter on Humanism," where he claims, "thinking in values is the greatest blasphemy imaginable against Being" (251). Heidegger's confrontation with the modern fact-value distinction extends from as early as his 1919 lecture courses titled *Towards the Definition of Philosophy* to his 1943 lecture on "The Word of Nietzsche: God is Dead" and beyond. My task is not to trace the development of his critique of the modern ethics-ontology distinction, but I would like to point out some of Heidegger's key insights that lead us to the heart of the matter.[78]

In the *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935), Heidegger brings our attention to the ways in which the modern distinction between Being and Ought reveals (or presupposes) the absence of any shared, objective ground that determines good and bad or right and wrong. When the "ought" is reduced to value (*Werte*), meaning is explained in terms of subjective intentions and desires. The modern fact-value distinction "posits the human being as something present at hand, deposits this thing into an empty space, and appraises it according to some table of values that it attached to it externally" (IM, 175).[79] In other words, the anthropocentricism of the fact-value distinction reduces, Kant notwithstanding, meaning and purpose to subjective preferences and tastes and utilitarian calculations. The contradistinction between brute, objective "facts" and

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[78] For a thorough exposition of the development of Heidegger's confrontation with the modern fact-value distinction see Frank Schalow's "At the Crossroads of Freedom: Ethics Without Values," in *A Companion to Heidegger's Introduction to Metaphysics*, eds. Richard Polt and Gregory Fried (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 250–262; and Hans Sluga's "'Conflict is the Father of All Things': Heidegger's Polemical Conception of Politics," in *A Companion to Heidegger's Introduction to Metaphysics*, eds. Richard Polt and Gregory Fried (2001), 205-225.

[79] It is worth noting that, in the "Preface" to the seventh edition of *Being and Time*, Heidegger refers to this 1935 lecture course as a companion to *Being and Time*.

subjective "values" presupposes that the objects "out there" in the "external" world have a reality independent of the subjective reality of "values."[80] This presents the world as a collection of "present-at-hand" objects wherein subjects merely project meaning and assign value onto brute, inanimate things. In "The Age of the World Picture" (1938), Heidegger remarks that the uprootedness of the "ought" is perceived by "the fact that we impart value to the object, and that which is interpreted as object, and that we take the measure of whatever is, solely in keeping with the criterion of value, and make of values themselves the goal of all activity."[81] This is especially the case in a capitalist society where the progress of existence is measured in terms of efficiency and quantifiable outcomes.[82]

The result of the gaping fissure between Being and "ought" is that our "habits of the heart" have broken down and relationships are seen as a contractual and commercial nature (Bellah at al. 1996). As Heidegger says, "Value appears to be the expression of the fact that we, in our position of relationship to it, act to advance that which is itself most valuable; and yet the very value is the impotent and threadbare disguise of whatever is, an objectivity of that has become flat and devoid of background" (QCT, 142). The subject, on the modern view, is the sole criterion by which we can evaluate the worth and significance of things. The post-Enlightenment assumption, then, is that there is no shared and common background that determines the meaning of things. On the premodern paradigm of ethics, a range of normative possibilities and virtues is opened up by the *ethos* of the *polis*. The separation of Being and "ought" reduces this spectrum to tables of values and rules of conduct, which leaves little to no room for moral agency or responsibility in

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[80] C.f. Charles Guignon, "Heidegger's Anti-Dualism: Beyond Mind and Matter," in *Heidegger's Being and Time: Critical Essays*, ed. Richard Polt (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005) 75-88; and Richard Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), 56-58.

[81] Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (abbreviated as QCT), trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 115-154, 142.

[82] See Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London and New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2005).

the deepest sense of the word. The leveling down of the totality of what-is (Being) to numerical

units of value posits a meaningless, anthropocentric world. This is why Heidegger says,

> To think against 'values' is not to maintain that everything interpreted as 'a
> value'—'culture,' 'art,' 'science,' 'human dignity,' 'world,' and 'God'—is
> valueless. Rather, it is important finally to realize that precisely through the
> characterization of something as 'a value' what is so valued is robbed of its worth.
> That is to say, by the assessment of something as a value what is valued is
> admitted as an object for man's estimation. (LH, 251)

The result of the modern distinction between ethics and ontology is that motivation for

ethical life falls out, because people no longer see a reason as to why they should care about it.

As Hubert Dreyfus points out, "The things that once evoked commitment—gods, heroes, the

God-man, acts of great statesmen, the words of great thinkers—have lost their authority. As a

result, individuals feel isolated and alienated. They feel that their lives have no meaning because

the public world contains no guidelines."[83] Far from binding us together, values hold us apart! Or,

as Heidegger puts it, "No one dies for mere values" (QCT, 142).

If the question of ethics is "Why should I care?" then I think that Heidegger (following

Aristotle) has an answer. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Heidegger does not

approach ethics as a regional ontology, so we should not expect him to pick up and miraculously

bind together the fragments of modern moral philosophy. At the heart of Heidegger's philosophy

is his refusal to accept the presupposition that all of our ideas are in order. To undermine the

fact-value distinction, we cannot begin from the presuppositions that separate the human

sciences from the natural sciences (see Heidegger BT, 131-34). This means that we must refrain

from treating individuals as atomized, self-encapsulated organisms "able to be mastered at a

glance, running a set course" nor should we expect human behavior to be "graspable in charts

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[83] Hubert Dreyfus, "Heidegger on the Connection between Nihilism, Art, Technology, and Politics" in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, 2nd ed., ed. Charles Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 345-372, 347-348.

and under rubrics in which the paths on which comparisons can be made have been laid down and fixed in an orderly manner."[84] Heidegger is not constructing an ethical theory or establishing a moral system, but he is asking about the choiceworthy life.

I think that if I can successfully show that Heidegger undermines the modern division between ethics and ontology, then we will be in a position to see that *Being and Time* is a book of ethics broadly construed, if anything is. At the start of this chapter I said that the question of *Being and Time* is: What is the Being of *Dasein* ("being-there") as the being that asks the question of Being that allows it to ask the question of Being? This is a question about the ethical conditions of moral agency. Another way of stating the guiding question of *Being and Time* is "What must humans be like to have an ethics?" In the next chapter, I attempt to demonstrate that Heidegger's Aristotelian studies leading up to *Being and Time* reveal the profound ethical insights of Heidegger's magnum opus.

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[84] Martin Heidegger, *Ontology—Hermeneutics of Facticity* (abbreviated as "OHF"), (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 31.

CHAPTER 3:

HEIDEGGER'S DESTRUCTION OF MODERN MORAL PHILOSOPHY

In the previous chapter, I sketched out some of the profound philosophical and sociohistorical differences between the broad, premodern paradigm of ethics based on the shared *ethos* and the narrow, modern framework of moral philosophy. We saw that the anti-Aristotelian and anti-teleology movements of the Enlightenment leveled down the *ethos* of the ethics to subject-relative characteristics and generated incoherent fragments of moral understanding. I would like to take a moment to summarize and highlight the main difference between premodern (Aristotelian) and modern (post-Enlightenment) understandings of the purpose of ethics. The following summary is intended to serve as a reminder of the issues and challenges Heidegger faces in his destructing and restructuring of ethics.

Recall that, for Aristotle, ethical inquiry is supposed to be transformative and preparatory for politics (NE, 1103b4-7). As a practical and normative endeavor, the purpose of ethics "is not to know what virtue is, but to become good, since otherwise the inquiry would be of no benefit to us" (Aristotle NE, 1103b29-30). The assumption guiding his investigation is that those who are interested in ethics care about being good persons and want to have fulfilling and meaningful lives. For this reason, any examination of the good life should be action-guiding and action-judging. Or, as Aristotle says, "we must examine the right ways of acting; for…the actions also control the sorts of states [*hexeis*] we acquire" (NE, 1103b31-32). States of being are more than mere dispositions or tendencies to act in certain ways. That is, disposedness (which is the more

precise interpretation of *hexis*) to a certain kind of life is not a first-order, unreflective state of existence. Rather, as Irwin clarifies, a person's state of being "includes his desires, feelings, and decision" and "has been formed by repeated activity" (1999, 349). The general idea is that the good life is created and possessed through acting and living well, that is, according to reason, in the political community. In addition, it is assumed that, as a life-shaping and value-disclosing examination, "every account of the actions we must do has to be stated in outline, not exactly." Because, "the type of accounts we demand should accord with the subject matter; and questions about actions and expediency, like questions about health, have no fixed answers" (Aristotle NE, 1104a1-4). This means that the best or highest quality of life that a person can have depends on, to a large extent, the conditions that make possible being ethical.

Given the broad and contextual nature of Aristotelian virtue ethics, any account of what is involved in being a good person and having a fulfilling life cannot be reduced to a one-size-fits-all formula. Stated otherwise, according to Aristotle, the purpose of ethics is not to convince people to have a particular view of morality or to take a particular kind of moral stance. Instead, central to Aristotelian "considerations of well-being and a life worth living" are "certain excellences of character or virtues" that constitute a basis for individual responsibility and social involvement, which are unified by *phronēsis* (practical wisdom) and justified by a broad teleological framework (Williams 1993, 34 and 35 respectively). On this view, the purpose of ethics is to make sense of the normative framework or horizon that makes it possible to be an ethical agent.

Post-Enlightenment ethics, as we have seen, has a radically different purpose. Modern ethical theory, as a product of the Enlightenment, is a fundamentally different kind of inquiry, because it lacks a moral ontological frame of reference for life-shaping and value-disclosing

considerations. Enlightenment reason defines morality as a predicate or subject-relative value of human existence, and the task of moral philosophy is to unify evaluative judgments such as moral injunctions, principles of actions, and rules of conduct with a purely descriptive, that is, value-free theory of human nature. But the strict and simplistic fact-value dichotomy and the modern invention of the individual create an incommensurable gap between the nature of being human and the normative and practical dimensions of human existence. Without a normative dimension to serve as a shared standard and measure to evaluate ways of living, modern ethical theory has no foothold for discerning what is the highest potential or best quality of life that a person can have. The modern fact-value distinction holds the view that moral content is relative to the attitudes and feelings of self-encapsulated individuals, and that such subject-centered and self-created values cannot be discerned through empirical observation nor rationally justified by the facts of human behavior.

In other words, modern moral philosophy lacks a broad teleological frame of reference that orders, unifies, and justifies the obligations and values of moral-political existence. Another way of understanding the issue is to see the differences between the assumptions guiding the modern and Aristotelian approaches to facts and values. According to MacIntyre, the Aristotelian notion of ethical facts is "characterized with reference to the hierarchy of goods which provide the ends of action…facts about human action include the facts about what is valuable to human beings (and *not* just the facts about what they think is valuable" (2007, 84). Insofar as modern reason remains silent in matters concerned with the ends of social and normative practices, it has little to say about being a good person and living the good life. Since moral injunctions and principles cannot have the "status which will make appeal to them rational, appeal to them will indeed appear as a mere instrument of individual will and desire" (MacIntyre 2007, 54). The

assumption implicit in the fact-value dichotomy is that individuals are autonomous, self-encapsulated subjects, and human relationships and social involvement are artificial, contractual, second-order constructions. This view of moral agency conveys a weak and tenacious connection between moral autonomy (or freedom) and obligation. Human relationships and social involvement exist "only as the expression of the choices of the free selves who make it up. And should it no longer meet their needs, it must end" (Bellah et al. 1996, 107). Bellah and his colleagues astutely observe: "The language of 'values' as commonly used is self-contradictory precisely because it is not a language of value, or moral choice. It presumes the existence of an absolutely empty unencumbered and improvisational self. It obscures personal reality, social reality, and particularly the morality that links person and society" (80).

The issue of moral motivation has no bearing in modern moral philosophy, because values do not tell us anything about human relationships and individual responsibility. In *Whose Keeper? Social Science and Moral Obligation* (1989), Alan Wolfe sheds lights on the normative and practical issues surrounding the modern socio-economic assumption that "[s]ociety works best…when there exists a mechanism for enabling people to maximize rationally their self-interest."[85] The economic theory of moral motivation maintains that the actualization and fulfillment of values is the basic and ultimate ideal of human existence; however, as we have seen, this is a very thin and hollow moral vision, because it has little to say in regards to preferences about preferences. Instead, the economic approach to moral obligation and regulation is formulated along radically individualistic lines: "because the pursuit of my self-interest contributes to some collective good—economic growth or some form of welfare optimality—my obligation to you is to do what is best for me" (Wolfe 1989, 7).

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[85] Alan Wolfe, *Whose Keeper? Social Science and Moral Obligation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1989) 7.

As we can see, the individualistic ontology built into the fact-value distinction creates a paradox for modern moral philosophy. On the one hand, the emphasis on individual choice and moral autonomy goes against the forms of political oppression and discrimination associated with ancient and traditional moral visions. On the other hand, the "moral"-economic system of modernity is dissatisfying because it says nothing about desires, interests, and ways of life worth pursuing. The modern issue of moral motivation appears to be rooted in the polarizing view of the relationship between persons and society, and freedom and obligation. If we can get at the conditions of moral motivation then, I think, we will be able to see what is involved in being a moral being.

This is precisely the point of the first section of this chapter. My goal is to prove that Heidegger not only challenges the underlying metaphysical assumptions of moral philosophy, but also shows us a way out of the fact-value distinction and back to the unity of ontology and ethics. In the second and third sections, I engage two standard critiques against Heidegger's ethics. The first holds that Heidegger's inattentive treatment of human relationships precludes practical and theoretical forms of moral responsibility. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to this as the existentialist critique, for the critics who hold this position seem to focus on uncovering the ways in which Heidegger's description of authentic selfhood is ethically indifferent to concrete forms of social involvement. The second critique maintains that Heidegger's account of authentic agency rests on an exceptional and eccentric condition that has been detached from the social world. I will refer to this as the nihilistic critique, because the commentators who hold this position tend to argue that Heidegger is insensitive to the moral-political dimension of human existence. Eric Nelson formulates the critiques of Heidegger's ethics along similar lines. He states, "The absence of the ethical in Heidegger's works is either due to its being: (1)

descriptively neutral, ethically indifferent, or merely disinterested (which can be designated the value-neutrality or, in Levinasian terms, the ontological indifference thesis), or (2) intrinsically annihilative, violent, and unethical (which might be the nihilism thesis)."[86] In the last section, I argue that these critiques of Heidegger's ethics presuppose an individualistic ontology of the social world. If I am correct that Heidegger shows us what humans must be like to have an ethics, then the complaints of Heidegger's supposed neglect of ethics do not sufficiently consider Heidegger's radically anti-individualistic ontology.

Heidegger's "Violent"[87] Interpretation of Aristotelian Ethics

I have said that Heidegger, like Aristotle, is doing something different from modern moral philosophy. In this section, I shall argue that *Being and Time* is an ethics in the same sense that the *Nicomachean Ethics* is an ethics.[88] Both attempt to show what is characteristic of a life that is structured by the sense of the ought. However, before diving into Heidegger's violent interpretation of Aristotle's *Ethics*, we should reflect on why Heidegger thinks it is necessary to return to the premodern understanding of Being. In so doing, we will see that the fact-value

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[86] Eric Nelson, "Heidegger and the Questionability of the Ethical." *Studia Phœnomenologica* 3 (2008): 395–419, 396.

[87] I pointed out in the previous chapter that the aim of Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology is to work our way back to the "birth certificate" of the Western intellectual tradition in order to simultaneously challenge and put into question the contemporary interpretations of the leveled-down possibilities of *das Man* (BT, 44). This involves a dual process of destructuring our average, commonsense understandings of things, for as he simultaneously examines some common sense idea, he rejects the ordinary understanding of things and at the same time he sees some insight in that ordinary understanding that reveal a more authentic and primordial understanding of what it is to be human. Heidegger's phenomenological interpretation of Dasein's Being is radical and violent, for, in Heidegger's words, "we do not come to things which are ontically obvious for the 'common understanding'; but the questionable character of everything obvious opens up for us" (BT, 323).

[88] This argument is not original to me. My thoughts concerning the strong correlations between *Being and Time* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* have been strongly influenced by the following works. Walter Brogan, *Heidegger and Aristotle: The Twofoldness of Being* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); Charles Guignon, "Authenticity," *Philosophical Compass* 3, no. 2 (2008): 277-290, and "Existentialist Ethics," in *New Directions in Ethics*, ed. J.P. DeMarco and R.M. Fox (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 73-91; William McNeill, *The Glance of the Eye: Heidegger, Aristotle, and the Ends of Theory* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), and *The Time of Life: Heidegger and Ēthos* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); and Franco Volpi, "Being and Time: A 'Translation' of the Nicomachean Ethics?" in *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in His Earliest Thought*, ed. Theodore Kisiel and John van Buren (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) 195-211.

distinction, which is built into the divorce between Being and Ought, arises from a productionist metaphysics that comes down to us from the ancient Greeks, a metaphysics that, because it is socio-historically contingent, has no binding force for us.

In *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle* (1921-22), Heidegger makes what might appear to be offhanded remarks about ethical values and the modern system of morality. He writes, "Someone could devise an absolute system of morality, a system of ethical values and value-relations that are valid in themselves, and yet in so doing still be—I do not say: a bad person. That argument is out of place here."[89] As I said, these remarks may appear as a tangential and *ad hominem* criticism of modern ways of approaching moral issues, because Heidegger acknowledges that this lecture course is not the appropriate time or place to develop his argument. However, we can take this passage as our guiding clue into his destruction of modern moral philosophy. How is it that a bad person could formulate an absolute—that is, universal and necessary—system of ethical values? How could an individual create an absolute system of morality, which presumably involves thinking through and reflecting on moral values such as friendship, family, marriage, education, etc., and at the same time "remain blind to objects and relationships, which actually appear in regularly living morality, i.e., in facticity as the mode of their possible actualization and realization" (Heidegger PIA, 124)? Moreover, if, as we have already seen, no post-Enlightenment justification of ethics is possible, then why, according to Heidegger, do we remain "undisturbed in our advocacy of an absolute ethics" (Heidegger PIA, 124)? The answer is that an absolute ethics calls for a disengaged, detached view of the world

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[89] Martin Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Initiation into Phenomenological Research* (henceforth abbreviated as "PIA"), trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001) 124.

and has its origin in "the ontology of the *present-at-hand* [*vorhanden*]" (Heidegger BT, 332).[90]

Unraveling this distorted and crude understanding of Being, in modernity, will allow us to see

why we have a tendency to blindly accept the idea that all of our assumptions and concepts are in

order.

According to Heidegger, the Western tradition of metaphysics is derived from a distorted,

one-sided view of reality. In *Being and Time*'s discussion of the ontology of present-at-hand, i.e.,

Cartesian substance ontology, Heidegger argues that the tendency to think of what-is as a

collection of brute meaningless and valueless objects presupposes a sharp differentiation of

objects. On this view, one cannot say that values *are*, because whenever we use the copula "is"

we imply that whatever we are referring to *is*; but since values are not objects, properties, or

attributes, all that can be said is that values are valid.[91] Heidegger argues that the standard,

mainstream way of defining what it is to be assumes that entities are merely occurring or lying

around in the world, and qualities such as "'beautiful,' 'ugly,' 'in keeping,' 'not in keeping,'

'useful,' 'useless,'" etc., are "non-quantifiable value-predicates by which what is in the first

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[90] In this particular passage, Heidegger is talking about the meaning of Being-guilty, that is, Dasein's existential guilt and showing how it differs from the traditional moral-religious concepts of guilt. Heidegger's analysis of the call of conscience and the phenomenon of guilt is fundamental for any discussion of Heidegger's ethics and we will dive into this topic later in this chapter and throughout the proceeding chapters. For the time being, I want to note that I am following Douglas Kellner's compelling argument that Heidegger's analysis of Being-guilty contains "both a possible connection between Heidegger's ontology and ethics, and a general notion of the relationship between ethics and ontology" ("Authenticity and Heidegger's Challenge to Ethical Theory," in *Thinking About Being: Aspects of Heidegger's Thought*, vol. IV, ed. Christopher Macann, (London and New York: Routledge, 1984), 198-213, 205).

[91] This is a complicated matter and, even though we spent the last chapter sketching out the history of the Being-Ought and fact-value distinctions, for the sake of brevity I did not cover nineteenth century Neo-Kantian value philosophy, but I should note that I am relying on Hans Sluga's succinct formulation of Heidegger's critique against the "ontology of values." On Sluga's reading, "Heidegger's point is this: we consider it necessary to introduce values because Being itself no longer provides the measure. But then, in order to secure their authority, we find ourselves forced to ascribe Being to values. Values turn out to be a particular kind of being. And now we found ourselves at an impasse. For if Being can provide no measure, as we assumed at the outset, then the particular mode of Being that is the Being of values cannot do so either" (2001, 220). For more on nineteenth century value philosophy see Gadamar (1999), 58-75; Allen W. Wood and Songsuk Susan Hahn, eds., *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century (1790-1870)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Volume VII: Modern Philosophy: From the Post-Kantian Idealists to Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche* (New York: Image/Doubleday, 1994).

instance just a material Thing, gets stamped as something good" (BT, 131-32). What does this tell us about the being of values? It says that values are subject-relative qualities imposed onto the world of things. For example, a pencil is not useful or useless in itself; rather, its use-value or utility "merely reflects our own desires" (Polt 1999, 56). On the ontology of present-at-hand, the beauty of a sunrise, the importance of keeping promises, and the utility of a pencil cannot be measured by qualitative standards or "objective" facts where "facts are understood in terms of a particular interpretation of reality."[92] Valuable features of present-at-hand things, it is assumed, represent subjective reality, whereas factual features are those attributes that "can be enumerated, weighed, measured, and experimentally determined" (Heidegger HCT, 15).

If this is the case, then how do we interpret the meaning of moral judgments? According to the modern view, moral knowledge consists of a set of propositions about that world, which would be true by reference to some fact(s) in the "external" world. Knowing that promise-keeping is good, for instance, depends on a causal inference that relates subjective values to objective facts. However, as we saw in the second chapter, gathering statistical facts about the practice of promise-keeping does not tell us whether promise-keeping is good or bad. Just because the majority of subjective individuals keep their word does not mean that I should or ought to follow suit. This is because treating facts and values as present-at-hand attributes "cannot give meaning to beings, if Being itself is without meaning and measure" (Sluga 2001, 222).

In other words, the simplistic fact-value distinction "conceals the *ethos* of ethics" (Schalow 2001, 253). It covers up the ways in which our practical, embodied, and skillful understanding of what-is is already constituted by a network of significance and meaning that

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[92] Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena* (henceforth abbreviated as "HCT"), trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1985) 15.

makes it possible for things to show up as being the beings that they are. On Polt's reading of

Being and Time, he astutely points out that Heidegger jettisons the fact-value distinction built

into modern moral philosophy by insisting that conduciveness or "readiness-to-hand [*zuhanden*]

is how things of use are *in themselves*. Presumably [Heidegger] would grant that without Dasein,

there can be no things of use (there may be a surface with outpouchings, but it is not a glove

anymore). However, as long as Dasein does exist, the thing *is* a glove. This is a fact about the

thing, and the fact is not a creation of my will" (1999, 57). Heidegger's classic example of the

"work-world of the craftsman" illustrates that the being essential to the hammer is its possibility

to be used for making, building, and fixing things (BT, 153). The whole functionality of social

practices constitutes the context or grid of intelligibility in which something can show up as

counting or mattering in any possible way. In other words, everything is a product of social

interpretations, except the structure of interpreting itself.

Heidegger's remarks, in the PIA passage quoted above, against the modern advocacy for

an absolute ethics of values can be understood in light of his argument that the world itself is

always already meaning-laden and purposive. In his 1924 lecture course on *The Basic Concepts

of Aristotelian Philosophy*, Heidegger describes a situation in which one wants to do something

nice for one's friend, and in this description we see that our basic comportment in the world is

always in some affective orientation. He writes,

> I want to give my friend a gift, to give him joy; this is the *telos*—joy. …If I want
> that, if it is to be brought to its end, if the other is to be pleased, what then? Now
> begins the deliberating: how is joy to be brought about for the one concerned?
> The deliberation yields that I want to give him a book. …Thus I go to a book
> dealer, and indeed a definite one, in order to get the book quickly, so as to bring to
> its end the concern with joy as its *telos*. It is not through the deliberation that the
> bookstore becomes a bookstore.[93]

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[93] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy* (hereafter abbreviated as "BCAR"), trans. Robert D.
Metcalf and Mark B. Tanzer (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), 42.

The attempt to devise an absolute system of ethical values conceals and remains blind to the background horizon of meaning and significance in which our deliberations, intentions, desires, purposes, and relationships make sense. In our daily ways of doing and handling things, we move around in our ordinary, competent, habitual coping with the familiar world in which we dwell. We do not see ourselves as distinct from the world, but rather our activities and modes of existence only make sense against and in relation to this shared and common background of meaning, which Heidegger identifies as "Being-in-the-world." As Being-in-the-world, *Dasein* (being-there) can be understood as the general name for the fact that human existence is always already engaged and caught up in the midst of things and others and, therefore, always has some grasp or understanding of what-is in the broadest sense.

If we are to begin to understand what it means to have an ethics, then we need to get away from the idea that desires, intentions, and purposes are subjective and only in our minds, and the counterpart idea that only factual features of things are in the external, mechanistic world (Heidegger BCAR, 40; BT, 143). Rather than any kind of consciously formulated conception of ontology (what it is to be), we always already have a vague and shared understanding of what it means to be in the world—i.e. to be in love, to be involved in a project, to be in the process of making things, to be generous and decent beings, etc. This is because, as Heidegger suggests, there is a tacit understanding of Being that is embodied in our pre-reflective ways of behaving or relating toward things. This "*vague average understanding of Being*" (Heidegger BT, 25) shows us that what actually exists is not a collection of brute facts or mechanistic entities; instead, entities are what they do. To be more precise, the vague understanding of the Being of Being-in-the-world (Dasein) is determined by "a pre-established network of purposes that draws on the

established traditions of our community and shows us things…as generally meaningful within our world" (Polt 1999, 57).

This is why Heidegger says that to understand Being is to be "able to be given over to a world that *is*, […]. We must be able to understand actuality *before* all experience of actual beings. This understanding of actuality or of [B]eing in the widest sense…is in a certain sense *earlier* than the experience of beings."[94] The basic idea is that everything we encounter in the world is always already determined in relationship to an order of Being, which is not in our minds but is in the world itself. The structural order of "in order to" and "for the sake of which" is in the world understood "as that *wherein* a factical Dasein as such can be said to 'live.' 'World' here has a pre-ontological existentiell signification. Here again there are different possibilities: 'world' may stand for the 'public' we-world or one's 'own' closest (domestic) environment" (Heidegger BT, 93). In other words, the pre-established network of practices, organizations, traditions, and purposes grants the possibility of a differentiation of worlds, i.e., the world of business or the world of fashion. In order to fully appreciate the depth and radicalness of Heidegger's ethical insights, I would like to take some time to spell out Heidegger's reasons for claiming that Being-in-the-world is a unified phenomenon that does not presuppose a sharp differentiation of objects and subjects, or facts and values.

In his description of "Being-in," Heidegger distinguishes between thinking about the preposition "in" as a spatial and an existential relation. The former refers to "Being-in as 'Being in something' ['*Sein in…*']." Being in, unhyphenated, "designates the kind of Being which an entity has when it is 'in' another one, as the water is 'in' the glass, or the garment is 'in' the cupboard" (Heidegger BT, 79). Being in, understood spatially, is used "in the sense of a definite

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[94] Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (hereafter abbreviated as "BP"), revised ed., trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982), 11.

location-relationship with something else which has the same kind of Being" as that of Being-present-at-hand. Being-in, understood as an existentiale, that is, a constitutive state of Dasein's Being, does not refer to "a spatial 'in-one-another-ness' of things present-at-hand" (80). Instead, Heidegger points out, the existential sense of "in" is "derived from '*innan*'—'to reside,' '*habitare*,' 'to dwell' [*sich auf halten*]." The existential use of the preposition "in" is what we have in mind when we talk about being in love, being involved, being familiar with and accustomed to. In short, Being-in of Being-in-the-world should not be confused with the traditional view of the relationship between an independent, external world occurring outside of a self-sufficient mind. Heidegger goes into great phenomenological detail to account for the ways in which Being-in "implies Dasein's being-dependent-upon the world."[95] Being-in is an essential structure of Dasein's Being, which means that in order for Dasein to be, it must always already be in a world.

Heidegger (like Aristotle) says that what is definitive of Dasein's Being is a certain *Befindlichkeit*, that is, a passive dimension of finding ourselves *thrown* into a world.[96] That is,

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[95] Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time ("The First Draft of" Being and Time)* (henceforth abbreviated as "CT"), trans. Ingo Farin (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), 25.

[96] Theodore Kisiel points out that Heidegger appropriates Aristotle's *diathesis* (disposition or condition) "as *Befindlichkeit*, which refers not only to a situation but also to *how* one 'finds oneself' situated, positioned, disposed. It is destined to become the very first mode of 'being-in,' which lies at the heart of BT." In *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 293. In Heidegger's 1924 lectures on *The Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, Heidegger appropriates Aristotle's notion of *diathesis* as "disposition" (38), and three years later it shows up in *Being and Time* as "state of mind" (see §§29-31). There is a slight difference between these two possible ways of finding oneself. In 1924, Heidegger emphasizes the active dimension of "*finding-oneself in the mode of being in a disposition-and-bringing-oneself-therein. I only find myself disposed in the genuine sense by bringing-myself-therein…*" (38). In this context, Heidegger says that Dasein's disposition is something that it chooses. For instance, "I enter into gladness only by virtue of the fact that I am glad. There are only things around me that are gladdening, on the condition that I am glad, that I obtain genuine gladness" (translation modified). *Being and Time*, on the other hand, emphasizes the passive dimension of being-thrown. In this appropriation of Aristotle's notion of *diathesis*, Heidegger says that moods come over or "assail us" (BT, 176). I cannot account for the reason for this difference definitely, but I am willing to speculate that, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger might be shying away from the active aspect of disposition insofar as it is related to *pathos*, which has been Latinized as "passions" of subjective individuals. The speculative point I am trying to make is drawn from McNeill's argument that Heidegger wants to emphasize the ways in which "the world is not at all simply 'our' world, that it is neither the property of, nor something first formed by the activity of, human beings" (2006, 40). Also see Heidegger's discussion of "world-formation" in *The Fundamental*

we find ourselves always already in a world, already underway in the midst of things in a historical context, which we have not created ourselves but, to a great extent, constitutes our understanding of the meaning of life (or Being). One is thrown into a world, already embedded in a community, caught up in situations, speaking a language with a whole frame of reference or understanding of reality that is based on our *having been* socialized into the standard practices and forms of life of that community. In the process of socialization this holistic background of meaning and intelligibility becomes second nature to us in such a way that one is not even conscious of them. This is why Heidegger can say, Dasein "finds *itself* primarily and constantly *in things* because, tending to them, distressed by them, it always in some way or other rests in things. Each one of us is what he pursues and cares for. In everyday terms, we understand ourselves and our existence by way of the activities we pursue and the things we take care of" (BP, 180).

We should be able to see *Befindlichkeit* is "based upon thrownness [*Geworfenheit*]" (Heidegger BT, 389) and "refers not only to a situation, but how one 'finds oneself' situated, positioned, disposed" in the world (Kisiel 1993, 293); I find what I am thrown into. In addition, Heidegger's appropriation of the Aristotelian notion of *diathesis* (disposition of condition) plays up the "close relation between 'having' and 'being in'" (Kisiel 1993, 293) by displaying the ways in which our pre-ontological understanding of what it is to be is embodied in our pre-theoretical, pre-reflective know-how in being involved in and constituted by the practical world. This justifies Heidegger's claim that "Being-in is not a 'property' which Dasein sometimes has and sometimes does not have, and *without* which it could *be* just as well as it could with it" (BT, 84). Being-in-the-world is hyphenated in order to emphasize that it is essentially a unitary

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Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude (henceforth abbreviated as "FCM") (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), §68.

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phenomenon, and thrownness and situatedness are equi-primordial and equi-operative in any experience and understanding of what it is to be human. Furthermore, taken together, thrownness and situatedness constitute what Heidegger refers to as Dasein's "facticity" (*Fakitizitåt*): "Whenever Dasein is, it is a Fact; and the factuality of such a Fact is what we shall call Dasein's '*facticity*'" (BT, 82). Facticity is not a present-at-hand property or attribute that can be conceptualized or explained in categorical or mathematical terms. The reality of Dasein's facticity "never becomes something that we can come across by beholding it" (Heidegger BT, 174). Heidegger's claims make sense when we keep in mind that Dasein's facticity consists of all that has come before in our lives that makes us who we are. Having been enculturated into the forms of life and *ethos* of a community is the factuality of Dasein's facticity, and as such is that which we cannot go behind or get around.

Several important consequences for mainstream moral theory that follow from this preliminary sketch of what it means to be as Being-in-the-world. First, Heidegger's description of Being-in suggests a relationship between selfhood and worldhood that does not essentially accept any sharp differentiation of facts and values, and it conveys the idea that the relationship between the self and the world "cannot be understood on the model of the relation between subject and object."[97] On this picture, humans only have possibilities or ways of being that we are manifesting or not manifesting at any given time. Dasein does not have factual traits or properties, because the essence of being human is not a present-at-hand substance, but is to a large extent constituted by the background of meaning and intelligibility that makes it possible for us to have any understanding of what it means to be human. The unitary phenomenon of Being-in-the-world has been taken as self-evident by standard, mainstream moral philosophy so

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[97] Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1991), 45. Also see Heidegger BT, 87.

much so that it has forgotten the ways in which human agency is produced in and through our practical dealings with the world.

Second, Heidegger's characterization of Being-in-the-world undermines mainstream approaches in moral theory that divide "human behavior into theoretical and practical categories" (Kellner 1984, 207; and Heidegger BT, 99, 347-48). And, for this reason, Heidegger's "analyses combine subject matter traditionally separated into ethics and ontology" (Kellner 1984, 207). To clarify, Heidegger's method is to begin with a phenomenological description of something common and familiar to us such as wearing glasses, sewing a dress, and obeying traffic signals, and to try to see what the shortcomings or problems are in that description of Dasein's everydayness. We should begin ethical inquiry in being caught up in and in the midst of daily life and allow the phenomenological description and attestation to lead the way (Heidegger BT, 69). Understanding ourselves in this undifferentiated (*indifferenz*) mode of being is made difficult by the hardened and calcified interpretations handed down by the tradition, and so Heidegger goes to great lengths to avoid falling prey to the pre-packaged and ready-made labels of traditional theoretical and practical categories.[98] For example, Heidegger's account of human being as Being-in-the-world calls into question the shortcomings of the mentalistic vocabulary of "subject"

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[98] Robert Dostal finds Heidegger's use of the term "*indifferenz*" problematic for assessing the "'ethics' of *Sein und Zeit*, [and] of Heidegger's analysis of society and community (the existentialia—*Mitsein*)" (In "The Problem of '*Indifferenz*' in *Sein und Zeit*," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* XLIII, no. 1 (September 1982): 43-58, 43). In this paper, Dostal meticulously works through *Being and Time*'s usage of "*indifferenz*" and finds that at times Heidegger uses the term to refer to the existential constituion of Dasein's Being (the essential structures that cannot be proved or justified by a priori argument), but there are other times when Heidegger uses "*indifferenz*" to describe the inauthentic, humdrum character of *das Man*. Dostal's argument seems to be this: Heidegger's inconsistent use of "*indifferenz*" not only leads to misinterpretations of the text, but also raises serious concerns about Heidegger's insistence that his description of *das Man* should not be read as a moralizing critique. In the section below I address some of Dostal's concerns about the social and communal aspects of *Being and Time*, so I do think I need to fully address this issue at this time. However, I think it is important to note that, in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* (1928) Heidegger does address at least some of Dostal's concerns, but in this particular paper Dostal does not reference Heidegger's response to the problem of neutrality and neutral Dasein. See Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* (henceforth abbreviated as "MFL"), trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984), §10.

and "consciousness," as well as, the subjective idea that moods or feelings are in our minds.[99] In our practical engagements with others and involvement in the world, we do not find ourselves as self-encapsulated isolated minds that have to leap out of an inner sphere to interact with other minds and operate in the external world. Or, as Heidegger says, "In directing-itself-toward and apprehending, Dasein does not first get out of itself, out of its inner sphere in which it is encapsulated. Rather its very sense is to be *always already 'outside'* (*ex-stasis*) in the world, in the rightly understood sense of 'outside' as in-being and dwelling with the world, which in each instance is already uncovered in some way" (HCT, 164; also see BT, 89).

This brings us to the third way that Heidegger calls into question traditional moral theory. In the passage from the *History of the Concept of Time* cited above, Heidegger's account of Dasein's practical mode of comportment does not differentiate between a value-free or objective and value-laded or subjective way of Being-in-the-world. In other words, we see the interconnectedness of what have been traditionally divided into evaluative and descriptive categories. All forms of knowing, discovering, judging, apprehending, feeling, and so on are derivative from and presuppose "some prior understanding of Dasein's existential possibilities" (Hatab 2000, 22). Enlightenment moral theories, for instance, which attempt to tell us how to act and try to devise a set of moral principles, duties, or imperatives based on value-free facts of human nature, presuppose a pre-established understanding of "existential concerns and possibilities" (Hatab 2000, 22). This means that the interest in human behavior, human relationships, and individuals' obligations to others is guided and directed by the general and broad assumption that these things matter. "Accordingly," as Hatab succinctly puts it, "to ask about the good or ethical possibilities is to already be *interested* in ethics, as opposed to

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[99] I am borrowing this argument from Guignon's "Heidegger's Anti-Dualism: Beyond Mind and Matter," in *Heidegger's Being and Time: Critical Essays*, ed. Richard Polt (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 75-88.

mechanical obedience, resistance, or a thoughtless indifference. To be-in-question, ethically, then, is to already be ethical in some sense" (2000, 59).

The fourth, and last point, about Heidegger's destruction of modern moral philosophy is that he dismantles the Enlightenment "general and specific" notion of morality as the particular cultural sphere "in which rules of conduct" are divorced from theological, legal, aesthetic and various other socially constructed practices, and instead based on some kind of anthropological, psychological, or biological conception of human nature (MacIntyre 2007, 39). Recall that modern individualism, as a product of the Enlightenment, maintains a sharp distinction between the self and society and thinks of morality "purely in terms of respect for others. The category of the moral is [sometimes] thought to encompass just our obligations to other people" (Taylor 1989, 14). The modern notion of the moral sphere of existence, then, necessarily excludes "other questions beyond the moral which are of central concern to us, and which bring strong evaluation into play" (Taylor 1989, 14). Questions such as: What is the best quality of life that a person can have? What makes like genuinely fulfilling and worth living? How should one live? How can I own up to and take responsibility for the direction of *my* life? What is the good life? Modern moral theory can only presume to tell us the right way to act, not how to take responsibility for the meaning and direction of the lives that we are living, that is, always underway in constructing. Heidegger circumvents the Enlightenment defined category of the moral by beginning his ontological inquiry in the midst of our shared, communal life.

The pre-established network of significance and meaning that constitutes the whole functionality of practices is the context in which "Dasein's most basic way of being-in-the-world" is manifested (Dreyfus 1991, 45). In Dasein's practical modes of concern, it understands itself and entities in relation to a holistic totality of contextual involvements. When everything is

functioning properly, when everything is going the way it ought to, one does not notice the hammer, but one 'sees' through it to what one is aiming at. "Similarly, when material is put to use," Heidegger writes, "we encounter its producer or 'supplier' as one who serves well or badly" (BT, 153). For this reason, Heidegger asserts, "As 'being-in-the-world,' Dasein is at the same time *being together with others* [*miteinandersein*]" (CT, 18). The precise nature of the relationship between the self and others is an extremely contentious debate in Heidegger scholarship that we will work through carefully in the next section. For the time being, I am concerned with making the case that Heidegger's account of Dasein's most basic way of Being-in-the-world—which he refers to as, "average everydayness"—presents a notion of shared being wherein the normative dimension inhabits the practical life-world. Averageness (*Durchschnittlichkeit*), that is, the "everyday undifferentiated character of Dasein" is the ontological bedrock from which can start to ask about the meaning of Being (Heidegger BT, 69). This vague and shared sense of the unity of life—or *ethos*—is given in the immediacy of experience, and it is ontologically prior to and broader than the narrow, other-oriented definition of morality.

Heidegger's destruction of the assumptions built into modern moral philosophy not only problematizes the foundations of moral theory but also pulls the rug out from under our deeply ingrained commonsense notions of individualism and responsibility. I hope that the following examination of the genesis of Heidegger's Aristotelian scholarship leading up to *Being and Time* will show us that Heidegger offers us alternative path to addressing some of the most fundamental questions of ethics, which go beyond the modern notion of moral. Please keep in mind that this is a preliminary sketch that will be filled in throughout the remainder of our discussions. The purpose at this time is twofold: first, to get a sense of how Heidegger's violent

interpretation of Aristotle's philosophy presents an alternative account of the ontological conditions of human agency, and, second, to establish the framework wherein criticisms of Heidegger's supposed neglect of ethics can be addressed properly (which is the task of the second section).

The keys to understanding Heidegger's appropriation of Aristotle's *Ethics* are movement (*kinesis*) and discourse and conversation (*logos*). A number of commentators have shown that Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotelian ontology brings out an understanding of the Being of beings that is at odds with much of the tradition of Western metaphysics, which is that beings are not brute, static substances, but are happenings or events. We have seen that the totality of what-is is always already interpretation-laden and what is given in Dasein's facticity is a meaning-filled life-world of possibilities (see Guignon 2005, 85). And, at the same time, that way of Being-in-the-world is possible only because Dasein is projected into the future trying to make something of itself. "Accordingly those characteristics which can be exhibited in this entity are not 'properties' present-at-hand of some entity which 'looks' so and so and is itself present-at-hand; they are in each case possible ways for it to be, and no more than that" (Heidegger BT, 67).

This ontological bedrock of "thrown possibility" (Heidegger BT, 183) intimates the Aristotelian idea that the teleological world is fundamental to our experience of an orderly and meaningful way of being. On Heidegger's interpretation, we are constantly articulating and organizing the world through discourse and conversation. Our common mode of interacting with the world is always based on using the public language that we get from "the They" (*das Man*; or Aristotle's *hoi polloi*). Our practical activities and ways of concerning ourselves with things is always guided by the public possibilities and norms associated with and embedded in "an intelligibility that is common to all" (Heidegger BCAR, 16; also see Kisiel 2000, 197-99).

"*Logos*" comes from the verb "*legein*," which means, "to gather" (as in gathering grapes or gathering sheep), and the "genuine function of *logos* is…"the 'bringing of a matter to sight" (Heidegger BCAR, 14). Heidegger plays up the etymology of *logos* when he interprets the Greek definition of human being, "*zoon logon echon*," as "a living thing that (as living) has language" and emphasizes that "[t]his definition should not be thought in biological, physiological, social-scientific, or any such terms. This determination lies before such distinctions" (14). Speaking is the way that human beings press out and make manifest the conduciveness of things, which is always done according to the ways of being that are in the shared public language. "The intelligibility in which being-there [Dasein] moves, the One [*das Man*], is grounded ultimately in '*doxa*,' in the average meanings of things and of oneself" (Heidegger, 52).

I take it that Heidegger's interpretation is meant to bring to light that *logos* is the gathering in which dispersed things have been brought together and organized via *synthesis* and *diairesis* (meaning "this, not that"). The gathering itself relies on "what one says." The totality of what makes up the reality of our engagements and concernful dealings with the world are beings capable of change and often underway in becoming what they are. Yet, we can evaluate the success or failure of things, because the world, as gathered and articulated, has unfolded into presence and absence, and the definition of beings (the Greek word here is "*horismos*," which means horizon or definition) are formally determined by the proper path of development for things of this type to realize what they are in *potentia*. For instance, a sunset is not just the sum of a succession of momentary points of the Earth's rotation or spatial-location. Instead, I see the sunset as the changing of the colors in the sky, the cooling of the temperature, and the ending of a long day, but the sun has not set until it has dropped below the horizon (metaphorically

speaking, of course). Or, to return to our previous example, an acorn is not simply a nut occurring in the world; rather, an acorn is a being that has the potential to be an oak tree.

I am trying to show that Heidegger borrows from Aristotle an "ontological teleology"[100] for all things generally and especially for human beings. If we think of the Being of beings not as a substance, which by its very definition is something that endures through time and stands under or underlies change, and instead think of Being as a happening, then we will see Dasein as an event, a movement that is a correlate of Aristotle's notion of a *kinesis heneka tou* (or becoming). On Heidegger's interpretation, the Western intellectual tradition until modernity is parasitic on this teleological foundation. The question of the Being of beings is a question about the essence (*wesen*) of humans. "Essence," in German, is a verb and can mean "living being" and, in Heidegger's use, is best understood as the event of "essencing" of a particular historical unfolding that is still underway (BT, 41).[101] This verbal meaning of essence is conveyed in the following passage from his 1924 lecture course:

> The *to ti ên einai* ["what it was to be" or "essence"] has in itself the determination of the *ên* [it was]: the being-there of a being, and indeed with an eye to *what it was*, to its *descent*. […] I see a being that is there with respect to its being, in the way that it is there as *coming from out of*… I see a being that is there genuinely in its being when I see it in *its history*, the being that is there in this way coming from out of its history into being. (BCAR, 26)

In other words, the horizon of intelligibility that lets us encounter entities in some meaningful way is temporality, specifically the happening (*Geschehen*) or "historicity" (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of

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[100] Charles Guignon, "Heidegger and Kierkegaard on Death: The Existentiell and the Existential," in *Kierkegaard and Death*, ed. Adam Buben and Patrick Stokes (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011), 184-203, 203n22.

[101] Polt gives a better description the significance of the verb "*wesen*" in Heidegger's scholarship. "The verb *wesen* is useful to Heidegger in two ways. First, it gives him a fresh way of talking about the search for what is most important about something. The noun "essence" carries a lot of undesirable metaphysical baggage; it suggests that we are looking for some timeless abstraction, or some everlasting core of things. But the verb *wesen* suggests that we simply have to pay attention to how things actually happen. […] The second way in which Heidegger takes advantage of the verb *wesen* is preserving it for Being, and thus using it to help us avoid thinking of Being as a being" (1999, 145).

the world. In the passage above, Heidegger is not speaking about the historicity of the Being of beings "primarily in relation to the network of cumulative experience of the past, mediated by a sequential, objective coherence of culture."[102] Rather, as an essential unfolding of Being, the defining features of beings are determined by their proper path toward their realization or fulfillment, and the consummation of this event of emerging into presence is the *telos*.

Heidegger's appropriation of Aristotle's idea of movement (*kinesis*) helps to clarify his claim that "'*telos*' is not 'aim' but rather *eschaton*, having the character of limit, 'what is outermost.' Aim and purpose are definite modes in which *telos* is an 'end,' but they are not primary determinations. Instead, purpose and aim are founded upon *telos* as 'end,' which is the originary meaning" (BCAR, 59). Putting this all together, we can say that the Being of "being-an-end" is determined by the *eschaton*—the ultimate or outermost limit, which in turn provides the boundaries or limits (*peras*, which is the root of the English word "perimeter") that constrain and guide movement toward its *telos*. We can assess becoming a sunset or becoming an oak tree, because we grasp the completed whole or realization of Being (a sunset or an oak tree), "and that completedness is a *peras* such that 'movement and action go toward it'" (Heidegger BCAR, 28). To further justify his claim that "'*telos*' does not mean 'aim' or 'purpose'" and that the "primary basic determination is *being-an-end*," Heidegger points out that the *telos* of becoming a doctor is the same as becoming a thief (BCAR, 57). When we talk about a consummate doctor or a consummate thief, nothing morally good or bad is indicated; rather, "what is addressed as complete is that which has nothing left in the context of having a genuine being-possibility at

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[102] Jeffrey Andrew Barash, "Historical Meaning in the Fundamental Onotlogy of *Being and Time*, from *Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Meaning*," in *Heidegger's Being and Time: Critical Essays* (2005), 169-188, 174.

one's disposal in its [genuine] line of descent" (Heidegger, 56; translation modified).[103] Stated

differently, when understood as the outermost limit beyond which nothing can be actualized or

brought to fulfillment, *telos* is first and foremost the *peras* (limit) that determines beings insofar

as they are finished and complete.[104] Being complete does not have the "additional meaning of

exceptional [and] valuable;" rather being-an-end "constitutes a being-character that is not bound

to a specific meaning of *agathon* [good], such as is usually expressed in a determinate quality of

a being" (Heidegger BCAR, 59).

By discerning the ultimate, outermost limit of Dasein, we will have an indication of the

proper *telos* of the Being of human beings. It is in the sense that Heidegger, in both the *Basic*

Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy and *Being and Time*, insists that thinking of the end as

something that can be accomplished or produced is not what characterizes Dasein ontologically,

because being finished or complete can only happen when Dasein is no longer. "With death, life

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[103] This might sound as if Heidegger is decontextualizing or "ontologizing" the moral significance of Aristotle's *Ethics*, which is exactly what some critics such as Francisco J. Gonzalez and Jacques Taminiaux argue. (See Francisco J. Gonzalez, "Beyond or beneath Good and Evil? Heidegger's Purification of Aristotle's Ethics," in *Heidegger and the Greeks: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Drew A. Hyland and John Panteleimon Manoussakis (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 127-56; Jacques Taminiaux, "The Interpretation of Aristotle's Notion of *Aretê* in Heidegger's First Courses," in *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, ed. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 13-27.) One could argue that since stealing is harmful to others, a consummate thief has an immoral character by definition; and since producing health is beneficial for others, being a consummate doctor involves the cultivation of a morally good character. However, think of the morally ambiguous character of Robin Hood and Dr. Jack Kevorkian (also known as Dr. Death), who many hold in high regard even though their actions put common moral beliefs in question. If we keep in mind that the primary concern of Heidegger's analysis of Aristotle's virtue ethics is to strip bare the substantive markers of Dasein's average everydayness in order to get at the essential structures definitive of being human, then we should not expect our fundamental, unreflective assumptions to remain concealed and intact. The reason we have the ordinary interpretation of morality, as laid out in the second chapter, is due to the constraints of the sort of artificial and prohibitive presuppositions of things that has been handed down in an increasingly obscure way (Heidegger BT, 341). From his early interpretations of Aristotle's thought through *Being and Time*, Heidegger finds that what is definitive of Dasein's average everydayness is idle talk (*Gerede*) or being lead around by idle talk and not having a grip on things. In being involved with and being-at-home in the world, one is falling (*verfallen*) into the circumstances that arise in life. Although falling, which can be described as a correlate of idle talk, is an essential existentiale, i.e. part of the constitutive structure of Dasein, there is a quality characteristic of the They (*das Man*) that looks disjointed and disowned (*uneigentlich*, also translated as "inauthentic"). In his "ontologizing" of Aristotle's *Ethics*, Heidegger tries to uncover and retrieve that which has been concealed and covered over in the philosophical tradition in order to bring to light a possible path for the concrete realization of what was implicitly there all along.

[104] C.f. Martin Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist* (henceforth abbreviated as "PS"), trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 85.

is at its end; death makes life complete in that it takes being away from the there, life disappears"

(Heidegger BCAR, 61). Or, as Heidegger says in *Being and Time*, death, "*as the possibility of*

the impossibility of any existence at all, […] gives Dasein nothing to be 'actualized,' nothing

which Dasein, as actual, could itself *be*" or fail to be (307). As the one possibility that Dasein

cannot achieve or accomplish, death throws Dasein back onto the unfolding of its life and makes

it clear that being-possible is not at all what we think it is. As Heidegger aptly puts it, "Being-

gone is the most extreme mode of being-there, such that the interpretation of being is thrown

back upon the explication of the there" (BCAR, 62). Death makes clear that human existence is

different from the ontology of ready-to-hand, because the *telos* of Dasein is not a termination of

movement, but is a movement or, more precisely, a "way of being-towards" that can continue to

exist when it is complete (which Aristotle identifies as *energeia*). Heidegger suggests that death

points us toward an understanding of ourselves with a different kind of teleology, which is not

focused on production/*poiēsis* and the actualization of possibilities, but rather on *praxis*.

To clarify, I want to take a moment to show what Heidegger gets from Aristotle's

poiēsis-praxis distinction. As we have seen, to be human is to always already be projected into

an open range of possibilities, and that projection takes the concrete form of enacting public

possibilities in being an active participant in the conventions and norms of the social world

human beings inhabit. The impending possibilities that we are directed toward, as members of

the They (*das Man*), have the characteristic of the "not yet," but still we grasp them as

possibilities in terms of something that we can accomplish or achieve for ourselves (Heidegger

BCAR, 85; BT, 286-89). This movement (*kinesis*) was discussed in the second chapter in terms

of Aristotle's notion of *technē* and *poiēsis* wherein the goal of projection is to actualize

possibilities through completion, accomplishment, and successful production. The art of

shoemaking, for example, depends on training, practice, tools, and materials. The cultivation of this skill-set is brought to completion when the shoemaker makes a pair of shoes. Bringing the end of shoemaking to completion depends on the shoemaker in a broad sense, insofar as she competently follows instructions and has the proper skillset; but the end of shoemaking, the actual shoes, are separate and distinct from the movement of her ownmost being-possible. Simply stated, when the process of *poiēsis* has reached its end, the movement stops. That being said, *poiēsis* has a futural teleological dimension to it such that items in use (ready-to-hand) can be understood in terms of the projects that they participate in. This positive dimension of Dasein's everydayness reveals that, in projecting into future possibilities, Dasein always already sees that there is something for-the-sake-of-which it acts (in the narrow sense). In making shoes, the shoemaker is doing two things simultaneously. She is producing a state or product that is distinct from her agency and, at the same time, she is forming her identity as a human being of a particular sort (*praxis*). Or, as Heidegger says, "*poiēsis* and *praxis* are two possibilities that, perhaps, only designate two distinct modes of appropriation" (BCAR, 127).

In connection with Heidegger's discussion of death, when understood as one's ownmost ability-to-be, the for-the-sake-of-which (or *telos*) of *praxis* is the one possibility that does not come from *das Man*; when it is approached properly it establishes first and foremost the possibility of taking over ownership of ourselves from *das Man*. Such enownment (*eigentlichkeit*) is what Heidegger calls authentic existence. In one of Heidegger's richest descriptions of Being-towards-death, he describes the gravity of the situation: "When, by anticipation [*vorlaufen*], one becomes free *for* one's own death, one is liberated from one's lostness in those possibilities which may accidentally thrust themselves upon one; and one is

liberated in such a way that for the first time one can authentically understand and choose among the factical possibilities lying ahead of that possibility which is not to be outstripped" (BT, 308). The other key point that finitude makes clear is that while Dasein is a constant work in progress, there is no specific project or goal that essentially defines Dasein's Being. In other words, the for-sake-of-which of *praxis* is connected to the idea of the possibility of being-possible without that being anything that could be actualized. Even though self-constitution (*praxis*) is given in the ontological bedrock of Dasein's Being, authentic individualism is something that one has to become through one's own efforts. In the following passage, McNeill not only clarifies the fundamental difference between *poiēsis* and *praxis*, he also helps us see the ethical implications of authentic self-constitution. *Praxis* "is not a learning by routine or by some technique, as in art or *technē*. For in matters of conduct, where every situation is different, there can be no fixed technique or standard for arriving at the appropriate action" (2006, 90). Putting this all together, we can say that the proper *telos* of Dasein's Being is not matter of accomplishments or outcomes, but a matter of constantly facing up to and embracing our own finite project of being self-constituting individuals, whatever the specifics (or 'modes') involved may be. This is why Heidegger says, "[t]his determination should not be conceived as though there were a *technē* for this taking-opportunities and venturing-out […]. …Nor is there…something like a universal military order, an a priori ethics, by which humanity becomes better *eo ipso*. Everyone must have, for himself, his eyes trained on that which is at the moment and which matters to him" (BCAR, 123). For Heidegger, there is something fundamental to being human, which is that they are answerable for their own life-story. As pure possibility, we are responsible for what we make of our own life-happening, and this is our *telos*.

Ethics "does not mean 'moral'; one must not superficially hold oneself to words when considering the 'ethical virtues'." Heidegger goes on to emphasize that *ethos* "means the 'comportment' of human beings, how the human being is there, how he offers himself as a human being, how he appears in being-with-one-another—[…], has a comportment in the way he stands with respect to the matters about which he speaks" (BCAR, 73). When understood in terms of the person's way of taking a stand and holding (*Haltung*) herself in comporting to the world, human agency cannot be described in terms of inert possibilities or subjective values. Self-constitution, or what Heidegger discusses in *Being and Time* as self-constancy (*Selbständigkeit*), "does not depend on an action simply ending, on a result coming about;" instead, what is decisive is "*resolving oneself*" (Heidegger BCAR, 127). Resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*)[105] or being-resolved captures what is involved in taking ownership of and responsibility for the life-story that I have had to live and continue to be living. Self-constitution involves a clear-sighted, forward-directed seizing of possibilities insofar as one is being-possible as a future-directedness that stands out in the sense that there is no final outcome that will be the completion of this project and yet where that project itself is definitive of one's life as a human being. Or, in Heidegger's words, "*Praxis*, as the how of being-in-the-world, appears here as the being-context that we can also designate in another sense as *existence*. Being-composed is not something optional and indeterminate, for in *hexis* [character formation] lies the primary orientation toward the *kairos* [moment]: 'I am there, come what may!'" (BCAR, 119) This emphasizes the idea that human agency has to do with being-resolved to take action without any kind of assurance or moral law that one is doing the right thing.

Another characteristic that comes out of Heidegger's description of resoluteness is that character formation is not a matter of inert connections through the course of events, but is a

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[105] This is an appropriation of Aristotle's *prohairesis* (which is usually translated as "ethical character").

mode of comportment to the world that is chosen in the form of "repetition" (*Wiederholung*), which the constantly repeated renewal of one's fundamental life-defining commitments (BCAR, 128). The main idea is that Heidegger (like Aristotle) tries to generate a conception of an ethical stance in making life-defining choices. We will return to the virtues of being authentic throughout the following discussions. For now, I would like to focus our attention on some of the distinguishing features of Heidegger's appropriation of Aristotle's ethics so that we may see that Heidegger not only undermines metaphysical assumption built in modern moral philosophy, but also offers an alternative view of the conditions of ethical agency. To begin with, the question about the Being of human being is a question about the essence of human agency. What is important, in Heidegger's view, is that essence is not a matter of necessary properties or attributes, but is a matter of being underway on a path for which boundaries and guidelines have been laid out by history. Although human beings are unique in that their end is not a termination, they are always understood in relation to the Being of the totality of what-is, that is, the happening (*Geschehen*) and "historicity" (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of the world. Since human beings are not brute objects with present-at-hand properties, they cannot have necessary character traits (*hexeis*, also translated as "habits"), as understood by the Western tradition. If there is no substance in which enduring character attributes can inhere, then the only way to embody the virtues is through repetition, which is a personal feature of human existence.

What is important, in Heidegger's view, is that essence is a *to be*, a task or burden that Dasein is delivered over to itself. "Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather, it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it" (Heidegger BT, 32). It is the nature of Dasein that it compels us to undertake the task of living that it is thrown into, and it is always already comporting itself to the realization of its

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life as a whole. Simply stated, we all have to live out our lives and to make something our lives as our own, not as someone else's life, and this is an issue for us. Because Dasein's "essence lies…in the fact that in each case it has its Being to be, and has it as its own," Heidegger writes, "we cannot define Dasein's essence by citing a 'what' of the kind that pertains to the subject-matter [*eines sachhaltigen Was*]" (Heidegger BT, 32). Instead, the most we can do is to try to identify the constitutive characteristics of Dasein, as the being that asks the question of its Being, that allows it to ask the question of Being.

Heidegger is not preaching or advocating a particular stance with respect to morality. As he reminds us, "The fact that daily and even hourly we move within and encounter half-truths, lies, and even worse things (indeed at times we seem to encounter nothing else) is well known, […]. Furthermore, these are matters better left to the preacher, inasmuch as scolding is certainly not part of philosophy" (PIA, 124). Heidegger's description of Dasein's relationship to its Being should been seen as more fundamental than the establishment of some kind of absolute foundation or criteria for us to make a choice, because rather than tell us how to live, he tries to uncover what anyone must be like to be an ethical agent in any sense. And, as we have seen, the fundamental understanding of what it is to be human that is characteristic of the entire heritage of Western philosophy, going back to the ancient Greeks, is that a human is a living being that is capable of action for its own sake (*praxis*) and also capable of giving reasons and acting on the basis of reasons (*poiēsis*).[106]

Our sense of what is important in life and what should motivate us to take ownership of our own life-happening comes from the ideals and commitments of our shared world. It is by virtue of being a member of a political community that I come to have a sense of what is worthwhile in life. Ideals such as freedom, democracy, and equality, as well as, virtues such as

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[106] See Heidegger BT, 41; MFL, 155; BCAP, 230.

friendship, integrity, and practical wisdom can have the binding force that they do because they make me the person I am. At the same time, however, this does not mean that political membership automatically implies the formation of character. The formation of one's character is one of the tasks or *to be* of our facticity that we are thrown into, and this means that it is up to us to challenge the contemporary interpretations of and to carry forward these possibilities. For example, the project of freedom is part of the teleology of the Western world. Rosa Park's refusal to move to the back of the bus, Gandhi's nonviolent civil disobedience, and Susan B. Anthony's campaign for women's rights are all examples of individual efforts to challenge and retrieve our commitment to freedom. Character formation (or self-constitution) involves practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) in "seeing not only as looking-toward that brings facts of the matter into relief, but seeing of the world as looking-around, looking-around oneself in the world, primarily as looking-around in resolving-oneself. Being-in-care about being-there…" (Heidegger BCAR, 130).

Critiques of Heidegger's Supposed Radical Individualism

I hope it has become clear that Heidegger's account of the possibility of being an authentic individual is normative in the sense that it concerns the best quality or form of life that a person can live. This inquiry of the practical and normative dimensions of the self is a necessary condition for having an ethics but, at the same time, these considerations do not provide any clue as to what is the best moral approach or attitude. Given that Heidegger is much more focused on the self rather than on the obligations that we owe to others, some scholars argue that Heidegger's conception of authenticity is radically individualistic and inherently self-centered. I shall take this time to consider three objections raised against Heidegger's supposed radical individualism.

First, Christina Schües argues, "Heidegger basically *fails* to provide a theory of decentralized subjectivity, and he fails in his undertaking to show how we get back from this authentic mode to the concrete-factual existence of intersubjectively construed Being-in-the-world."[107] Earlier I discussed how being a they-self leads to a leveling down of possibilities. As an inauthentic they-self, Dasein is caught up in the "turbulence and frenzy" of its practical dealings and present concerns in everydayness. We are choosing in such a way that the explicit choosing that we are making has been handed over to the-they, so that Heidegger can say, "Dasein makes no choices, gets carried along by the nobody, and thus ensnares itself in inauthenticity " (BT, 312). As a They-self, one is not making choices in the sense that he or she can stand behind or own up to those choices. On Schües's reading, "The others are the undifferentiated others who can be summarized under the title of 'They.' […] *the other is the 'They', the One, people in general*" (1992, 351). Schües's criticism about Heidegger's characterization of the self-other relationship seems to hinge on her reading of the self-transformative experience of anxiety (*Angst*). As we previously saw in the above discussion of death, Heidegger tries to identify and confront what it is to be human in "limit-situations" (a term he borrows from Karl Jaspers), and in those moments of experiencing the absolute limits of one's life one is able to see what human existence is all about. According to Schües, in this existential *solus ipse* "Heidegger already envisages an escape from everydayness, i.e., an escape from imprisonment in the uncanniness of Dasein" (1992, 355). Schües interprets Heidegger's conception of authenticity an "*abstract worldless existence*" (1992, 360), and comes to the conclusion that "Heidegger's project should be regarded as 'hermeneutics of isolation' rather than a 'hermeneutics of facticity'" (357).

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[107] Christina Schües, "Heidegger and Merleau Ponty: Being-in-the-world with Others?" in *Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments*, editor Christopher Macann (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 345-372, 357.

For the sake of understanding Schües's argument, we should take a moment to clarify

Heidegger's description of the limit-situation of anxiety. The experience of anxiety, from a

phenomenological standpoint, leads to an experience of uncanniness (*unheimlichkeit*), which is

discerned as a complete breakdown of Dasein's world. This breakdown undermines the belief

that the worldly they-possibilities can validate one's way of living. In anxiety, Dasein finds itself

thrown into a world that can no longer validate or affirm its worth as living in that world.

Furthermore, what one finds threatening is that she has to be in some world and yet, no world

can justify her existence, because any world is contingent. The utter contingency and

vulnerability of Being-in-the-world is captured well in Harrison Hall's description of the

"hermeneutic circle." He writes,

> The general background of intelligibility or world that gives us our most basic
> sense of things, others, and ourselves is itself without any ultimate source of
> intelligibility or ground. It is the deepest level for us or of us. […] What is rock
> bottom in terms of basic skills and felt familiarity is only contingently so—there
> is no further sense of correctness or final justification for the way we are. Even
> the choices we make from among the possible interpretations (purposes, projects)
> culturally available to us are utterly contingent—determined if at all by more
> fundamental implicit choices that are themselves contingent.[108]

In the experience of anxiety, for the first time one encounters one's identity as the

individual who has to stand on her own two feet and make something of her life with no support

or guarantees. In anxiety (and death), one is afraid for being any kind of person whatsoever in

any world. As a result of this extreme uncanniness and radical uprootedness, Heidegger says,

"*the disclosure and the disclosed are existentially the selfsame in such a way that in the latter the*

world has been disclosed as world, and Being-in has been disclosed as a potentiality-for-Being

which is individualized, pure, and thrown" (BT, 233). In this sense, existence itself is the source

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[108] Harrison Hall, "Intentionality and World: Division I of Being and Time," in *The Existentialists: Critical Essays on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre*, ed. Charles Guignon (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 103-118, 116.

of anxiety, which forces us to confront the actions and choices that have made us what and who we are. The individuating experience of anxiety liberates Dasein "*from* possibilities which 'count for nothing' ['*nichtigen*'], and lets him become *free* for those which are authentic [owned]" (BT, 305). Since all of our possibilities come from the They, the emphasis here is not on the existentiell "what," but rather, on the "how." That is, there is a radical difference in how Dasein appropriates "the *facticity of its being delivered over*" and already underway in a historical context, which it has not created itself, but which constitutes its Being to a great extent.

It seems to me that Schües's argument does not see the ways in which *das Man* is part of Dasein's facticity, that is, a constitutive part of Dasein's thrown situation. Given that Schües appears to differentiate between *das Man* and Dasein's facticity, I think that her argument equates *das Man* with the modern conception of the social world as an aggregate or association of autonomous individuals. Given this misunderstanding of Being-with, Schües ignores Heidegger's emphasis on the importance of being a participant in a community. And she incorrectly asserts, "Heidegger has no difficulty in showing how questions arise out of (*entspringen*) the concrete existence of worldly relations," but "he fails to do justice to the further move of return (*zurückschlagen*)" (348). Moreover, I do not think that Schües's reading of *Being and Time* fully considers the fact that Dasein always already and all along is an authentic self. That is to say, as our fundamental potentiality-for-being, the authentic self is definitive of what we are. In *Time and the Shared World: Heidegger on Social Relations*, Irene McMullin puts it succinctly: the self-transformative experience of anxiety "individuates by pulling Dasein out of the self-forgetfulness of inauthenticity and bring[s] it face to face with its

own condition as a temporally particular having-to-be. This does not mean that Dasein was not an 'individual' prior to authenticity—Dasein is *always* a self defined by mineness."[109]

A second criticism of Heidegger's supposed individualism in found in Frederick Olafson, who says that authenticity is "a virtue that does not have any social meaning, because it carries no obligation *to* anyone else."[110] Olafson interprets Heidegger's account of authentic existence through a Sartrean lens of radical freedom, which assumes that one can shake off the masses and become a heroic purely self-made individual of sorts. In Olafson's words, since *das Man* "occludes both the individuality and the distinctive ontological character of human being," to be an authentic individual means to be free from the obligations and constraints of the practical and normative realms of social existence.[111] Insofar as moral obligations are located in the Other, Olafson argues, authentic individuality is incommensurable with moral agency. This means that Heidegger's idea of authentic agency is incompatible with moral responsibility understood in the modern sense of "being answerable *to* someone *for* something" (Olafson 2006, 269).

On Olafson's account, Heidegger's shared world "contains no moral signposts," no specific maxims determining right action, and if authenticity "is to have any meaning in a life we share with other people, it would have to be made clear how we can be authentic together" (1998, 3). He concludes that the best way to legitimate the "authority of the ethical" in Heidegger's framework is to unify Heidegger's conception of *Mitsein* (Being-with) with the existentialist interpretation of the self (11).[112] However, in Olafson's attempt to establish "an ontologically

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[109] Irene McMullin, *Time and the Shared World: Heidegger on Social Relations* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 206.

[110] Frederick Olafson, "Freedom and Responsibility," in *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, ed. by Hubert Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 263-271, 268.

[111] Frederick A. Olafson, *Heidegger and the Ground of Ethics: A Study of Mitsein* (hereafter *Ground of Ethics*) (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3.

[112] Olafson's project of providing a rational justification of morality corresponds to what MacIntyre describes as the "Enlightenment project," which as I previously discussed, is parasitic on the fact-value distinction of the natural sciences.

based ethic of the 'We'" (5), he ignores Heidegger's argument that "[…] the Self is conceived 'only' as one [*eine*] way of Being of this entity" (BT, 153, translation modified).

It seems to me that Olafson and Schües's existentialist readings do not extend to Heidegger's distinction between "Being-with" (*Mitsein*) and "Dasein-with" (*Mitdasein*), and for this reason they underestimate the virtues of being authentic. Since this seems to be a common misreading in Heidegger-ethics debates, we should take some time to understand the difference between Being-with and Dasein-with. As average everyday Being-with, we are social conformists in simply doing what one does—"in this kind of Being is grounded the mode of everyday Being-one's-Self" (Heidegger BT, 149). In short, to be human is always Being-with. "Dasein-with" refers to the actual social relations that people engage in, which are concretely realized in their cooperative ventures together. These concrete modes of social engagement and commitment are possibilities "only if Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, already is with Others" (BT, 162). The point is that *das Man* and the possibility of being an authentic agent are essential structures of Being-in-the-world that are ontologically interconnected and have to be taken into account simultaneously.

The existentialist interpretation of authenticity fails to recognize how *das Man* is ontologically prior to "authentic Being-one's-Self." It does not make sense to ground ethics solely in Heidegger's notion of *das Man*, because responsibility and freedom require Being-one's-Self. Heidegger's description of average everydayness, however, reveals that in such everydayness one is not yet a self at all.[113] The issue of responsibility has no bearing or foothold

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[113] My response to Olafson's existentialist reading of *Mitsein* is influenced by an array of scholarship on Heidegger's understanding of morality: Dreyfus (1991, 142-45 and 154); Guignon (1986, 82); McMullin (2013, 5-6, 102, 123, 147-48, and 165); Lawrence Vogel, *The Fragile "We": Ethical Implications of Heidegger's "Being and Time"* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 28-48.

in *Mitsein*, because being responsible requires being a fully developed and authentic moral agent. In Heidegger's words,

> Yet because the 'they' presents every judgment and decision as its own, it deprives the particular Dasein of its answerability [*Verantwortlichkeit*]. […] It can be answerable for everything most easily, because it is not someone who needs to vouch for anything. It 'was' always the 'they' who did it, and yet it can be said that it has been 'no one'. In Dasein's everydayness the *agency* through which most things come about is one of which we must say that 'it was no one.' (BT, 165, emphasis added)

On Heidegger's account, selfhood is in fact one mode of Being that is specialized and derivative and does not arise in ordinary experience for the most part (BT, 153). It is important to understand that, on Heidegger's description of Being-in-the-world, everything in the world that we encounter speaks to us of others and speaks to us in very concrete ways in which others become manifest to us in our actual worldly dealing with things.[114] It is not as though one is first Being-in-the-world and then the "with-others" is tacked on. "To avoid this misunderstanding," Heidegger writes, "we must notice in what sense we are talking about 'the Others.' By 'Others' we do not mean everyone else but me—those over against whom the 'I' stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does *not* distinguish oneself—those among whom one is too" (BT, 154).

The very Being of being human is the social being of Being-with-others. Heidegger's descriptions of "Being-with" and "Dasein-with" reveal that a "bare subject without a world never 'is' proximally, nor is it ever given. And so in the end an isolated 'I' without Others is just as far from being proximally given" (BT, 152). In our average everyday lives we ourselves are, proximally and for the most part, the ensemble of our social interactions with others: we are placeholders in a social grid in which our relations with others determine our identity. According

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[114] "When, for example, we walk along the edge of a field but 'outside it', the field shows itself as belonging to such-and-such a person, and decently kept up by him; the book we have used was bought at So-and-so's shop and given by such-and-such a person, and so forth" (Heidegger BT, 153-154).

to Heidegger, to try to imagine a human without socialization is not to imagine a more pure or genuine instance of human, but rather someone or something that is not really human at all.[115]

The second issue with Olafson and Schües's existentialist reading of Heidegger's supposed individualism is that it does not fully consider the virtues of being authentic put forth is Heidegger's description of authenticity as "freedom towards death" (BT, 311). Recalling my initial characterization of how anxiety exposes Dasein's being-thrown into a world of significance with no absolute criteria to justify one choice over the other, I would now like to draw out the implications of Heidegger's claim that authenticity involves a constant condition of anxiety. This is not simply the psychological condition of being anxious; nor is it a willingness to face anxiety. Rather, it seems to be a constant recognition that the world, which I normally take as a source of validation and justification of my existence, is completely contingent. In Heidegger's view, "Being-towards-death is essentially anxiety" (BT, 310), which can be characterized as an "existential crisis"[116] in which Dasein finds itself faced with the ultimate choice of how it stands in relation to its own finitude. The authentic stance toward death is what Heidegger characterizes as "anticipation" or "running forward" (*Vorlaufen*). "*Vorlaufen*" is a German word loaded with significance that implies courage, integrity, personal responsibility, drive, and motivation. The word expresses the "trench experience" of charging the enemy trenches even in the face of certain death. "Running forward" implies courageously facing up and taking a stand in relation to the most decisive and world-defining event, which is "the possibility of authentic existence" (Heidegger BT, 307). Freedom towards death seems to be a

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[115] As Heidegger says, "Our investigation takes its orientation from Being-in-the-world—that basic state of Dasein by which every mode of its Being gets *co-determined*" (BT, 153, emphasis added). This is also an Aristotelian point.
[116] William Blattner, "Authenticity and Resoluteness," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger's "Being and Time,"* ed. Mark A. Wrathall (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 320-327, 324.

finite freedom that enables Dasein to be open without illusions and anxiety helps Dasein maintain that openness (BT, 311; c.f. CT 46-47).

By way of bringing this all together, Heidegger identifies authentic freedom towards death as "anticipatory resoluteness," which does not "signify a kind of seclusion in which one flees the world; rather, it brings one without Illusions into the resoluteness of 'taking action'" despite the fact that this could be self-destructive (BT, 358). One is in fact flying in the face of the most basic practical rule: "save your life." To be clear, Olafson and Schües are correct that Heidegger is not providing rules or principles of action, but their criticisms of Heidegger's supposed individualism fail to see that Heidegger is identifying fundamental conditions for the possibility of an ethical stance. Anticipatory resoluteness can be understood as an "executive virtue," which is not an objective in itself, but "assist[s] in realizing other objectives" (Williams 1985, 8). Thinking of authenticity as an executive virtue, in my view, helps us make sense of Heidegger's claims that anticipatory resoluteness does not "stem from 'idealistic' exactions soaring above existence and its possibilities; it springs from a *sober understanding* of what are factically the basic possibilities for Dasein. Along with the *sober anxiety* which brings us face to face with our individualized potentiality-for-Being, there goes an *unshakeable joy* in this possibility" (BT, 358, emphasis added). Contrary to the existentialist reading of *Being and Time* offered by Schües and Olafson, which assumes that being authentic involves shaking off the *hoi polloi* and becoming an isolated, worldless subject, Heidegger's description captures a serious and dedicated mode of existence in the shared world. He is not giving a how-to-guide on moral agency; instead, he is identifying the executive or overarching virtues of taking an ethical stance in the unfolding happening of Being-in-the-world. (More will be said about how this is ethics in the technical, not morality.)

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Another way to frame this discussion of the virtues of being authentic is to distinguish Heidegger's notion of finite freedom from the modern notion of radical freedom found in Olafson's Sartrean reading of Heidegger.[117] Given our discussion of authenticity as anticipatory freedom towards death, we can see that having courage in the face of one's finitude and the recognition of limits assumes that one has a clear understanding of what options are worthwhile and the character formation to reach the point in one's life where one can make good choices. This is not the radical freedom characteristic of modern individualism in which nothing hangs on one's decision (see Bellah et al. 1996; Guignon et al. 1999; and Taylor 1989). What is important, in Heidegger's view, is that freedom "*is* only in the choice of one possibility, that is, in tolerating one's not having chosen the others and one's not being able to do so" (BT, 331). Notice the ideals of personal responsibility, integrity, and self-denial implicit in this understanding of freedom as a sacrifice and burden. In coming back to that potentiality-for-being an authentic self, one takes over and makes explicit—defines through one's own actions and choices—the life-story (that is, the teleology) that one has had to be and is being all along. To clarify, we have seen that, in Heidegger's view, what is normative for us, that is, what possibilities or roles we are going to enact have been decided to a great extent and are largely accidental. There are no essential attributes that determine my being, for example, a woman, a philosophy graduate student, or a daughter. Most of us can admit that slightly different circumstances could have taken our lives in different directions. Heidegger's characterization of freedom seems to involve choosing one set of possibilities that one can hold for one's ownmost potentiality-for-being, e.g., marriage or the commitment to the love of one's life, Jesus Christ, a political stance, the arts, etc.,

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[117] For an in-depth analysis of Jean-Paul Sartre's critical reading of *Being and Time*, see McMullin (2013, Chapter 3).

and this means that one is then going to tolerate the fact that he or she has not made other possibilities the center of one's life.

Our modern notion of negative freedom cannot capture or refuses to acknowledge "that genuine attachment to others might require the risk of hurt, loss, or sacrifice" (Bellah et al. 1996, 109). As Bellah and his colleagues point out, most people "find the idea of loving in spite of, not because of social constraints very appealing. […] If you really wanted to do something for the person you loved, they said, it would not be a sacrifice" (109-10). Heidegger's characterization of finite freedom, on the other hand, emphasizes the weightiness and *gravitas* of facing up to and embracing our own finite project of being self-constituting individuals. We will return to this topic in the discussion of resoluteness and authentic community below. My concern at this time is to prove that, in Heidegger's account of freedom, there is a much more substantive notion of our finitude and limitations in being part of a greater whole than the Sartrean, arbitrary freedom of choice found in Olafson's existentialist reading of Heidegger.

The third, and last, criticism that we will consider against the supposed solipsistic individualism in Heidegger's conception of authenticity is John Caputo's Christian[118] argument that Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology is incommensurable with the modern project of working out an "ethics," which, on his interpretation, means formulating rules and universalizable principles to justify and guide the behavior of autonomous individuals. On Caputo's account, Heidegger's refusal to develop an ethical theory of sorts is due to his failure to see the Other. Specifically, the Heideggerian-Aristotelian ethics occludes the Christian virtues of

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[118] For the sake of brevity, I decided to not take up the Heidegger-Levinas debate head on, but to indirectly approach it by way of Caputo's criticisms about the self-oriented aspects of Heidegger's notion of authenticity. For more extensive investigations of Levinas' attack on Heidegger's supposed neglect of the Other, see Joanna Hodge, *Heidegger and Ethics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); McMullin 2013; Eric S. Nelson, and John E. Drabinski, eds., *Between Levinas and Heidegger* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2014); and Iain Thomson, "Rethinking Levinas on Heidegger on Death," in *Horizons of Authenticity in Phenomenology, Existentialism, and Moral Psychology: Essays in Honor of Charles Guignon*, ed. Megan Altman and Hans Pedersen (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, forthcoming 2014).

compassion and humility.[119] For Caputo, "Fundamental ontology shuts down, excludes, or neutralizes the whole dimension of being dis-abled (instead of having a *Seinkönnen*), of being cast-out of the world (instead of being projected into it) […]. The full measure of facticity is suppressed by the ontology of everydayness and the world of work and care" (1994, 334). Due to this "'essentializing' tendency in Heidegger," Caputo argues, "Heidegger never heard, or never attended to the, the 'call of the other,' which is the most concretely situated and factical being of all" (1994, 342). Caputo's argument draws on the fundamental differences between Aristotelian-master morality and Judeo-Christian slave morality. As we saw in chapter two, MacIntyre (2007) also says that Aristotelianism excludes Judeo-Christian moral virtues. What is of interest for my purposes is the part of Caputo's argument that relies on the presupposition that the Other is one focus among others of the individual's responsibilities and obligations.[120]

On Caputo's reading, Heidegger's account of facticity presents "a world of able-bodies artisans and equipment, of a busily engaged but thoughtless bourgeoisie, and above all of able-bodies knights of anticipatory resoluteness" (1994, 334). In an effort to fully appreciate his argument, I would like to take a moment to clarify Caputo's implied connections between Heidegger's idea of the authentic individual and Søren Kierkegaard's knight of faith. Caputo

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[119] John D. Caputo, "*Sorge* and *Kardia*: The Hermeneutics of Factical Life and the Categories of the Heart," in *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in His Earliest Thought*, ed. John van Buren and Theodore Kisiel (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 327-343, 330-31. Caputo makes similar claims in "Heidegger and Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, 2nd edition, ed. Charles Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 326-344; and "Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and the Foundering of Metaphysics," in *Fear and Trembling, and Repetition: International Kierkegaard Commentary*, Vol. 6, 201-224.

[120] Part of the problem, for Caputo, is that Heidegger "never noticed the revealing differences between the Aristotelian (master) and the biblical (slave) paradigms": the former is a "hermeneutics of excellence and *arete*," the latter is a "hermeneutics of humiliation" (330-31). Though the tension between Heidegger's Aristotelian and Christian interpretations is interesting, for me, it is not what is of issue in understanding Heidegger's position on moral philosophy. I find the pressing issue in Caputo's argument to be that this supposed oversight is an indication of the ways in which "Heidegger omitted the entire framework of mercy and *kardia*, of lifting the burden of the other" (339). Ted Sadler presents a compelling response to Caputo's argument concerning "the incompatibility between Heidegger's Christian and Aristotelian sources" in *Heidegger and Aristotle: The Question of Being* (London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: The Athlone Press, 1996) 152. Also see Lawrence Vogel's discussion of Caputo's criticisms of Heidegger's appropriation of Aristotle's virtues (1994, 96-98).

argues, "When Heidegger thought of facticity he thought of struggle and work, and so he incorporated Kierkegaard's attack upon the comfortable bourgeoisie of 'Christendom' into his story" (1994, 332). In *Fear and Trembling*, the pseudonymous author, Johannes de Silentio, presents the common understanding of ethical existence in which one must be committed to having one's moral duties outweigh one's personal desires and needs as an individual.[121] What makes ethical existence comforting is that one does not have to own up to one's decisions, for one's choices are subordinate to the general good. In this sense, the Other is the source of one's moral duties; the Other adds a moral ideal. However, Silentio suggests that there might be times when the individual's motivations outweigh the general good of the ethical. The knight of faith sees that the highest *telos* is the ethical and wants to live the ethical life, but she recognizes that she might have to step outside of the ethical for the sake of her self-defining commitment to God.

This possibility is what Silentio refers to as the "teleological suspension of the ethical" (1983, 54-67). The basic idea is that there can be a *telos* that is higher than the ethical, and the knight of faith is prepared to suspend the ethical for this higher *telos*. *Fear and Trembling* uses the biblical story of Abraham in order to illustrate that, in matters of faith and religious existence, the call of the ethical can be held in abeyance for the sake of a higher calling. As the paradigmatic figure of the knight of faith, Abraham is prepared to step outside of the ethical and to act as a particular individual when he serves God and fulfills this commitment of faith through the sacrificial offering of his son Isaac. Insofar as Abraham is prepared to step outside of the ethical and to act as a particular individual, he is not a moral person in the eyes of traditional ethical theorists. For, on the modern view of the ethics of intentions, preparedness to obey the moral law requires that I expunge my particular uniqueness as an individual in order to see that

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[121] Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (and) *Repetition*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983).

the ethical, that is, the general and universalizable good, is the highest good. Abraham's personal commitment cannot be described as one value or duty among others, because it is purely personal and individualized. In the teleological suspension of the ethical, Abraham's "justification is paradoxical, for if he is, then he is justified not by virtue of being something universal but by virtue of being the single individual" (1983, 62).

Underlying Caputo's Levinasian critique of Heidegger is contempt for the ways in which Silentio-Kierkegaard problematizes modern ethical theory. As we have seen, mainstream ethics are supposed to provide us with universalizable reasons for acting. Silentio-Kierkegaard not only calls into question the Enlightenment project of justification, but he also repositions ethics and makes it subordinate to a higher, personal calling. Whereas "[i]t is a simple matter to level all existence to the idea of the state or the idea of society," Silentio-Kierkegaard shows that to stand out as a single individual is a matter of anxiety, distress, and paradox (1983, 62-64). Notice that Abraham's sacrifice is not a matter of calculating possibilities or ranking duties. Since his identity as a particular individual is defined by his personal commitment to God (which lies outside of the ethical), his duty to God cannot be mediated by the universal and his personal virtue cannot be described as moral virtue. "The one knight of faith cannot help the other at all. Either the single individual himself becomes the knight of faith by accepting the paradox or he never becomes one. Partnership in these areas is utterly unthinkable" (71). In other words, the nature of rational justification excludes the possibility of acting as an individual, because it requires that others share in *my* reasons for acting, which means that others bestow upon me *my* obligations. The problem, in Silentio-Kierkegaard's view, is that traditional ethics simply tell us what to do, and there is no room in ethical theory for personal responsibility and individuality.

Caputo's criticism of Heidegger's supposed neglect of the Other, in effect, equates the knight of faith's teleological suspension of the ethical with Heidegger's teleology of *praxis*: both are grounded in a groundless, morally neutral ground of personal duty.[122] Even though Heidegger successfully demolished the isolated, Cartesian subject, Caputo argues that he did so at the detriment of "the subjectivity of the 'other'," which is "the subject as patient, as subject to grief and misfortune, power and oppression" (1994, 338). As compelling as Caputo's argument is, I think it misconstrues a few things. To begin with, Caputo's reliance on Christian *kardia* ignores the fact that Christian mercy and compassion did not seem to do much for the Jews during the Spanish Inquisition or the holocaust.[123] Elaborating on the complexities of the various historical expressions of Christian virtues would lead us into a digression, so I am merely positing this statement as food for thought. More to the point, reading Heidegger through a theological lens, as Caputo does, ignores the fact that, for Heidegger, the "I" is always subordinate to the "us." To make the case for my controversial claim, I need take some time to sketch out Heidegger's interpretation of conscience (*Gewissen*) and guilt (*Schuld*) in the second chapter of *Being and Time*, Division II, entitled "Dasein's Attestation of an Authentic

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[122] The relationship between Heidegger and Kierkegaard is complicated, to say the least. In the third endnote in the fourth chapter of the second division of *Being and Time*, Heidegger explicitly refers to Kierkegaard as "the one who has seen the *existentiell* phenomenon of the moment of vision with the most penetration" (497; also see 492 and 494). In 1927 (BP), however, Heidegger criticizes Kierkegaard's interpretation of the moment of vision (*Augenblick*) and its connection with eternity. Then, in 1929/30 (FCM), Heidegger goes back to Kierkegaard's existentialists insights, saying: "In Kierkegaard here there is much talk of choosing oneself and the individual, and if it were my task to say once again what Kierkegaard has said, then it would not only be a superfluous endeavor, but would be one which in essence lagged behind Kierkegaard with regard to his purpose. His purpose is not ours, but differs in principle, something which does not prevent us from learning from him, but obliges us to learn what he has to offer. But Kierkegaard never pushed onward into the dimension of this problematic, because it was not at all important for him, and his work as an author has a completely different basic purpose, that also required different ways and means" (190-91). Any attempt to unravel the complexities of Heidegger's indebtedness to Kierkegaard would go beyond the task of the current project. Suffice it to say, that even though both authors are critical of the ways in which *das Man* evades responsibility, Kierkegaard holds these existential ideas in the service of Christianity. On Heidegger's debt to Kierkegaard see: Adam Buben, "The Perils of Overcoming 'Worldliness' in Kierkegaard and Heidegger," *Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle Annual* 2 (2012): 65-88; and *Meaning and Mortality: Origins of the Existential Philosophy of Death* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, forthcoming); John van Buren, *The Young Heidegger: Rumor of the Hidden King*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).

[123] Heidegger's Nazism is discussed in the next chapter.

Potentiality-for-Being, and Resoluteness." In response to Heidegger's supposed neglect of the Other, I hope to show that authentically Being-with-others becomes possible and necessary on the basis of authentic individuality.

Recall that as a They-self, one chooses based on public norms and the normative force of what one does is just based on these public norms themselves. "With Dasein's lostness in the 'they,' that factical potentiality-for-Being which is closest to it (the tasks, rules, and standards, the urgency and extent, of concernful and solicitous Being-in-the-world) has already been decided upon" (Heidegger BT, 312). In our ordinary everyday way of experiencing the "*voice of conscience*," the normative force is in the norms and standards of the public world (as with Kierkegaard's ethical sphere). Stated differently, for Heidegger, "world is the context in which Dasein enacts its ability to be according to public *norms* or *measures*" (McMullin 2013, 133). Socialization involves conforming to and being attuned to the norms, standards, and expectations of Being-with-others. In the account of Dasein as *das Man*, Heidegger finds that Being-with in the mode of the They-self contains a temptation toward falling in line with the standards and conventions of the understanding and self-interpretations of the community/*polis*. The world gives us general reasons for doing so. For instance, I do not speak out of turn, because I do not want to be ostracized or shamed; or, I go out of my way to please others, because I have a need for belonging.

Heidegger's account of the normative force of being a functional and productive member of society "makes room for the claim that the other makes on me *prior* to and as a condition for these public norms" (McMullin 2013, 133). At the same time, however, this "'public conscience'," understood as "the voice of the 'they'," "hides the manner in which it has tacitly relieved Dasein of the burden of explicitly *choosing* these possibilities" of Being (Heidegger BT,

323 and 312 respectively). The "call of conscience," on the other hand, is outside of commonsense or public morality altogether. (Hence Caputo's criticism.) "Indeed the call is precisely something which *we ourselves* have neither planned nor prepared for nor voluntarily performed, nor have we ever done so. 'It' calls against our expectations and even against our will" (Heidegger, 320). Whereas the public conscience calls us up short in the sense of being guilty for "failing to satisfy, in some way or other, the claims which Others have made as to their possessions," the call of conscience "*appeals*" to Dasein's "ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self; and this is done by way of *summoning* it to its ownmost Being-guilty" (Heidegger, 327 and 314 respectively). In other words, when we leave behind the They conventions and standards, when the leveled-down commonsense measures are stripped bare of their normative force, we find that there is no "basis" (*Grund*) for being judged and yet, in the call of conscience, Dasein finds itself completely indebted.

As we saw, in the death chapter of *Being and Time*, Heidegger arrived at Dasein's ownmost potentiality-for-Being "without holding up to Dasein an ideal of existence with any special 'content,' or forcing any such ideal upon it 'from outside';" the call is content-less and silent. Since the call of conscience pushes the They "into insignificance" and robs the Self of the They-self of its "lodgment and hiding-place," the self "gets brought to itself by the call" (Heidegger BT, 317). Stated otherwise, the call comes from the uncanny, anxious potentiality-for-Being of Being-towards-death and calls to or summons the They-self to its authentic potentiality. This is why Heidegger says, "While the content of the call is seemingly indefinite, the *direction it takes* is a sure one and it not to be overlooked" (BT, 318). The basic idea, then, is that the authentic self in one's ownmost potentiality-for-Being calls the They-self to its

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existential guilt, which is not a particular debt or obligation (*Schuld*) that can be repaid, but is a failure to fully realize one's own potentialities for being human.

What emerges in the experience of the call is an ontological gap "between our *ability-to-be* and our *concrete ways of realizing it*."[124] Insofar as all possibilities are of the They, all of the components of any self come from the same pool of social possibilities. This means that we are completely indebted for all of the concrete possibilities of living that we have. In the call, we find ourselves indebted as beings who are not products of our own self-making, which seems to be why Heidegger says that Dasein "has, in Being with Others, already become guilty toward them" (BT, 334). In terms of our ownmost potentiality-for-Being, we also find, in the call of conscience, that we lack a basis or ground that justifies the teleology of our lives. In other words, we lack an absolute foundation or universalizable reason that warrants us for being in any of the particular They-self possibilities that we have drifted into, and we lack a proper or correct reason that dictates to us what is the right way to be human. This lack or gap of "Being-a-basis," then, is twofold: "The Self, which as such has to lay the basis for itself, can *never* get that basis into its power; and yet, as existing, it must take over Being-a-basis. To be its own thrown basis is that potentiality-for-Being which is the issue for care" (Heidegger, 330).

The issue is what is it to be transformed from a They-self into an authentic self-Being, which is an existential modification of the They (BT, 313). As we have seen, the whole notion of existential guilt is not that you have done something morally wrong; rather, it is prior to and a condition for the possibility of moral guilt. Or, as Heidegger says, "*Being-guilty does not first result from an indebtedness [Verschuldung], but that, on the contrary, indebtedness becomes possible only 'on the basis' of a primordial Being-guilty*" (329). In Heidegger's account of the

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[124] Charles Guignon, "Becoming a Self: The Role of Authenticity in *Being and Time*," in *The Existentialists: Critical Essays on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre*, ed. Charles Guignon (2004), 119-132, 124.

phenomenological attestation of the possibility of authentic existence, we find that the

indebtedness and obligation to respond to the call of conscience is one's own responsibility.

Moreover, Heidegger's account seems to suggest that, in taking a resolute stance on the direction

of our lives, we can take responsibility for the gap of there being a basis and make it our own.

     I would like to suggest that Heidegger is trying to find something that does not simply tell

people that it is their life to live, but rather that motivates them to take a stand on their life and to

become resolute so that they may become authentic. To prove this somewhat controversial claim,

I would like to emphasize some of the passages in *Being and Time* where Heidegger suggests

that resoluteness is an ethical stance (in the broad Aristotelian sense). "Resoluteness, as *authentic*

Being-one's-Self, does not detach Dasein from its world, nor does it isolate it so that it becomes a

free-floating 'I'." Rather, Heidegger argues, "Only by authentically Being-their-selves in

resoluteness can people authentically be with one another—not by ambiguous and jealous

stipulations and talkative fraternizing in the 'they' and in what 'they' want to undertake" (BT,

344-45). This self-formation in the community does not necessarily involve an external or

material change. There will certainly be some changes, but there is no universal principle or

fixed table of values for all people that will determine what constitutes the good life. The change

is not in the 'what' or content of one's life. This is seen in the following passage where

Heidegger says, "The 'world' which is ready-to-hand does not become another one 'in its

content', nor does the circle of Others get exchanged for a new one" (344). Rather, the

transformation is in the *how*, that is, how one lives one's life.[125] The implication here is that it is

not just going to be a transformation in the style of living, but, in terms of the broader picture, the

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[125] Stated more precisely, our mode of comportment toward Being (the *how* of our ways of Being) have a dual nature. On the one hand, the background horizon of intelligibility makes it possible for things to show up as significant and meaningful. On the other hand, our stance within this horizon of meaning also determines *what* is worthwhile and significant. In this dual sense of the Being of Dasein, then, the *what* of our concerns and solicitudes is interconnected with the *how*, understood as our modes of comportment toward Being.

authentic relationship to Being lets others and the social world become encountered in some new way. Instead of relating to others according to one's preconceptions and expectations, the authentic individual lets others be who they are. "In the light of the 'for-the-sake-of-which' of one's self-chosen potentiality-for-Being," Heidegger writes, "resolute Dasein frees itself for its world. Dasein's resoluteness towards itself is what first makes it possible to let the Others who are with it 'be' in their ownmost potentiality-for-Being, and to co-disclose this potentiality in the solicitude which leaps forth and liberates" (344).

Returning to Caputo's Christian criticism of Heidegger's "hermeneutics of elitism," which mistakenly equates Heidegger's vision of authentically Being-with-others with Silentio-Kierkegaard's knight of faith, we can see that there are certainly some points of agreement in Heidegger's and Kierkegaard's view of commonsense morality and traditional ethical theory.[126] Both authors are highly contemptuous of the modern attempt to formulate a table of values and duties that is fixed for all people. In addition, Heidegger and Silentio-Kierkegaard de-structure the contemporary interpretations of the leveled-down possibilities of social existence. Lastly, both philosophers see individuality as a demanding and arduous achievement, not an ontic given. However, whereas the knight of faith's identity as a particular individual is defined against (or in opposition to) the ethical, Heidegger argues that individuality is a high achievement for participants of a particular sort in a particular type and level of linguistic community. It seems to me that Caputo's argument fails to see that, for Heidegger, "authentic human relations are possible only where individuals have broken out of the mold of conformism and self-centeredness of contemporary life" (Guignon 1986, 87). Furthermore, even though Heidegger's

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[126] Despite the differences in this context, I do find fundamental similarities in *Being and Time*'s and *Either/Or, Part II*'s interpretations of ethical individualism. I develop this argument in "Mortality and Morality: A Heideggerian Interpretation of Kierkegaard's Either/Or," in *Horizons of Authenticity in Phenomenology, Existentialism, and Moral Psychology: Essays in Honor of Charles Guignon* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2014), 219-229.

view of authenticity, as centered on the kairological "moment of vision" (*Augenblick*) certainly, owes a debt to Kierkegaard, Heidegger's notion of resoluteness is not as extreme as Kierkegaard's. That is, whereas the knight of faith's particularity is defined by his absolute commitment to God, Heidegger is not extreme in this way and actually seems to be more in touch with common concerns. Indeed, Heidegger sees himself as trying to demythologize theological concepts to show that they have some kind of existential reality, which is why theological concepts such as the call and guilt have the force that they do.[127]

My point is that even though Heidegger and Kierkegaard share a common disdain for mindless social conformism, they hold different views of authentic individualism. For Heidegger, authentic individualism is prior to and a condition for ethical agency, which is not the same as the knight of faith's teleological suspension of the ethical. In fact, since, on Heidegger's account, authenticity is something that occurs in "moments of vision," he says that "Dasein is already in irresoluteness [*Unentschlossenheit*], and soon, perhaps, will be in it again" (BT, 345). Insofar as we tend to drift back into the same habits and routines of everydayness, Heidegger insists that this is part of why *praxis* in the form of repetition (*Wiederholung*) is so important. "Repetition does not mean the bring-into-play of a settled completedness, but rather *acting anew in every moment on the basis of the corresponding resolution*" (BCAR, 128). Moral agency, then, involves the actualized potentiality for recovering, retrieving, and carrying forward the fundamental commitments that a person has made before, always revising them as she goes along.

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[127] See Heidegger PIA, 148; "Phenomenology and Theology" (1927), in *Pathmarks* (henceforth abbreviated as "PA"), trans. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 39-62; Benjamin D. Crowe, *Heidegger's Religious Origins: Destruction and Authenticity* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006); and Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: "Between Good and Evil,"* trans. Ewald Osers (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), esp. 107-125.

Critiques of Heidegger's Supposed Nihilism

I hope the discussion of Heidegger's so-called radical individualism has dispelled some of the more pressing issues surrounding the moral outlook of Heidegger's notion of authentic individuality. In particular, Heidegger's notion of finite freedom highlights what it means to make a choice as a moral agent situated within and bound up with, what Taylor refers to as, "inescapable horizons."

> Otherwise put, I can define my identity only against the background of things that matter. […] Only if I exist in a world in which history, or the demands of nature, or the needs of my fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of God, or something else of this order *matters* crucially, can I define an identity for myself that is not trivial. Authenticity is not the enemy of demands from beyond the self; it supposes such demands. (1991, 40-41)

Another key point that has emerged in our refutation of criticisms about Heidegger's notion of authentic individuality is that, in Heidegger's view, the call of conscience is not a matter of turning inward or abnegating responsibility. Instead, the call summons Dasein to its obligation (and inescapable indebtedness) to take responsibility for its own facticity. A calling in this deep sense of a vocation or direction in life should be understood as "a crucial link between the individual and the public world" (Bellah et al. 1996, 66). The task (or essence) is to take what is initially something that is only accidental and to form it into something that can have an overarching meaning and direction that becomes definitive of who one is. I hope we can see that Heidegger's refusal to say anything (positive) about moral philosophy does not mean that he has nothing to say about an *ethos*, "where this is understood as a way of life that makes an agent capable of addressing moral issues in a mature and resolute way" (Guignon 2008, 287).

However, some critics claim that Heidegger's way of undermining the modern fact-value distinction and blurring the modern boundary lines between ethics and ontology leads to nihilism, or, at best empty formalism. As Heidegger's former student Karl Löwith famously reports,

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> The primary attraction of his philosophical doctrine was not that it led his disciples to await a new system, but instead, its thematic indeterminacy and pureness; more generally, his concentration on the 'one thing that mattered.' It was only later that many of his students understood that this 'one thing' was nothingingness, a pure Resolve, whose 'aim' was undefined. One day a student invented the far from innocent joke: 'I am resolved, only toward what I do not know.[128]

In this section I would like to consider two criticisms about Heidegger's supposed failure to capture the entire richness of the social context of human existence. Even though I examine the details and nuances in each author's interpretation of Heidegger's destructuring of the positive and prohibitive dimensions of average everydayness, the underlying objection that unites the authors in this section their claim is that being an authentic agent rests on an extraordinary and eccentric condition completely detached and separate from *das Man*. In the end, according to this critique, Heidegger's so-called nihilism prevents him from providing a moral outlook for individual existence.

First, in "The Problematic Normative Assumptions of Heidegger's Ontology," Tina Chanter claims that Heidegger's phenomenological description of our ordinary understanding of things presupposes a commonality of the forms of life in a particular linguistic community, and this homogenizing view of the social world tends to reinforce the standard exclusionary practices of that community. Consequently, Chanter argues, "This characteristic of his methodology leads him to posit, almost by default, a culturally specific version of Dasein that he takes to be exemplary, but whose exemplarity is never made available for critical interrogation."[129] Chanter's claim seems to be that Heidegger's interpretation of Dasein's Being implies a certain

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[128] Karl Löwith, "The Political Implications of Heidegger's Existentialism," in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993), 167-185, 171-72.

[129] Tina Chanter, "The Problematic Normative Assumptions of Heidegger's Ontology," in *Feminist Interpretations of Martin Heidegger*, ed. by Nancy J. Holland and Patricia Huntington (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2001), 73–108, 74.

form of homogeneity and cultural elitism or a particular sort of *polis*, which does not make room for socio-political pluralism or differentiation. Chanter suggests that, insofar as Heidegger's account of everydayness is "geared almost exclusively to the world of work," it "ignores what most would regard as important aspects of experience, for example, sexuality, eroticism, enjoyment, and pleasure, or, at best, treats them as only important as subordinate to Dasein's successful negotiation" of its world of work (2001, 82). Her argument is that Heidegger uncritically takes up the normative assumptions embedded in the common modes of practical agency and "methodologically rules out in advance any serious consideration of significant differences between individuals" (2001, 74).

Guiding Chanter's criticism of Heidegger is the view that the Western experience of political commonality privileges a historically contextualized understanding of human agency and excludes or neglects the embodied experience of Being-in-the-world. This is indicated in her argument that "[s]ince Heidegger's Dasein is allegedly neutral, there is no room for him to acknowledge the political implications of the division of labor that is implied by his account. Since his ontology is one that has universal pretensions, there is no place for an acknowledgment of the sexist, racist, and classist structures on which his account implicitly relies" (2001, 106). This is a Marxist criticism of existentialism that claims there is a cultural elitism in existentialism that dismisses the material conditions of oppression. The objection, properly understood, is that Heidegger's interpretation of the practical and normative life-world conveys a specialized way of experiencing the world that excludes the atypical or non-standard cases of people. In effect, reading Heidegger through a Marxist-feminist lens that focuses on the material conditions of social existence, Chanter claims that Heidegger's supposed formalism occludes considerations of systematic forms of oppression and marginalization.

On the other hand, there are a number of prominent Marxist-feminist philosophers who use Heidegger's ideas to broaden and unify the fragmented horizon of our contemporary *ethos*. For instance, even though Dorothy Leland agrees with Chanter's criticisms about Heidegger's description of the "undifferentiated character of Dasein's everydayness" (BT, 69); nonetheless, Leland attempts to resolve the situation by broadening the sociological framework of *das Man* to include oppressive and periphery social structures of human existence. Let us take a moment to consider Leland's position.[130]

Heidegger's *das Man*, Leland writes, "provides a useful framework for working out accounts of human agency in which the communal nature of human being takes center stage. However, the framework is limited, particularly if applied to the historical/cultural realities in which we actually live" (2001, 111). In particular, Leland is critical of the presupposition of coherency and unity implied by the conformity of average everydayness, which she refers to as, the "'we' model" of membership in a linguistic community (2001, 116-17). Part of Leland's argument seems to be that, on Heidegger's account, Dasein's averageness, as a way of life, expresses a sense of togetherness and belongingness that is not available or comforting to politically oppressed and marginalized cultures. She is critical of the ways in which Heidegger's conception of *das Man* fails to account for the "the internal diversity in any given social group and hence the conflicting, and potentially subversive, values that can be found within the social order from which authentic Dasein must draw its moral choices."[131] Leland references examples of "conflictual cultures," which are excluded from or oppressed by the Western experience and

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[130] Dorothy Leland, "Conflictual Culture and Authenticity: Deepening Heidegger's Account of the Social," in *Feminist Interpretations of Martin Heidegger*, ed. by Nancy J. Holland and Patricia Huntington (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2001), 109–127.

[131] Nancy J. Holland, "Introduction II—Specific Contributions: Feminists Read Heidegger," in *Feminist Interpretations of Martin Heidegger*, ed. by Nancy J. Holland and Patricia Huntington (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2001), 43–50, 44.

discourse of being human. For example, she discusses the Native American self-understanding that is covered over and marginalized in the social norms and conventions of the European colonizers. In the process of assimilation, the Native American cultural identity becomes fractured and disjointed in order to fit within the language of their colonizers. In this sense, the reconstructed and reshaped multi-cultural identity tends "to express the interpretations of social dominant groups, and these interpretations can conflict with and even suppress alternative interpretations" (Leland 2001, 118). If the framework of Heidegger's *das Man* is to have practical and normative applicability, according to Leland, then it needs to make room for marginalized and silenced voices. Indeed, Leland argues that the framework of Heidegger's ontology is broad and formal enough to be reframed in such a way that "we can link authenticity to struggles over social meanings and see it as taking shape as part of a political practice" (2001, 124).

Whereas Chanter's reading of Heidegger excludes the possibility of developing a rich contextual understanding of Dasein, Leland's reading suggests that "we get a different picture of what is involved in authentic living when this picture is drawn from the standpoint of individuals whose 'thrownness' includes being members of marginalized or oppressed social groups" (2001, 112). What is the difference that makes the difference between these Marxist-feminist interpretations? I would like to suggest that the key to making sense of the Heidegger-Marxist-feminism debate lies in our understanding of the social world, i.e., what we mean when we talk about the social world.

In previous chapter, we saw that one of the consequences of the Enlightenment is the individualistic and fragmented view of reality. Accordingly, social relationships have come to be viewed as completely contingent and detrimental to Enlightenment freedom, where freedom

refers to "freedom from" social obligations and commitments. This process of fragmentation gives way to the tendency to think of a social community in terms of an aggregate or association. As Iris Marion Young points out, "When philosophers and political theorists discuss groups, they tend to conceive of them whether on the model of aggregates or on the model of associations, both of which are methodologically individualistic."[132] We have seen both models in the previous discussion of ontological individualism; however, I find it helpful to borrow Young's definitions in order to move our discussion along. When a social group is understood in terms of an aggregate, persons are classified by a set of shared attributes, such as "eye color, the make of car they drive, [or] the street they live on" (1990, 43). I do not think that Chanter has this concept of social existence in mind when she criticizes Heidegger. However, it seems to me that she might be thinking of social existence as an association, which Young defines as, "a formally organized institution, such as a club, corporation, political party, church, college, or union. Unlike the aggregate model of groups, the association model recognizes that groups are defined by specific practices and forms of association" (1990, 44). Nonetheless, both conceptions of social existence presuppose an individualist ontology of the social world. Understood as an aggregate, self-encapsulated individuals exist "prior to the collective," and a social group is reduced to a "mere set of attributes attached to individuals." In a similar manner, an association also sees "the individual as ontologically prior to the collective, as making up, or constituting groups" (Young 1990, 44).

If I am correct that Chanter's argument—that Heidegger's account of Dasein fails to consider the sexist, racist, and classist structures of the human condition—is based on the model of association, then her critique presupposes some form of ontological individualism. In so doing,

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[132] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 43.

it seems to me that Chanter's reading neglects the practical and normative richness of Heidegger's notion of Being-thrown-in-the-world. To begin with, Heidegger does not assume that his analysis of the work-world furnishes a complete understanding of contextual human agency. Indeed, he says it is only one example, and he warns against the attempt to "understand world as the ontical context of useful items, the things of historical culture," and insists the Being-in-the-world is "not beings qua tools, as that which humans have to deal, as if being-in-the-world meant to move among cultural items. Nor is world a multiplicity of human beings" (MFL, 181). What is important, in Heidegger's view, is that our basic or common mode of interacting is always based on and guided by the public language and norms of our socio-historical community. Language (*logos*) is not merely a tool for communication; rather, discourse and conversation form our most basic sense of identity and ways of relating toward things. As members of a linguistic community, being a citizen in a *polis* is fundamental for shaping our sense of what is the best quality of life that a person can have. In this sense, our political membership discloses a range of possibilities that are co-constitutive characteristics of Dasein's Being. As Young correctly argues, social membership and "group affinity" are captured by Heidegger conception of thrownness.

> …[o]ne *finds oneself* as a member of a group, which one experiences as always already having been. […] From the thrownness of group affinity it does not follow that one cannot leave groups and enter new ones. Many women became lesbian after first identifying as heterosexual. Anyone who lives long enough becomes old. These cases exemplify thrownness precisely because such changes in group affinity are experienced as transformations in one's identity. […] The present point is only that one first finds a group identity as given, and then takes it up in a certain way. While groups may come into being, they are never founded. (Young 1990, 46)

Contrary to Chanter's argument, it seems to me that Heidegger's account of human agency characterizes Dasein as a participant in a *polis* where what it is to be is articulated by

logos (discourse or conversation). In other words, a *polis* can contain deep contradictions and distortions. But this just means that we have to be resolute in confronting the "World-historical Situation" via clear-sighted "struggle" and "communication" (Heidegger BT, 436). As a political being, the normative and practical dimensions of the *polis* disclose a tacit understanding of what it is to be human, which is made manifest in discourse and conversation. As we saw in our discussion of Heidegger's appropriation of Aristotle, human beings emerge into presence from a like-mindedness grounded in the fact that *logos* constitutes their reality, who then, through self-formation in the community, seek definition and differentiation. Being human, then, is to exist as a handing down of public possibilities that are part of a communal understanding of things wherein that shared understanding embodies certain kinds of fundamental commitments that are characteristic of the political context in which one lives. In Heidegger's inquiry of the conditions for the possibility of being a fully developed person, he is trying to get at the transcultural conditions for being human—i.e., broadly construed and linguistically constrained.

I think it is important to keep in mind that Heidegger is not trying to make any generalizations about humans. Fundamental ontology is not sociology or any other ontic science. He says, explicitly, that we are only concerned with the way people are "proximally and for the most part." "Proximally and for the most part" refers to the way things are for the anyone, that is, the typical person, and this inquiry is for and about the more or less typical cases of being human (Heidegger BT, 422). However, Heidegger is not claiming that he is giving essential characteristics of all human beings whatsoever. Rather, he is trying to describe characteristic virtues of core or typical instances of adult humans in a social system. In Heidegger's words, "everydayness is a way *to be*," and in this everyday way of Being-in-the-world "there belongs further the comfortableness of the accustomed, even if it forces one to do something burdensome

and 'repugnant'" (BT, 422). Of course, many of us deviate from these norms in various ways, but even if one is no longer touched by everydayness this is still part of the way that people are manifest with each other.

In fact, I find that what Heidegger characterizes as "Being-in-the-*polis*" in his 1924 lectures on *The Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy* should be read as foreshadowing his account of Being-in-the-world in *Being and Time*.[133] As I previously discussed, *logos*, as the medium of engagement, discloses forms of life that include the practical goals and normative guidelines of Being-in-the-*polis*. In Heidegger's 1924 Aristotelian studies, he writes,

> *In the being of human beings themselves, lies the basic possibility of being-in-the-polis*. […] Implicit in this determination is an entirely peculiar, fundamental mode of the being of human beings characterized as 'being-with-one-another,' *koinōnia* [community]. […] This is not being-with-one-another in the sense of being-situated-alongside-one-another, but rather in the sense of *being-as-speaking-with-one-another* through communicating, refuting, confronting. (BCAR, 33)

In other words, discourse and conversation and making distinctions are prior to and a condition for a shared world of mutual support and cooperation in which people are always already engaged in common projects and working together in the living meaningful and fulfilling lives. On Heidegger's holistic and contextualized view of human agency, the practical and normative dimensions of the social world are fundamental to shaping our vision of a well-lived life (*ethos*), but this does not mean that we simply accept what has been given. As we saw in our discussion of resoluteness, to be an authentic individual is to take an ethical stance on the convictions and commitments of one's community, where this means communication, refuting, and confronting the social interpretations and self-understandings that make us what we are. This is suggested when Heidegger says, "phenomenological ontology takes its departure from the hermeneutic of

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[133] I take my lead from Kisiel's observation that "many themes that were given short shrift in BT, according to critical readers, are dealt with in great detail in SS 1924" (1995, 293).

Dasein, which as an analytic of *existence*, has made the guiding-line for all philosophical inquiry at the point where it *arises* and to which it *returns*" (BT, 62).

A second criticism of Heidegger's supposed empty formalism is found in Dreyfus, who argues that, in *Being and Time*, "Heidegger builds in a nihilistic response to the possibility of total leveling. The *form* of acting on *any* possibility is all that is absolutely essential for constancy, and constancy is all that is essential for authenticity" (1991, 332-33). I see two components at work in Dreyfus's social constructionist reading of *Being and Time*. On the one hand, his reading of the first division centers on the ways in which the practical and normative life-world constructs the Being of Dasein without remainder. In so doing, Dreyfus's interpretation captures the ways in which everydayness discloses a range of social roles and practical skills that make possible being a functional and productive member of the social world. In this way, Dreyfus's reading is consistent with the social constructionist view of selfhood, which says that to understand what it means to be human one needs to understand the context of meaning Dasein finds itself in. In a similar fashion, Dreyfus argues that the They and authentic selfhood are potentialities-for-Being that are definitive of our existence. Insofar as the practical and normative conventions of the social world are products of social interpretations, Dreyfus is correct to play up the significance of Heidegger's claim that all the possibilities and interpretations of Dasein's Being are entangled and interwoven in public modes of existence. However, Dreyfus's criticism about Heidegger's supposed nihilism is insensitive to how being authentic is an existentiell or lived-world possibility of Dasein.

The two components of Dreyfus's reading—social constructionism and nihilism—are exhibited in the following passage: "Heidegger holds that (1) all the for-the-sake-of-whichs are provided by the culture and are for the anyone and (2) Dasein can never take over these

impersonal public possibilities in a way that would make them its own and give it an identity" (1991, 305).[134] It seems to me that Dreyfus's interpretation overlooks Heidegger's reasons for saying, "Dasein is in every case what it can be [*Seinkönnen*], and in the way in which it is its possibility [*Möglichkeit*]" (BT, 183; c.f. BT, 63). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that his existential discoveries are based on existentiell reality, or, in other words, relationality and dialogue are essential to phenomenological descriptions. To clarify, it is a sociological ontic fact that, in the "process" (i.e., event) of socialization and habituation, Dasein's potentiality-for-Being (its *Seinkönnen*) is funneled into the They, so the They-self is a potentiality-for-Being that is definitive of our existence. At the same time, however, being a They-self, as we have seen, shows up as a fragmented and irresolute mode of existence, which indicates that there is a more coherent and consistent way of being. This potentiality-for-Being authentic is what Heidegger refers to as "self-constancy" [*Ständigkeit*]: "the *constancy of the Self* in the sense of its having achieved some sort of position. *The constancy of the Self*, in the double sense of steadiness and steadfastness" (BT, 369). As we have seen, being authentic involves a focusing of the self through an overarching and binding commitment to something, and this resolute and steadfast stance toward the future gives wholeness or unity to one's life by way of binding possibilities together. On this picture of the human condition, we can see that the They and authentic self-Being make up the existential potentialities-for-Being, and being a They-self and being authentic are both modifications of the complex, biaxial self.

By putting this all together, Heidegger seems to suggest that the basic idea of what is involved in living a life is to direct our ownmost "can be" (potentialities-for-Being) into particular possibilities, where possibilities means social roles, practical identities, character traits,

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[134] Dreyfus makes similar claims in "Can There Be a Better Source of Meaning Than Everyday Practices? Reinterpreting Division I of *Being and Time* in the Light of Division II" in *Heidegger's Being and Time: Critical Essays* (2005), 141–154.

and ways of life. Among these possibilities, there are two main potentialities-for-Being, which

Heidegger refers to as being a They-self and being authentic. Dreyfus's reading appears to

misconstrue Heidegger's argument that potentialities are definitive of who we are as humans. To

elaborate, Heidegger writes,

> The Being-possible which is essential for Dasein, pertains to the ways of its
> solicitude for Others and its concern with the 'world', as we have characterized
> them; and in all these, and always, it pertains to Dasein's potentiality-for-Being
> towards itself, for the sake of itself. The Being-possible which Dasein is
> existentially in every case, is to be sharply distinguished from empty logical
> possibility and from the contingency of something present-at-hand. (BT, 183)

In other words, it is by being embedded, enmeshed, and focused in a public context that one first

becomes a coherent and concrete individual as opposed to a merely dispersed, confused, and

chaotic They-self. One's own commitments and priorities can have coherency and continuity

only because there is a groove in the public realm of possibilities in which people are working

together. Being authentic, then, is not something that is given, but is carved out from a complete

absorption in *das Man*. The actual concrete expression that constitutes one's way of life and

configuration of possibilities is made manifest in taking an active part in the world. Heidegger

writes,

> Since we are with-one-another, in the process of dealing with human beings, we
> come to be steady and level-headed. Since we bring ourselves into situations
> involving risks, we have the possibility of learning courage, of leaving cowardice
> behind, not in a fantasized reflection upon being-there, but rather in *venturing-out
> into being-there* according to the possibilities of existence as encountered. (BCAR,
> 122-23)

Dreyfus' criticism about Heidegger's supposed nihilism seems to treat *das Man* and

authentic existence as two separate entities or radically alternative ways of life. However, it

seems to me that the They and authentic individuality are two core potentialities-for-Being that

are definitive of what Dasein is. Authentic existence is always concretely realized and expressed

in particular public possibilities. In Heidegger's words, "*authentic* existence is not something which floats above falling everydayness; existentially, it is only a modified way in which such everydayness is seized upon" (BT, 224). Being authentic is not, as Dreyfus's reading seems to imply, detached from the contexts and materials of *das Man*, but it is an individual carrying forward, and revitalizing and rejuvenating of the ideals that are definitive of Dasein's Being.

This oversight appears to encourage Dreyfus's Nietzschean interpretation of Heidegger's description of authenticity. To clarify, for Nietzsche, the idea of a teleological or purposive driven life becomes laughable with the "death of God," where this is understood as the loss of firm foundations or a transcendental basis for our values and ideals.[135] In showing how contingent and arbitrary our sense of meaning and purpose is, Nietzsche contends that our traditional sources of authority and value are and have always been human inventions. More importantly, the death of God brings about a feeling of weightlessness and purposelessness, and so Nietzsche tries to find another way that is not teleological to give purposiveness and weightiness to life. Nietzsche tries to remedy our moral crisis with a healthy dose of active nihilism in the concrete form of the "*Übermensch*" ("Overman"). For Nietzsche, the issue is not to change the content of one's life but to impart a style or design in one's life in such a way that one's decisions are one's own. As a preliminary stage for a higher way of life, Nietzsche sees the "true spirit" as the ideal artist who can play in the wreckage of the death of God. He writes, "the ideal of a spirit that plays naively, that is, not deliberately but from overflowing fullness and power, with all that up to now was called holy, good, untouchable, divine; […] the ideal of a human and superhuman well-being and goodwill that will often enough appear *inhuman*" (2001, 247). However, I hope it has become clear by now that Heidegger's notion of authentic existence

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[135] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 119-120.

is a mode of being actively engaged and involved in the social world, which is not an expression of Nietzsche's playful, aesthetic ideal.

By reading Heidegger through a Nietzschean lens, Dreyfus's criticism focuses on Heidegger's description of the ways in which *das Man* constitutes the practical agency of Dasein's average everydayness, and assumes that the possibility for being an authentic agent rests on an eccentric and exceptional condition that has been detached from *das Man*. This interpretation seems to be as misleading as Olafson's existentialist interpretation, for both readings ignore the numerous passages in *Being and Time* where Heidegger emphasizes, "*Authentic Being-one's-Self* does not rest upon an exceptional condition of the subject, a condition that has been detached from the 'they'; *it is rather an existentiell modification of the 'they'—of the 'they' as an essential existeniale*" (BT, 168). The possibility of being an authentic agent is something that is given in the ontological bedrock, which is built into the very idea that Dasein cares about itself and is for the sake of itself.

Another way to approach this misreading of *Being and Time* is put forth by Walter Brogan, who argues that Dreyfus's interpretation seems to be "an overemphasis on Division I of *Being and Time*, and the assumption it is in Division I that can be found Heidegger's sense of community." "Genuine community," Brogan argues, "is not found out of this public realm of the 'they,' […] but rather on the basis of a way of being together that itself creates the possibility for a kind of public sharing of oneself that is authentic and existentiell."[136] I would like to suggest that the basis Brogan refers to is what Heidegger discusses as the "destiny" or historical "sending" of a people (*Geschick*) and the fate (*Schicksal*) of authentic world-historical individual (BT, §§74-75). Before I begin to justify my position, I want to make it clear that the following

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[136] Walter Brogan, "The Community of Those Who Are Going to Die," in *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, ed. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 237-248, 239.

discussion is not intended as a thorough exposition of authentic historicity (in the next chapter, I spend a considerable amount of time on this topic); rather, the issue at hand is to suggest that Heidegger's view of the authentic world-historical individual is antithetical to or, at least, incompatible with nihilism.

Contrary to Dreyfus's Nietzschean reading of anticipatory resoluteness, Heidegger does not suggest that authenticity involves a rejection or disowning of old values and the affirmation of new values. Nor is Heidegger's view of authenticity devoid of an ethical orientation toward life. Rather, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger characterizes authentic historicity as a transformation from being a slave to tradition to being an authentic world-historical individual, who being in a shared situation has to take action without any kind of assurance that he or she is doing the right thing. As Heidegger says, "The resoluteness in which Dasein comes back to itself, discloses current factical possibilities of authentic existing, and discloses them *in terms of the heritage* [*Erbe*] which that resoluteness, as thrown, *takes over*" (BT, 435). In other words, the authentic individual embraces possibilities of the They, not as remnants of its past that are present-at-hand, but as contemporary expressions of our historically unfolding heritage that she is part of. In doing so, the authentic individual challenges and re-appropriates the contemporary expressions of those possibilities. In Heidegger's words, "…repetition makes a *reciprocative rejoinder* to the possibility of that existence which has-been-there. But when such a rejoinder is made to this possibility in a resolution, it is made *in a moment of vision; and as such* it is at the same time a *disavowal* of that which in the 'today', is working itself out as the 'past'" (BT, 438). When understood as a *reciprocative rejoinder*, resoluteness should be seen as going back to and transforming civic-humanist and biblical ideals that are part of our Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian heritage. In repeating the possibilities of action that arise from Dasein's heritage, the

authentic person "may choose its heroes," Heidegger writes, "for it is in resoluteness that one first chooses the choice which makes one free for the struggle of loyally following in the footsteps of that which can be repeated" (BT, 437).

From this view of Dasein as a happening (*Geschehen*) and as historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*), we can see that, on Heidegger's account, we are surrounded by understandings of life that provide character ideals and normative commitments such as, heritage, resolve, loyalty, resilience, indebtedness, steadiness and steadfastness, courage in the face of one's finitude, and the recognition of limits. These executive virtues have a binding force because they make us who we are (as opposed to executive virtues embedded in historical paradigms of other cultural understandings and forms of life). Heidegger's account of authenticity, then, is compatible with Nietzsche's self-overcoming and playful ideal of embracing one's self-determining freedom; where this is understood as liberating oneself from the illusions of there being something authoritative by fully embracing one's own freedom from the social world. It should be clear by now that "Heidegger rejects any existentialist conception of authenticity understood as shaking off the influence of the 'herd' in order to get in touch with one's true, inner self. To be authentic is not to transcend the public but to realize public possibilities in a more coherent, focused, and creative way" (Guignon et al. 1999, 193).

Concluding Remarks on the Supposed Moral Bankruptcy of Heidegger's 'Ethics'

I find that most critiques of Heidegger's ethics (broadly construed) depend on the generally accepted assumption in modern moral philosophy that human beings are essentially self-encapsulated, rational subjects contingently connected to the practices and normative guidelines of the social world. In other words, the critiques presuppose an individualistic ontology of the social world, where individuality is ontologically prior to any kind of community

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or process of socialization. The assumption is that we are individuals who have obligations and are living the good life if we meet our obligations. On this view, responsibility and obligation are seen as contractual requirements for social participation and membership. Whereas moral theory (in the modern sense) is concerned with providing impartial and value-free guidelines for individual behavior, Heidegger is asking about the conditions for the possibility of transforming how one lives. "We ought to remind ourselves that the original meaning of *ethos* [character], as Aristotle records and as Heidegger attempts to reawaken, is related to habit, to habitat and dwelling [*ethos*]. One's *ēthos* refers to where one dwells ontologically, the place from which we emerge and to which we return in showing ourselves in a particular manner of Being in each case" (McNeill 2006, 74-75).

I believe that Heidegger's account of ethics ought to be read in an Aristotelian manner where the holistic context of the cosmos and social world and the possibility of being an authentic individual constitute the conditions that make ethical agency possible. *Being and Time* is an ethics in the same sense that *Nicomachean Ethics* is an ethics. Aristotle and Heidegger are not selling us on any particular moral code or position about morality; rather, are trying to show us what it means to be capable of being a fulsome ethical agent. I hope it has become clear that Heidegger's conception of human existence is in an important sense prior to modern ways of basing ethics on ontological individualism. For Heidegger, the co-constituted *polis* of mutual support and cooperation provides the virtues or character ideals for the possibility of living a meaningful and fulfilling life. Since human beings lack an impartial and value-free ground for understanding how they ought to be living their lives, one is going to have to be self-making in a certain way without any absolute assurance that it is the right way to live. Heidegger stresses the point that since we can never get an absolute distance from the common intelligibility of our

linguistic community, we have to make ourselves from the normative, practical, and historical materials around us (see BCAR, 52; BT, 167-68). However, this does not lead to Sartre's radical freedom, Kierkegaard's knight of faith, or Nietzsche's *Übermensch.* Since we are always already caught up in the midst of things and there is no escaping the practices and forms of life of the community, ultimately all of what we are in our lives are the decisions we undertake. In Heidegger's words, "Only the particular Dasein decides its existence, whether it does so by taking hold or by neglecting. The question of existence never gets straightened out except through existing itself" (BT, 33).

In the next chapter, I will consider current scholarship on the positive insights of Heidegger's thought in order to highlight and expand on some of the ideas developed in this chapter, and to justify my argument that Heidegger is against any form of ontological individualism. Insofar as Heidegger tries to show how ethics can hear the callings of a moral-political community, he is doing something quite different from modern moral philosophy. Heidegger tries to provide a general sketch or framework of ethical agency that is proper to the human condition, which does not simply tell people that it is their life to live, but actually motivates them to take up that personal responsibility and to make something of it. Heidegger has a broader and more pluralistic sense of ethics than modernity allows, because, for Heidegger, ethics is a preparation for politics where the focus is on the authentic individual who is socially engaged and actively involved in civic life. In contrast to the narrow and fragmented way that modernity approaches moral philosophical questions, Heidegger offers us an understanding of ethics that centers on the commitments and concerns of political existence.

CHAPTER 4:

HOW HEIDEGGER'S ETHICS HEARS THE CALLINGS OF AN *ETHOS*

The considerations thus far have been focused on examining the criticisms against

Heidegger's supposed neglect of ethics and bringing into relief the metaphysical assumptions

built into modern moral philosophy. Our inquiry into Heidegger's purported neglect of ethical

life shed light on two conceptual distortions tied up with the metaphysical foundations of modern

moral philosophy. We saw that underlying the criticisms about Heidegger's characterization of

authentic existence is the belief that the "individual is prior to society, which comes into

existence only through the voluntary contract of individuals trying to maximize their self-interest"

(Bellah et al. 1996, 143). To say that individuality is ontologically prior to society is to make two

claims. First, moral obligation springs from a tacit agreement among rational individuals, where

rationality is defined in terms of self-interest. On this view, there is no direct way to account for

values and standards that extend beyond the individual's own idiosyncratic preferences. There

are no qualitative distinctions of worth in the social world, because there is no such thing as

society. For this reason, "it is easier to think about how to get what we want than to know what

exactly we should want" (Bellah et al. 1996, 21). Second, our ability to encounter things that

matter such as the needs of the environment and gender equality is dependent upon subjective

values. This is because in a world of inherently meaningless forms of life, value and significance

are defined in terms of subject-relative characteristics. The main problem underlying the

criticisms against Heidegger's view of authenticity, as I have laid it out, is the presupposition of

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some kind of individualistic moral framework in which the individual "constitutes its own moral universe" (Bellah et al. 1996, 76).

The cluster of ideas about social meaning that centers on the image of modern individualism is far-reaching, generating a moral discourse that is pervaded by, what Lawrence Vogel identifies as, "two extreme assumptions: (1) the view that meaning must reside in the unconditioned or nowhere at all—in which cases all conditioned beings are devalued; and (2) the view that meaning resides only in the individual subject who projects values on things in light of arbitrarily willed acts of commitment" (1994, 45). Ontological individualism gives way to an illusory conception of the existential function of moral-political communities, which, in turn, blocks the way for modern moral philosophy to access and give an account of the meaning-filled contexts of the life-world that provide the basis on which we are able to address things that matter and are significant to us as members of the community. Insofar as the existentialist and nihilistic arguments against the ethics or ethical implications of Heidegger's view of authenticity are pervaded by the assumptions of ontological individualism, they fail to take seriously Heidegger's extended attack on the modern distinction between ethics and ontology. Specifically, these criticisms tend to miss the ethical implications of Heidegger's rejection of the modern conception of the self (see BT, §25) and his alternative vision of selfhood "conceived 'only' as a way of Being" socially engaged and involved in the world (BT, 153).

One way to see the difference between Heidegger's and the tradition's vision of ethical existence is to look at the Aristotelian paradigm of virtue ethics, which holds that the *polis* is the medium in which I can realize and make a life of my own. Being a person, on this view, involves the actualization of the human capacity to make decisions about one's life, and this activity is dependent upon character-building practices, such as friendship and integrity, which are

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expressions of ways of belonging to a *polis*. Political membership teaches us what it means to be responsible individual members of political society, thereby granting us the possibility live a life worth living. The Aristotelian approach to ethics illustrates an understanding of individualism that views the self as an overarching pattern of life and a way of being responsive to the normative governed possibilities (or social roles) that make up our identity as members of the *polis*. The plausibility of the particular virtues that arise in Aristotle's account of ethical existence depends on the shared vision of the good life that is exemplified by the *phronimos* who, as the archetypal ideal of a good person, takes a stand on the bedrock practices of a community that regulate a people's shared way of life. Understood as an ethical ideal, self-constitution exemplifies the virtues of a shared vision of the good life.[137]

Far from this ethical ideal of individualism, the modern view of self-realization is an amoral phenomenon (Taylor 1991, 21, 44, 125). The "monological ideal" underlying modern conceptions of self-realization indicates that society has both suppressive and creative functions (Taylor 1991, 34). On the one hand, socialization is a process of fragmentation that leads to extremely manipulative forms of human relations and to feelings of alienation and isolation. On the other hand, the social world provides us with self-affirming roles or possibilities such as marriage and career paths, which are seen as raw materials at our disposal, that is, things on hand for us to use to create a sense of self-worth or identity. Sartre illustrates the monological ideal underlying this instrumental view of self-constitution, saying,

> directions, instructions, orders, prohibitions, billboards address me in so far as I
> am just *anybody*; to the extent that I obey them, that I fall into line, I submit to the
> goals of human reality which is just anybody and I realize them by any techniques.
> I am therefore modified in my own being since I *am* the ends which I have chosen
> and the techniques which realize them—to any ends whatsoever, to any

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[137] This is why young people are not allowed to study ethics. They lack "experience of the actions in life, which are the subject and premises of our arguments" (Aristotle NE, 1095a3-4).

techniques whatsoever, any human reality whatsoever. […] There is no doubt that my belonging to an inhabited world has the value of a *fact*.[138]

Aristotle's *phronēsis* (practical wisdom), the virtue that guides *praxis* (action in the narrow sense), is leveled down to a skill or technique disconnected from the broader political context. In contrast to the premodern ethical ideal, the ideal modern self is not weighed down by normative governed identities, because the modern archetypes are merely instrumental possibilities that do not have any authoritative influence. Confined to the sphere of subjective desires and preferences, values lack moral authority. As Julian Young puts it, "values that are 'fabricated' by us lack" a binding normative force, because "what is chosen can, if the going gets tough, always be unchosen."[139] The problem is that, as people become more detached rugged individualists, they become disconnected from the traditions and communities anchoring their lives (c.f. Heidegger BP, 289-90).

As a result of this uprootedness from the wider communal context, ontological individualism "encourages a purely personal understanding of self-fulfillment, thus making the various associations and communities in which the person enters purely instrumental in their significance" (Taylor 1991, 43). Modern individualism gives way to a contentious and fragmented social dynamic where the ideals and goals anchoring one's life are uprooted from the meaningful, normative context of agency that makes possible the realization of these ideals and goals. In short, this conception of individualism is self-defeating and self-undermining. "Modern individualism seems to be producing a way of life that is neither individually nor socially viable, yet a return to traditional forms would be to return to intolerable discrimination" (Bellah et al. 1996, 144). The hard won freedom and autonomy of our contemporary Western *ethos* is, in part,

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[138] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (henceforth abbreviated as "BN"), trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), 656.
[139] Julian Young, *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 101.

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a reaction against the oppressive forces of the traditional hierarchy of relations and marginalizing political systems of the ancient world. Indeed, "[b]reaking with the past is part of our past. Leaving tradition behind runs all the way throughout our tradition" (Bellah et al. 1996, 75). However, as many philosophers, sociologists, and psychologists have noticed, the ideal modern self has achieved freedom from oppressive traditions and communities, but it has also encouraged a "fragmented society […] whose members find it harder to identify with their political society as a community" (Taylor 1991, 117).

The social fragmentation of modern individualistic outlooks has detrimental consequences for modern moral philosophy. First, people no longer feel a sense of deep responsibility to their fellow citizens. To help illustrate this point, consider the (in)famous words of Margaret Thatcher, "There is no such thing as Society. There are individual men and women and there are families."[140] The explicit assumption here that the ultimate basic realities of the world are self-encapsulated individuals is consistent with the utilitarian and expressivist outlooks discussed in the second chapter. If there is no such thing as society and human beings are self-interested, utilitarian calculators, then the best possible form of existence is "justified as matters of personal preference. Indeed, the ultimate ethical rule is simply that individuals should be able to pursue whatever they find rewarding, constrained only by the requirement that they do not interfere with the 'value systems' of others" (Bellah et al. 1996, 6). When political society is seen in terms of a social contract, where members of the state agree to cooperate and negotiate to work together to the extent that all parties involved will mutually benefit from the relationship, the best indicators we have of how we should live are based on fleeting personal preferences. This enables a risk-free outlook on life that is based on the belief that whatever benefits society

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[140] Cited in John Blundell, *Margaret Thatcher: A Portrait of the Iron Lady* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2008), 193. See, also, Charles Guignon, *On Being Authentic* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 33-35.

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benefits the individual and visa-versa, therefore, we should establish a society in which everyone would act on their own self-interest. This detached hedonism encourages the experience of the self and others as commodities. According to Heidegger, the social contract *ethos* of the modern world is self-defeating, because it only allows for negative freedom and does not give us any reason to embrace our freedom to make long-term commitments that carry responsibility. It "takes Dasein as something ready-to-hand to be concerned with—that is, something that gets managed and reckoned upon. 'Life' is treated as a 'business', whether or not it covers its costs" (Heidegger BT, 336).

In addition to the problem of responsibility, in a fragmented political society commitment is not deeply grounded. Our relations with others is based on the idea that human relationships exist for the sake of the mutual benefit of individuals, which is indicated in the common expression "You scratch my back, and I'll scratch your back." We stay in the relationship so long as we benefit from it, and we can leave when it no longer serves this purpose (no strings attached). When relationships are viewed as a "business procedure," there is the illusory expectation that moral theory (in the modern sense) should tell us "*something currently useful about assured possibilities of 'taking action' which are available and calculable*" (Heidegger BT, 340). This is an expectation for a cost-benefit analysis that yields risk-free commitments. The problem in "this imagery of exchange" is that "the self stands apart from what it does, and its commitments remain calculated and contingent on the benefits they deliver" (Bellah et al. 1996, 69). This disassociates the self from its actions, and it becomes difficult to see whether individuals can bind themselves to higher purposes and ideals that give meaning to life.

Suffice it to say, modern individualism goes hand-in-hand with social contract thinking, which "thrives only on mistrust" and is guided by idle chatter and gossip (Heidegger BT, 159). If

ethics is understood in terms of an *ethos*—an accustomed way of life that is oriented toward the good life—then the challenge facing modern moral philosophy and Heidegger's critics is not primarily about the formulation of a code book for the behavior of autonomous individuals, but rather, is how to combat fragmentation, where this refers to a break down in the holistic context of the *polis*. In other words, if the project of modern moral philosophy is to find a basis for morality (MacIntyre 2007, 54), then it needs to close the (presupposed) ontological gap between the self and political society.

Despite their differences, Kantianism and utilitarianism attempt to resolve the tension between individualization and socialization by moving from the particular content of the individual's moral deliberations to a set of principles or imperatives of action applicable to the whole of social life. In its most basic and rudimentary formulation, the Kantian political community is a "kingdom of ends" structured by laws that promote the autonomy of individuals and is based on universalizable motives of duty-bound moral persons (Kant 2002, 51-53). The utilitarian political community, on the other hand, is a social aggregate structured by laws that maximize the well-being and minimize the suffering of the collective whole. Political society, on this view, is based on the cost-benefit terms or principles of contract-bound and result-oriented individuals (c.f. Mill 2001, Chapter V). These attempts to provide a basis for morality seem to obscure "personal reality, social reality, and particularly the moral reality that links person and society" (Bellah et al. 1996, 80).

Modern moral philosophy is trapped in what Bellah and his colleagues identify as the "first language" of Western sociality, which is "the language of the self-reliant individual" (154). The first language of modern individualism undermines that ability of citizens to address ethical problems in a coherent, democratic fashion. Trapped in the language of ontological

individualism, modern moral theory does not have access to the ethical language of personal responsibility and civic membership that "organizes life by reference to certain ideals of character—virtues such as courage and honor—and commitments to institutions that are seen as embodiments of these" identity-conferring ideals (Bellah et al. 1996, 160). Overturning social fragmentation requires the use of "the languages of tradition and commitment" in the moral-political community—the "second languages" that shape and make possible being a unified ethical self (Bellah et al. 1996, 154).

I hope it has become clear that modern moral philosophy finds itself stuck between a rock and a hard place. The pervasive individualism underlying modern moral theory appears to reinforce the fragmentation that it is trying to overcome and, arguably, is counterproductive to the task of articulating a shared vision of the good life, where this is understood in the Aristotelian sense of being a good person and making a fulfilling and worthwhile life. That being said, even though the premodern understanding of the self and ethical life once made sense for Aristotle, it no longer makes sense in our contentious, individualistic, and fragmented political context. For this reason, modern moral philosophy fails to broach the question of ethics—"How ought we to live?"—because it lacks a basis for critical reflection and the resources for envisioning "higher," more meaningful ways of life. Confined to the presuppositions and assumptions governing the first language of modern individualism, moral theory is paralyzed by its inability to formulate a coherent outlook of the good life.

This predicament of sociological and ontological fragmentation brings us to the guiding questions of this chapter: "What does it mean to be an individual?" and "What are the ontological conditions for the possibility of being an ethical agent?" My goal in this chapter is to prove that Heidegger's diagnosis of the pervasive individualism in modern moral philosophy

also provides a corrective for the Enlightenment project of justifying ethics. In the first section, I consider Heidegger's critique of ontological individualism in order to show that there is a certain kind of anti-individualism in Heidegger's thought that avoids the philosophical problems predicated on modern individualism and the fact-value distinction. I find that Heidegger's analysis of the role of discourse and Being-with in human existence makes clear that the link between the self and the social world is ontological. In the second section, I try to show the ways in which this ontological difference makes an ethical difference. The guiding question of section two is whether the vision of the good life put forth in Heidegger's notion of authentic historicity is capable of addressing our contemporary needs. Heidegger's view of authentic historicity suggests that, instead of drifting into public possibilities and abnegating responsibility for our ways of life, we can recover the energy, commitment, and dedication to the ideals and projects that are definitive of our own unfolding historicity. When authentic existence is understood as a regulative ideal, the effective realization of this ideal consists of following in the footsteps of heroes and heroines whose actions embody historical ideals and carve out paths of possibilities for authentic existence (BT, §§ 74-75). This is because genuine decisions not only repeat public possibilities that one has chosen and simultaneously inherited, but resoluteness also retrieves goals and ideals of Dasein's own past. "In other words, genuine decisions involve taking a risk in the context of a unique situation. For Heidegger, rules have no authority for 'a free existing'. Instead, we can take inspiration from our heroes or role models" (Polt 1999, 91). Even if it the case that authentic historicity functions as a regulative ideal, it not apparently obvious whether Heidegger's ethics (broadly construed) avoids falling prey to prevailing forms of ethical relativism. Drawing on recent scholarship that attempts to articulate the ethical dimensions of Heidegger's thought, the second section investigates the possible drawbacks of seeing authentic

existence as a regulative ideal that includes the conditions of human life that make possible this ideal. In the end, I suggest that in order to make sense of Heidegger's claim that fundamental ontology ought to be understood as an "originary ethics" (BW, 258), then we need to take seriously his post-humanist view that denies a metaphysical distinction between ethics and ontology.

Heidegger's Anti-Individualism

In the "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger insists that *Being and Time*'s project of fundamental ontology is ethics in the originary sense of finding a way into the shared basis of unity and meaning in our everyday, practical life-world. To combat the pervasive individualism in modern moral theory, Heidegger reminds us that "ethics" does not originally refer to a table of values, criteria of right action, or categorical imperative. Instead, the primordial meaning of "ethics" is *ethos*, which "means abode, dwelling place" (Heidegger BW, 256). By recalling that "ethics" derives from *ethos*, Heidegger is getting at an understanding of ethics as an expression of a unified way of life, as a community's way of dwelling and inhabiting the world. The etymological origins of ethics reminds us that ethics is an expression of feeling at home in the world in the sense that one's identity is inextricably bound up with a familiar dwelling-place and shared sense of communal belonging in the world. The emphasis in *ethos* is not placed on obedience to rules or principles, but is centered on the character ideals and "practices of commitment," i.e., *praxis*, "that define the community as a way of life" (Bellah et al. 1996, 156).

This indicates, according to Vogel, that "[f]undamental ontology is a fundamental ethics insofar as it reminds us of the worldly dwelling-place we always already inhabit even in the absence of any cosmic place. It allows one to affirm *metaphysical* nihilism—the loss of an 'onto-theological' foundation—without seeing in this destiny a reason for despair" (1994, 6). In

contrast to the traditional view of moral theory, Heidegger sees ethics as a way back to "the context of a belongingness," found in the "homeland" of Höderlin's "Homecoming," which is not to be misconstrued in patriotic or nationalistic terms but refers to "the history of Being" (Heidegger BW, 241). Heidegger's vision of ethics as a "homecoming" is not a nostalgic yearning for the oppressive ways of the past or a homogenous form of life. If we remember that history (*Geschichte*) "is not something that *follows along after* Dasein, but something which already goes ahead of it" (Heidegger BT, 41), then we can start to see that Western political society is dragged along by the tides of history, and Heidegger is trying to find a way to paddle out in front of it. Heidegger attempts to put forth a revolutionary response to the problems associated with the fragmentation and homelessness of our modern *ethos* or dwelling-place. This is a conservative revolution that follows a pathway back to the wellsprings of meaning in order to recover and carry forward the hidden basis of responsibility and commitment. As Vogel puts it, "Rather than plunging us into a mood in which nothing matters or anything goes, the anxiety-provoking idea that 'No-thing' grounds our Being-in-the-world simply returns us to our care for our own Being as the basis on which anything can matter to us" (1994, 6).

As cryptic as the "Letter's" remarks may be, I think it provides clues for seeing how the ethics of *Being and Time* destroys the first language of modern individualism in order to recover and reconstruct the second language of responsibility and commitment that is responsive to our shared heritage (*Erbe*). My argument is that Heidegger's remarks about dwelling, belongingness, and language (as "the house of Being and the home of human beings" [BW, 262]) help us see how *Being and Time* exposes the self-evident presuppositions governing modern moral theory and offers an alternative way of approaching the fragmentation and homelessness of our modern age. In particular, a key feature of Heidegger's thought that contributes to his destruction and

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reconstruction of modern individualism is that language (or discourse) and dwelling (or Being-with) are constituent parts of the essential structures of human agency.[141]

The purpose of the following examination of Heidegger's analysis of the existential role of discourse and Being-with is twofold. First, I try to prove that, far from supporting any form of ontological individualism, Heidegger puts forth an anti-individualist ontology of the social world. If ontology in the broadest sense refers to the meaning of Being, then the following discussion of language and Being-with should make clear that, for Heidegger, meaning can never be found in the relation between an independently existing world and a self-encapsulated subject or mind. This is because the link between the self and the world is ontological. Second, I hope to show that this ontological difference makes clear that belonging to a shared tradition is prior to, and a condition for the possibility of, individuality and being a moral agent. It is my position that Heidegger recovers an appropriate hermeneutical lens through which we can see the authentic individualism as an overarching undertaking to seize upon and embrace what it means to be human.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger reminds us that Dasein's most basic way of inhabiting and dwelling in the world is always based on the discourse circulating in the forms of life of the public world. "In both ordinary and philosophical usage, Dasein, man's Being, is 'defined' as […] that living thing whose Being is essentially determined by the potentiality for discourse" (Heidegger BT, 47). To say that the potentiality for discourse is definitive of Being Dasein is to point out that we are participants within a shared communal world and our active participation in

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[141] *Logos* seems to play a foundational role in the development of Heidegger's thought. I am in full agreement with Nelson's argument that the "language of address, of claiming and being claimed, of responding and co-responding, emerged in relation to the question of *logos* in the earliest lecture courses and continues to inform the responsiveness of poetic language formulated in his [Heidegger's] later works; his previous and later thought share in this care for the word. The event of address and being addressed, of being claimed and responding to the claim, resonates throughout the transformations of Heidegger's thought" (2008, 401).

this world is an enabling condition for being human. Properly understood, *logos* (discourse and conversation) does not refer to neutral, value-free rules of logic, but is the shared possibilities of self-assessment and self-constitution that form the basis of a communal context. What is important, in Heidegger's view, is that discourse and conversation disclose the guidelines of norms and conventions that, in general, define our Being as social agents. It is this shared basis of self-interpretation and self-constitution that, proximally and for the most part, defines us as beings of a particular sort.

Commenting on Heidegger's 1924 lectures, McNeill notes the important role that *logos* plays in Heidegger's fundamental ontology: "Human Being in a world is intrinsically a Being-with-others; it is determined by a *legein* concerned with what is good and advantageous for human *praxis*. *Logos* is never simply individual or private, but always already has inscribed within it our being in a common world, in a world shared with others; *logos* is always the *logos* of a community" (2006, 82). Contrary to the existentialist-inspired suggestion that Heidegger casts a negative light on the They, Heidegger's claim is that active participation in the social world is an essential structure of human agency. In his words, our Being as the They is a "*primordial phenomenon that belongs to Dasein's positive constitution*" (BT, 167). It is by virtue of being a member of the They that we inhabit a language, where this is understood as dwelling in a like-minded world of traditions, narratives, expectations, and character ideals. The existential function of *logos* is that is articulates the "patterns and narratives that shape a sense of a well-lived life—in other words, not just what we do, but how we live and who we are" (Hatab 2000, 56). In this sense, *logos* is our ethical compass in life, the fine tuning of which depends on us.

This point follows from Heidegger's insistence that language is the medium and basis of self-understanding that grants us access to meaningful life-paths and ways of being human. As Heidegger makes clear in the following passage, *logos* is an essential structure definitive of our Being as social agents.

> Speaking with each other is not something that goes on all the time, but speech itself—*logos*—is always operative—whether we're repeating what others have said, or telling stories, or even just silently speaking to ourselves or taking *respons*ibility for ourselves. […] Not only is speaking to others and to oneself the behavior that makes human beings stand out as human; speaking is also the way that humans direct and guide all their other kinds of behavior. […] Talking, therefore, is human being's distinctive, universal, and fundamental way of comporting itself toward the world and toward itself.[142]

To say that conversation and discourse are always operative in our ability to be human is to make two claims. First, our involvement in the world makes us human in the sense of being agents capable of giving reasons and acting on the basis of reasons. Second, *logos* plays a formative role in shaping our understanding of what is at stake in our own lives and our ability to make meaningful choices based on this overarching self-understanding. Seen in this way, the link between the self and the social world is ontological, not moral where this refers to universal rules and principles or subjective values. Heidegger's claim is that one has to be part of a moral-political community in order to have a life to live, and one has to have a life to live in order to be human. These fundamental aspects of agency are not two separate things that can be hooked together. Rather, for Heidegger, they are totally entangled and interdependent structures that make it possible for us to become individuals and effective ethical agents.[143]

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[142] Martin Heidegger, *Logic: The Question of Truth* (henceforth abbreviated as "LQT"), trans. Thomas Sheehan (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), 2-3.
[143] If we recall from chapter three's characterization of the biaxial structure of selfhood, being the They and being an authentic self are the essential potentialities-for-Being definitive of Dasein. What is important, in Heidegger's view, is that "these structures are possibilities for human existence to be, and only that. And every human existence *qua* human has already personally decided, one way or the other, regarding this ability: either authentically, i.e., from out of oneself; or [inauthentically], by renouncing this possibility; or by just not being up to such a decision. Human existence is handed over to itself in its having-to-be [*Zu-sein*]" (LQT, 342). In other words, Dasein comes into the

Heidegger's emphasis on the constitutive role of *logos* in gathering together and unifying various, dispersed forms of social life brings to light the acuity of Heidegger's observations that, since there is a "fluid boundary between the public and one's own being-in-the-world" (HCT, 237), the problems of fragmentation that arise in the breakdown of the modern political context cannot be remedied by simply "negating the public realm" and retreating to the so-called freedom of "'private existence'" (BW, 221). This is because withdrawing from the obligations and responsibilities of individual membership in the public world is itself a form of social existence.

We could put the point this way. Although the They "belongs to Dasein's positive constitution," "[t]he extent to which its dominion becomes compelling and explicit may change in the course of history" (Heidegger BT, 167). In the modern world, public spaces are leveled down to a homogenous context of mediocrity, averageness, and "*distantality* [*Abständigkeit*]" (BT, 164). Heidegger sees that modernity can only be accomplished with the loss of qualitative distinctions of worth and meaningful limits. In this way, the public institutions and social

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world with the potentiality to be a social being and also the potentiality to become owned by securing its own identity through its own life-defining choices and actions. To see the significance of Heidegger's account of human agency, it is helpful to consider the traditional view that he is dismantling. Despite their differences, John Locke and Kant locate agency is the consciousness or will of self-encapsulated subjects. (See John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 335; Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 259-66.) Both conceptions of human agency retreat from the practical life-world by assuming a disengaged, disembodied, objective basis of self-understanding. Thus, the individualist ontology of agency is acquired by withdrawing from "the ordinary first-person experience" of the lived-world "and taking on board some theory, or at least some supposition, about how things work" (Taylor 1989, 162-63). "In effecting this double movement of suspension and examination," Taylor points out, "we wrest the control of our thinking and outlook away from passion or custom or authority and assume responsibility for it ourselves" (1989, 167). Agency, so constructed, makes a sharp distinction between the conscious mind and the external world, thereby reducing the meaningful context of social existence to an impersonal stance of self-reflection. Otherwise put, human agency is understood as the ability to disassociate myself from my actions in order to talk responsibility for my inner intentions. Far from the traditional Kantian or Lockean conception of selfhood, Heidegger argues that Dasein cannot disassemble and then reassemble its place in the world; rather, Dasein's existence is a constant work in progress that resists all forms of calculative thought and risk-free principles of action. This is because being a person, on Heidegger's view, is an event or happening, not a thing or intentional state that can be mastered and controlled by instrumental reason. Instead, selfhood is a constitutive end of Dasein's existence, which is always still outstanding so long as it is (Heidegger BT, 279).

practices articulate the They's concern with averageness and censorious conformism. As Heidegger says, the language of the They "keeps watch over everything exceptional that thrusts itself to the fore. Every kind of priority gets noisily suppressed. […] Everything gained by struggle becomes just something to be manipulated. Every secret loses its force" (BT, 165). With the disappearance of a shared basis for genuine commitment and decisive action (in the narrow sense of *praxis*), it seems that modern ethical existence can only be accomplished with the loss of greatness. However, retreating to isolated individualism not only fails to combat the fallenness of modernity, it also encourages and reinforces "the dictatorship of the public realm, which decides in advance what is intelligible and what must be rejected as unintelligible" (Heidegger BW, 221).

This analysis of the ways in which the language of modern individualism "falls to the service of expediting communication along routes where objectification—the uniform accessibility of everything to everyone—branches out and disregards all limits" (Heidegger BW, 221) lends credit to Nelson's claim that *Being and Time* is about ethics in the sense that it attempts to awaken Dasein out of its comatose that "is insensitive to every different level of genuineness and thus never gets to the 'heart of the matter'" (Heidegger BT, 165). Nelson puts it this way: "Heidegger is not concerned with developing a social or moral philosophy as such but with the question of how individuation (*Vereinzelung*), within the horizon of the question of being (*Sein*), is possible given the predominance of the social and the fallenness of the public sphere."[144] Nelson finds an "ethics" in Heidegger's thought "in the phenomenological sense" (2008a, 131), which "is not about the formation of a set of values, world-views or ideology at all, much less some 'spiritual' or 'cultural' warfare, but opening up their questionability in exposing

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[144] Eric S. Nelson, "Heidegger and the Facticity of Ethics," in *Rethinking Facticity*, ed. François Raffoul and Eric S. Nelson (Albany: SUNY, 2008), 129-48, 130. (Henceforth abbreviated as 2008a.)

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the self to its world" (2008a, 132). Whereas traditional moral philosophy takes as its starting point the monological subject engaged in self-reflection and proceeds to problematize intersubjective relationships, Heidegger begins with the ontological bedrock of the *ethos* and attempts to understand and deal with breakdowns in that initially holistic context of the *polis*.

As Nelson aptly describes it, "Heidegger's analysis takes as its point of departure Dasein in its 'neutrality,' in what he calls the 'indifference' of everydayness, and proceeds to examine situations that broach the significance of being and the self by placing this indifference in question" (2008a, 133). What interrupts the humdrum of everydayness and puts it all into question are those moments when one experiences the absolute limits of Being-there. The experience of anxiety and Being-toward-death, from a phenomenological standpoint, exposes the questionability of the taken-for-granted narratives and patterns of life that ensure us that our lives make sense and legitimate what we are doing in the current situation. Nelson aptly describes this opening questionability of the Being of Being-in-the-world, saying, "Dasein cannot have itself as a possession, according to Heidegger, since it is already thrown into a world in which it is not the center and in which it is being decentered" (2008a, 138). Heidegger does not want to re-center the decentered the modern subject; instead, I think he wants to expose the forgotten background of meanings and horizons of possibilities articulated in the bedrock practices and institutions of the modern world. He does this by exposing the poverty of the language of modern individualism, the language that "surrenders itself to our mere willing and trafficking as a dominion over beings" (BW, 223). If Dasein is to combat the "widely and rapidly spreading devastation of language" that "undermines…moral responsibility in every use of language" (BW, 222), Heidegger suggests, "it must first *pull itself together* from the *dispersion* and *disconnectedness* of the very things that have 'come to pass'" (BT, 441-42) and come to see itself as a participant in a shared

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world. Human agency, in this discursive sense, "begins in the response not only to others but to things and oneself, it is an ethical practice" (Nelson 2008b, 409).

The second key feature of Heidegger's account of the existential structures of human agency that contributes to his dismantling of ontological individualism is his argument that political membership is not brought to Dasein by chance, but is an essential structure of Dasein's Being that gives us the possibility of being decent people and living worthwhile and fulfilling lives. More precisely stated, the phenomenological evidence presented in Heidegger's account of everydayness attests to the ways in which "being-with-one-another means *being-with-one-another in a world*. This is the basis upon which this being-with-one-another, which can be indifferent and unconscious to the individual, can develop the various possibilities of community as well as society" (Heidegger HCT, 241). Notice that Heidegger does not say that socialization entails intimate, calculative, or indifferent relationships. There is a distinction being made here between the basis or ground of Being possibilities and the concrete manifestation of those possibilities. That is to say, the unitary phenomenon of Being-with-one-another in a world is the ground on which hating one another, loving each other, counting on others, and various other ways of caring-for (*Fürsorge*) others are possibilities for Dasein's Being. Heidegger suggests as much when he writes:

> Being-with is not being on hand also among other humans; as being-in-the-world it means as the same time being 'in bondage' [*hörig*] to the others, that is 'heeding' and 'obeying' them, listening [*hören*] or not listening to them. Being-with has the structure of belonging [*Zu(ge)hörigkeit*] to the other. It is only by virtue of this primary belonging that there is something like separation, group formation, development of society, and the like. (HCT, 266)

This passage contains profound insights that help us see how Heidegger's destruction of the modern individualistic outlook of the social world recovers an appropriate ontological interpretation of human life that gives us a deeper understanding of socialization and human

agency. First, Heidegger's notion of belonging to a shared tradition opens up the possibility for seeing what is involved in being an ethically integrated individual. Belongingness is not an additive feature of Dasein's Being such that Being-with (*Mitsein*) is something that Dasein can choose and unchoose. This is because, as McMullin notes, Being-with "is an ontological, rather than an ontic or factual feature of my way of existing" (2013, 31; also see Heidegger BT, 167). Our essential belonging to a sociohistorical world is a source of understanding what it means to be a spouse, partner, friend, mentor, and so. The various ways that we can see ourselves as being for-the-sake-of the other are made possible by the fact that human agency is "socially engaged all the way down" (Hatab 2000, 83). In an effort to fully capture the "thick" image of the self proposed by Heidegger's notion of belonging, I would like to take a moment to recall the dichotomous situation set forth in the modern outlook on life.

In chapter two, we saw that "after centuries of degeneration, internal inconsistencies, and failures in the Enlightenment project of transcending mere custom and justifying moral rules once and for all, the structures of morality have collapsed, leaving only incoherent fragments."[145] When Nietzsche's madman cried out that "God is dead! […] And we have killed him!" (2001, 120), he called attention to the terrifying repercussions of Enlightenment individualism and the fact-value distinction. With no notion of absolutes, where these are regarded as objective, universal, unchanging sources for self-assessment and justification, there is a pervasive feeling of weightlessness and loss of meaning in the modern world. When the traditional sources of meaning that people used to accept as absolutes are no longer believable in the Western world, there is nothing to hold on to that can bind people together and validate their ways of life. In short, if nothing has intrinsic value and meaning, then there is nothing worth pursuing. From the

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[145] Robert Solomon, "A More Severe Morality: Nietzsche's Affirmative Ethics," in *The Existentialists: Critical Essays on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre* (2004), 53-72, 64.

loss of universally binding standards of worth arises an awareness that it is up to us individually

to create our own values and define our identity through the choices we make in the world. As

Sartre famously says, "man being condemned to be free carries the weight of the whole world on

his shoulders; he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being" (BN, 707).

However, we have seen that Sartre's negative liberty, which presupposes Enlightenment

individualism, is not freedom in the positive sense and does not open the possibility for political

action. This is because, as Taylor points out, "The agent of radical choice would at the moment

of choice have *ex hypothesi* no horizon of evaluation. He would be utterly without an identity.

He would be a kind of extensionless point, a pure leap into the void."[146]

The question, then, is what does it mean to be a responsible individual in the sense of

making meaningful choices and understanding what one's task is in life? More precisely stated,

what are the ontological conditions, that is, the background conditions of meaning and

intelligibility that enable us to have choices and to understand our lives as worthwhile in any

sense? If morality is arbitrary, there are no absolutes that we have to accept, and secular

individualism defines one's identity (or Being), it becomes difficult to see how there could be

resources for envisioning a genuinely meaningful and worthwhile life. It seems as if ontological

individualism places us in a precarious predicament of having to choose between Enlightenment

foundationalism and modern nihilism. However, I would like to suggest that Heidegger's notion

of belonging to a tradition offers us a middle way between the failed Enlightenment project of

justification and the modern breakdown and rejection of shared sources of meaning and value.

Heidegger's answer to this dichotomous predicament is that our contemporary *ethos*

contains binding normative commitments that involve what Williams refers to as "thick

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[146] Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers, Volume I* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 35. (Henceforth abbreviated as 1985a).

concepts," such as belongingness, indebtedness, finitude (limits), and responsibility, "which

seem to express a union between fact and value" (1985, 129). What is important to note is "that

the application of these concepts is at the same time world-guided and action-guiding" (Williams

1985, 141), meaning that their application is "determined by what the world is like […], and yet,

at the same time, their application usually involves a certain evaluation of the situation, of

persons or actions", and "they usually (though not necessarily directly) provide reasons for

action" (129-130). The thick character of such concepts expresses the traditional interpretation of

civic membership, social roles, and executive virtues that we grow into that is always historically

conditioned and always attuned to a wider communal context. These thick concepts spring from

our Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian heritage, and so the normative force of the normative

commitments circulating in our contemporary *ethos* cannot be found in autonomous reason nor

created by the self-encapsulated individual. Rather, concepts such as belongingness and

indebtedness speak to us in transformative and motivating ways, because who we are, what we

are, is a handing down of public possibilities that are part of a shared tradition. In short, these

thick ethical concepts make us who we are. "The real force of morals," as Gadamer puts it, "is

based on tradition. They are freely taken over but by no means created by free insight or

grounded in reason."[147]

In Heidegger's discussion of indebtedness (*Verschuldung*), for instance, we find

ourselves completely indebted to our thrown situation for all of the concrete possibilities that we

have and, at the same time, we find ourselves coming up short, burdened by a debt that can never

be repaid but is always owed or outstanding. Heidegger finds that "this Being-guilty is what

provides, above all, the ontological condition for Dasein's ability to come to owe anything in

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[147] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (henceforth abbreviated as "TM"), 2nd rev. edition, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshal (New York: Continuum, 2002), 280.

factically existing. This essential Being-guilty is, equiprimordially, the existential condition for the possibility of the 'morally' good and for that of the 'morally' evil—that is, for morality in general and for the possible forms which this make take factically" (BT, 332). Notice that Heidegger's use of the word "morality" in this passage is placed in quotes to indicate that he is not referring to the tradition view of morality as an isolated domain of Being-in-the-world or one stage on life's way. This makes sense when we keep in mind that Heidegger insists that ethics ought to be understood in terms of an *ethos*. When grasped in terms of a plurality of horizons gathered together and unified in an *ethos*, our existential Being-guilty opens up our failure to take responsibility for the choices that have made us who we. In other words, Heidegger's use of "morality" does not refer to the Enlightenment conception of it as "that particular sphere in which rules of conduct which are neither theological nor legal nor aesthetic are allowed a cultural space of their own" (MacIntyre 2007, 39).[148] When Heidegger identifies Being-guilty as the ground or basis for the concrete manifestations of goodness and evil, I think he is attempting to show us that the lack or absence of there being any basis to justify our Being-in-the-world is the existential condition for the possibility of being ethically integrated individuals in all that we do.

Being-guilty expresses Dasein's thrown Being-already-in in the sense of "inhabiting a common tradition, a shared thrownness" that discloses a range of concrete possibilities (Young 1997, 62). For Dasein to acknowledge its gratitude and indebtedness to the *ethos* for all of its possibilities it must own up to the obligations and responsibilities that come with political membership. To do the opposite, that is, to abnegate and disown its guilt and indebtedness is to behave as though "all doors are open" (Heidegger BT, 222), to be a slave to first-order desires and immediate impulses, to mindless conform to the authority of tradition. Instead of

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[148] Also refer to the previous discussion of this history presented in chapter two.

unthoughtfully conforming to ready-made social rules and identities, Heidegger suggests that

Dasein's proper relation to its shared tradition is one of gratitude, loyalty, and reverence (BT,

443). In fact, I find a string of executive virtues that follow from Heidegger's account of

Dasein's authentic relationship to its thrownness. The resolute individual responds to its thrown

situation by wholeheartedly owning up to that "which it has inherited and yet has chosen" (BT,

435). Dasein owns up to the debt and responsibility that comes with its shared inheritance by

"revering the sole authority which a free existing can have" (BT, 443). Resolute Dasein "does

not blow its horn; it does not announce itself publically with programmatic announcements" (CT,

70). Rather, it remains open for "what is world-historical in its current Situation" (BT, 442).

With "steadiness and steadfastness" (BT, 369), resolute Dasein affirms its debt of gratitude to its

ethos for all that it is and for all that can be in "silent exemplary activity together with and for

others" (CT, 70).

Notice how the list of executive virtues that come out of Heidegger's description of

Dasein's authentic mode of dwelling, inhabiting, and being-at-home in its *ethos* are not moral

obligations, but instead identify admirable and second-order dispositions that, to a great extent,

provide clues as to how one ought to respond to a situation. Otherwise put, it is not a moral

obligation to acknowledge one's indebtedness or to be grateful; nevertheless, guilt and gratitude

are conditions for the possibility of taking a meaningful stand in whatever situation one

encounters in the world at the time. In Sartre's example of the young man confronted with the

choice between joining the French Resistance or caring for his sick mother, his possibilities show

up as competing obligations due to the kind of person he has been.[149] The responsibility to join

France's fight against the Nazi occupation and the obligation to be a compassionate and caring

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[149] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1985), 24-29.

son are "not just possibilities he happens to have invested with value. His options are experienced as obligations before he gives them weight in a self-conscious act of will" (Vogel 1994, 34). The context (*Zusammenhang*) of this situation, how things count or matter for the young man and determine what he does, shows up as a burdensome and obligatory choice, because the young man "has the sufficient moral character to appreciate what is morally relevant in his situation" (Vogel 1994, 35). As Heidegger's account of the executive virtues of authenticity makes clear, being a person of a particular sort is not an autonomous, rationally determined choice, nor is it a result of caprice. The young man's moral character—his ability to "recognize the evil of Nazi occupation" and the goodness of caring for his mother—"is not a choice he makes; it is more like a station he finds himself occupying given that he has received a good upbringing and has the right sort of basic responses" (Vogel 1994, 35). It is precisely because the young man has already been thrown into a normatively governed tradition that has made him what he is, can he appropriate and take responsibility for the shared thrownness that he is delivered over to.

I think this is what Heidegger means when, in the "Letter," he says, "The abode [*ethos*] of man contains and preserves the advent of what belongs to man in his essence" (BW, 256). Our dwelling place contains binding normative commitments that make us what we are and grant us the possibility to do something worthwhile and meaningful with our lives. What is fascinating about Heidegger's analysis of the moral language of our Western *ethos* is that it unravels the ways in which our everyday ways of seeing things on the basis morality are limited and parochial, and this unraveling of our first language shows how these thick concepts have some kind of existential reality in life and that is why they have some kind normative force and binding power on us. By recovering the second language of guilt and indebtedness, for instance, Heidegger is

able to show that the obligation to take responsibility for the meaning and direction of one's life-story does not lie outside of nor is it external to one's own life-happening. Instead, on Heidegger's account, it is from our own life-story that we can come to see that we are not measuring up to what we can be and wanted to be. That our lives lack the integrity and cohesiveness that would make them our own does not indicate that we have failed to follow the categorical imperative or utilitarian principle. Instead it indicates that we are failing to become what we are: responsible, moral agents.

As we saw in the third chapter, the ontological gap between our ownmost "ability-to-be" and the actual concrete expression that constitutes our way of life reveals the lack or absence of a pre-given basis that can justify and give our lives the integral unity that would make them our own. The issue is nothing less than Being-in-the-world. "We do not ground our own Being-in-the-world, yet we are responsible for reappropriating a place to which we have already been appropriated" (Vogel 1994, 47). The importance of integrity, cohesiveness, directedness and the like springs from our indebtedness to a shared tradition as being socially engaged and involved in the ongoing project of trying to impart meaning and depth into our lives. In this conception of life there is no way to drive a wedge between facts and values. So doing would imply that "Dasein were a 'household' whose indebtedness simply needed to be balanced off in an orderly manner so that the Self may stand 'by' as a disinterested spectator while these Experiences run their course" (Heidegger BT, 340). Contrary to the spectator approach to life, Heidegger argues that in order to have integrity one has to be socially committed and in order to be socially committed one has to have integrity. Seen in this way, belongingness, indebtedness, finitude, and responsibility are not factual properties or subjective values created *ex nihilo*, but are underlying conditions for, or to use Heidegger's jargon, potentialities-for-Being moral agents.

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When Heidegger says that "Being-with has the structure of belonging [*Zu(ge)hörigkeit*] to the other" (HCT, 266), he means that belonging to a shared tradition is definitive of our Being as world-historical individuals, and anything that is definitive of us also limits us. Being-historical is an enabling condition that makes it possible for us to understand what is at stake in life and to press forward into possibilities of self-identity that are opened up in our world-historical situation. I think Gadamer succinctly captures Heidegger's notion of belongingness when he says, "history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live" (TM, 276). Dasein finds itself always already delivered over to certain obligations and duties that are definitive of being an active participant in the moral-political community. The range of duties and obligations are bound up with the "for-the-sake-of-which(s)" discussed in chapter three. "For-the-sake-of-whichs are not goals of action. They are rather social roles, partial identities, which determine for an individual a given range of goals" (Young 1997, 60). My self-understanding as a college teacher, for instance, is bound up with and dependent upon the guidelines set forth in the world of academia such as service to the campus community, commitment to students' academic excellence, and active scholarly engagement with and service to the profession. In order to be a teacher, then, I have to be true to the fundamental commitments that are characteristic of the world of academia. This does not imply that I blindly or uncritically adopt the normative instructions inscribed in the world of academia. Indeed, Heidegger claims that this is a form of falling, which involves an abnegation of personal responsibility in my own character development. In retreating to prescriptive norms of behavior, Heidegger says, "Dasein closes itself off from possible situations of critical confrontation [*Auseinandersetzung*], commitment, doing one's best to achieve

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something, and decision-making [*Wahl*]" (CT, 31). It is precisely because Dasein's thrown projection is culture-bound and something for which Dasein is ultimately responsible, can it "achieve a rootedness in tradition, a kind of weight which contrasts with the insubstantiality, that 'lightness of being' of inauthentic Dasein which allows it to be blown around by the winds of opinion" (Young 1997, 71). Or, as Heidegger puts it, "only because it *is* what it becomes (or alternatively, does not become), can it say to itself 'Become what you are,' and say this with understanding" (BT, 186).

In short, to say that the identity-conferring possibilities of the social world carry certain obligations and duties that are definitive of being human means that our *ethos* or dwelling-place offers us normative resources and assets for being an individual and a moral agent. Being a self, on Heidegger's view, is not some project that I can undertake independent of the identity-conferring commitments (i.e., social roles and practices) circulating in the historical context that I dwell in. "I am not a 'radical chooser' floating unhinged above value-free facticity but am already involved in a heritage: a context of importance that discloses limits and possibilities. To act capriciously, without concern for my past, is not the height of, but the absence of, self-responsibility" (Vogel 1994, 47; also see Young 1997, 59).

Thus far we have seen that the basic structure of human agency that Heidegger has laid out in its potentiality-for-Being a responsible agent is based on discourse and belongingness, which indicates that human agency is contextualized all the way down. "Meaning is always present and socially constituted; I am only through language and the social relations, practices, and institutions that it enables" (Vogel 1994, 45; c.f. Heidegger BT, 193; CT, 28-29). On Heidegger's view, it is by virtue of speaking a language and belonging to shared forms of life that we inhabit a proper way to be human, where this means to engage in conversation in the

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polis, to cultivate long-lasting friendships, to be neighborly, to be contentious citizens, to be compassionate doctors and honest lawyers, and so on. The crucial point here, as Young notes, is that the *ethos* determines our sense of what is "*appropriate or valuable* to do. Individuals are born into a sense of virtue—of an appropriate or proper way to be" (1997, 61). The *ethos* makes no claims to objectivity or certainty; however, it does disclose a range of meaningful, life-defining choices that are formally determined by the proper path of development that realizes or achieves those potentialities-for-Being a moral agent. "Typically, these possibilities are personified by exemplary, charismatic figures who in legends, anecdotes, myths and artworks of the culture are raised to 'heroic' status" (Young 1997, 61-62).

Based on our considerations of Heidegger's emphasis on the sociohistorical context and situatedness of human agency, I think it is fair to say that Heidegger's approach to ethics dismantles many of the ontological distortions operative in modern moral philosophy. In particular, on the modern outlook, agency is generally defined in terms of being the autonomous center of one's own decisions. As Williams puts it,

> In the thought of Kant and others influenced by him, all genuinely moral considerations rest ultimately and at a deep level, in the agent's will. I cannot simply be *required* by my position in a social structure—by the fact that I am a particular person's child, for instance—to act in a certain way, if that required is to be of a moral kind, […]. To act morally is to act autonomously, not as the result of social pressure. (1985, 7)

On the Kantian view, what is important in life is doing one's duty, and to uphold the moral law is to rise above the deterministic laws of nature as well as the contingency and complexity of social life. Action, both in the narrow sense of self-constitution and the broad sense of skillful, social practices, is regarded as secondary and derivative from intentional states. In stark contrast to the decontextualized model of human agency, Heidegger argues that a self conceived in isolation from situated actions and choices is as "complete" as a picture of human life without death. "If

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we make a problem of 'life', *and then just occasionally* have regard for death *too, our view is too short-sighted*. The object we have taken as our theme is *artificially and dogmatically curtailed* if 'in the first instance' we restrict ourselves to a 'theoretical subject', in order that we may then round it out 'on the practical side' by tacking on an 'ethic'" (Heidegger BT, 363-64).

The thematic object referenced in this passage is the ontology that is peculiar to Dasein as the being that cares about what it is. To say that what is definitive of the Being of Dasein is that it cares about its identity is to say that we care about what it means to be human in the robust sense of living the good life in a fulfilling and worthwhile way. That is to say, the meaning of our finite project of self-constitution and self-identity matters to us, because we care about our lives and the world we inhabit. As we saw in chapter three, Being-toward-death gives us a clearer sense of what is important in life: as "death brings me before my life as my own to lead," Being-toward-death "reminds me that it is up to me to take stock and make sense of my time and place" (Vogel 1994, 46). Far from wresting me free from my worldly attachments and undertakings, as well as, my social commitments and obligations, the uncanny, anxious being of Being-toward-death brings to light the importance of owning up to the self-appointed task of realizing my ownmost potentiality-for-Being.

To be a self in this sense is to make explicit and definitive the meaning of one's life as a whole by taking a stand in relation to the normative ideals and possibilities circulating in the historical community. Borrowing the definition of dialogical agency from Taylor's *Ethics of Authenticity*, Heidegger's account of the situated, discursive structure of selfhood means that our identity is "always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the identities our significant others want to recognize in us. And even when we outgrow some of the latter—our parents, for instance—and they disappear from our lives, the conversation with them continues within us as

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long as we live" (1991, 33). My understanding of who I am and what is at stake in life is in constant interchange with significant others, and this dialogue is always bound up with the narratives and identity-conferring possibilities circulating in the social world.

Granted, Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's attack on modern moral theory certainly influenced Heidegger's critique of the ways in which the moral conscience of *das Man* reduces self-responsibility to conventionality and the impersonal, normalizing standards of average everydayness present "every judgment and decision as its own," thereby depriving "the particular Dasein of its answerability" (Heidegger BT, 165). Reminiscent of Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's critiques of thoughtless social conformism, Heidegger's examination of the nature of social existence brings to light the "deficient and Indifferent modes that characterize everyday, average Being-with-one-another" (Heidegger BT, 158); however, Heidegger stops short of abandoning the social world altogether. Indeed, on Heidegger's view, "inauthentic *das Man* is not a deficient or dispensable condition" of being human, but is an essential structure of the dynamic unfolding of life (Hatab 2000, 26).

The profound difference is that Heidegger's destruction of the basic assumptions built into moral philosophy makes transparent the anonymity and impersonality of our "publicness" ("*die Offentlichkeit*") and, at the same time, recovers a deeper, more authentic mode of being socially engaged and involved. As Lawrence Vogel puts it, "Authenticity, far from freeing one for a radical originality, lets one appreciate the depth of the world to which one is already committed to" (1994, 44). Whereas Kierkegaard's knight of faith suspends the *telos* of the ethical for the sake of his personal absolute and Nietzsche's Overman stands beyond good and evil by embracing the blank canvas of her existence, Heidegger's resolute individual "does not withdraw itself from 'actuality', but discovers first what is factically possible; and it does so by seizing

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upon whatever way is possible for it as its ownmost postentiality-for-Being in the 'they'"

(Heidegger BT, 346). To break through the conformist crust of public norms, then, "is not to be

aware that nothing matters but to recognize that how things matter to me is my responsibility:

that there is no neutral metalanguage or fixed yardstick for assessing rival self-interpretations"

(Vogel 1994, 46).

I think it is fair to say that Heidegger's account of "Dasein's situated and responsive

selfhood" (Hatab 2000, 83) exposes the value-neutral, unencumbered imperatives that modern

moral philosophy invokes to legitimate "right conduct," where this refers to precepts and

proscriptions for making decisions, as symptoms of Western nihilism. Instead of locating the

ontological conditions for responsible agency in Sartre's radical chooser, Nietzsche's free spirits,

or some version of Kant's "subjective principle for action" (practical rule) or "categorical

imperative" (objective law) (Kant 2002, 37), Heidegger's description of selfhood as situated in

and responsive to the normative commitments circulating in the *ethos* captures the way in which

the Being of ethical agency is historically-bound and contextualized all the way down.

Specifically, his exploration of our Western *ethos* does not generate a list of pre-determined

virtues or a table of values that is fixed for all people, but it does show us what is needed to be an

ethical agent under these circumstances.

In order to live a well-lived life, one has to be able to see one's own life-story as bound

up with the unfolding world-history that is going somewhere. This is a purposive form of life

without a pre-given purpose. Guignon helps to clarify what I mean when I say that Heidegger's

notion of Dasein's historical rootedness can be articulated as a *telos* for us even given the

breakdown of the religious, mythical, and cosmic narratives of the past that were used to justify

various forms of life. According to Guignon, "A life characterized by authentic historicity is one

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that takes over what has come before as a 'heritage' pregnant with potential, and grasps its own

fate as bound up with the 'sending' or 'mission' (*Geschick*)" of the projects and goals of the

shared world.[150] It is because Dasein is a participant in the "struggle" and "co-historizing" of a

community that it can take an active role in retrieving, reappropriating, and communicating the

goals and ideals articulated by public institutions and embodied in social practices (Heidegger

BT, 436). "Since the everyday can seize hold of heritage, it follows that being-there has the

possibility of tearing heritage away from the everyday, and bringing it to an *original*

interpretedness" (Heidegger BCAR, 188). By authentically seizing its heritage, Dasein takes

responsibility for and makes its own the goals and ideals of its shared inheritance that are

definitive of its self-understanding and place in the public world. As Vogel aptly puts it,

"Because the past one is called to appropriate is always a shared inheritance—*our* past—and the

future toward which one projects oneself is a communal possibility—*our* future—one never

speaks for oneself when one articulates a moment of vision; one speaks for 'us'" (1994, 53).

The point I am trying to make is that *Being and Time*'s notion of destiny, as the public

form of authentic historicity, is the "Letter on Humanism's" cure (or homecoming) for the

homelessness of our modern age. When Heidegger says that "the thinking of *Being and Time* is

essentially concerned that the historicity of Dasein be experienced" (BW, 239), I take it that he is

suggesting that *Being and Time* attempts to put forth the defining characteristics of a moral

orientation toward life that are embodied in the life of the concrete, socially engaged individual

member of the *polis*. Heidegger's account of the dialogical self makes it possible, or at least

plausible, to experience the rootedness of our Being in the shared background meanings that

makes sense of our personal undertakings, self-understandings, and self-assessments. I think I

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[150] Charles Guignon, "Existentialist Ethics," in *New Directions in Ethics: The Challenge of Applied Ethics*, ed. Joseph P. DeMarco and Richard M. Fox (New York and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 73-91, 85.

have provided sufficient evidence that Heidegger's thick picture of the self demonstrates that "it is only in relation to society that the individual can fulfill himself and that if the break with society is too radical, life has no meaning" (Bellah et al. 1996, 144). Otherwise stated, Heidegger's presentation of the *ethos* as "the context of belongingness to the destiny of the West" (BW, 241) dismantles some of the ambiguities that arise from the "failing fragments" of the first language of modern individualism, which limit the expression of our self-understandings to subjective values, first-order desires, spontaneous feelings, and cost-benefit analyses (Bellah et al. 1996, 157). By drawing on the second language that organizes life by reference to thick ethical concepts such as belongingness, indebtedness, and "commitment to institutions that are seen as embodiments" of the values and character ideals of our shared inheritance—such as loyalty, reverence, and citizenship—Heidegger's notion of authentic historicity exemplifies an individualism that is constituted, rooted in, and responsive to unfolding horizons and shared visions of the virtues of a worthwhile life. What remains to be addresses, however, is how the experience of the historicity of Dasein can be transformative in such a way that addresses our contemporary needs. In order to see the contemporary significance of Heidegger's virtue ethics, it is necessary to discuss the possible drawbacks or shortcomings of what I see as Heidegger's attempt to offer an alternative an existential-ontological teleology that is neither Aristotelian nor Christian.

Authentic Historicity and Ethical Relativism

Before moving forward into a discussion of the possible drawbacks of Heidegger's ethics, I would like to take a moment to highlight some illuminating consequences for moral philosophy that follow from Heidegger's (Aristotelian-inspired) attempt to identify the ontological conditions that enable a person to be capable of being an ethical agent. First, it provides an

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alternative way of looking at things that "recognize[s] that ethical understandings need a dimension of social understanding" (Williams 1985, 131; quote modified by me). By bringing into light a way of making sense of our lives as individual participants in a wider sociohistorical context with various forms of life shaped by the normative ideals and practical identities of "the community, of a people" (Heidegger BT, 436), Heidegger exposes the pervasive notion that one could sever oneself from this context in order to completely rework and recreate oneself according to a rational plan is an incoherent idea. To objectify or thematize everything about one's life is to try to be an unencumbered, pure "neutral self," lacking any connection to the wider social contexts of meaning in which things can genuinely matter. What is missing in this modern picture of the self is "precisely the *mattering*. The self is defined in neutral terms, outside of any essential framework of questions" (Taylor 1989, 49). To the extent that meaning is in the public world and our access to this world is dialogue, the notion that we can start from scratch and formulate a regulative system of rationality or set of rules for individual behavior loses its credibility. Instead, as Heidegger makes clear, we ought to start from where we are, which is within a given background understanding. Since the social world has a role in making us who we are, the historical situatedness of our self-understandings contains resources for evaluating and making sense of our lives. We do this kind of self-introspection with various kinds of normatively governed roles all the time, e.g., I question whether I am a good friend, a decent philosopher, and a thoughtful daughter. I think Williams' description of a phenomenology of ethical life illuminates this profound difference between Heidegger's ethics and moral philosophy. By starting from within the experience and understanding of the human *ethos*, that is, "the ways in which we experience our ethical life," Heidegger's account "reflect[s] on what we believe, feel, take for granted; the ways in which we confront obligations and recognize

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responsibility; [and] the sentiments of guilt and shame." This could be considered "a good philosophy, but it would be unlikely to yield an ethical theory" (1985, 93).[151]

The second consequence for moral philosophy is that Heidegger's description of our contemporary *ethos* contains binding normative commitments that involve thick ethical concepts such as belongingness, indebtedness, and responsibility circumvents the Enlightenment paradox of justification. In fact, I would go so far as to claim that Heidegger's description of the shared visions of character ideals and communal goals articulated by the bedrock practices and institutions of our contemporary *ethos* reveal that the Enlightenment paradox is a self-defeating, pseudo-problem produced by ontological individualism (and the fact-value distinction). "The error" of the Enlightenment project "is the rejection of the ethos as the foundation of morality with a compensating insistence on the rational justification of morality. Without a presupposed ethos, no justification is possible. With an ethos, none is necessary."[152] In other words, if morality (or ethics in the narrow sense) refers to our beliefs about how we ought to live and what counts as a well-lived life, and the *ethos* is the dwelling place or ethical environment (*Umwelt*) that enables us to make meaningful, self-defining choices and live worthwhile lives, then our participation in that *ethos* also constitutes our understanding of a flourishing life. I hope it is clear that what comes out of Heidegger's description of our contemporary *ethos* is an ethics that speaks to and for a community. In contrast to moral philosophy's aim to give directives to individuals, Heidegger tries to describe being part of a moral-political community, and what comes out of this description is a robust and sophisticated characterization of individualism as a distinct sort of membership in a community. This is precisely why Heidegger says, "Ethics

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[151] See, also, Lauren Freeman, "*Metontology*, Moral Particularism, and the 'Art of Existing'" A Dialogue Between Heidegger, Aristotle, and Bernard Williams," *Continental Philosophy Review*, 43 (2010): 545-68.
[152] Robert Solomon, "A More Severe Morality: Nietzsche's Affirmative Ethics," in *The Existentialists: Critical Essays on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre* (2004), 53-72, 64.

belongs within politics. Here, we must leave aside other modern concepts of ethics and politics, and understand the investigation as one that is primarily oriented toward being-along-with-others, that above all considers individuals positioned in relation to others" (BCAR, 87).

If my thesis that *Being and Time* is about ethics in the sense that it provides clues of how to live a good life and motivates us to recognize that the good life is worth living is to hold any weight, then it needs to be shown how the ontology that makes us human springs from and returns to ethics, broadly construed. The third chapter claims that *Being and Time* is contains an ethics in the same sense that the *Nicomachean Ethics* is an ethics: both are concerned with identifying the ontological conditions that enable a person to be capable of being ethical in the sense of being good. It is my hope that the section above provided sufficient proof that Heidegger's anti-individualist ontology and insistence on the ontological priority of the *ethos* sets us on the proper course for specifying what it means to be an ethical agent in the robust sense of being a good person. Thus far, we can say that each human being has a fundamental project to fully realize their own potentialities-for-Being human. What is important, in Heidegger's view, is that Dasein's potentialities-for-Being are always channeled into life-defining possibilities or social roles, and embodying, that is, *being* some subset of these possibilities is crucial for being ethically integrated individuals. That is to say, our subset of self-identities is the "for-the-sake-of-which" that is part of a viable *ethos*. On one hand, then, "[t]he kind of world, in particular, social world, in which I find myself will profoundly determine the kind of person I can be. I cannot, for example, be a priest in a world without churches, or a yuppie in a world without cell-phones" (Young 1997, 59). On the other hand, I am ultimately responsible for the ways in which I realize my potentialities-for-Being.

The glaring question, however, is what makes fundamental ontology "the original ethics" (Heidegger BW, 258)? What ethical difference does Heidegger's ontological difference make, and how does it respond to our contemporary needs? Several commentators point out that Heidegger's anti-individualistic ontology and insistence on the historical rootedness of human agency goes a long way in undermining the most basic tenets of Enlightenment moral philosophy. But it remains to be seen whether Heidegger's description of authentic individualization provides phenomenological evidence necessary for specifying what it means to be an individual in the most robust sense of being a good person. For instance, as Vogel cautiously notes,

> Even if the individual is inextricably bound to the larger community, this will not be enough to show that fundamental ontology is sufficient as a 'fundamental ethics,' for it may imply that the individual's possibilities are always conditioned by conventional, parochial conceptions of good and evil. This would leave unanswered whether there is a measure for evaluating different local moralities or for mediating among competing conceptions of the good within a community. (1994, 51).

Vogel lays out the case for the objection that Heidegger's notion of historicity is as ethically ambiguous as the Sartrean conception of ontological freedom. Just as Sartre's advice to the French student faced with the dilemma of joining the Free French forces or staying home to care for his mother ("You're free, choose, that is, invent" (1985, 28)) conveys a conception of freedom that leads to a lack of freedom, so too, Vogel worries, Heidegger's idea of authentic historicity may not give our lives objective grounding or measures of the sort that combats prevailing forms of ethical relativism or moral nihilism. This is also a cause for concern that Heidegger's fundamental ontology leads to "arbitrary decisionism." Recalling chapter three's discussion of the alleged moral nihilism and empty formalism in Heidegger's notion of anticipatory resoluteness, the common reading of *Being and Time* (especially §74) is that his philosophy ultimately leads to decisionism, that the resolute, "world-historical individuals cannot

be measured by moral standards" that are common and universally binding for *das Man*.[153] To be

clear, the charges of ethical relativism and moral nihilism do not necessarily entail the

decisionistic allegation, but they do open the door to it.

At this point, I would like to draw on Young's in-depth investigation of this situation to

make some brief remarks concerning the charges of formalism, decisionism, and moral nihilism.

First, as we have seen, "*Being and Time's* conception of authenticity […] demands that one

thinks of one's future in terms of a 'destiny' that is determined by the 'heritage' of one's

community. Hence, in at least a very broad sense of 'political' […] it demands that one should

become politically, socially, engaged" (1997, 72). The claim that *Being and Time* offers no

content for an authentic life loses its appeal when we notice that "[t]he work, that is, in so far as

it touches on practical life, operates on a second-order, a meta-level." The content can be

discovered in Dasein's heritage. Although *Being and Time* points to Dasein's heritage, "it does

not tell us what we will find there." Within the framework of *Being and Time's* conception of

authentic historicity "we can see that a great variety of political commitments can be

persuasively argued for." Indeed, it is formal enough to enable us to be open-minded about the

fact that "there can be radically different interpretations from within a community of the

character of communal tradition" (Young 1997, 73). This range of plurality and breadth of

diversity captured by Heidegger's notion of authentic historicity certainly leads to a flexible

procedure for determining the content of authentic existence, but the formal nature of this

procedure does not mean that it is "*inadequate*" or that "Heidegger offers us no procedure at all."

As Young argues, "It is often argued that Kant's 'categorical imperative' fails to generate any of

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[153] Jürgen Habermas, "Martin Heidegger: On the Publication of the Lectures of 1935," trans. William S. Lewis, in
The Heidegger Controversy, ed. Richard Wolin (1993), 186-97, 190. I should mention that Habermas is comparing
Heidegger's notion of anticipatory resoluteness to Hegel's world-historical individuals.

the particular duties that he wants it to generate. Yet no one is tempted to call Kant a 'moral nihilist'" (Young 1997, 84).

Furthermore, second-wave and Latina feminists find that Heidegger's account of the ontological link between Dasein as a self-making being and as being indebted to its shared inheritance offers us a wide range of standards and horizons of meanings to draw from for guidance in contemporary political and social situations. For instance, Latina feminist Mariana Ortega calls on Heidegger's account of Dasein's historical rootedness to make sense of questions about agency and responsibility that arise in the Latina experience of forms of alienation and hostility. She writes, "Given that the Heideggerian account is not explicit about particular contexts, and about issues of gender, race, class, etc., we can use the Heideggerian ontological and ontic framework and make the ontic concerns more explicit. Given that Heidegger does not write much about ethical and political concerns, we can follow the guidance of Latina as well as other feminists to provide possibilities for resistance as well as solidarity."[154] The point I am trying to make is that our traditions simultaneously inhabit various forms of oppression, racism, sexism, and alienation, as well as, provide us with the resources for fighting against and condemning such debilitating and despicable practices. Contrary to the decisionistic readings and allegations of empty formalism and moral nihilism, Heidegger's argument is that since we owe our existence to something greater than ourselves, we are produced by and responsive to our hermeneutic situation, which is pre-shaped by historical pre-judgments (Heidegger BT, 275). Instead of denying, avoiding, or finding tranquility in these prejudices that color our view of others and the world, we ought to destructure and reconstruct that which makes us what and who we are.

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[154] Mariana Ortega, "'New Mestizas,' ''World'-Travelers,' and 'Dasein': Phenomenology and Multi-Voiced, Multi-Cultural Self," in *Hypatia*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Summer 2001), 1-29, 19.

That being said, the question of whether Heidegger is able to respond to modern forms of ethical relativism still remains open. Heidegger claims that authenticity is a "factical ideal" (BT, 358), which means that it is always operative on the existentiell level, and anticipatory resoluteness demands that Dasein must be true to the deepest convictions and commitments of its shared inheritance. However, Heidegger insists that to be authentic is not to adopt any particular moral code, and, in fact, Heidegger has nothing to say about morality, where this refers to normative ethics. He sets forth the ontological limits and boundaries of our Being as ethical agents—i.e. death and historicity—but this gives us no help in making factical decisions. Otherwise put, although Heidegger proves that Dasein's fundamental project must be realized as part of the inescapable practices and forms of life of the *ethos*, his account of a well-lived life leaves room for the possibility of an authentic Nazi. Notably, it also leaves room for the possibility of an authentic member of the German Resistance (*Widerstand*) and an inauthentic Nazi—such as Albert Speer, who is known as "the Nazi who said sorry," but continuously lied about the details of his personal relationship with Hitler and involvement in the Nazi regime.[155] This does not refute ethical relativism, but it does help us see how complex the issue is. If Heidegger's account of the existential paths of virtue is supposed to function on the concrete, existentiell level, then it will have to be made clear how the virtues can be intuitively justified. To elaborate and clarify, let's consider two relativism objections raised against Heidegger's ideal of authenticity.

Vogel locates a type of meta-ethical moral (or normative) relativism, the view that the justification of moral beliefs is not absolute or universal but is relative to traditions, cultures, or political communities, in the historicist reading of *Being and Time* that identifies the weightiness

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[155] See Albert Peer, *Inside the Third Reich: Memories* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970); Joachim Fest, *Albert Speer: Conversations with Hitler's Architect* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007).

of the life of the individual in Dasein's communal destiny. Vogel acknowledges that the historicist reading "subverts the anarchism of the existentialist reading which places too much emphasis on the solitude of the individual facing his Being-unto-death. Only as members of a community with a shared past does one seek to own up to one's fate in relation to a destiny 'we' all face" (1994, 65). Nevertheless, Vogel finds that meta-ethical moral relativism finds its way into Heidegger's fundamental ontology insofar as "there is no perspective independent of the heritage in which one stands—and the 'prejudices' that govern it—to judge whether one set of idols or ideals is better than others" (1994, 67). Vogel's argument is that authentic historicity subordinates the individual to the standards of the "we" and provides no transcultural, transhistorical, or objective guidelines that affirms the well-being of other heritages, communities, or persons. Without an objective standard or principle, Vogel worries that the ideal of authenticity implies that "everything is permitted," or encourages a "live and let live" attitude towards others.

Dostal voices a similar concern, arguing that Heidegger does not provide a sufficient political basis for evaluating the norms and ideals of the "we." Dostal recognizes that "Heidegger's sketch of *Dasein* clearly and self-consciously rejects both individualism and subjectivism. What is troublesome, however, is Heidegger's treatment of human interrelationship is his sketchy characterization of human togetherness, of human solidarity, that is, the solicitude of authentic Being-with."[156] Where Vogel locates the possibility of relativism on the meta-ethical level of authentic historicity, Dostal suggests that the ideal of authenticity is pervaded with a form of normative relativism. To be clear, Dostal does not put his objection in relativistic terms, but he suggests as much when he argues that Heidegger's ethics cannot be understood in the broad Aristotelian sense "as a coherent account of the good life," because authenticity "as an

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[156] Robert Dostal, "Friendship and Politics: Heidegger's Failing," *Political Theory* 20.3 (1992): 399-423, 405-06.

ethical ideal" does not express the second-person perspective of the other *qua* friendship and love (1992, 403). The claim being made here is that in the transition from Dasein's finitude to historicity, Heidegger "shifts from the apparently individualistic language of individuation (*Vereinzelung*) and loneliness (*Einsamkeit*) to the community (*Gemeinschaft*) as 'Generation' (*Generation*) and 'the people' (*das Volk*)," but "this shift is made without a transition through friendship and the second person, without 'you' or 'thou'" (Dostal 1992, 410). The first-person experience of the 'I' and 'we,' Dostal claims, is not sufficient "for transforming a mere 'common place' into a *polis*," that is, for cultivating a form of life "that maintains a tension between the self and the community" (1992, 411). If love and friendship play second fiddle to death and transcendence, as Dostal argues, then Heidegger's justification of the for-the-sake-of-which of Dasein's fundamental project of *being* a person of a particular sort may leave us with 'groundless grounds' or a 'criteria-less criteria' for making the kinds of long-term commitments that carry responsibilities to others.[157] In other words, the importance of human interrelationships would be relative and subordinate to the ideals of the 'I' or 'we.' "We will need relationships to fulfill but not to define ourselves" (Taylor 1991, 34).

Being and Time makes it clear that the virtues of being an authentic individual member in a community arises (*entspringt*) from Dasein's understanding (*Verstehen*) of the human *ethos*. This goes a long way in making sense of Heidegger's discussion of the short story about Heraclitus, in the "Letter on Humanism." "The story is told of something Heraclitus said to some strangers who wanted to come visit him. Having arrived, they saw him warming himself at the stove. Surprised, they stood there in consternation—above all because he encouraged them, the astounded ones, and called for them to come in, with the words, 'For here too the gods are

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[157] See, for example, Thomas J. Nenon, "Martin Heidegger and Grounding of Ethics," in *Husserl's Ideen*, ed. Thomas Nenon and Lester Embree (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2012), 177-93.

present'" (BW, 256).[158] Understood as "abode" or dwelling-place, the *ethos* bestows meaning and valorizes "the little things" in everyday life.[159] The Heraclitus story resounds with *Being and Time*'s attempt to find the extraordinary in the humblest, most common regions of everydayness. It breathes life into the forgotten normative (and perhaps religious) dimensions of Dasein's Being and reclaims the heritage that had been stifled by and lost with the death of God. We should understand authenticity as an ideal that enables Dasein to feels things very deeply, to wholeheartedly give itself over to its life-defining endeavors, and realize the need for and importance of integrity in its involvements with others. In short, authenticity ought to be understood as an ethical ideal that demands *being* a good person. The challenged we are faced with is that even though Heidegger speaks of our relationship to others, there are few clues as to what kind of relationship or friendship he has in mind. He suggests that "the character of 'goodness' lies in making authentic existence possible," and is manifested "in a possibility which it [Dasein] has inherited and yet has chosen" (BT, 435), but this is not a guide to action or a general law that tells us what we ought to do or how we are obliged to respond to certain circumstances. For this reason, ethical relativism of the sort described above supposedly rears its ugly head in *Being and Time*'s suggestion that authentic heritage (*Erbe*) is a unique and genuine way of Being-with. Without a normative ethics that says something about right conduct or the 'ought' of the second-person experience of responsibility, Vogel and like-minded scholars find that Heidegger's fundamental ontology falls short of formulating a fundamental ethics.

The objection could be put this way. Since Dasein is what it does and what it does is not different from what others do, how can it justify or give moral reasons for what it does? How can

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[158] Originally reported in Aristotle, "Parts of Animals," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 1: The Revised Oxford Translation* (1984), 639a1-697b30, 645a17-23.

[159] This reading of the significance of the Heraclitus story for the "Letter on Humanism" came out of conversations with Guignon, as well as, Robert Mugerauer's *Heidegger and Homecoming: The Leitmotif in the Later Writings*, 2nd revised edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

Dasein be certain that what it is doing is right? How can Dasein be certain about what it is good

to do or good to *be*? The *polis* is not inherently good. Many political systems have been and are

oppressive and destructive. What basis, then, does Dasein have for making claims about the right

and proper way to *be*? Dostal, Vogal, and like-minded commentators would like to see whether

Heidegger makes a contribution to moral philosophy that would give us an objective basis of

sociopolitical solidarity, or a universally binding mechanism such as Kant's moral law, or a

"common moral ground Hegel called *Moralität*" (Vogel 1994, 69). The claim seems to be that

Being and Time needs an objective, universal standard that unifies the innumerable domains of

action in order to avoid falling prey to prevailing forms of relativism (which were less

concerning for Aristotle).

   The basic claim seems to be that Heidegger's distinction between inauthentic and

authentic ways of caring-for (*Fürsorge*) the Dasein of others rests on the organizing principle of

Kant's distinction between non-moral ends or hypothetical imperatives and moral ends or

categorical imperatives. "Ordinary goals, for instance for wealth and comfort, are goals that a

person may or may not have. If he does, then there are a number of instrumental things that he

ought to do—hypothetically, in Kant's sense—to attain them. But if he lacks these goals, no

criticism attaches to him for neglecting to pursue them."[160] I need not be praised or blamed for

the importance I place on wealth or comfort, because these are non-moral ends, meaning that

their value is relative to personal preferences and desires. In contrast, there are higher-order ends

that Kant identifies as absolutely universal and binding at all times. "Those who lack them are

not just free of some additional instrumental obligations which weigh with the rest of us; they are

open to censure. […] A higher goal is one from which one cannot detach oneself just by

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[160] Charles Taylor, "The Diversity of Goods," in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers, Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 230-47, 237. (Henceforth abbreviated as 1985b.)

expressing a sincere lack of interest, because to recognize something as a higher goal is to recognize it as one that men ought to follow" (Taylor 1985b, 238). These goals are internal to the practice of being human. For Kant, then, the term "ought" is central to the realm of higher-order ends, that is, the moral order of reasons for action. These higher-order goods is what Kant terms "ends-in-themselves," which is intended to indicate their sacred place in the moral order, that is, the "kingdom of ends." This is the realm of absolute values that categorically demands all individuals to subordinate their personal motives, that is, the lawless realm of lower-level goals, to the universalizable laws of morality. In the discussion leading up to Heidegger's characterization of "*Being-with*" as "a mutual care, or better being concerned-for [*Mitsorge*, *genauer*: *Fürsorge*]," Heidegger aptly describes Kant's categorical imperative: it "is an imperative in which the condition categorically embraces the conditioned and has absolute value. And this being that exists as an end in itself is human being, that is, every rational being" (LQT, 186; see, also, BCAR, 65).

Before discussing the plausibility and benefits of the Kantian interpretation of Being-with, I think it is important to note that there is a difference in objectives, in that Kant wants to ground morality in a universal basis of self-legislating freedom that transcends Newtonian laws of nature, while Heidegger's account of Dasein's ways of Being-with has nothing to do with morality, but rather is attempting to clarify the ontological wellspring of our understanding of what it means to be human. Stated differently, Kant attempts to ground the principles of right action in a metaphysical theory of what it is to be human, whereas Heidegger tries to describe what anyone must be like to be an ethical agent. Heidegger's investigation focuses on the nature of the good

life. Kant's *Groundwork*, on the other hand, centers on the nature of the "ought" that applies

categorically to individuals and aggregates of individuals (as a kingdom of ends).[161]

With this difference in view, I think we might be able to see the ways in which Vogel and

Young offer a plausible and valid Kantian antidote for the relativism that arises from the tension

between the right and the good in Heidegger's conception of authentic heritage as Dasein's

source of life-affirming goals and ideals. In section 26 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger identifies

"two extreme possibilities" of solicitude, and it is here that Vogel and Young locate a Kantian

morality (*Moralität*) that provides order and regulates our interactions with others. On their

reading, Kant's moral law is analogous to Heidegger's notion of positive solicitude (*Fürsorge*)

presented in section 26 of *Being and Time*, which chapter three describes as the spectrum of

possible ways in which Being-with is concretely realized as Dasein-with or co-Dasein

(*Mitdasein*).[162] Recall that solicitude (*Fürsorge*) refers to the continuum of possible ways of

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[161] As I stated in chapter three, Heidegger has the highest regard for Kant's groundbreaking contributions to the tradition of Western thought. Heidegger even goes so far as to say that "Kant's interpretation of the phenomenon of respect is probably the most brilliant phenomenological analysis of the phenomenon of morality that we have from him" (BP, 133). Nevertheless, Kant remained steeped in the problems rooted in the Cartesian bedrock of ontology, which grasps beings as brute substances with static properties. As we have seen, Heidegger attempts to dismantle this tradition by insisting that the Being of a being must be understood in terms of its potentialities and its proper path to realizing these potentialities. The Cartesian influences in Kant's metaphysical distinction between persons and things is what Heidegger has in mind when he says, it is quite clear that, in order to "determine more exactly the *ontological* statement that existence is an end in itself," Kant introduces "the notion of *value*. This is the clearest proof (unexpressed, obviously) that, to begin with, the determination 'end-in-itself' is insufficient to clarify what is meant here. On the other hand, the structure that we understand under the rubric of 'care' is oriented from the beginning not simply to characterizing this kind of being [*Seinsart*], but also to understanding it in its being [*Sein*]—something that was not even an issue for Kant" (LQT, 186; c.f. BP, §15, especially 170).

[162] It is important to recall the difference between Being-with and Dasein-with, because we have already seen that not keeping this difference in mind leads to misunderstandings. The former is "the existential 'for-the-sake-of' of Others," which is to say that it is a condition for being human. Or, as Heidegger puts it, "as Being-with, Dasein 'is' essentially for the sake of Others. This must be understood as an existential statement as to its essence" (BT, 160). Since Dasein is not an enduring substance in which enduring properties or traits inhere, as understood by the tradition of substance ontology, Dasein's Being-for-the-sake-of Others must be understood as an integral part of Dasein's fundamental ontology or self-making life-project. As self-constituting beings, we are always already ahead of ourselves forming and articulating our self-identities through our involvements in the world. In all that we do and in all that we are, we manifest a particular sort of *ethos*. Being-with others is fundamental in shaping and expressing the for-the-sake-of-which of our *ethos*. Stated differently, our orientation toward our lives, where possibilities show up as meaningful or counting in some way, is to a large extent dependent upon, entangled with, and inseparable from our relationship to others. This is what we discuss in section one above as the belongingness of the dialogical

being together with others (c.f. McMullin 2013, chapter 6) and "is guided by considerateness and forbearance" (Heidegger BT, 159). According to Vogel and Young, Kant's third formulation of the moral law, which commands to "[a]*ct so that you use humanity, as much in your own person as in the person of every other, always at the same time as end and never merely as means*" (Kant 2002, 47), can be found in the mode of solicitude that "leaps forth and liberates [vorspringend-befreinded]" the for-the-sake-of the other in such a way that "he can become transparent to himself *in* his care and […] become *free for* it" (Heidegger BT, 159). The degree to which people are "*authentically* bound together," Heidegger claims, "is determined by the manner in which their Dasein, each in its own way, has been taken hold of" (BT, 159). In devoting "themselves to the same affair in common" (BT, 159) and "communicating and struggling" (BT, 436) to realize the potentiality of their life-projects in some concrete form, Being-with fosters the "sort of communion with others [*Teilnahme*]" (CT, 23) where people "can authentically be with one another—not by ambiguous and jealous stipulations and talkative fraternizing in the 'they' and in what 'they' want to undertake" (BT 344-45). As Vogel puts it, "We coexist authentically and so form an 'authentic We' when each feels that he belongs to a common project yet encourages the others to pursue the project in a way that attests to their own individuality" (1994, 79).

The argument set forth by Vogel and Young seems to be Heidegger's characterization of authentic Being-with as the condition that "makes possible the right kind of objectivity [die rechte Sachlichkeit], which frees the Other in his freedom for himself" (BT, 159) suggests the Kantian moral relationship that dutifully respects the first-person character of the other as an end-in-himself. This is because the solicitude that "leaps forth and liberates" is rooted in the

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self. Accordingly, Dasein cannot be itself without Being-for others. To be sure, Heidegger recognizes that "I can never *be* the Dasein of others, although I may be together *with* them" (CT, 39).

meaning of ethical individualism. What "makes possible the right kind of objectivity" (BT, 159), Young argues, is the degree to which "we confront each other free of pretension, competition and disguise; as it were, naked, soul-to-soul. […] Authentic Dasein sees the other not as a preconceived role or set of roles, but as an autonomous Dasein for whom its own being is an issue and a choice" (1997, 104). And, according to Vogel, this "liberating solicitude" "constitutes the core of what it means to treat the other as an *end-in-himself*. To be most deeply responsible to another person *as* other, as an individual who stands beyond the horizon of 'the Anyone,' I must be sensitive to the other in his potential for interpreting the meaning of his existence for himself" (1994, 79). We can see that, for both Vogel and Young, Heidegger's notion of authentic, liberating solicitude is analogous to Kant's moral law, because it is a way of Being-with that respects and cares for the other's existence as an end-in-itself. In other words, the other's potentiality-for-Being a person of a particular sort is respected as an end irreducible to my own projects, goals, and potentiality-for-Being. It is this irreducible meaning of the other's existence that, as a source of obligation, makes it possible for Dasein's Being-for-the-sake-of Others to not be reduced to mere tools or present-at-hand values.

In contrast to authentic solicitude, the other extreme possibility of Being-with others, is what Heidegger identifies as the inauthentic way of Being-with that "leaps in" (*einspringen*), takes over, and constrains the other's freedom for living up to his or her potentiality-for-Being. In the solicitude that "leaps in and dominates," Heidegger says, "the existence of the Other" is reduced "to a '*what*' with which he is concerned" (BT, 159). This way of Being-with constrains the other's first-person responsibility for taking up and owning up to his or her fundamental project of self-constitution. The teacher-student relationship is commonly used to exemplify the difference between inauthentic and authentic solicitude. As a liberating way of Being-for the

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student, the teacher does not feed the student ready-made answers, she does not 'teach for the test' so that she may receive a bonus from the administrators or a positive evaluation from the student who is satisfied with his exam grades, but instead she struggles with the student in exploring the subject-matter and asking difficult questions. The former way of Being-with, where the significance and meaning of the student is bound up with the teacher's desire to be an efficient and effective teacher, reduces the other's existence to a practical identity or a bundle of practical identities and sublimates the relationship to the leveled-down possibilities of the They.

This is why Heidegger can say, "This kind of solicitude, which leaps in and takes away 'care', is to a large extent determinative for Being with one another, and pertains for the most part to our concern with the ready-to-hand" (BT, 158). In other words, in the banality of everydayness, Dasein's Being-for others is an instrumental relationship determined by the network of significance, meaning, and functionality of the practical and normative life-world. Insofar as Being-with is determined by its function within the practices and institutions of the social world, the meaning of the other's existence is mediated by the They's preconceptions and expectations of how the other should fit into the social order. Simply stated, insofar as the functionality of practices is the context in which we understand the other, our relationship to the other is normatively governed and cashed out in terms of ready-made social roles, purposes, projects, and goals. The teacher-student relationship that is guided by the tradition is embedded in and justified by the instructions and guidelines inscribed in the forms of life of the public realm (see Heidegger CT, 28). Put in Kantian terms, inauthentic solicitude is motivated by the outcome or intended consequences and, therefore, is not acting out of duty or respect for the autonomy of the other (as a rational agent), but out of desire, and is not treating the other as an end-in-himself, but as a mere means to an end. "'Leaping-in' positive solicitude is more engaged"

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than leaping-ahead (Young 1997, 103). "But," as Young points out, "it is concerned not with the other as person, only with some 'what,' some project, with which he is concerned. The agent takes over this project and presents it back to the other as something 'finished and at his disposal'" (1997, 103; Young is quoting Heidegger BT, 159).

In contrast to the inauthentic and anonymous ways of Being-with, where the normative force of what we do is simply based in the public norms that govern and regulate our relationships and interactions with others, the authentic way of Being-with others is to let them *be* in their ownmost potentiality-for-Being, to let persons *be* the kind of persons that they want to become. This means that Dasein's Being-for-the-sake-of the other as an individual is not determined by local and institutional obligations. The standards that determine Dasein's proper or authentic relationship with others are not grounded in culturally specific norms, nor are they mediated by general social rules that determine in advance the right way to care for others. Instead, Dasein's basis for deciding "what it may be good (or even obligatory) to *be* or *love*" (Taylor 1989, 79) is "its fundamental kind of existence: that in its being, it is concerned for that very being" (Heidegger LQT, 185).

Insofar as authenticity is a modification of inauthenticity, liberating solicitude is operative on the existentiell level, and this means that Dasein's relationship to the other "must be a personal relation to the other in his particularity, not an impersonal relation to the other as an instance of the universal" (Vogel 1994, 123). Moreover, Heidegger's description of the first-person experiences of Dasein's modes of Being-for others in general seems to be a destruction of traditional notions of intersubjectivity that make a sharp differentiation between the self and the other. In a telling passage, Heidegger demonstrates the difference between the traditional notion

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of intersubjectivity and his view of inter-human relationships as an entire existential situation of contextualized involvements. He writes,

> […] the other, the 'thou,' is nothing like a second 'I' to whom I counterpose myself. We certainly cannot deny that the possibility of understanding another is to some degree co-conditioned by how I understand myself or my existence as such. But such conditionedness of the factical performance of understanding another already presupposes (and does not first create) being-unto-another as unto a thou. In interpreting the phenomenon of being-with as being-unto-another (as we must, in principle), never forget that we never experience other people as some indeterminate mental 'centers,' floating around in an empty 'over-against-us.' We experience each other person as an existence, a being-with, a being-with-one-another in a world. Even being-with-one-another lives first of all from a shared-being [*Mitsein*] with him in a world. Thus, the other is, in principle, uncovered for others in his very existence. (LQT, 197)

Dasein's social embeddedness and historical rootedness, i.e., its thrownness, colors its self-understanding without remainder, so that it cannot step outside of its life-world and view itself or the other as a mere spectator in the building and making (*Bildung*) of the shared world. For this reason, freedom and responsibility do not get a foothold in the impersonal and ahistorical morality of Kant's categorical imperative. Nevertheless, seen through the Kantian lens, Heidegger's notion of authentic Being-with suggests a kind of existential distance from the They that allows for "tough love; a tough-minded kind of, where necessary, critical 'objectivity' which facilitates (but never seeks to compel) the other's 'becoming himself" (Young 1997, 106). As Young aptly puts it, "With regard to those, with whom it has a direct, personal relationship—the circle of its '*du*' relationships, its friendships—authentic Dasein evinces not only the negative respect due to the world of Dasein at large, but also 'positive' respect, the active relationship of 'letting be,' of authentic care" (1997, 106). The main point of the Kantian reading seems to be that, for both Kant and Heidegger, "[i]ndividuation is not the enemy, but the condition, of our being 'authentically bound together'" (Vogel 1994, 79; Vogel is quoting Heidegger BT, 159). Heidegger suggests as much when, in his lectures on *The Essence of Human Freedom*, he says:

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"This individualization is the condition of the possibility for the division in the distinction between person and community."[163]

The purpose of this discussion of the Kantian reading of *Being and Time*, section 26, is twofold. It is intended to show, first, that Heidegger does not ignore Being-with, and, second, how Heidegger's ethics, broadly construed, avoids falling prey to charges of ethical relativism and arbitrary decisionism. I think enough has been said to establish that there is a complete reciprocal interdependence between Dasein's ownmost potentiality-for-Being and Being-with others in Heidegger's description of being part of a moral-political community, as presented in section one above. In regards to the second objective of the discussion of the Kantian reading, I find a tenuous and indirect connection between Kant's moral law and Heidegger's notion of authentic Being-with. As compelling and valid as Young's and Vogel's arguments may be, I think it might be a stretch to say that the Kantian outlook does the kind of work necessary for addressing the charges of relativism and decisionism. To clarify, I would like to restate the problem as I have laid it out.

Recalling the previous characterization of the situation, Heidegger's account of the virtues of authentic existence demonstrates that there are innumerable domains of possibilities and courses of action based on the historical ways of dividing up Being into different types of beings, and each is different in its understanding of the human *ethos*. Fundamental ontology makes it clear that authenticity is a mode of Being an ethical agent that gathers together and unifies possibilities (or social roles) from various normative domains, each of which carries its own set of ideals and virtues. Dasein's fundamental project is defined as the teleology that regulates and orders a set of possibilities, but if that teleology is gathered from the various

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[163] Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Human Freedom: An Introduction to Philosophy* (henceforth abbreviated as EHF), trans. Ted Sadler (London: Continuum, 2002), 90.

normative domains within a social order, then, similar to Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*, the standards are

relative to the spirit (or *Geist*) of the "we" who share those values. The virtues of the *ethos*, then,

are skills that can be learned and cultivated in order to perform certain duties, carry out social

functions, and achieve personal, self-affirming goals. If this is the whole picture, it seems to be

unsatisfactory. It cannot justify the virtues. If the organizing principle of the virtues necessary for

effective ethical agency centers on mastering skills that enable the successful performance of

social roles and fulfillment of traditional prescriptions for ethical conduct, then it is hard to see

how appealing to the historical context of the intelligibility of human affairs provides sufficient

standards for moral change and effective ethical agency. John McDermott presents a telling

example of the inadequacies that lay in appealing to the tradition as a criteria for ethical conduct.

He writes,

> It is *difficult* to sort out the vast panoply of traditions, especially in that some of
> them appear to modern culture to have barbaric and dehumanizing effects. One
> thinks here of the ancient Meso-American Mayan civilization which regularly
> chose young virgins to be dropped off a cliff into sure death below as an
> acknowledgement of a fertility ritual. And it was the same Mayans who insisted
> on the beheading of the losing captain in a game of sport similar to our basketball.
> Other instances abound. Yet, before our revulsion becomes too self-righteous, it is
> we in the twentieth century who have indulged in the Holocaust, Hiroshima, and
> Nagasaki, and speak glibly about a *just* nuclear war. Further, it is we of the
> twentieth century who have participated in the unnecessary deaths of 100,000,000
> people, all for reasons of obdurate racial, religious, and ideological conflict.[164]

The problem is that the extent to which these local social orders and moral communities

can be criticized or appropriated "lay in appealing to a teleological conceptions of history"

(Williams 1985, 104) or a "social teleology" (MacIntyre 2007, 1997). Where the teleology is

supposed to justify the virtues, why we should accept the virtues becomes a question of why we

should accept the teleology. In other words, ethical relativism arises when the bedrock practices

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[164] John J. McDermott, "Pragmatic Sensibility: The Morality of Experience," in *New Directions in Ethics: The Challenge of Applied Ethics* (1986), 113-36, 125.

of a community that regulate a people's way of life is treated as the ultimate *telos* of human existence. If the *telos* is relative to the virtues of socio-political ways of life, in the sense that the virtues are needed for the actualization of those forms of life, then senseless acts of violence and oppression could be considered virtuous actions (as noted in McDermott's quote above).

In moral philosophy, this is presented as a tension between the good and the right, that is, what it is good to be and what it is right to do. In general, modern ethicists hold the view that what defines our humanity is the recognition of responsibility as that domain where the "generalized other"[165] is the ground of moral obligations that imposes limits on and constrains our personal desires and needs. For this reason, everyone can and should be committed to subordinating their personal motives to the demands of the other. This is a fundamental duty of being human. Vogel and Dostal characterize the problem as a situation where the ethical demands of society can clash with the ethical demands of the second-person experience of the other, that is, an interpersonal relationship that is not mediated by individual preferences or socially-defined commitments. Young's creative and valid solution is to suggest that "the *Moralität* of section 26 qualifies, but does not contradict, the ethical relativism of section 74" (1997, 107). Young's argument that *Being and Time* contains a "qualified ethical relativism," holds that there is "no inconsistency between *Being and Time's Sittlichkeit* and its endorsement of *Moralität*" this is because section 26 "contains something life an elevation of the foundations of the Western liberal tradition to a universally binding status." "If this is so," Young argues, then

> section 26 contains the ultimate rebuttal of all negative responsibility criticisms.
> Since […] it is precisely the Western ethico-political tradition that enables us to
> condemn totalitarianism in general and Nazism in particular, and since this

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[165] Seyla Benhabib, "The Generalized and Concrete Other," in *Women and Moral Theory*, ed. Eva Kittay and Diane Meyers (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1988), 154-77; cited in Alan Wolfe, *Whose Keeper? Social Science and Moral Obligation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 3.

tradition is represented in *Being and Time*, as a formal structure binding on all Dasein, it follows that, far from lacking critical potential *vis-à-vis* Nazism, the work, in fact, positively rejects it as an institutionalization of inauthenticity. (1997, 108)

The basic issue underlying the relativism and decisionism charges against Heidegger is about the normativity of norms and the decisive consideration seems to be whether Heidegger has the resources for interpreting the meaning of ethical judgments. All norms are normatively governed by conventions, but this does not give us an absolute or all-encompassing reason to follow these norms. If doing the right thing means adhering to the customs governing the community, and those criteria cannot be grounded in a foundation that sets forth basic principles about right and wrong ways to live, then what basis do we have for making ethical judgments about our own ethical outlook or other cultural outlooks? This is a paradox for modern moral philosophy.[166] What stands out in Kant's vision of morality is that autonomy is an internal source of motivation and ethical judgment. There are two components of Kant's notion of autonomy that Vogel's and Young's interpretations of Being-with pick up on. "The first is that no authority external to ourselves is needed to constitute or inform us of the demands of morality. [...] The second is that in self-government we can effectively control ourselves. The obligations we impose upon ourselves override all other calls for action, and frequently run counter to our desires. We nonetheless have a sufficient motive to act as we ought."[167]

It seems to me that Vogel's and Young's readings pick up on the extent to which Heidegger's notion of "situated freedom" is indebted to Kant's emphasis on autonomy as the keystone to freedom and responsibility. For Kant, "a free will and a will under moral laws are the same" (2002, 63). This means that freedom is a regulative idea of reason that places demands on

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[166] For further, in-depth accounts of this paradox, please refer to Williams 1985, Chapter 9; Taylor 1985b, Chapter 5.
[167] J.B. Schneewind, "Autonomy, obligation, and virtue: An overview of Kant's moral philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 309-341, 309.

rational agents. To act according to the demands of freedom is to act from duty, not inclination or impulse. To ignore the demands of freedom is to ignore that which makes us human. The fundamental principle of Kant's notion of autonomy underscores a basic principle of what it means to say that Dasein's Being is "an *issue* for it" (Heidegger BT, 32). Accordingly, I think it is possible to see authentic existence in terms of what Kant refers to as a "regulative ideal" that governs and imposes a pattern on our first-order activities (Kant 2002, 71-79). Just as Kant "believed that morality required autonomy and that no moral principle could properly be *yours*— or, to put it another way, nothing that was your could be a moral principle—unless you had freely acknowledged or adopted it" (Williams 1985, 169), so too, for Heidegger, only those who are capable of giving themselves over to making themselves responsible are free. As Heidegger puts it, "Only those who can truly give themselves a burden are free" (MFL, 166).

For Kant and Heidegger (and Aristotle), what is distinctive about being human is the capacity for a second-order reflectiveness on our first-order activities.[168] And the possibility to impose a pattern on our first-order activities is given in the ontological bedrock of human life. Everything that we encounter is always encountered in relationship to an order of Being, a structural order that is always already in the world, which enables possibilities to show forth as either appropriate or inappropriate in relation to our lives. That shared vision of the proper ways of being human includes the conditions that make possible being an effective ethical agent. Stated otherwise, the essential structures of Dasein are potentialities-for-Being or ways of being that are prior to, and conditions for the possibility of, being a person.[169] Being able to make

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[168] The idea that agency involves a second-order reflectiveness on our first-order desires is developed by Harry G. Frankfurt, "The Importance of What We Care About," in *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press), 80–94.

[169] "Structure" is a technical term that Heidegger borrows from Dilthey to refer to the ways in which things can be related. The concept of structure is intended to show relations among things in terms of the meaningfulness and significance within the actual context of life. Lived dynamic relationships do not have the kind of categorical necessity that Kant attempts to posit, but there is a certain kind of regularity that makes it possible to identify basic

meaningful choices and life-defining commitments involves the recognition of one's own limits and constraints. There are various ways we can see limits in our self-understanding. As we previously discussed, seeing ourselves as finite enables us to see human life as a self-making project, as a work in progress moving towards an end that is not a purpose or goal. Death changes our understanding of purpose so that there is no final outcome that will justify Dasein's self-chosen path or way of life; instead, the project itself is definitive of Dasein's life as a person of a particular sort. Insofar as Being-towards-death transforms Dasein's understanding of what life is all about, it also "makes Dasein, as Being-with, have some understanding of the potentiality-for-Being of Others" (BT, 308).

Being-towards-death is not an absolute ground in the Kantian or traditional sense, but it is an absolute boundary that imposes limits onto the dynamic unfolding of human life. For Heidegger, freedom is always already situated within "inescapable frameworks" (Taylor 1989), this social embeddedness and historical rootedness is the evaluative context of expression in which we interpret our needs, desires, wants, and passions. "My source for possible projects is the heritage that I share with others in my community, the wealth of possible self-interpretations that my culture has accumulated over millennia. Thanks to my heritage, I have the option of guiding my life according to the possibility of being, for instance, a conservative or a revolutionary" (Polt 1999, 101). What imparts the possibility of evaluating a well-lived life and the well-being of other heritages, communities, and people is not external to or outside of the fundamental, essential structures of the Being of human agency. Dasein is thrown into a meaningful, value-laden world in which it can co-participate in the struggle to realize the potentialities-for-Being of a people and a community. The point is that Dasein must decide what

structures of the dynamic unfolding of life. Life can unfold in innumerable ways, but the claim made by Heidegger is that there are structural patterns underlying our life-projects that are always there as conditions for the possibility of being a person of a particular sort.

possibilities matter to it. Its life is marked by a finitude that calls it forth to make some fundamental decisions, to make itself from the materials of its thrownness.

Understood as a regulative ideal, authentic existence is a second-order stance that imparts a significant commitment to our lives, which makes it possible to have a sense of the situation and to feel obligated to take action in a concrete situation. I think Heidegger suggests as much when he says, "The ethicality of action does not consist in realizing so-called values, but in the actual willing to take responsibility, in the decision to exist within this responsibility" (EHF, 191). It is by becoming decisive and becoming the normative source of Dasein's own actions that it can develop its capacity for focusing on its ownmost ideal that is definitive of its self-understanding. The degree to which Dasein leaps-in for and leaps-ahead of the Dasein of others depends to a large extent on the resoluteness of Dasein's life-defining commitments to itself. Heidegger's characterization of the resolute individual emphasis that the authentic relationship to others it to let others be who they are, that is, to let them emerge into presence and essentially unfold according to what their own potentiality-for-Being is. "Only by authentically Being-their-Selves in resoluteness can people authentically be with one another" (BT, 344). In a revealing letter to Hannah Arendt (in 1925), Heidegger writes,

> And still one would like to 'say' something and to offer oneself to the other, but we could only say that the world is no longer mine and yours—but *ours*—only that what we do and achieve belongs not to you *and* me but to us. […] And only that all kindness to others and every unforced, authentic act is *our* life. Only that joyful struggle—and the definitive commitment to something chosen—are ours.[170]

The Kantian reading of Heidegger's ethics, broadly construed, is undeniably fruitful and compelling. It demonstrates the ways in which Heidegger's "originary ethics" (BW, 258) makes a contribution to moral philosophy that attempts to find some order in the mess that emerges

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[170] Martin Heidegger, *Letters 1925-1975: Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger*, ed. Ursula Ludz, trans. Andrew Shields (Florida: Harcourt, 2004) 19.

from Enlightenment individualism and the breakdown of the holistic political context. Understood as an extremely demanding ideal, authenticity can give us clues to simpler ideals that enrich everyday, ordinary forms of life. One way to give one's life meaning is by developing a project for or towards others. Dasein can do something constructive with its life to improve things. At every moment we are having an effect on the lives of others. To fight against forms of evil such as racism, anti-Semitism, and sexism, we can make ourselves better persons. This involves a second-order reflectiveness that asks, "What can I contribute?" and "how can I help to improve things?" I think McMullin succinctly captures the argument I am trying to put forth: "understanding in Heidegger's sense of *ways for me to be* in the world—can therefore be characterized as a type of *participation* in the other's meaningful, committed activities of existing. Particular ways of being in the world are not simply mine, but *ours*" (2013, 177).

Authenticity as a Call for an Ethical Transformation

As suggestive as the Kantian insights may be, I worry that it sinks or swims in the same way for both Kant and Hegel. That is to say, the rise of Enlightenment individualism, which emerges out of the fact-value distinction, bred a host of conceptual binaries that continue to plague moral philosophy: either our values have an objective reality or they are subjective and meaningless; either we are free or everything is determined; either we are rational and orderly or we are passionate and impulsive. These distinctions are treated as mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive. The task of moral philosophy, then, is to construct from the ground up obligatory rules for human behavior. On this picture,

> [m]orality is conceived purely as a guide to *action*. It is thought to be concerned
> purely with what is right to do rather than with what it is good to be. In a related
> way the task of moral theory is identified as defining the content of obligation
> rather than the nature of the good life. In other words, morals concern what we
> *ought* to do; this excludes both what it is good to do, even though we aren't

obliged […], and also what it may be good (or even obligatory) to *be* or *love,* as irrelevant to ethics. (Taylor 1989, 79)

The difference between morality and the good life rests on the breakdown between the "is" and the "ought." That is to say, moral philosophy can only achieve its goal of formulating obligatory rules for human behavior at the expense of care for the quality and context of ethical life. Without the sense-making context given in the dialogical and historical rootedness of human agency, the project of moral philosophy is self-defeating, because it turns qualitative, context-sensitive content into some kind of assembly line product.

Heidegger captures the shift and loss of qualitative distinctions in moral philosophy as parasitic on the leveling tendencies of the modern age. In the modern age, the ultimate goal is normalization, that is, the leveling down of Dasein's possibilities to the least common denominator of the social context wherein the "possible options of choice" are confined "to what lies within the range of the familiar, the attainable, the respectable—that which is fitting and proper" (BT, 239). The leveling tendencies of our modern age strengthen moral philosophy's reduction of morality to all-encompassing rules and principles of action that can be used to justify the status-quo. If the task of moral philosophy is to provide an objective standard or litmus test for determining what one ought to do, then I think that Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology involves the recognition that the task of moral theory is antithetical to the existential project of living the good life. This is because, in retreating to prescriptive rules of behavior and universalizable standards of right and wrong, the normative dimension of the practical life-world is leveled down to the generalized other, as the source of *my* obligations and duties. In short, moral philosophy encourages the abnegation of ethical responsibility by enabling the pervasive tendency in modern individualism to narrow our range of possibilities to an

ultimate either/or: either "we have complete control over who we are," or "our life is all laid out for us in advance, and there is no need for us to make difficult choices" (Polt 1999, 90).

The point that I am trying to make is that a source of discrepancy between the vision of the good life put forth in Heidegger's account of authentic historicity and moral philosophy's fixation on the content of obligation is found in the aims of their projects. Whereas the task of moral philosophy centers on defending what is right to do, Heidegger's project attempts to uncover the motivational pull that comes from Dasein's "ontological can-be" (Kisiel 1993, 432). Following Kisiel's argument, I see Heidegger's project as an attempt to awaken Dasein, "to interrupt the initially everyday […] absorption with things by the indifferent 'self' immersed in the Anyone, and thus to single out Dasein to own up to its own existence, more specifically, to the 'demand' (SZ 266f.) dictated by the unique situation defined by its lifetime" (Kisiel 1993, 432). The transfiguration from the They-self to the authentic self depends on Dasein's awakening. To awaken Dasein to the meaning of its life is to find something in Being that calls for and evokes a passionate commitment, that "snatches one back from the endless multiplicity of possibilities which offer themselves as closest to one—those of comfortableness, shirking, and taking things lightly—and brings Dasein into the simplicity of its *fate* [*Schicksals*]" (Heidegger BT, 165 and 435 respectively).

Part of my thesis is that Heidegger has nothing to say about morality. His characterization of the virtues of a flourishing life gives us no help in making factical decisions. That said, I find in Heidegger's "originary ethics" an antidote to problems of morality that dismantles the conceptual binaries associated with ontological individualism and the fact-value distinction. Heidegger's anti-individualist ontology and insistence on the ontological priority of the *ethos* not only undermines the most basic tenants of Enlightenment morality, it also sets us on the proper

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course for proving that Heidegger's description of authentic individualization provides phenomenological evidence that is necessary for specifying what it means to be a moral agent in the robust sense of being a good person. In order to justify this controversial claim I need to demonstrate that Heidegger's description of authentic historicity creates an ethical transformation that closes the gap between us and the good. The task of the next chapter is to show how can own up to and take responsibility for this ontological gap.

Before moving ahead, however, I want to make it clear that I see my thesis as an extension of and a contribution to the scholarship that attempts to articulate the ethical dimensions of Heidegger's thought. Throughout this chapter we have seen a number of ways in which Heidegger's fundamental ontology has the resources to address the failing and incoherent fragments of moral philosophy. For example, Nelson's "ethics of facticity" demonstrates that Heidegger's account of the existential function of *logos* reveals individuation as a responsiveness that confronts and opens up the questionability of everydayness. In addition, we relied on Hatab's scholarship to establish that authentic existence must be understood in terms of "the *tension* between socialization and individuation, not a break with the social world" (1007, 27). The scholarship that I have drawn from throughout this chapter contributes to two central objectives of my thesis. It aids in my critique of the underlying assumptions in the objections raised against Heidegger, and it lends credit to my previous claim that Heidegger holds a substantive notion of ethical individualism that gives us an idea of how ways of being in the They, which generally would be scattered and all over the place, can have something that binds them together into a unified whole. In line with chapter two's argument that, for Heidegger, the "I" is always subordinate to the "us," the authors in this chapter, who articulate the ethical dimensions of fundamental ontology, contribute to my effort to clarify and unpack Heidegger's

claim that Dasein's inherited pathways of authenticity are put forth by the heroes and heroines that have demonstrated how the life of an ethically integrated individual is consistent with the virtues and ideals of a moral-political community.

These insightful and valid attempts to open up and make sense of the ethical dimensions of Heidegger's thought address the problematic assumptions built into Western metaphysics and are sensitive to the challenges Heidegger's "originary ethics" poses for moral philosophy. And although this scholarship makes it possible to see how, from a sociological standpoint, Heidegger is able to get from the "is" to the "ought," I am not convinced that this enables us to return back from the "ought" to the "is." In the next chapter, I hope to show that Heidegger's relentless attack of humanism and his refusal to give an absolute position to anthropomorphism dismantles the metaphysical distinction between the "is" and the "ought."

CHAPTER 5:

HEIDEGGER'S ETHICS IS FIRST PHILOSOPHY

In this chapter I try to put forth an account of Heidegger's ethics in which the decisionistic and relativistic critiques cannot show up as legitimate objections to Heidegger's ethics. The problems of decisionism and relativism seem to encapsulate many of the metaphysical assumptions that structure our way of thinking about ethics in modernity. One such idea that is subjected to Heideggerian diagnosis is the pervasive tendency toward individualism and subjectivism which, as we have seen, can be traced back to Descartes' thought. It is through the Cartesian bedrock of subjectivity that "man is […] transformed into an exceptional being, into a subject which, with regard to that which truly (i.e., certainly) is, which is primary, has preeminence among all *subjecta*" (Heidegger QCT, 150). On this "subjectified" view of the self, humans are essentially self-encapsulated, conscious minds who form ideas about the external world. To function efficiently in the world is to formulate correct ideas about the external world, where this is understood as an objectified reality that is made up of intrinsically meaningless objects. Thus, in order to formulate a complete account of the universe, as the traditional way of answering the question of Being, it is necessary to distinguish between objective facts and subject-relative values. This distinction relies on an anthropocentric understanding of Being in which "[m]an founds and confirms himself as the authoritative measure for all standards of measure with which whatever can be counted as certain—i.e., as true, i.e., as in being—is measured off and measured out (reckoned up)" (Heidegger QCT, 151). According to the

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anthropocentric view, the mental, inner sources of behavior are fundamental and the physical, outer bodily movements are secondary and derivative. Here human action is purely instrumental, a matter of maximizing subjective preferences and desires. Values are justified by the instrumental approach that prioritizes a means-ends, calculative view of life with the result that there are no thick ethical concepts that give us guidelines or meaningful directions.

Heidegger's way of dealing with the fact-value distinction built into subjective individualism should be familiar by now. Heidegger's anti-individualistic ontology turns subjective individualism on its head. In particular, his notion of belongingness dissolves the barriers of modern individualism by revealing the ways in which humans are participants in the unfolding, meaningful contexts of agency that make up the historical *ethos*. What we have not yet discussed is how Heidegger's insistence on the *ethos* as an ontological given, as the ontological bedrock of human agency, prevents the ubiquitous anthropocentrism in modern thought from arising. We have seen that Heidegger's ontological account of the *ethos* problematizes the anthropocentric idea that humans are the source and measure of all meaning. Recall that "*ethos*" refers to the life of a community, that is, a form of life with its practical and normative dimensions. As thrown participants in the public language and habits of an *ethos*, we are always already committed to ideals and goals that define the *ethos*. Heidegger's explorations of the *ethos* of the Western *polis* present us with an understanding of what executive virtues are needed to realize our own Being as individual members of a linguistic community. Although the current practices of the *polis* are filled with distortions, they are shot through with insights into binding normative commitments that involve thick ethical concepts such as belongingness, indebtedness, responsibility, and finitude (limits). The implication is that we are surrounded by understandings of life and character ideals (virtues) that can be articulated as a *telos* for us,

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because our Being as humans is always already situated in an *ethos* that makes binding demands on us by making us the people that we are. Dasein is not a free-floating subject that determines its own standards and meanings. In contrast to the anthropocentric view of humans as self-encapsulated standards of measure and value, Heidegger's account of our Being as participants of a particular historical unfolding that is still underway makes it clear that limits, standards, and guidelines are built into the Being of the *ethos*.

Another metaphysical assumption underlying decisionism and relativism is a distorted and reductionistic picture of what it means to be human. "With the rise of subjective individualism, a transformed understanding of what is at stake in being human appears on the scene."[171] There are, to be sure, various interpretations of the essence of humans formulated throughout the history of Western philosophy. What is peculiar about modern forms of humanism, ranging from Descartes to Sartre, is that they center on the notion of essence as self-defining and autonomous agency severed from its transient place in its community and history. Humanism, Heidegger writes,

> in the more strict and historiographical sense, is nothing but a moral-aesthetic anthropology. The name 'anthropology' as used here does not mean just some investigation of man by a natural science. Nor does it mean the doctrine established within Christian theology of man created, fallen, and redeemed. It designates that philosophical interpretation of man which explains and evaluates whatever is, in its entirety, from the standpoint of man and in relation to man. (QCT, 133)

In this passage I think Heidegger is saying that the modern understanding of humanism we inherit from the rise of anthropocentrism relies on specialized interpretations of humans found in regional ontologies such as history, morality, and aesthetics. These interpretations tend to uncritically presuppose an atomistic view of humans as self-encapsulated subjects engaged in

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[171] Charles Guignon, *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), 18.

self-reflection. On this view, the relation between humans and what they inhabit is based on the model of the relation between subject and object.

Prevailing forms of humanism hold the view that the self is "completely self-defining, with no essential bonds to anything else in the cosmos" and the social world (Guignon 1983, 18). My familial, social, religious, "and national origins are appendages or decorations that may be cast off in my search for integration," and this integration happens on my terms, with the components I choose, that I decide are important in my search for a worthwhile and fulfilling way of life (Guignon 1983, 18). Humanism and anthropocentrism promote a one-sided range of values such as autonomy, personal happiness, productivity, and effectiveness, while concealing virtues and ideals that make up the deepest evaluative commitments that gain their meaning from their place in our shared background understanding such as constancy, integrity, reverence, and heritage.

In order to avoid the uncritical presuppositions of humanism, we have seen that Heidegger focuses on our Being as thrown and situated "self-interpreting" or "self-constituting" beings. What is important, in Heidegger's view, is that our Being (or essence) as humans is inextricably bound up with a meaningful, purposive *ethos*. It is only because we have absorbed and are attuned to the dialogical interpretations, commitments, and obligations that define the life of our community that we have the possibility to be ethical agents. All of this indicates that things in general count or matter to us in some way in relation to our participation and undertakings in the shared contexts of a particular historical *ethos*.

The source of the anthropocentric understanding of Being correlated with humanism is the metaphysical polarization of the "is" and the "ought" that is so pervasive in the modern age (Heidegger QCT, 133). Throughout his work, Heidegger consistently attacks the uncritical

tendency toward value-thinking (*Wertdenken*) as an offshoot of the is-ought dichotomy that "upholds subjectivity as the domain of values in opposition to the valueless sphere of inanimate things ('nature')" (Schalow 2001, 250). Part of the problem is that the so-called is-ought paradox is based on the standpoint of detached, dispassionate objectivity, which, as we have seen, distorts possibilities of self-understanding and self-assessment that are crucial for understanding the practical and normative dimensions of human existence. When Being-in-the-world becomes a representation or theoretical construction of the detached spectator's perspective, the essential richness and depths of Being-in-the-world as dwelling becomes lifeless and dead. When the world is represented as raw materials on hand (*Bestand*) for fulfilling subjective values and "human beings appear not as family, neighbors, co-workers, church members and friends, but as a homogenous mass of resources at one's disposal for use in one's own personal project of self-actualization and self-enhancement,"[172] our Being as inhabitants of commitments and concerns that define our *ethos* does not show up as an issue for us. For this reason, Heidegger argues, "[t]hat which formerly conditioned and determined the essence of man in the manner of purpose and norm has lost its unconditional and immediate, above all its ubiquitously and infallibly operative power of effective action. That suprasensory world of purpose and norms no longer quickens and supports life. That world has itself become lifeless, dead" (QCT, 98). Whereas ancient warrior cultures—such as the Spartans, Meso-American Mayans, and Crow Indians— inhabited a shared vision of what life was worth living for as it was handed down in the paradigmatic stories (*mythoi*) of the life of past heroes and heroines[173], in the contemporary

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[172] Charles Guignon, "Hermeneutics, Authenticity, and the Aim of Psychology," in *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* 22, no. 2 (2002): 83-102, 93.

[173] The Being of a Greek temple, for instance, "fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being. The all-governing expanse of this open relational context is the world of this historical people. Only from this expanse does the nation first return to itself for the fulfillment of its

world our ability to identify what genuinely matters in life is confined to the range of character

traits that determine optimal human functioning and productivity in an objectified world.

The decisionist and relativist critiques assume that there could be a vantage point from

which one can dispassionately distance oneself from one's dwelling-place in order to represent

the world as one rational world-view among others. The decisionist critique of Heidegger thinks

that the decisionist holds the view that the brute facts of human life—such as character traits,

social roles, family and religious ties, a past, and linguistic practices—are inherently meaningless

and arbitrary accessories of human existence. Because the autonomous subject determines the

value and meaning of these add-ons, the ideal subject is free to reflect on, interpret, and define

the meaningfulness (and meaninglessness) of its facticity through its choices and actions. This

means that there is a purely subjective standpoint from which one can make decisions about

incommensurable, distinct ethical standpoints. In a similar manner, the critique of Heidegger on

relativistic grounds wants a firm, absolute view of ethics. From this universal perspective, being

a relativist is a bad thing. In some sense, Heidegger is a relativist, but this is not how he would

describe what he is up to. For Heidegger, the longing for an absolute standpoint is based on an

illusion. Both critiques arise with Enlightenment modernity's quest for fixed "systems of values"

and "classifications of values" (Heidegger QCT, 71). The critiques stand or fall with the notion

that there is a value-neutral and context-independent subjective world-view that correctly

represents reality. "Without this system of calibration, it is thought, our interpretations would

'hang in the air' and would not be about anything" (Guignon 1983, 193).

Heidegger's diagnosis of Enlightenment modernity's quest for a system of calibration is

that it is unsatisfactory on ontological grounds. "This quest makes humankind brutelike, deprived

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vocation" (Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (1993), 139-212, 167).

of an ontological *ethos* that assigns limit, order, and measure to human existence."[174]

Heidegger's account of the ontological *ethos*, when properly understood, leads us to see that the

very idea that we lack such ontological limits, standards, and measurements is a deeply rooted

pseudo-problem that arises only in the anthropocentric shadow of the modern age that has

transformed Being into a value (QCT, 102).

I hope to show that Heidegger replaces the anthropocentric understanding of beings that

"represents humans as centrally important within a *metaphysical* interpretation of beings as a

whole" (Polt 1999, 168) with a teleological understanding of Being that "signifies a happening

(*Geschehen*) which we ourselves are and in which we are involved."[175] This understanding of

Being is "Dasein-related, but not Dasein-centered."[176] Before, on this analysis, one can define

the kind of life appropriate for humans, our proper dwelling, one has to lay bare the existential-

ontological conditions that make that life possible. Since, for Heidegger, the Being of the totality

of what-is is a happening or event (*Geschehen*) often underway moving toward a definable

realization, to understand the Being of beings as a whole is to understand it in terms of its

potentialities and its proper path toward realizing those potentialities. From this view of Being as

a happening, we can say that Being is always already directed toward a *telos* (end), which for

humans is the good (*agathon*) (Heidegger BCAR, 31). "When we can bring this understanding

[of Being] to light, we see that it is not something we can accomplish. It is not an artifact of ours,

our '*Gemächte*.' It must be there as the necessary context for all of our acting and making. We

can only act insofar as we are already in the midst of it" (Taylor 2005, 449). What is important,

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[174] Michael E. Zimmerman, in *A Companion to Heidegger's Introduction to Metaphysics*, eds. Richard Polt and Gregory Fried (2001), 185-204, 202.

[175] Martin Heidegger, *Supplements: From the Earliest Essays to "Being and Time" and Beyond*, ed. John van Buren (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002), 173.

[176] Taylor, Charles. "Heidegger on Language," in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (2005) 433-455, 445.

on Heidegger's view, is that our way of Being, our mode of inhabiting a form of life with normative and practical dimensions, is "possible only in virtue of something not itself, something 'prior' (both temporally and logically), to which that life, along with all its goods and ills, is indebted."[177]

To tie this all together is to say that the ontological conditions of our understanding of what it is to be human are the conditions that make the human *ethos* possible. The kind of life appropriate to humans, therefore, can only be accounted for as its *ethos*. To be human is to always already be conditioned by and indebted to an understanding of Being that grants or gives (*Es gibt*) the conditions that make human life possible. This means that the proper measure or standard of human dwelling (and all particular beings that make up that dwelling) is not imposed by us, but is in our way of Being, our way of existing.

Heidegger's post-humanist account of Being makes it impossible to drive a wedge between ontology and ethics. In contrast to mainstream moral philosophy and most readings of Heidegger, my thesis is that ethics, for Heidegger, is first philosophy. Insight into what ought to be, not just what is, is always already available to us. We are inhabitants of a teleologically ordered *ethos* that is not of our own making, but which opens up pathways of possibilities that enable us to become what we are. The pressing question for ethics, in this broad sense, is not about the justification for action, it is not about maxims and motives that dictate how one should act in a particular situation, but the possibilities of living found in particular historical paradigms. According to Heidegger, we can gain some insight into the prospects of a worthwhile life by struggling with "history and the paradigms it provides" (Sluga 2001, 224). In other words, the shared background practices and interpretations handed down can be transformed from a

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[177] James C. Edwards, "The Thinging of the Thing: The Ethic of Conditionality in Heidegger's Later Work," in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (2005) 456-467, 458.

mindless, mechanical tradition to a "fateful sending" (Heidegger BW, 231). This self-transfiguration is "not, however, for the sake of man, so that civilization and culture through man's doings must be vindicated" (Heidegger BW, 233). It is a repetition of possibilities that retrieves the goals and ideals that have been handed down so that Dasein can encounter its Being as the ought of its existence. What matters in Heidegger's ethics is not primarily morally correct action but opening ourselves to receive and respond to an understanding of Being. As he puts it in a letter to Elisabeth Blochmann (May 1919):

> It is a rationalist misunderstanding of the nature of the personal flow of life to believe, and demand, that it should vibrate in those same broad and sonorous amplitudes which well up at inspired moments. Such demands arise from a lack of inner humility before the mystery and grace of all life—and we must live in continuity with those moments—not so much enjoying them as fitting them into our lives, taking them along in the passage of life, and including them in the rhythm of all future life. And at those moments when we directly feel ourselves and the direction in which we, as we live, belong, we should not only state, or simply record, the clarification that has come to us—as though it were simply confronting us as an object—but the comprehending possession of one's self is genuine only if it is truly lived, i.e. if it is, at the same time, a Being.[178]

In the first section of this chapter I argue that Heidegger's post-humanist understanding of the human *ethos* calls *us* to transform our lives by taking a resolute stance on them and fully realizing our potentialities-for-Being human. Heidegger's ethics attempts to enable us to be ready and prepared to "be claimed again by Being, taking the risk that under this claim [we] will have seldom much to say" (BW, 223). Since there is no outcome or effect that can justify this self-transformation, the appeal of Heidegger's ethics cannot be measured or "valued according to its utility" (BW, 217). It should only serve as an attempt to specify what it is to be fully human in the sense of being a respondent who receives an understanding of Being and has to own up to the task of being claimed by Being. Heidegger is not putting forth a particular stance or response.

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[178] Quoted in Rüdiger Safranski's *Martin Heidegger: "Between Good and Evil,"* trans. Ewald Osers (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 87-88.

Instead, he tries to generate the core virtues of an ethical stance, totally changing the meaning of ordinary phenomena of feelings, death, conscience, and guilt so that the responsiveness to being claimed by Being is Dasein's own responsibility. I think that Heidegger finds something in the historicity of the human *ethos* that motivates us to transform our own existing in such a way that we will be able to gain access to the phenomena, which in this case is what it is to be human, that will enable us to come to some conclusions and close the gap between us and the ought.

This chapter concludes by raising critical questions about Heidegger's ethics. Overall, I believe it is a mistake to think that Heidegger does any of the tasks that modern moral philosophers want. In the end, all we have are understandings of life that provide character ideals that, together with meaningful goals and projects for the whole of our lives, make possible a flourishing *ethos*. Heidegger undercuts the uncritical presuppositions of much of moral philosophy and provides an alternative account of ethics that picks up the stick from the other end. This puts the burden of proof on those who think there is something important about moral theory in the modern sense. The onus of proof rests with those who want to claim that a correct way to be human exists and that there is an absolute, unchanging, timeless, ground for understanding how we ought to be living our lives.

Heidegger's Rejection of the Is-Ought Distinction

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate that the decisionist and relativistic critiques do not get off the ground in Heidegger's original ethics. Once we establish that Heidegger's original ethics is a complete rejection of the metaphysical distinction between the "is" (*Sein*) and the "ought" (*Sollen*), it should become apparent that, on Heidegger's view, the Being of ethical agency is always already situated and caught up in the fundamental commitments and ideals of the human *ethos*. That Dasein's "thrown essence" is anchored in the ways an ongoing *ethos*

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interprets itself and its world, and is always already unfolding "essentially in the throw of Being as the fateful sending" (Heidegger BW, 252 and 231; respectively). In short, essential dwelling is the essence of being human. Heidegger's original ethics is original in that it puts forth a proper way of dwelling (*ethos*) and Being-at-home (*Heimlichkeit*) within the current of the historical essence (or essencing) of a community (*Gemeinschaft*). To live a life in light of a proper understanding of the essence of being human, therefore, is for Dasein to "recognize itself as historical *in its being*: its finitude is a historical finitude."[179]

To justify my claim that ethics, for Heidegger, is first philosophy I shall attempt to show how Heidegger dismantles the metaphysical distinction between the "is" and the "ought." Then I shall proceed to highlight three fundamental differences between the anthropocentric is-ought distinction, which we previously discussed as an underlying condition of modern homelessness and uprootedness, and Heidegger's ontological account of the Being of the human *ethos*. In so doing, I hope it becomes clear that Heidegger's original ethics must be understood as a radical overturning of the modern subject-object ontology handed down in the Enlightenment anthropocentric view of reality which prevents the charges of relativism and decisionism from getting a foothold in Heidegger's account of the Being of ethical agency. This is because such criticisms depend heavily on the possibility that we can step outside of "the entire background of understanding embedded in" the meaning and significance of our "teleological language" (Guignon 1983, 189). However, for Heidegger, language (*logos*) is not a tool at the disposal of the human will or reason. It is the medium in which humans dwell and belong. As Heidegger says, "in order to be who we are, we human beings remain committed to and within the being of

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[179] Joseph K. Schear, "Historical Finitude," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger's "Being and Time,"* ed. Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 360-380, 376.

language, and can never step outside of it and look at it from elsewhere."[180] Whereas the anthropocentric view of beings as a whole glorifies rationality, utility, and autonomy in a godless world, Heidegger's ethics points to a way of Being human (that is, dwelling) that finds a clearing in which the gods, as an indispensible source of meaning, emerge into presence.

What distinguishes Heidegger's original ethics from Enlightenment morality lies in their understanding of the meaning and measure of Being itself. Chapter two argued that the Enlightenment understanding of Being maintains the scientific distinction between objective, quantifiable facts and subjective, relative values. The idea, as we have seen, is that the primary properties of things—such as mass, weight, size, and various other mathematically measurable data—can be counted as real, while secondary and tertiary qualities—such as love, fear, dreams, desires, and various other subject-relative values—do not exist in the world and hold no ultimate authority in the practical life-world. On such an outlook, all the meaningful questions that can be asked by humans can be answered if we bracket our initial experience of things and view the world from a disengaged standpoint. This is what Heidegger calls "The Age of the World Picture": "The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture. The word 'picture' [*Bild*] now means the structured image [*Gebild*] that is the creation of man's producing which represents and sets before. In such producing, man contends for the position in which he can be that particular being who gives the measure and draws up the guidelines for everything that is" (QCT, 134). The anthropocentric view holds the belief that ultimately there is an inherently meaningless and empty world and, if values exist at all, they are merely products of the human will. "Thus, as soon as this thinking achieves dominance in the modern age, as self-sufficient reason, the real development of the division between Being and the ought is made

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[180] Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1982), 134.

ready. This process is completed in Kant" (Heidegger IM, 212). None of the values (which, for nineteenth century value theorists, includes claims about morality, beauty, and truth) that humans project onto things have ultimate authority or meaning over others. The only kind of worth (*Werte*) that can be 'found' lies in economic values. In "On the Essence of Truth," Heidegger puts it this way: "The theologically conceived order of creation is replaced by the capacity of all objects to be planned by means of a worldly reason [*Weltvernunft*] which supplies the law for itself and this also claims that its procedure is immediately intelligible (what is considered 'logical')."[181] Understood as the foundation stones of reality, the is-ought chasm takes hold in Kant's autonomous will and paves the way for Nietzsche's overcoming of nihilism via the will to power[182] and Sartre's voluntarism as the basis for an "ethic" of absolute freedom and responsibility.

The fatal move for Enlightenment humanism occurs when "everything interpreted as 'a value'—'culture,' 'art,' 'science,' 'human dignity,' 'world,' and 'God'—is valueless"; that is, "what is so valued is robbed of its worth" when it has no basis in the order of things, but is

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[181] Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth" (1930), in BW, ed. David Farrell Krell (1993), 111-138, 119. In a lengthy but telling passage, Heidegger characterizes the shortcomings of humanism and anthropocentricism: "By disavowing itself in and for forgetfulness, the mystery leaves historical man in the sphere of what is readily available to him, leaves him to his own resources. Thus left, humanity replenishes its 'world' on the basis of the latest needs and aims, and fills out that world by means of proposing and planning. From these man then takes his standards, forgetting being as a whole. He persists in them and continually supplies himself with new standards, yet without considering either the ground for taking up standards or the essence of what gives standards. In spite of his advance to new standards and goals, man goes wrong as regards the essential genuineness of his standards. He is all the more mistaken the more exclusively he takes himself, as subject, to be the standard for all beings" (BW, 132).

[182] See, for instance, Martin Heidegger, "Part Two: Nihilism as Determined by the History of Being," in *Nietzsche, Volume IV: Nihilism* (henceforth abbreviated as "NIV"), trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper & Row: 1982), 197-252. An especially noteworthy passage is in Heidegger's criticism of the historical sciences. He writes, "Because the default of Being is the history of Being and this is authentically existing history, the being as such, especially in the epoch of the dominance of the nonessential nihilism, lapses into the unhistorical. The sign of this lapse is the emergence of the historical sciences, which advance a claim to be the definitive representation of history. They take history to be of the past, and explain it in its emergence as a causally demonstrable continuum of effects. […] Our historical situation is being analyzed everywhere. It is the point of departure and the goal for the mastery of beings, in the sense of securing man's standpoint and status within them. Historical research consciously or unconsciously stands in service of the will of human cultures to establish themselves among beings according to a comprehensible order. The will to nihilism as normally understood, and to its campaign, as well as the will to an overcoming of nihilism, become operative in the historiological reckoning of historiologically analyzed spirit and of world-historical situations" (240-41).

purely the product of the human will and, hence, "is admitted only as an object for man's estimation" (Heidegger BW, 251). In one fell swoop the Being of beings as whole is objectified as an object in the causal order of nature, and this meaningless and arbitrary position is treated as the source of meaning and value; "the world is transformed into picture and man into *subiectum*" (Heidegger QCT, 133). The dominance of the modern subject-centered outlook collapses in on itself in its attempt to place the human will in charge as that which orders human reality and creates values. "Acts of valuing that arise solely from our opting to value certain things can be changed or retracted at will; ultimately, they can only reflect the basic desire to have our own desires fulfilled or, as [Heidegger] often puts it, our will willing itself."[183] As characterized in chapter two, just as Medieval philosophers would find it blasphemous to say that God is the highest value of the human will, so too, Heidegger relentlessly attacks the anthropocentric understanding of Being as "the greatest blasphemy imaginable against Being" (BW, 251). What Heidegger finds blasphemous about anthropocentric value-thinking is "the presumption of their givenness as either culturally determined preferences or norms rooted in the natural order of things. Because of its unquestioning nature, value-thinking can foster an attitude of either relativism or dogmatism. As such, the devotion to values reinforces biases that members of a culture uncritically accept" (Schalow 2001, 251; cf. Heidegger QCT, 153).

In Heidegger's diagnosis of the anthropocentric conception of values we come to see the ideal of absolute autonomy as fundamentally incoherent. What is called for is a critical reflection (*Besinnung*) on the self-evident presuppositions of our modern understanding of what it means to be human. It is Heidegger's belief that insight into what it means to be human is always available to us if we open ourselves up to an understanding of Being. Heidegger's view, when consistently worked out, orients our attention to the "openness of Being" (BW, 252), that is, the "world" of

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[183] Lee Braver, *Heidegger's Later Writings: A Reader's Guide* (London and New York: Continuum, 2009), 69.

Being-in-the-world as the dwelling-place and one's "home" (*Heimat*).[184] Understanding the Being of the totality of what-is originates not in the human will; rather, "a background of understanding arises in the course of our practices, and our practices are guided by that encompassing background. In the course of this clearing and disclosing, entities are discovered in their places in the whole" (Guignon 1983, 180). When enlightened and modern philosophers attempt to get a handle on things from a detached, dispassionate perspective, this background understanding of beings as a whole is taken for granted and forgotten. It is taken for granted as trustworthy and reliable in the way that we experience and expect the earth to support us while walking on a country path. What the anthropocentric fact-value distinction takes for granted and hence forgets is that dwelling is indispensible to understanding what beings *are*.

Heidegger's retrieval of a more original ethics stands the anthropocentric understanding of Being on its head. Since what a being is is determined by its place (or "region;" *Raum*) in the norms and conventions embodied in a web of social systems and structures, the fact-value distinction is parasitic on the understanding of what it is to be that it ordered by the *logos* of the historical *ethos*. What is given prior to Enlightenment reason is a background of understanding anchored in the ongoing current of historical dwelling, in ways of inhabiting one's home (being "homely" or *heimisch*). Our sense of what behavior is appropriate and inappropriate, of where things and people belong, of comfortable and uncomfortable places, of meaningful life-affirming goals, and of skillful and sloppy craftsmanship depends on dwelling in structures of belonging. And, as we have seen, our sense of belonging is rooted in the enduring historical meanings that go beyond the subject-centered limits and obligations of Enlightenment humanism. The meanings that we find (*Befindlichkeit*) in the depths of our "attunement to language and in history" (Guignon 1983, 180) are neither constructions of pure reason nor willful projections, but

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[184] See Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), 1-38.

are anchored in ongoing cultural interpretations of the historical *ethos*. What is important, in Heidegger's view, is that the Being of Dasein is circumscribed by its dwelling-place in the nexus of fundamental commitments and identify-conferring virtues of the shared *ethos*. In other words, the 'content' of our lives is always drawn from and ultimately dependent upon the range of possibilities embodied in the background of understanding anchored the historical origins of the human *ethos*.

If Heidegger's account of the openness of Being is correct, then the language of values is self-contradictory. What beings *are* is not of our own making. The importance and significance of things are not products of what we humans choose and project onto the world. What the anthropocentric view of Being calls 'values' are not values. Instead, "'culture,' 'art,' 'science,' 'human dignity,' 'world,' and 'God'" (Heidegger BW, 251) are ways of Being that show forth for us in light of the hidden "meaning and ground" (Heidegger BT, 59) of shared background practices. "Ground" (*Grund*) here does not refer to an absolute foundation of some sort; it is akin to *logos*, which "discloses a world in which features are located, which is also a locus of strong goods, of objects of the specifically human emotions, of human relations" (Taylor 2005, 448), but is not an entity itself and, therefore, cannot be grounded. What is primary, as we have seen, is not an aggregate of meaningless objects and neutral facts, but "is a historically unfolding 'clearing' or 'opening' which cannot be coherently set over against a reality distinct from that clearing" (Guignon 1983, 200). One consequence for the anthropocentric understanding of Being that follows from Heidegger's characterization of the openness of the Being of the totality of what-is is that humans can only be "masters" or "centers" of the world and creators of values by denying their place and participation in the openness of Being. However, to deny our place and participation in the holistic meaning contexts that make up the human *ethos* is to deny what

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makes it possible for things to show forth as meaning or counting in some way. For this reason, it does not make sense to claim that Being (as the totality of what-is) is a product of self-sufficient reason or a projection of the "value-positing will" (Heidegger QCT, 81). "Man is not the lord of beings. Man is the shepherd of beings" (Heidegger BW, 245). (We return to the topic of being shepherds below.)

To make this point a different way, "when the world of significance is understood as made up of contexts of internal relations, there is no way to distinguish the 'essence' of an entity—what it is in itself—from its actual 'existence' within the totality. But if the essence/existence distinction is collapsed," then the fact-value distinction, which has been used to prop up ontological individualism, crumbles as well (Guignon 1983, 179). If our understanding of Being is inseparable from the holistic, evolving web of meanings articulated by and circulated in our public world, then the grounds for our beliefs and practices must lie in the contexts of meaning that we always already find ourselves in. It is not possible, on this view, to make law-like generalizations about human nature. This is because our shared sense of reality is largely shaped by our enculturation into the traditions and customs of a historical *ethos*. What the anthropocentric view of Being posits as "nature" is in fact "second nature," i.e., a product of having been conditioned into the forms of life of a sociohistorical world. As Mark Wrathall puts it,

> Who I am is in part a function of what Heidegger calls 'disposedness' (*Befindlichkeit*). My disposedness is the rich texture of character traits, preferences, desires, skills, dispositions, etc., with which I (like everyone else) find myself saddled. Because I always already have a disposedness, I am inclined toward some possibilities and away from others. In addition, who I am is in part a function of my understanding of the world and my place in it.[185]

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[185] Mark A. Wrathall, "'Demanding Authenticity of Ourselves': Heidegger on Authenticity as an Extra-Moral Ideal," in *Horizons of Authenticity in Phenomenology, Existentialism, and Moral Psychology: Essays in Honor of Charles Guignon*, eds. Megan Altman and Hans Pedersen (2014), 347-68, 356.

It is by becoming initiated into the web of meanings circulating in our historical *ethos* that we can come to be humans with a defined identity and a sense of what is at stake in living in the world. It is the degree of regularity and reliability that our social structures possess that enables us to find life meaningful. The *ethos* that is constituted by our language of purposes and goals— the 'in-order-to' and 'for-the-sake-of-which' of social institutions such as "marriage, war, the remembrance of the lives of the dead, the carrying on of families, cities, and services through generations and so on" (MacIntyre 2007, 103)—is one in which beings are ontologically defined by their relations to other beings within the holistic context of our practical and normative life-world. Thus, it is Heidegger's view that, since the Being of beings is fully defined by its place in a web of meanings generated in the shared understanding of an ongoing cultural interpretation, the fact-value distinction is derivative from and parasitic on the more fundamental teleological mode of dwelling.

In short, our lives as Being-in-the-world always already unfold along the guidelines of the norms that govern the forms of life of our *ethos*. As a result, our "disposedness" or "contextualization" within the horizon of a historical *ethos* is indispensible to our self-interpretations and self-understandings of what it means to be human. Heidegger's characterization of Dasein emphasizes that Dasein's projection into possibilities is constrained by its disposedness. Dasein is not a free-floating subject that projects meaning onto an empty, arbitrary world of objects. Instead, its very ability to project forward into possibilities is a happening that participates in a "world-historical happening" (Heidegger BT, 41). This means that Dasein's "existence" (*Existenz*) is carrying forward the ideals, commitments, and obligations of the past by projecting itself into the historical possibilities of its *ethos*. As Heidegger says, "To understand history cannot mean anything else than to understand ourselves—not in the sense that

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we might establish various things about ourselves, but that we experience what we *ought* to be. To appropriate a past means to come to know oneself as indebted to that past" (PS, 7; see, also, BW, 231).

The Virtues of Heidegger's Post-Humanist Ethics

If the anthropocentric understanding of Being is obliterated, then the distinction between "is" (*Sein*) and "ought" (*Sollen*), which is used to prop it up, is dismantled as well. What follows from Heidegger's destruction of the anthropocentric assumptions underlying the is-ought distinction is a post-humanistic critique of the values esteemed by moral philosophy. Heidegger's original ethics puts forth an alternative, post-humanist understanding of Being that attempts to identify the executive virtues circulating within a historical *ethos* that enable Dasein to appropriate the tradition as its heritage. My argument is that Heidegger's original ethics attempts to describe the self-transformative experience of a life, as a specific constellation of social possibilities, that is structured by a sense of the "ought." I have suggested this throughout the course of my analyses; however, for the sake of focusing on the topics under discussion, I could only hint at the ways in which Heidegger's account of authentic Dasein envisions "an experience of what we *ought* to be" (Heidegger PS, 7). The task at hand is to demonstrate that Heidegger's fundamental ontology should be seen as an attempt to awaken Dasein to its ownmost ontological ought-to-be, where this awakening is understood as a radical transformation into a different concrete way of living. I hope to prove that, "without holding up to Dasein an ideal of existence with any special 'content', or forcing any such ideal upon it 'from outside'," what emerges out of Heidegger's account of our Being as world-historical individuals, which is an existentiell modification of the They, is nothing short of an ethical transformation (BT, 311). In Heidegger's account of Dasein's ethical self-transformation from a They-self to an

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authentic world-historical individual, we find a tremendous normative force from within Dasein that "*gives testimony*, from its ownmost potentiality-for-Being, as to a possible *authenticity* of its existence, so that it not only makes known that in an existentiell manner such authenticity is possible, but *demands* this of itself" (Heidegger BT, 311).

I shall confine the following account of Heidegger's original ethics to three features that demonstrate key differences between the anthropocentric ontology of mainstream moral philosophy and Heidegger's conception of ontological teleology. First, what follows from Heidegger's destruction of the is-ought distinction is that the boundaries of regional domains of mainstream ethics dissolve as well. Chapter four raised the issue concerning the fact that there are innumerable domains of ethics based on the historical ways of dividing beings up into different types, each with its own regional understanding of the human *ethos*. This situation is seen in the array of "applied ethics" courses in many colleges and universities, e.g., professional ethics, business ethics, biomedical ethics, environmental ethics, and so on. The challenge for mainstream moral philosophy is to try to provide general, universalizable principles that are applicable to any situated understanding of the human *ethos*. It attempts to provide overarching moral principles that can justify a person's behavior in such and such a situation. However, as we have seen, since ubiquitous rules or rationalizations of Being-in-the-world are derivative from and parasitic on Enlightenment individualism, which holds that the individual agent is radically free from inherited forms of life and is conceived of as a sovereign source of authority, it is not clear that there is a domain of ethics that the self can be subject to. Heidegger's refusal to accept the anthropocentric understanding of Being allows him to put forth an ethics that is based on an understanding of the ways in which particular domains of ethics are intermingled and interwoven within the horizon of understanding of the human *ethos*. In a recent essay on "'Demanding

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astutely argues that Heidegger's ethics

> includes all the distinctively human ways that we comport ourselves. So in
> addition to a concern with living in a morally upright way, it might also include
> living in a beautiful or aesthetically pleasing way, living in an environmentally
> responsible way ('saving the earth' [*das Retten der Erde*] in Heidegger's
> vernacular), living in a pious way, pursuing knowledge, and so on. Within ethics
> in this broadest sense, then, there are many different normative orders to which an
> agent can be subject (the aesthetic, the ecological, the religious, the
> epistemological domain, to name a few). (Wrathall 2014, 353)

Wrathall points out that each domain is circumscribed by "its own ideals and virtues. An

ideal presents the fullest or completest form of achievement within a normative domain. What

counts as good or bad, better or worse, is determined in relation to this ideal" (2014, 353-54).

The fully consummate cellist, for instance, is the ideal that the beginning cellist aspires to be.

Gradually the beginner forms a greater understanding of what being a consummate cellist

requires. As we saw in chapter two, the same developmental process holds for the various

domains of ethics such as being a doctor and being a thief. What it means to be a consummate

doctor is analogous to what it means to be a consummate thief: "what is addressed as complete is

that which has nothing left in the context of having a genuine being-possibility at one's disposal

in its [genuine] line of descent" (Heidegger BCAR, 56). The point I am trying to make is that an

ideal, for Heidegger, is a self-conducting or self-comporting way of being that "discloses what

the current situation requires in order to bring out the best in it" (Wrathall 2014, 354). A key to

understanding Heidegger's original ethics is to see that an ideal is not added or tacked onto a

domain of ethics; rather, it is the highest and most complete way of being that enables beings of

a particular type to dwell and flourish in their domain. Just as a good (or bad) cellist is one who

approximates (or fails to approximate) the consummate cellist, so too, a good or bad friend is one

who approximates or fails to approximate the ideal friend. The range of goodness and badness

for being human, then, must be understood in terms of the conditions that enable Dasein to dwell in and flourish in its normative domain or niche. The niche for Dasein, according to Heidegger, is the *ethos*. Since there are ideals for all the various domains of the human *ethos*, we could say that a good life for humans is that which approximates the ideal mode of dwelling in and inhabiting the possibilities of the *ethos*, where the good refers to the conditions that enable the development and growth of an ideal *ethos*. Understood as the overarching normative domain that unifies the various domains of ethics, the excellences (*aretē*) of dwelling and Being-at-home (*Heimlichkeit*) follow from proper dwelling as the conditions for that realization (or "essencing").

It seems clear that authentic Dasein *is* authentic dwelling in relation to the environment (*Umwelt*) Dasein is thrown into. We can see that Heidegger considers authenticity to be the most desirable way to live, and authenticity is a Being-possibility for members and inhabitants of an *ethos*, understood as a form of life with practical and normative dimensions. Being an inhabitant enables us to engage in conversation, learn through *paideia* (ethical education[186]), form good (and bad) habits, exercise our capacity for deliberation, engage in friendship, and so on. "One could say that belonging to a normative domain is a condition for the disclosure of the meaning of certain actions. And conversely all those actions whose significance is determined in relation to the virtues and ideals of the order belong in some sense to the domain" (Wrathall 2014, 355). If the normative domain of authenticity is "existence" (*Existenz*), which includes all the domains of ethics "in which we define ourselves as who we are" (Wrathall 2014, 356), it follows that authentic dwelling is a particular way of inhabiting possibilities. Since this is always part of a shared Being-with, Heidegger's account of authentic dwelling touches on terrain covered by

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[186] Ethical "education is less about promulgating rules than forming habits and shaping character." It "is about learning to discern the particular features of situations that call for this rule rather than that one" (Sandel 2009, 198).

moral philosophy, but without any rules or rationalizations.[187] Instead, Heidegger insists that

"[*f*]*or our being, characterized by particularity, no unique and absolute norm can be given*. It

depends on cultivating the" virtues (of character) that enable Dasein to be what it authentically is

(Heidegger BCAR, 126).

"But since it is underdetermined for each of us which possibilities to pursue, given the

possibilities the world affords us and our disposedness, who I am is in some sense always an

open question" (Wrathall 2014, 356). To own up to the possibilities that are definitive of who we

are involves simplifying our lives. This is what Heidegger refers to as the simplicity of Dasein's

fate (*Schicksals*). Human existence is marked by a finitude, which means that we cannot be

everything in life, not everything is possible, so we must make some fundamental decisions

about the possibilities that matter to us. In simplifying its life, Dasein chooses the choices that

are definitive of its life and, in so doing, gets rid of all the trivialities and incidentals that it tends

to get caught up in as a They-self (Heidegger BT, 435). In Heidegger's words, "The Self's

resoluteness against the inconstancy of distraction, is in itself a *steadiness which has been*

stretched along—the steadiness with which Dasein as fate 'incorporates' into its existence birth

and death and their 'between', and holds them as thus 'incorporated', so that in such constancy

Dasein is indeed in a moment of vision for what is world-historical in its current Situation" (BT,

442).

Since Dasein exists as a handing down of public possibilities that are part of a shared,

communal understanding of things, where that shared understanding embodies fundamental

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[187] "Heidegger insists that the normative domain of existence must itself provide the orientation toward authenticity. That means that the justification for regarding authenticity as an ideal cannot be grounded in the normative structures of other domains. Heidegger, for instance, consistently refuses to justify authenticity as an ideal by appealing to any moral or practical advantages that might flow from an authentic existence. He is not directly interested in the question whether authenticity contributes to the quality of our 'being with others.' This would make authenticity a merely hypothetical or contingent ideal. Heidegger wants instead […] to show that it is essential to us as humans" (Wrathall 2014, 360).

commitments that are characteristic of the historical *ethos*, the simplification of Dasein's fate is the culmination of a configuration of self-chosen possibilities that constitute its path (essence) of self-formation. Heidegger's characterization of Dasein as a happening or event makes it clear that if there is going to be any continuity, coherency, and connectedness in the various domains of ethics, it has to be taken up as a self-making and self-habituating task. This is because virtuous dispositions develop best only given repeated undertakings of virtuous acts. This is a feature of self-directedness that goes beyond training and practice. The ultimate *telos*, as we have seen, is to be self-constituting inhabitants of the shared *ethos*, which means that the *telos* of human life is a consistent and steady activity (*praxis*). Understood as a certain kind of life, the self-defining and character-building virtues of Dasein's Being are embodied through a constantly repeated renewal of one's fundamental commitments, which are always drawn from and directed toward the historical *ethos*. As we have seen, the basic structure of human existence that Heidegger lays out in its potentiality-for-Being as an authentic world-historical individual is based on self-constancy (*Selbständigkeit*). This is a personal feature of human existence that is "characterized by resoluteness, autonomy, individuality, responsibility, loyalty, and commitment" (Kellner 1984, 203). *Selbständigkeit* determines the meaningful context of agency in the sense that it is up to Dasein to impart coherency and constancy in its life by taking a meaningful stand in the concrete situation it finds itself in. This is neither an application of rules nor is it something that happens to Dasein; rather, it is an onerous personal undertaking, which is why Heidegger says, "the question of existence never gets straightened out except through existing itself" (BT, 33).

The second key difference between the anthropocentric ontology and Heidegger's ontological teleology is found in their understanding of the Being of ethical agency. In contrast to the anthropocentric conception of agency, Heidegger argues that commitment to values and

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courses of action does not equate to autonomy. For Heidegger self-defining commitments are always chosen on the basis of *thrown* commitments, that is, Dasein's thrown identity, which is experienced as always having been. In this sense, I do not make commitments so much as commitments make me. In Heidegger's view, there is a finite range of things that we care about, which make our lives worth living in the sense that if we did not honor these commitments, then we would not be the people we are. In a sense this collection of commitments can be characterized as a person's "motivational set"[188] that is definitive of his or her identity. As Harry Frankfurt argues, "A person who cares about something is, as it were, invested in it. He *identifies* himself with what he cares about in the sense that he makes himself vulnerable to losses and susceptible to benefits depending up whether his what he cares about is diminished or enhanced."[189] A person's motivational set is something that she is emotionally invested in such a way that if you were to try to make her bracket her motivational set, which is what the modern moral rule of impartiality tells people to do, what you would be left with is not a pure basis of moral choice, but rather a fragmented and fractured human being that is incapable of any action whatsoever. Kantians (and most mainstream moral philosophers) tell people to be impartial, to bracket or put out of play the commitments that are definitive of their identity (Being). However, according to Heidegger, this kind of "moral bracketing" does not reveal a pure basis of obligation, because the unencumbered self is not really a self at all.

On Heidegger's account of the call of conscience, there is a tremendous normative force from within the individual, which is not something impersonal and impartial like the categorical

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[188] Bernard Williams, *"Moral Luck": Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 102.

[189] Harry G. Frankfurt, "The Importance of What We Care About," in *The Importance of What We Care About: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 80-94, 83. For a comprehensive discussion on Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle's "two-tiered" view of human agency and motivation, see Charles Guignon, "Heidegger's Concept of Freedom, 1927-1930," in *Interpreting Heidegger: Critical Essays*, ed. by D. Dahlstrom (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 79-105.

imperative, moral law, or utilitarian principle (BT, 335-41). Rather, the indebtedness and the

obligation to take responsibility for one's own decisions and actions is no longer a matter of

being the moral law, but is a matter of having the normative force to accomplish whatever is at

stake in being human. That teleology has always been there and so, in transforming itself into a

person who embraces what it is to be human, Dasein brings to concrete realization what was

implicitly there all along. This is why Heidegger says, "Everyone who actually wills knows: *to

actually will is to will nothing else but the ought of one's existence*" (EHF, 196). This ethical

stance is going to arise and manifest, according to Heidegger, in the self-transformation from a

they-self to an authentic world-historical individual. In Heidegger's way of describing it, we

strive to be authentic world-historical individuals, but that does not mean that there is some kind

of new configuration of possibilities that we take up. It means that we are going to be living in a

different sort of way. We are going to take responsibility for the teleology that has always been

there all along. There might be no outward, publicly observable difference between the They and

an authentic person, but the resolute agent is making a different internal movement in her actions,

i.e. a movement towards self-constitution rather than merely an appeasement of some immediate,

first-order desire. Someone can still perform the same concrete actions that she performed as a

They-self after she has come into her own and is properly what she has always been all along in

the human essence; so in that sense, nothing externally visible about her will have changed.

However, everything will have changed internally—that whole internal movement will be

different.

This is not a criterionless self-transformation. As we have seen there are many "executive

virtues" that follow from Heidegger's account of authentic dwelling. Authentic dwelling

involves striving to be a responsible individual member of the *ethos*, wholeheartedly seizing and

embracing what it means to be human, focusing on meaningful goals for the whole of our lives, courage in the face of one's finitude, recognition of limits, "resoluteness against the inconstancy of distraction" (Heidegger BT, 442), self-constancy "in a moment of vision for what is world-historical in its current Situation" (Heidegger BT, 442), constantly repeated renewal of one's fundamental commitments through "the repetition of the heritage of possibilities" (Heidegger BT, 442) (which "does not abandon itself to that which is past, nor does it aim at progress" (Heidegger BT, 438)), freedom for "the struggle of loyally following in the footsteps of that which can be repeated" (Heidegger BT, 437), destiny, and so on. "The criterion for loyalty is *Selbständigkeit* […]. This criterion applies only to an authentic person for only the individual that has chosen authentic possibilities and constantly repeats its choice has achieved the 'steadiness' and steadfastness' of self-constancy. Seizing on a definite possibility and loyally standing by it refers to an activity of *commitment*" (Kellner 1984, 204). An activity of commitment (*praxis*) to something "outside" the self, something that one can hold as definitive of one's way of life. For Kierkegaard, for example, the highest form of life is the idea of an infinite passionate commitment to God. As a focal commitment, Kierkegaard's self-defining relation to God centers and simplifies his other concerns and solicitudes (e.g., he had to give up his engagement to Regina Olsen).

Whereas before the possibilities one drifted into were sort of accidental and provisional, in the movement from the They-self to the authentic self, the world-historical individual takes an open stance in making life-defining choices, which means that its cares, concerns, and solicitudes are organized and gathered together by its self-defining relation to the ought of its existence. This is not a rigid or inflexible stance. "As fact, resoluteness is freedom to *give up* some definite resolution, and to give it up in accordance with the demands of some possible Situation or other"

(Heidegger BT, 443). The "Situation" is not just a circumstance of some sort. It is a meaningful

context of agency that "has its foundations in resoluteness. […] [T]he Situation *is* only through

resoluteness and in it" (Heidegger BT, 346). As previously discussed, when taking ownership of

the direction of our lives, there is no concrete path that we ought to be following. There are paths,

which we ourselves do not create, that will define the significant possibilities or options that are

available to us and will also give us some sense of what kind of deliberation and criteria can be

operative in making choices. However, those criteria cannot be grounded in an absolute

foundation that assures us that it is the right way to live. Indeed, nothing is resolved by

deliberation, which is why Heidegger says, "[f]actically […] any taking action is necessarily

conscienceless" (BT, 334).

This is what we previously discussed as the nature of the "hermeneutic situation." It has

been made clear that there is no specific project or goal that essentially defines Dasein's Being

other than being future-directed. If Heidegger is correct that human agency is contextualized

without residue and "[o]ur purposive agency is always directed and underway" (Guignon 1983,

97), then the ultimate *telos* of dwelling, that is, the task of living for humans, is to recover,

appropriate, and repeat the ideals of a particular historical *ethos* in a consistent, steady, and

coherent way to move toward belongingness. Stated more precisely, the essence (*Wesen*) of

Being Dasein is the unfolding of having been enculturated into the forms of life of a particular

historical *ethos*; and, at the same time, that way of Being-in-the-world is possible because Dasein

is always already standing out toward the future trying to accomplish something for itself, which

is its existence (*Existenz*). Insofar as Dasein *is*, where existence is properly understood as

standing out toward an open range of possibilities disclosed by Being-thrown into the historical

unfolding of a world, it can never get behind or around its essence (*Wesen*).

That I find myself underway in living a life that is not a product of my own making; "that much I did not make goes toward making me whatever I shall be praised or blamed for being; that I must constantly choose among competing and apparently incommensurable goods […]; that an event that simply happens to me may, without my consent, alter my way of life; that it is equally problematic to entrust one's good to friends, lovers, or country and to try to have a good life without them" (Nussbaum 1986, 5). What is at stake in considerations of a well-lived life (*ethos*) is not the content of particular possibilities (i.e., social roles, character traits, dispositions, etc.), but are the virtues of a way of life that is contingent, vulnerable, and mortal. What is in question is not the content of actual pursuits and activities, but the proper (*eigen*) ways of Being for *us*, who are the participants and members of the communities and traditions that shape our Being. Considerations of this kind are not clarified by principles or codes of conduct that are fixed for all people. This is because what is in question is not what humans must be like in order to care about the moral law or choose among conflicting moral codes. Instead, Heidegger is concerned with the ontological conditions that enable us to share in significant action (*praxis*) and bear responsibility for the destiny of the community as a whole, as a meaningful context of agency that enables us to make meaningful choices and live worthwhile and fulfilling lives.

What is important to see is that Heidegger's rejection of the anthropocentric understanding of Being is a clear rejection of Kant's categorical imperative and any type of means-ends instrumental approach to understanding Being. Heidegger's exploration of the binding normative commitments and character ideals circulating in our historical *ethos* makes it clear that limits (finitude) and boundaries (*peras*) are built into our existence. The understandings of life circulating in and articulated by our *ethos* have a binding force because they enable us to be the finite, fragile, and vulnerable beings that we are. I think Heidegger's argument is that

meaningful choices come from giving up and letting go of unchosen possibilities. The closing down of possibilities imparts the normative force to fully commit to and embrace our own consummate way of dwelling and Being-at-home (*Heimlichkeit*). In the end, all we have are the character ideals and excellences handed down in the human essence: all we *are* are the contingent necessities that have come before in our lives that make us who we are.

The third key difference between the anthropocentric ontology and Heidegger's ontological teleology lies in their understanding of Dasein's relation to Being. We have already seen that the modern scientific worldview abandons premodern teleology and replaces it with a conception of reality as an aggregate of present-at-hand objects existing independent of human minds and social practices. This conception of Being as the enduring presence of intrinsically valueless, contextless, and meaningless objects makes it impossible to find shared standards and meanings for envisioning "higher" or "better" ways of life beyond the mundane ways of coping and getting by. Without a cosmic order to define guidelines and boundaries for the proper development of things, Enlightenment modernity has a difficult time responding to "the most fundamental of all requests that have been made of philosophy."[190] That is, "a request for an account of the 'good life'; an account that is grounded not in human subjectivity, not in taste, intuition or custom, but in, rather, reflective insight into the nature of reality itself. Put into Hume's language, the request is for a fundamental 'ought' that is as securely anchored in humanity-independent reality as is any 'is,' an 'ought' that we simply *discover*, and in no sense *make* […]" (Young 2009, 91). Without an ontological bedrock that connects the "is" and the "ought," it is not possible to envision possibilities for a worthwhile life. Heidegger's rejection of the is-ought impasse and his alternative ontological teleology resolves modernity's pseudo-

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[190] Julian Young, *Heidegger's Later Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 91.

problem by undermining the idea that Being is without meaning and measure. His argument is that Being makes a claim on *us*. Being "is *ours*, as the destiny of our community."[191]

What is important to see in Heidegger's original ethics is that his conception of dwelling dissolves the modern paradoxical barriers imposed on human existence by the is-ought distinction and makes us participants in the ongoing unfolding of dwelling in and building of the historical *ethos*. As members of a viable, world-historical *ethos*, what ought to be is available to us if we transform our lives and remain open to the "calling" or "sending" (*Geschick*) of the world-historical Situation. I think Heidegger has something like this in mind when he says,

> "Man is not the lord of beings. Man is the shepherd of Being. Man loses nothing in this 'less'; rather, he gains in that he attains the truth of Being. He gains the essential poverty of the shepherd, whose dignity consists in being called by Being itself into the preservation of Being's truth. The call comes as the throw from which the thrownness of Da-sein derives. In his essential unfolding within the history of Being, […] [m]an is the neighbor of Being" (Heidegger BW, 245).

In this passage I think Heidegger is connecting *ethos* to "abiding" and "dwelling" (and "homecoming") as a habitus or form of life that preserves, cares for, and nurtures the truths of a shared destiny (*Geschick*). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger discusses the "ought" of dwelling as the loyalty and reverence of heroes and heroines fatefully carrying forward the ideals of a "heritage" and "destiny." "That destiny, what a people is sent to be, and the fate ('the authentic historicity') of Dasein are inseparable."[192] The authentic possibilities of Dasein's heritage are the "sole authority" that provide the ultimate "content" for a critical assessment and evaluation of the contemporary embodiments of the normative ideals that are part of our Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian heritage. In the "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger conveys the same idea, but in quasi-religious language that elevates Dasein to the status of a shepherd and neighbor of Being. I think

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[191] Richard Polt, *The Emergency of Being: On Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 82.

[192] Daniel O. Dahlstrom, "Existential Socialization," in *Horizons of Authenticity in Phenomenology, Existentialism, and Moral Psychology: Essays in Honor of Charles Guignon* (2014), 329-46, 343.

his discussion of the "heroes" of Dasein's destiny parallels his characterization of Dasein as the shepherd of Being.

Specifically, it seems to me that *Being and Time*'s account of the possibilities open to participants of a historically unfolding heritage corresponds to the "Letter's" suggestion that the even highest, "holy" (*Heilig*; "healing") things inhabit the humblest, lowliest places (the earth). "*Kai entautha*, 'even here,' at the stove, in that ordinary place where every thing and every condition, each deed and thought is intimate and commonplace, that is familiar [*geheuer*], 'even here' in the sphere of the familiar, *einai theous*, it is the case that 'the gods come to presence'" (Heidegger BW, 258). The highest, holiest modes of dwelling are not found in maxims and principles of moral philosophy. Rather, they are embodied in the actions and sayings of the shepherds of Being. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., for example, calls a people back to their shared destiny when he speaks out of a tradition and towards a heritage. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "understood the biblical 'heritage' of America, and followed in the footsteps of early American pastors in incorporating biblical cadences and terminology into his speeches in order to persuade the American public that racism is a betrayal of America's ideals – its 'heritage' and 'destiny'."[193] To be an effective shepherd of Being, on Heidegger's view, is to belong to, be rooted in, and bear responsibility in the shared struggle (*Kampf*) of a "generation"[194] for the "fateful destiny" of Being (BT, 436). As Heidegger (1923-24) says, "We ourselves *are* history

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[193] Charles Guignon, "Becoming a Person: Hermeneutic Phenomenology's Contribution," eds. Mark Bickhard and Jack Martin, in *The New Psychology of Personhood, Special Issue of New Ideas in Psychology* 30, no. 1 (2011): 97-106, 105.

[194] Dahlstrom points out, "Heidegger does not spell out what he means by 'generation' in this context. Instead he simply refers to Dilthey's concept of generation, […]. It designates contemporaries within a time-span (*Zeitraum*) of approximately 30 years, the typical time from birth to the onset of a new generation. […] While the extent to which Heidegger means to incorporate [the] details of Dilthey's account of generation is unclear, he plainly conceives Dasein to be authentically bound up with others in ways that are determined by its being of a generation. Its authenticity consists in retrieving those possibilities that it is already and, 'thereby in being in the moment for 'its time''—the time of its generation (Heidegger SZ, 385)" (Dahlstrom 2014, 343). Also see Wilhelm Dilthey, *Die geistige Welt: Einleitung in die Philosophie des Lebens, Gesammelte Schriften* (Band V. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1957).

and therefore bear the responsibility for how we engage in it, and thus come to terms with ourselves."[195]

Critical Assessment of Heidegger's Ethics

Recall that the overarching considerations of ethics broadly construed are about the development of character and the realization of the good life. Morality, on the other hand, is narrowly focused on rights and duties that are supposed to justify what one ought to do in such and such a situation. On my reading of Heidegger's original ethics, there is an implicit distinction between morality (*Moralität*) and ethics in its relation to *ethos*. Insofar as Heidegger's ethics attempts to put forth a form of life that is structured by a sense of the "ought," he is doing something quite different from modern moral philosophy. Whereas modern moral theory is concerned with providing impartial, value-free principles and guidelines for individual behavior in a way that is justified, Heidegger is focused on identifying the ontological conditions for the possibility of transforming *how* one lives. Heidegger does not examine the grounds or justifications for regarding certain actions as right (or wrong). He is not looking for principles to guide actions (and omissions). Then it seems to be a mistake to think that Heidegger does any of the work that mainstream ethicists want. Heidegger's original ethics is about living a good life and being a good person. This is in contrast to questions about doing the right thing, i.e., responsibilities, rights, and obligations, which are the concerns of moral philosophy (also called normative ethics). On Heidegger's original ethics, we are left undecided about "doing right." On the other hand, Heidegger's account of authentic dwelling puts forth a list of executive virtues that can motivate us to constantly take over and own up to our potentiality-for-Being world-historical individuals. Heidegger shows us that a flourishing life, characterized by

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[195] Quoted in Theodore Kisiel, "Situating Rhetorical Politics in Heidegger's Protopractical Ontology 1923-25: The French Occupy the Ruhr," in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 8, no. 2 (2000): 185–208, 190.

meaningful goals and life-affirming virtues, can be articulated as a *telos* for us even given the breakdown of the "grand narratives" of the past. Heidegger's original ethics picks up the stick from the other end, and puts the burden of proof on those who think there is something important about moral theory in the modern sense, something more than what Heidegger (and Aristotle) give us.

It is clear that Heidegger's ethics does not offer prescriptions that tell us how to act, and authentic dwelling cannot serve as the ultimate authority and justification for the correct choice of a way of life. Indeed, insofar as Heidegger's ethics refuses to justify general claims about right and wrong, rules to follow and not follow, or reasons to obey rules, I would say that Heidegger's ethics is anti-ethics. This does not, however, entail the rejection of the dialogical, practical, and normative dimensions of the human *ethos* as such. It only indicates the rejection of the modern advocacy for an absolute ethics, for universal values imposed on Dasein by others. As argued in chapter two, "the ethical systems propounded by Enlightenment philosophers," Kant withstanding, "had little to say of the notion of responsibility, or the dependent notions of duty and obligation. They rather favored varies forms of utilitarianism, an ethic which seems to make morality reducible to simple calculations based on empirical data."[196] Kant's rationalism also accepts without question the presuppositions of the mechanistic and objectified worldview of Enlightenment science, however, his ethical system attempts to apply the same methodological assumptions about *a priori* laws of nature to discover the *a priori* laws of human moral consciousness. The distinctive mark of Kant's justification of morality and the moral worth of actions, with its emphasis on reason, is its subsequent neglect (and denial) of the affective commitments, cares, concerns, and solicitudes of the human situation that matter to the existing

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[196] Solomon, Robert C., *From Rationalism to Existentialism: The Existentialists and their Nineteenth-Century Backgrounds* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1972), 13.

individual. What Heidegger rejects and dismantles is the enduring philosophical quest for a

neutral, unprejudiced, and detached standpoint of objectivity combined with the assumption that

reason is the supreme human faculty that will give us access to timeless moral absolutes and that

ethics ought to be based on a rational explanation of human behavior. The Enlightenment

paradigm of science, according to Heidegger, diminishes the affective dimensions of the human

situation that force us to confront our existence and accept responsibility for the actions and

choices that have made us what we are. The anxious awareness that there are no guarantees in

life brings us face-to-face with the fragility, vulnerability, and contingency of our existence. This

kind of experience opens up an enriched understanding of what life is all about. It is not a matter

of making the right choice, obeying rules, or following universal principles that dictate how we

ought to act (or not act). Rather, it is a matter of answerability. As authentic, Dasein is

answerable for and to the human *ethos*.

What is the upshot of Heidegger's anti-ethical ethics? In particular, since Heidegger is

not doing what modern ethicists do, why should modern ethicists read Heidegger? I do think that

Heidegger's anti-ethical ethics suggests that the *ethos* is a human universal, but to say that *this*

ethos is binding and normative for *us* is not to claim that such sociohistorical norms and practices

carry or hold universal validity. Rather, the implication is that human existence as such (Dasein)

is always already underway within the tradition it finds itself in. It is by virtue of speaking a

language, embodying tacit beliefs about appropriate and inappropriate behavior, and being

attuned to an entire web of meaning relations given in a shared background understanding that

we have a sense of how everything hangs together and what is at stake in living this life in this

world (that is, leading a life). Recognizing that our choices and commitments are always already

guided and mediated by the historical context means that we are always limited and constrained

by the world-historical *ethos* that we find ourselves in. When Heidegger says, "Dasein 'is' its

past in the way of *its* own Being" (BT, 41), he means that Dasein appropriates and is

appropriated by the commitments and projects of the historical *ethos*. Any attempt to understand

and address the question of human existence, then, must recognize that dwelling in and

inhabiting tacit beliefs and affective dispositions of the *ethos* is basic for being human. In short,

the *ethos* is essential to and constitutive of what it means to be Dasein.

Furthermore, on Heidegger's account, it is clear that there are distinctions between

correlates of virtues that are widely shared and those that are more regional or local to a domain

(as Wrathall says). But what are they and how do we pick them out? Allow me to explain. Most

commentators agree that Aristotle's list of virtues is androcentric, potentially excluding women

and slaves from realizing the good life. Furthermore, while such virtues as magnanimity and

pride are considered noble and praiseworthy character traits within the Greco-Roman *ethos*,

these traits are dishonorable in the Judeo-Christian *ethos* where acts of *caritas*, love, mercy, and

compassion are regarded as genuine communal practices. It is generally agreed that compassion

is one of the highest virtues that Aristotle could never have acknowledged. This is not simply a

difference between historical epochs; that is to say, it is not a pre-modern/modern issue. Mencius,

who was centuries before Aristotle, acknowledges compassion as the highest virtue. Another bias,

then, seems to be "Western." Compassion does not stand out as honorable and noble virtues in a

capitalist society and bourgeois morality. However, there seems to be executive virtues (i.e.,

what Tocqueville calls "habits of the hearts") that are transcultural or similar from culture to

culture and are essential for the possibility of regional virtues. The question, then, is how do we

separate executive virtues from local or regional virtues? And how might a Heideggerian deal

with the problem that someone from an *ethos* might be doing evil? What prevents us from taking up violent and oppressive traditions?

To answer these pressing questions it is necessary to identify the ontological conditions that make possible a flourishing *ethos*, and this is precisely where Heidegger's anti-ethical ethics can be seen as relevant for modern ethicists. I have argued that Heidegger's ontological teleology demonstrates that there is a proper path of development for humankind. Accordingly, there are essential characteristics or structures of human existence as such that are fundamental, and those point to ideal virtues, which might be universal (or perhaps *ought to be* universal). Historicity entails an ideal of steadfastness, constancy, steadiness, continuity, coherence, and so on. Belongingness (*Zughöerigkeit*) entails indebtedness (*Schuld*), self-sacrifice, personal responsibility, integrity, and motivation. Releasement or letting-go (*Gelassenheit*) entails mindful (*Bessinung*), stress-free, acceptant, reliant, and so on. These are widely accepted ideal virtues that can be seen among Native Americans, African Americans, Asians, Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Such executive virtues open up a way of dwelling that recovers and fosters the original meaning of the Old High German word "building" ("*bauen*"). This is why Heidegger later points out the etymological connections between "dwelling" ("*buan*") and "building" ("*bauen*"), noting that *bauen* "*also means*…to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for" (BW, 325). To dwell is to build and historicity, belongingness, and releasement are the ideal, executive virtues that make possible the building of and dwelling in a flourishing human *ethos*.

To sum up, my account of Heidegger's ethics argues that every virtue is disclosed by reality. Courage/cowardice, for instance, arise in response to the threatening. To see the threatening is to be clear-sighted, and this indicates that lucidity is a condition for the possibility of courage. The same holds for such claims as "strangling kittens is bad" and "abortion is a

woman's decision": these just follow from what kittens and women are. The problem is that since the existentiell is so pervaded by confusions and deceptions of everydayness, it can only provide "formal indications" which then have to be worked out. What allows us to sort out the ghastly perversions of the tradition we find ourselves underway in? The answer is that one cannot uncritically accept and appropriate traditions in which one finds oneself. Philosophers need to articulate and clarify the shared background understanding that binds together participants of a genuine community, and this is the unfinished and incomplete thrown project of being human.

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