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# The concept of action and responsibility in Heidegger's early thought

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The Concept of Action and Responsibility in Heidegger's Early Thought

by

Christian Hans Pedersen

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
PREFACE	v
Dissertation Introduction	1
Chapter 1. Developing a Heideggerian Conception of Action	15
Heidegger's Interpretation of the Aristotelian Understanding of Human Life in <i>Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy</i>	16
Tracing Heidegger's Development of His Conception of Action in His Thought Leading up to <i>Being and Time</i>	22
The Culmination of Heidegger's Early Understanding of Agency in <i>Being and Time</i>	25
Description of Our Everyday Activity Found in Heidegger's Account of Worldhood	26
Disposition ( <i>Befindlichkeit</i> )	29
Understanding ( <i>Verstehen</i> )	34
The Interdependence of Disposition and Understanding and the Resulting Conception of Action	38
Potential Problem Cases for this Conception of Action	42
Non-Productive Activity	42
Actions that Involve Explicit Deliberation	44
Having Different Self-understandings that Give Rise to Allowing Incompatible Things to Matter to Us	49
Actions that Do Not Seem to Involve Movement	53
Conclusion	55
Chapter 2. Understanding the Distinction between Authentic and Inauthentic Action	56
The First Distinction between Authentic and Inauthentic Action: Responsibility	57
The Second Distinction between Authentic and Inauthentic Action: Self- Knowledge	63
Conclusion	73

Chapter 3. Inauthentic Action	75
The Movement of Inauthentic Action—Falling	76
The Three General Types of Inauthentic Action	82
Productive Activity	83
Interaction with Other People	85
Non-Goal-Directed Action	88
Conclusion	96
Chapter 4. The Possibility of Being Responsible for Our Actions	97
Developing a Heideggerian Version of Compatibilism	100
Achieving Responsibility in the Strong Sense in Authentic Action	114
Chapter 5. Becoming Responsible in the Strong Sense—Revealing Our Being in Authentic Action	125
Revealing the Structure of Our Being in Authentic Being-Towards- Death	128
Conscience and Resoluteness	141
Heidegger’s Discussion of Phrōnesis in the <i>Plato’s Sophist</i> Lectures	143
Conscience and Resoluteness in Being and Time	155
Summary of the Preceding Analysis of Conscience and Resoluteness	171
The Connection between Conscience, Resoluteness and Death	172
Conclusion	176
Dissertation Conclusion	179
BIBLIOGRAPHY	188
About the Author	End Page

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

I employ the following abbreviations for the following frequently cited works.

### Abbreviations of Aristotle's works

NE            *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1985).

### Abbreviations of Kant's works

CPR           *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: MacMillan, 1965).

### Abbreviations of Heidegger's works

BCAP           *Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008).

BPP           *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988).

BT            *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

EHF           *The Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Ted Sadler (New York: Continuum, 2005).

HCT           *History of the Concept of Time*, trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992).

PIA           *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Initiation into Phenomenological Research*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001).

PS            *Plato's Sophist*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Andre Schuwer (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997).

# The Concept of Action and Responsibility in Heidegger's Early Thought

Christian Hans Pedersen

## ABSTRACT

In his early thought (which for our purposes will be considered to be roughly the time period from his first post World War I lecture course in 1919 to the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927), Heidegger offers a rich description of our practical engagement with the world. The aim of this project is to develop a Heideggerian conception of action from these early, concrete descriptions of the practical dimension of human life. The central feature of this Heideggerian conception of action is that action is understood as involving interdependent aspects of passivity and activity (or receptivity and spontaneity, in a more Kantian formulation). Considered in its entirety, my dissertation provides what I take to be a fruitful interpretation of Heidegger's early thought from the standpoint of his understanding of action. It also provides the provisional basis and framework for the further development of a general conception of human agency that can be extended beyond Heidegger's thought.

## PREFACE

I should perhaps preface the main body of this work with a short clarification of the title, *The Concept of Action and Responsibility in Heidegger's Early Thought*. This title might justifiably lead the reader to expect an entirely historical work whose aim is the interpretation and explication what Heidegger says about action and responsibility in his early thought. My aim here is slightly different.

For centuries philosophers have been struggling with the problem of free will. The problem, generally speaking, is that we typically hold two seemingly incompatible beliefs about ourselves and the structure of nature as such. On the one hand, we believe that we, as individuals have a significant degree of control over our actions and that our actions for the most part are of our own making and not the product of external, environmental influences. On the other hand, we tend to see the whole of nature as governed by strict causal laws, which determine all actions and events that take place. The sort of determinism assumed to be a threat to free will is often taken to be a naturalistic determinism. That is, the worry is that our actions as human beings are determined by natural laws at the physiological level, e.g. our genetic code makes us determined to act the way we do. Alternatively, one could see a threat to our free will posed by a sort of social determinism. The worry in this case is that our actions are

completely determined by various social forces, e.g. the way we were raised, the norms and expectations of our society, etc.

In Heidegger's early thought, we find an analysis and description of human agency that focuses on the fundamental role that our social and historical contextualization plays in our actions. Because of this, Heidegger's early thoughts on what it means to be human agent also potentially generate a worry about social determinism. Heidegger himself seems to be aware of this potential problem and seeks to develop a solution that would allow us still to recognize the influence that social factors have in our actions, but also open up the possibility that despite this influence, our actions can still be free in some meaningful way. The aim of this project is to use Heidegger's analysis of action to develop a coherent and plausible conception of action that might help us to resolve the problem of free will, at least when this problem is generated by the worry about social determinism. This way of approaching Heidegger's thought can be seen as fruitful in two ways. First of all, this approach is not found in the vast amount of secondary literature devoted to Heidegger's thought, so I hope that my project provides something of fresh way of interpreting Heidegger. Secondly, I hope to show that the conception of action we find in Heidegger's early thought can be useful when trying to address the larger problem of freedom and social determinism broadly considered.

I would also like to take the time here to acknowledge some of those people whose assistance has been invaluable over the course of my work on this project. The comments, questions and suggestions from the members of my dissertation committee (Rebecca Kukla, Ofelia Schutte, Stephen Turner and Joanne Waugh) have been

immensely valuable in forcing me to clarify and refine my claims and arguments. It is to my advisor, Charles Guignon, that I owe whatever clarity of thought and ability to write with lucidity that I possess. Over the years he has spent enormous amounts of time and energy editing, correcting and questioning my work in order to get me to say things as clearly and straightforwardly as possible. My general approach to doing philosophy will always be grounded in his tutelage. Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Faye, for her unflagging support through the years in which I have worked on this project and for her selfless assistance with the formatting and editing of the final document.

## DISSERTATION INTRODUCTION

Heidegger's rich description of our practical engagement with the world in his early thought (which for our purposes will be considered to be roughly the time period from his first post World War I lecture course in 1919 to the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927) has drawn significant attention from scholars over the years. As is often the case with the thought of complicated thinkers, there has been considerable difference of opinion among scholars over Heidegger's understanding of the practical and the practical implications of Heidegger's philosophy. These scholarly interpretations have ranged from more or less positive assessments and appropriations of Heidegger's thought to fairly strong condemnations of Heidegger's practical philosophy based on perceived connections to Nazism. The current project is an attempt to once again assess the role of the practical in Heidegger's early thought and to determine what aspects of Heidegger's account of our practical activity are worth being appropriated and carried forward.

The focus here will specifically be the conception of action that can be gleaned from Heidegger's early thought. While there has been much written dealing with various aspects of Heidegger's practical philosophy, there has been little explicit treatment of Heidegger's conception of action. The one substantial work on Heidegger's conception of action, Reiner Schürmann's *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to*

*Anarchy*<sup>1</sup>, focuses primarily on Heidegger's later works, treating Heidegger's early descriptions of our practical being as still being overly loaded with the metaphysical and existentialist concepts that the later Heidegger eschews.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Reiner Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*, Christine-Marie Gros, trans. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> This might lead one to ask the question of whether I should be focusing on Heidegger's early thought when attempting to develop a Heideggerian conception of action. Here I will attempt to give a brief justification for my preference for the thought of the early Heidegger over that of the later Heidegger, at least as far as developing a plausible theory of action is concerned. The conception of action that we find in the later Heidegger, at least on Schürmann's interpretation, is different from the conception of action we find in the early Heidegger in two main ways. One of these main aspects of the early Heidegger's account of action that Schürmann denies is carried over to that of the later Heidegger is the focus on the individual agent (cf. *Heidegger on Being and Acting*, 239-240). Schürmann views the earlier account of authentic action as an existentialist side-path in Heidegger's thinking that quickly drops out and is replaced by a focus on action as a social, political and/or historical phenomenon.

The other main aspect of the early Heidegger's account of action that Schürmann thinks the later Heidegger actively argues against is the teleological nature of action as conceived by the early Heidegger (cf. *Heidegger on Being and Acting*, 254-260). For Schürmann one of the most important projects for the later Heidegger is undermining what he sees as the pervasive influence of the technological paradigm on our understanding of being. This means that Heidegger must abandon and critique his own earlier teleological understanding of action because it is derived, like all of Western metaphysics according to the later Heidegger, from the Greek understanding of *techne*. It is the unfolding of this conception of *techne* that leads to the complete domination of the technological understanding of being. The activity associated with *techne* is *poiesis*, or making. The basic idea here is that in *poiesis* the craftsman has an idea of what she wants to produce and then transforms the raw material so that it corresponds with the initial idea and thus reaches its completion, or reaches its end (*telos*). It is the goal or *telos* of the project of production that guides it throughout, so *poiesis* is said to be teleological. As we will see, it is evident that at least the early Heidegger's account of inauthentic action, in which our activity is guided by the projects and goals which we have, very much fits into this *poietic* framework. Schürmann, along with the later Heidegger, advocates the cultivation of a certain "goallessness" in action. We undermine the technological understanding of being by acting without goals because we then allow the beings which appear in our engagement with the world to appear in a way other than that of something to be used in order to accomplish some end.

I would argue that the early Heidegger's account of action is more helpful in making sense of human agency than that of the later Heidegger. The main reason for this is that the two elements that the later account of action is concerned with eliminating, a notion of individual action and a teleological understanding of action, seem to be necessary to making sense of our actions. Even if a total focus on the individual agent may be a distortion, there does seem to be a non-eliminable sense of the individual agent in most concrete actions. Completely rejecting this element of action seems to run counter to the phenomenological tendency that gives the early Heidegger's thought its grounding in our lived experience. The same can be said for the rejection of the teleological understanding of action. It also is extremely difficult to imagine completely goalless action taking place on a regular basis. Almost all of our actions are intelligible because they take place within a context of significance that provides goals worthy of pursuing. Finally, it seems that Schürmann and the later Heidegger make goalless action itself a goal, or at least as a means by which the technological understanding of being can be undermined, thereby failing to really escape the teleological understanding of action.

When it comes to giving an account of Heidegger's early understanding of action, there have been two main approaches. As part of his more general interpretation of Heidegger's thought, Hubert Dreyfus maintains that for Heidegger most of our everyday actions are to be understood as skillful coping with our environment.<sup>3</sup> The claim in Dreyfus's account of skillful coping is that in traditional theories of action, far too much emphasis is placed on the role of explicit mental representations. Dreyfus argues, using Heidegger's analysis of everyday activities in *Being and Time*, that much of our everyday behavior takes place without any explicit mental states associated with it at all. For example, when opening a door or driving a car, we usually do not form explicit mental representations that guide our actions. I do not always have to think to myself something like "Turn the wheel now" to make a turn while driving. Dreyfus thinks proper phenomenological analysis (like that provided by Heidegger) of many of our everyday actions will reveal explicit mental representations only accompany our actions when there is some sort of breakdown in the normally smooth flow of our activities. When, for instance, I try to open a door and find myself unable to do so, I then would have to engage in some sort of explicit deliberation about what I should do.

Drawing on Heidegger's conception of *das Man*, or the One as Dreyfus translates it, Dreyfus adds to his conception of skillful coping by incorporating Heidegger's analysis of the way in which and the extent to which our absorption in the social practices of our time guides our everyday actions. According to Dreyfus, we can understand many

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<sup>3</sup> Dreyfus gives this account of Heidegger's understanding of action in many different articles and books. Dreyfus connects his conception of skillful coping most directly to Heidegger's thought in his *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

of our more sophisticated actions, e.g. giving a lecture or attending a funeral, as ways in which we enact various social roles and ways of understanding ourselves. For example, I give lectures several times a week because I understand myself, at least to some extent, as an instructor at a university. Again, Dreyfus argues that there are usually no explicit mental states accompanying these everyday sorts of actions. These self-understandings are largely tacit and guide our actions without any explicit reflection on our part.

There are two ways in which for Dreyfus's Heideggerian conception of action is problematic. There are several philosophical criticisms that can be brought against Dreyfus's conception of action considered in its own right, and there are questions that can be raised about the adequacy of Dreyfus's account as an interpretation of Heidegger. Let us begin by considering the general philosophical objections. First of all, one might find Dreyfus's claim that explicit mental states accompany our actions only in the case of some breakdown to be somewhat implausible.<sup>4</sup> Even if Dreyfus is right in maintaining that most traditional theories of action are too focused on the role of mental states in our actions, his claim that mental states explicitly accompany actions only in cases of breakdown seems to swing too far in the other direction. There are plenty of examples of everyday actions that involve explicit mental representations that cannot be considered breakdown scenarios. Consider again the example of giving a lecture and the preparation that goes into that. While I may more or less automatically get to work on writing my

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<sup>4</sup> This problem for Dreyfus's account of skillful coping is pointed out in essays by John Searle in his "The Limits of Phenomenology" in *Heidegger, Coping, and Cognitive Science*, eds. Mark Wrathall and Jeff Malpas, 71-92 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000) and Theodore Schatzki in his "Coping with Others with Folk Psychology" in *Heidegger, Coping, and Cognitive Science*, eds. Mark Wrathall and Jeff Malpas, 29-52 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

lecture when I arrive in my office, it is often the case that in the course of writing my lecture I explicitly remind myself to mention a certain example or allow time for class discussion. This sort of explicit reflection does not appear to be the product of a breakdown in the process of preparing my lecture (as my computer crashing would be). Rather, this sort of explicit reflection seems to be an integral part of the action of writing the lecture itself.

The other philosophical problem with Dreyfus's understanding of action as skillful coping is that by de-emphasizing the role of mental states in action, Dreyfus has removed one of the main ways of being able to understand what it means to be responsible for our actions or to have ownership of our actions. When we say someone is acting, we typically seem to mean that she is doing something or bringing something about as opposed to having something happen to her. As Harry Frankfurt puts it, the "problem of action is to explicate the contrast between what an agent does and what merely happens to him, or between bodily movements that he makes and those that occur without his making them."<sup>5</sup> When we call something an action, we usually seem to mean that the agent has some control over what she is doing. Actions are then contrasted with mere behavior or mere bodily movement, with the idea being that someone who is brainwashed can still be doing things and moving about, but we would not want to say she is actually performing actions. One of the main traditional ways of making sense of something being an action as opposed to mere bodily movement, i.e. making sense of

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<sup>5</sup> Harry Frankfurt, "The Problem of Action" in *The Philosophy of Action*, ed. Alfred Mele, 42 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

having responsibility for or ownership of our actions, is to focus on the role of mental states in bringing about the movement in question. For example, we would say that someone who has an intention to go swimming and then jumps into the pool is performing an action in the proper sense, while someone who is pushed into the pool is not. By maintaining that mental representations are not operative in this way when we act (except in breakdown situations), Dreyfus would seem to be obligated to give an alternate account of how we can be responsible for our actions or even how our actions can be counted as actions. If he does not provide such an account, it seems that his understanding of action as skillful coping ultimately conceives of human action as primarily being reduced to the non-reflective living-out of socially prescribed norms and habits, with explicit reflection on our actions emerging only in rare instances, leaving no way to ascribe ownership of actions to individual agents. While I do not endorse a return to the focus on accompanying mental states when ascribing ownership of an action, I do think that Dreyfus's conception of action fails to give a plausible alternative account of how we can be responsible for our actions.

The philosophical problems for Dreyfus's conception of action are in fact connected with the interpretive problems for his account. Dreyfus is clear that initially his interpretation of Heidegger is based primarily on Heidegger's analysis of everyday existence in Division I of *Being and Time* and that he avoids substantial discussion of Division II of *Being and Time* because he considers it to be "much less carefully worked

out” and “to have some errors so serious as to block any consistent reading”.<sup>6</sup> It is in Division II of *Being and Time* (among other places as we will see) that Heidegger tries to provide a solution to the way in which the structure of our everyday actions seems to leave no room for responsibility at the individual level. To Dreyfus’s credit, he appends a section to his *Being-in-the-World* that addresses Division II of *Being and Time*, but rather quickly abandons the Kierkegaardian interpretation he puts forward there. Dreyfus later attempts to interpret Division II of *Being and Time* as providing an account of expert skillful coping, in which the need for mental representations of intentions and guidelines for action has completely disappeared, replaced by an intuitive sense of the exact action called for by the given situation.<sup>7</sup> This interpretation of Division II in terms of expert action does not solve the problems for Dreyfus’s account—if anything, it exacerbates them as it further marginalizes the role of mental states in our actions while still not providing an alternative way of making sense of the individual ownership of actions.

The second main way of interpreting Heidegger’s early thought on action is the decisionist interpretation. According to this reading, the sort of non-reflective, everyday activity that is the central focus of Dreyfus’s conception of action as skillful coping is really only half of the story. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger clearly states that the first division of the work, which is the basis of Dreyfus’s interpretation, is concerned with inauthentic existence, while the second division of the work is concerned with what

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<sup>6</sup> Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, viii.

<sup>7</sup> See Dreyfus’s “What Could Be More Intelligible Than Everyday Intelligibility? Reinterpreting Division I of *Being and Time* in the Light of Division II,” *Bulletin of Science, Technology and Society* 24, no. 3 (2004): 265-274.

Heidegger calls authentic existence. On the decisionist reading of *Being and Time*, this distinction between inauthentic existence and authentic existence runs roughly as follows. When existing inauthentically, our actions are largely the product of non-reflective conformity to social norms, so in a sense Dreyfus's account of Heidegger's understanding of action is correct as far as it goes. However, according to the decisionist interpretation, when existing authentically, we come to realize that the norms and rules that guide our everyday actions are completely contingent. Authentic action comes to be understood as acting with the recognition that all of us, as solitary individuals, are free to reject traditional social norms and create for ourselves the guidelines for our actions. It is from this that decisionist interpretation gets its name. This interpretation reads Heidegger as endorsing the view that there are no criteria external to the individual agent that can be used to make a choice. According to the decisionist interpretation of Heidegger, all authentic actions stem from the unconstrained decision of the agent herself.

There have been a string of thinkers that have attributed this conception of authentic action to Heidegger and find in it the philosophical roots of Heidegger's association with the Nazi party in the 1930s.<sup>8</sup> In the words of Richard Wolin, one of the most outspoken critics of Heidegger:

In its [Heidegger's decisionism's] rejection of "moral convention"—which qua convention, proves inimical to acts of heroic bravado—decisionism shows itself to be distinctly nihilistic vis-à-vis the totality of inherited ethical paradigms. For this reason, the implicit political theory of *Being and Time*...remains devoid of fundamental "liberal

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<sup>8</sup> See for example the essays by Richard Wolin, Karl Löwith and Jürgen Habermas in Wolin's *The Heidegger Controversy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

convictions” that might have served as an ethicopolitical bulwark against the enticement of fascism.<sup>9</sup>

Aside from the potential negative socio-political implications of this decisionist understanding of action, this understanding of action also suffers from the same philosophical defect as all other simplistic libertarian conceptions of free action. The most general formulation of the libertarian position is that agents are able to determine their own actions entirely through their own will, without the influence of any factors external to the control of the agent. The problem is that there could conceivably be a causal line traced from aspects of any decision we come to with regards to action to factors that are outside the control of the agent. For instance, it could be argued that my decision to go to the Thai restaurant for dinner instead of the Mexican restaurant can be traced back to various factors that are outside my control, e.g. prior bad experiences with Mexican food, a catchy advertisement for the Thai restaurant, etc. If the libertarian wants to insist that the decision is made by me without the influence of any factors beyond my control, then upon what grounds or reasons can I base my decision? When all such factors are ruled out when making decisions, it seems that our decisions are left to arbitrary whims and fleeting desires, resulting in no real sense of control or responsibility on the part of the individual agent. If this is the case, it is hard to see how the authentic, non-conformist agent can be anymore responsible for her actions than the inauthentic agent who unreflectively enacted traditional social norms.

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Wolin, *The Politics of Being* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 65.

The textual problem for the decisionist interpretation is that this interpretation generally relies heavily on several select passages from Division II of *Being and Time*. When discussing authentic, resolute action, Heidegger does say: “On what is [Dasein] to resolve? *Only* the resolution itself can give the answer” (BT 345/298). This statement fits very well with the decisionist interpretation, but it also neglects other passages in which Heidegger makes it clear that authentic action cannot be a complete rejection of the norms that guide our everyday actions, but rather authentic action must be understood as a modification of our everyday ways of acting (BT 312/267). Furthermore, if Heidegger really did advocate a form of decisionism that endorses the wholesale rejection of our everyday activities and the social norms that guide them, it seems unlikely that he would dedicate so much of *Being and Time* and his early lectures to the careful analysis of this everyday activity.

The general aim of this current project is to develop an interpretation of Heidegger’s conception of action in his early thought that is both more faithful to Heidegger’s own works and is a more plausible general theory of action than either the Dreyfusian conception of skillful coping or the decisionist conception of authentic action. Specifically, the approach that I am advocating here is the development of a Heideggerian conception of agency that incorporates aspects of both the Dreyfusian and decisionist readings of Heidegger while avoiding the pitfalls associated with both interpretations. What would such a middle path between these two positions look like? Heidegger provides in a clue in one of the rare passages in *Being and Time* in which he uses the word action (*Handeln*) explicitly. Here Heidegger brings up the term ‘action’

merely to express his reservations about using the term, as he says that action “must be taken so broadly that ‘activity’ will also embrace the passivity of resistance” (BT 347/300). For Heidegger, the term ‘action’ must be understood so broadly that it includes passivity as well. When considered in light of the preceding discussion of the Dreyfusian and decisionist interpretations of Heidegger’s conception of action, this means that a properly Heideggerian conception of action will include both the way in which we are unreflectively responsive to our practical and social environments (the key feature of Dreyfus’s account of skillful coping) and the way in which we can still be seen to be agents in the strong sense of term, i.e. how we can be understood to have responsibility for or ownership of our actions (the main thrust of the decisionist interpretation of authentic action).

My project is divided into five main chapters. The first chapter deals with developing the general outline of this Heideggerian conception of action, now conceived of as including aspects of both activity and passivity. In this chapter I will mainly draw on Heidegger’s careful description and analysis of our everyday practical engagement with the world in Division I of *Being and Time*. In addition to this, I will draw on Heidegger’s interpretation and appropriation of certain aspects of Aristotle’s practical philosophy in Heidegger’s early lecture courses of the 1920s in order to further explicate and clarify the central features of the Heideggerian conception of action.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger makes an important distinction between authentic and inauthentic existence, or, for our purposes, between authentic and inauthentic agency. Explaining this distinction is the focus of the second chapter. Briefly put, there are two

main distinctions to be drawn between authentic and inauthentic action. The first distinction is that in authentic agency we come to take over or own our actions in a way that we do not when acting inauthentically. In other words, when acting authentically we become responsible for our actions in a way that we are not when acting inauthentically. The second distinction between authentic and inauthentic agency is that in authentic agency we disclose the structure of our being as agents in the proper way, while in inauthentic agency, we do not. In other words, we achieve a sort of self-knowledge in authentic action that is lacking when we act inauthentically. Understanding this distinction between authentic and inauthentic action allows us to see that Heidegger recognizes the potential problem for conceptions of action like that of Dreyfus, which focus only on our unreflective coping with the situations in which we find ourselves on a daily basis, and that Heidegger does propose a solution to this problem in his account of authentic action.

In the third chapter, I will focus on Heidegger's conception of inauthentic action. Heidegger describes inauthentic action as a certain form of movement, which he calls falling (*Verfallen*). We will begin our discussion of inauthentic action by considering the structure of falling and showing how the structure of falling gives rise to the two distinguishing characteristics of inauthentic action—the failure to be responsible for our actions and the failure to properly understand the structure of our being. There are several ways of acting identified as inauthentic in Division I of *Being and Time*. Using my own nomenclature to describe these ways of acting, they are productive activity, social interaction and “idle,” non-productive activities, e.g. watching television, “hanging

out” with friends, gossiping, etc. After the initial discussion of the structure of falling, the rest of the chapter is dedicated to explaining why these activities exhibit the structure of falling and how this makes them inauthentic.

The fourth and fifth chapters focus on developing a conception of authentic agency that shows how we can become responsible for our actions, how we can act in such a way that we reveal the structure of our being as agents and how these two distinguishing features of authentic action are intimately connected. The fourth chapter focuses on developing a conception of responsibility that is compatible with the Heideggerian conception of action understood as involving both active and passive aspects. To avoid falling into the empty, solipsistic decisionism of Wolin’s interpretation, it must be shown how a plausible account of responsibility can be developed that does not involve the complete overcoming of the passive aspect of action. If being truly responsible for our actions required such an overcoming, then authentic action would be the unconstrained decisionistic action of Wolin’s interpretation. In order to develop this conception of responsibility that is compatible with the Heideggerian conception of action developed in the earlier chapters, I analyze Heidegger’s interpretation of Kant’s practical philosophy in Heidegger’s 1930 lecture course, *The Essence of Human Freedom*, and then attempt to show how this later, Kantian formulation of the conception of responsibility can be translated back into Heidegger’s earlier conceptual framework in *Being and Time*.

The fifth and final main chapter builds on the work done in the fourth chapter by showing how being responsible for our actions in the strongest sense of the term involves

acting with a certain sense of self-knowledge. Heidegger develops his account of how we can achieve the appropriate form of self-knowledge through the experience of the interconnected phenomena of death, anxiety, conscience and resoluteness, the analysis of which makes up a large part of Division II of *Being and Time*.

The concluding chapter provides some preliminary consideration of the contributions (if any) that the Heideggerian conception of action developed here can make to the broader philosophical discussion of agency.

## CHAPTER 1. DEVELOPING A HEIDEGGERIAN CONCEPTION OF ACTION

The aim of this chapter is to develop a general Heideggerian conception of action. By this I mean that the aim is to lay out in very broad terms a characterization of the structure of human agency that is grounded in Heidegger's early thought. Heidegger does not explicitly give us a "theory of action," even though much of his early thought is concerned with the description and analysis of our concrete, practical existence as agents. This makes it somewhat challenging to develop a Heideggerian conception of action or even to figure out where to begin with this task. The general method employed here to develop a Heideggerian conception of action will be to briefly trace the development of Heidegger's analysis of the structure of human action through his lecture courses of the early to mid-1920s to the culmination of his existential analysis of human existence in *Being and Time*. While the main focus of this chapter will be *Being and Time*, it has become increasingly clear as more and more Heidegger's early lectures are published that the central ideas of *Being and Time* are developed gradually throughout Heidegger's lecture courses in the 1920s. In order to fully understand and to sometimes clarify Heidegger's characterization of human action in *Being and Time*, the conception of action found in *Being and Time* must be understood as an outgrowth of these earlier lectures, particularly, as I hope to show, as an outgrowth of Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle. In the final

section of the chapter, we will consider some potential problems for the Heideggerian conception of action and the potential responses to these problems.

### Heidegger's Interpretation of the Aristotelian Understanding of Human Life in *Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy*

At the end of the 1926 lecture course *Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy*, Heidegger briefly discusses Aristotle's conception of life (*zoē*) in *De Anima*.<sup>10</sup> This lecture course provides a good starting place for understanding Heidegger's conception of action in his early thought for two main reasons. The first one is the time period in which these lectures were given. If *Being and Time*, which was published in 1927, is seen as the culmination of Heidegger's early analysis of human agency, then it seems plausible to think that many of the ideas and concepts being discussed by Heidegger in his lectures in 1926 are at least operative in the background of *Being and Time*. The second reason for starting with this lecture course is the format of the text itself. The published version of this lecture course is composed of Heidegger's notes from which he gave the lectures and students transcripts of the lectures themselves. This gives the text the feel of a very succinct outline of Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle's understanding of life (specifically human life) and action. In some ways this format is detrimental, but I believe in this case it is actually helpful, as consideration of the few pages devoted to the

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that the published form of this lecture course consists of very rough notes made by Heidegger himself and appendices of student transcriptions of the lectures. It is assumed that the student transcriptions provide a reliable account of Heidegger's interpretation of the matter under discussion.

topic of life in this lecture allow us to very quickly and easily pick out the key aspects of Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle on these issues. We will try to use these key aspects of Heidegger's interpretation as preliminary clues to develop a more detailed conception of Heidegger's understanding of human agency. In the following sections of this chapter, we will then try to show how Heidegger develops and appropriates these Aristotelian concepts, resulting finally in the existential analysis of human existence in *Being and Time*.

In the *Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy*, Heidegger begins his discussion of *De Anima* and Aristotle's understanding of life with the following general definition of a living being: "We say something is living where we find that: it moves in an oriented way, i.e., in a way oriented by perception; it moves itself and can stop itself; it was young and ages; it takes in nourishment and grows; etc." (BCA 228). Heidegger goes on to further clarify what is meant by moving in an oriented way as he says that the motion of living beings is "different than the change of place to which lifeless things are subject...to move oneself toward something which matters to life in one way or another; an oriented motion in the respective surrounding world" (BCA 228). Here the key determination of life is oriented motion understood as motion toward something that matters. This self-orienting ability possessed by living beings is referred to as *krīnein* in the Greek or as the activity of distinguishing by Heidegger (BCA 228). The two main modes of distinguishing are *aīsthesis* (perception) and *noūs* (understanding). While all animals have the ability to perceive in some capacity, humans have perception and understanding.

Heidegger proceeds to discuss Aristotle's consideration of the basis of motion (*archē kinēseos*). For Aristotle, it is the object of desire (*orektōn*) that brings about the motion of a living being.<sup>11</sup> Aristotle's conception of the movement of living beings can be clarified by way of an example. Suppose a lion sees a gazelle and then proceeds to chase it. According to Aristotle's account, this is what happens. The gazelle is the object of desire. Upon seeing the gazelle, the lion's desire to eat the gazelle is stirred into motion. The desire in turn causes the lion to start moving in pursuit of the gazelle. The gazelle causes movement, but is itself unmoved.

What Heidegger chooses to highlight in this seemingly straightforward understanding of the movement of living beings is the role of desire (*ōrexis*). For Heidegger, one of the important and interesting things about Aristotle's account is that the "point of departure for the motion is not the pure and simple observation of a desirable object" and that "[i]t is not the case that the living being first observes things disinterestedly, merely looks about in a neutral attitude, and then moves toward something; on the contrary, *ōrexis* is fundamental" (BCAP 228). What this shows is that living beings have a fundamental openness to being affected by the world, which allows things immediately to appear to them as desirable or undesirable. There is found in *ōrexis* not only the urge towards the object of desire, but also the capacity to experience things in the world as desirable or as mattering in some way. Heidegger expresses this dual aspect of *ōrexis* when he describes it as "feeling oneself attuned in such and such a way, feeling well and ill, and thus also being on the lookout for" (BCAP 156).

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Aristotle's *De Anima* (433a27 and 433b10) and *De Motu Animalium* (701b33).

Now one may ask why Heidegger emphasizes the importance of distinguishing (*krīnein*) for life, and hence, the motion of living beings. It is apparent that when a living being moves towards an object of desire that the living being has distinguished that particular object as something desirable. The capacity of *ōrexis* to reveal objects as desirable is the capacity to distinguish objects from one another, at least insofar as their desirability is concerned. Remember that for Aristotle the object of desire is the basis of motion. However, living beings can only be moved by the desirable object if they take it as something desirable. Returning to the example of the lion and the gazelle, the gazelle does cause desire to move the lion, but the gazelle can only do this in the first place because the lion sees the gazelle as something to be eaten.<sup>12</sup>

For animals, this distinguishing takes place through perception (*aīsthesis*). Perception here is not to be thought of as a straightforward sensing of things in the world in terms of their objective qualities, but rather “it exists in a context of pursuit and flight” (BCAP 228). In other words, perception is always already oriented towards seeing things as desirable (worthy of pursuit) or detrimental (worthy of being avoided).

For humans, motion has the same structure, but humans possess the ability to make distinctions in more sophisticated ways than animals. In the case of human beings, “*krīnein* is not limited to *aīsthesis* but is also found in *noūs*” (BCAP 229). Heidegger here references the five intellectual virtues discussed by Aristotle in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*tēchne*, *epistēme*, *phrōnesis*, *noūs* and *sophīa*) as being the five

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<sup>12</sup> Martha Nussbaum argues for this view of Aristotle’s account of the movement of animals in her essay, “The Role of Phantasia in Aristotle’s Explanation of Action” in her book *Aristotle’s De Motu Animalium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 221-269.

modes of distinguishing specifically available to human beings. It might seem strange that Heidegger here characterizes the intellectual virtues as modes of distinguishing. Heidegger explains this interpretation of the virtues to some extent in his earlier 1924 lecture course titled *Plato's Sophist*. Despite the title of this lecture course, Heidegger begins it with an in-depth interpretation of Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which Aristotle discusses the intellectual virtues. Heidegger's interpretation of the intellectual virtues in this lecture begins with and is guided by Aristotle's characterization of the intellectual virtues as "five states in which the soul grasps the truth in its affirmations and denials" (NE 1139b15). In Heidegger's words, the intellectual virtues are "five ways human Dasein discloses beings in affirmation and denial" (PS 15). What Heidegger means by this is that in Aristotle's description of the intellectual virtues, Aristotle is describing the various ways that we as human beings can understand things in the world and ourselves. For example, the Aristotelian virtue of *epistēmē* characterizes our ability to understand things in the world as objects of theoretical, scientific inquiry.

Now we can return to the consideration of the connection between these intellectual virtues and the movement of human beings. According to Heidegger, some of the modes of distinguishing (i.e. intellectual virtues) correspond with certain types of movement. For example, the movement of *poiēsis* corresponds with the virtue of *tēchne*. The virtue of *tēchne* characterizes the way in which we understand things in the world in terms of their usefulness for our projects. *Poiēsis* is the activity (or movement in a broad sense) of making or producing something. We will discuss this productive activity in more detail later in this chapter. Heidegger maintains that the movement of *prāxis*, or

properly human action, corresponds to the virtue of *phrōnesis* (BCAP 230). With respect to other intellectual virtues, Heidegger claims that no corresponding movement is associated with them. According to Heidegger, there is no movement corresponding to *epistēme*, “since *epistēme* is theory and simply beholds” (BCAP 229). The movement associated with the virtue of *noūs* is “not attained by humans; it determines the first mover” (BCAP 229). While Heidegger does not say so, there is presumably no movement corresponding to *sophīa*, since the virtue of *sophīa* is a combination of *epistēme* and *noūs* (NE 1141a16).

What are the more general aspects of human action that can be drawn out of Heidegger’s brief interpretation of Aristotle’s conception of life? First of all, human life is to be understood as movement directed towards things which matter in some way or another. That which matters (the object of desire for Aristotle) is to be understood as the initial basis for acting. We always already encounter things in the world as mattering to us in some way before any decision on our part. In this way things in the world can be said to affect us or exert a pull on us. However, things encountered in the world are only able to do this on the basis of some articulation of the world that allows certain things to appear as desirable. Human action has the two basic aspects of being affected by things in the world (i.e. a passive aspect) and articulating the world in such a way that things are able to affect us in this way (i.e. an active aspect).

## Tracing Heidegger's Development of His Conception of Action in His Thought Leading up to *Being and Time*

Before turning to the consideration of how this basic Heideggerian understanding of human action as being constituted by active and passive aspects reaches its fullest expression in *Being and Time*, let us first attempt to briefly outline the course of Heidegger's development of this conception of action through some of his writings and lectures from the early 1920s. By charting the gradual evolution of this way of understanding action in Heidegger's thinking, we can better see the way in which Heidegger appropriates the more biologically-oriented Aristotelian discourse and translates it into his own more existential way of expressing things. This will allow us to understand more clearly how the often opaque concepts and terminology employed in *Being and Time* stem from a more concrete understanding of human life and action and, importantly, how these concepts and terms can once again be employed in a concrete analysis of the structure of human agency.

We can begin with the lecture course given by Heidegger in the winter of 1921-1922, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*. Despite the title of the course, there are very few explicit discussions of Aristotle within the text itself. Nevertheless, it seems clear that in this lecture course, Heidegger is beginning to try to formulate his interpretation of Aristotle in his own terminology. The focus of Part III of the lecture course is "factual life," i.e. life considered not as an abstract concept but rather in its phenomenological concreteness (PIA 61). There is an obvious parallel with Aristotle's *De Anima* even though Heidegger does not explicitly make the connection. Like

Aristotle, in this lecture course, Heidegger describes life in terms of movement (PIA 70, 85, 87). Instead of talking about the role played by desire in the movement of human beings, Heidegger uses the term care [*Sorge*], a term that will go on to play a prominent role in *Being and Time*. “Living,” says Heidegger, “in its verbal meaning, is to be interpreted according to its relational sense as *caring*: to care for and about something; to live from [on the basis of] something, caring for it” (PIA 68). As human beings we care about all sorts of different things: having food, finding employment, spending time with our friends and families, etc. Where Aristotle characterizes life as movement towards the object of the desire (or flight from that which is threatening), Heidegger characterizes life as movement guided by the things and people about which we care. It is from care that life gets its sense of directionality as Heidegger says that “caring always exists in a determinate or indeterminate, secure or wavering, *direction*” (PIA 70).

Heidegger also provides some very vivid descriptions of the passive aspect of life, i.e. the way in which things in the world can affect us and draw us towards them. In this lecture course, Heidegger calls this aspect of life inclination (*Neigung*), which “imparts to life a peculiar weight, a direction of gravity, a pull toward something” (PIA 75). He describes life as a “being-transported by the world” and says that this being transported is “pull-like” (PIA 78). In other words, part of what it means to be a human being is to be pulled towards those things that we care about and to have a tendency to immerse ourselves in the activities of the world.

In Heidegger’s lecture course from the summer of 1925, *History of the Concept of Time*, we can find the next stage of his translation of Aristotle’s concepts and

terminology into his own. Here Heidegger again understands human being as care. When analyzing the way in which we are drawn towards the things that we care about, he changes his terminology slightly. Where in the earlier *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle* Heidegger calls this aspect of care inclination, in the *History of the Concept of Time*, he uses the term disposition (*Befindlichkeit*), a term which he will still use in *Being and Time*. This terminological transition is interesting and important because in the *History of the Concept of Time* lecture course, Heidegger is still using language closer to that of Aristotle to describe human being in conjunction with some of his own terminology, the terminology that will become dominant by the time he writes *Being and Time*. In this lecture course, Heidegger characterizes our caring about things as “constantly being *solicited* by the world itself in this or that way” (HCT 254). In a way that parallels Aristotle’s characterization of the movement of animals being structured according to the possibilities of either pursuing something desirable or fleeing something threatening, Heidegger says that “being-in-the-world is so to speak constantly being summoned by the *threatening* and *non-threatening* character of the world” (HCT 254). Heidegger then summarizes what he means by saying that disposition is a fundamental aspect of our being as humans by stating that “in all of what we do and where we dwell, we are in some sense—as we say—‘affected’” (HCT 256).

We also find another significant progression in the *History of the Concept of Time* course. In his earlier explication of life in terms of caring about things and being drawn towards things in the world, Heidegger does not discuss the sort of active articulation that we found in his interpretation of Aristotle from the *Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy*

course. In the *History of the Concept of Time*, Heidegger makes it clear that care cannot be understood only in terms of disposition. Our being is also fundamentally characterized by what Heidegger calls understanding (*Verstehen*). While Heidegger's description of understanding here is somewhat meager (a deficiency which he remedies in *Being and Time* as we will see in the next section), Heidegger makes several important points that allow us to see what he means by understanding and how this is connected to his interpretation of Aristotle. As we saw in the previous section, Heidegger connects our ability to interpret something as desirable or to articulate the situation of action with Aristotle's concept of *noūs* (*noūs* considered in the broad sense of intellectual capacities, not in the narrow sense of *noūs* as a specific intellectual virtue). In the *History of the Concept of Time*, Heidegger explicitly connects understanding with interpretation, saying that the "cultivation of understanding is accomplished in *expository interpretation*" (HCT 260). Furthermore, the "primary form of all interpretation as the cultivation of understanding is *the consideration of something in term of its 'as what,' considering something as something*" (HCT 261). According to Heidegger, in interpretation we make explicit our understanding of something *as* something, e.g. *as* something desirable.

#### The Culmination of Heidegger's Early Understanding of Agency in *Being and Time*

At this point we have shown how Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle's conception of life and movement in his *Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy* lectures can serve as the basis for developing a Heideggerian conception of action. We have also

seen how this conception of agency as involving active and passive aspects is developed and refined through his earlier lectures. Now we turn our attention to *Being and Time*, in which we find Heidegger's most detailed analysis of the structure of human action. The aim of this section is to show how Heidegger takes this conception of action as being constituted by an active component (a capacity for articulating or distinguishing) and a passive aspect (an openness to being affected by things we encounter in the world) and develops it further in and through his existential analysis of the structure of human being.

*Description of Our Everyday Activity Found in Heidegger's Account of Worldhood*

In Chapter III of *Being and Time*, Heidegger lays out his understanding of the world and the importance of this concept for his larger ontological project. Heidegger maintains that in order to understand what it means for entities in the world to be, we should start by considering the way in which we encounter these entities and understand their being in our everyday existence. To understand the being of entities encountered in the world, “we will take as our clue our everyday being-in-the-world, which we also call our ‘dealings’ [*Umgang*] in the world and with entities within-the-world” (BT 95/66). Heidegger claims that our everyday interaction with things in the world is a “kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use” (BT 95/67).

Entities in the world, at least insofar as they are encountered in our use and manipulation of them, are understood as equipment (*das Zeug*) (BT 97/68). For Heidegger, we can never encounter one isolated piece of equipment. The term equipment always refers to a totality of equipment. This is because any individual thing encountered

in terms of its usefulness is understood as something to be used in order to do something else. In this way any individual piece of equipment refers beyond itself to something that it is used to accomplish. This end product or goal in turn refers to a further goal beyond it so that a total system of references is always implied by any single piece of equipment. For example, a nail is understood as something to be used in order to hold together pieces of wood. The pieces of wood are understood as things to be used in order to make a house secure against the elements. A hammer is understood as something to be used in order to pound the nails into the wood, etc.

In a parallel way, any of our individual activities involving equipment always take place within the totality of the referential framework of these ‘in-order-to’ relations. For example, someone cuts wood in order to have boards for siding. Someone pounds nail into the wood boards in order to make the house secure against the elements, etc. Our actions are generally directed towards some goal or end product. Heidegger calls these goals and products the “towards-which” (*das Wozu*) of our activities.

Heidegger maintains that this web of ‘in-order-to’ and ‘towards-which’ relations ultimately receives its structure from a ‘towards-which’ that does not refer to any further goal. This ‘towards-which’ is called the ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ (*das Worumwillen*), since it is that for the sake of which we ultimately do the things we do (BT 116/84). Any for-the-sake-of-which, according to Heidegger, “always pertains to the Being of Dasein” (BT 116-117/84). The example that he gives here is that of securing a house against bad weather. When we cut boards and use hammers and nails to fix the boards to the side of a house, we are doing so for the sake of providing ourselves with shelter. There is no

further aim towards which our activities are directed. In his commentary on *Being and Time*, Dreyfus interprets for-the-sake-of-whichs as also including various social roles.<sup>13</sup> This is a helpful extension of Heidegger's thought here (especially since Heidegger himself provides only one example). Dreyfus maintains that we also understand ourselves in terms of the roles we play and positions we fill in our social context. For instance, one could understand oneself as a teacher, daughter or politician. These are all possible ways of being and possible ways of taking up the situations in which we find ourselves.

That for the sake of which we are acting in any given case dictates the intermediate goals towards which we direct our actions. We assign ourselves an "in-order-to", i.e. we act in order to accomplish something, on the basis of a particular understanding of ourselves that serves as that for the sake of which we are acting (BT 119/86). When we act in order to accomplish that for the sake of which we are acting, we "prescribe" to ourselves intermediate goals towards which our actions must be directed if we are to accomplish our ultimate objective (BT 119/86). For example, I understand myself, at least in part, as a philosopher. This self-understanding serves as something for the sake of which I act that does not refer beyond itself to any further goals. I act in certain ways in order to accomplish or continually enact this self-understanding of being a philosopher. In light of acting in order to be a philosopher, certain intermediate goals (e.g. obtaining a PhD, writing a dissertation, publishing articles in journals, etc.) are prescribed to me.

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<sup>13</sup>Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 94-96.

Here we find the need to develop accounts of the two aspects of action discussed above—the active articulation that allows certain goals and actions to stand out as important or desirable to us and the passive capability of being affected by (i.e. drawn or pulled towards) certain actions and projects. Our self-understanding for the sake of which we act articulates the context of relations that is the world. Heidegger calls this aspect of our being as agents understanding (*Verstehen*). Based on this articulation, we then come to encounter certain things within the world as significant or important to us in some way. Heidegger calls this way in which we are affected by the things encountered in the world disposition (*Befindlichkeit*). He goes on to develop a more detailed account of the structure of human agency through the further development of these two key aspects of our being.

*Disposition (Befindlichkeit)*

In *Being and Time* (as in the *History of the Concept of Time*), Heidegger calls the passive aspect of our being *Befindlichkeit*, which is translated as “state-of-mind” in the Macquarrie and Robinson translation of *Being and Time*. *Befindlichkeit* is in fact not a term used in everyday German. Literally, *Befindlichkeit* would mean something like ‘how one finds oneself in the world’. I will translate *Befindlichkeit* as disposition in order to avoid the overly mental connotation of the ‘state-of-mind’ translation.<sup>14</sup>

Translating this term as disposition is meant to capture the sense in which we always find

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<sup>14</sup> By translating *Befindlichkeit* in this way, I am following Theodore Kisiel’s practice in his translation of the term in Heidegger’s *History of the Concept of Time* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992).

ourselves disposed towards the world in a certain way that goes beyond mental states and is more of an all-encompassing state of being. While this translation itself is not completely satisfactory, I think it more closely captures what Heidegger means by the term than ‘state-of-mind’.

Heidegger makes his approach to analyzing disposition clear at the beginning of page 29 of *Being and Time* when he states:

What we indicate *ontologically* by the term “disposition” is *ontically* the most familiar and everyday sort of thing; our mood [*Stimmung*], our Being-attuned [*Gestimmtsein*]. Prior to all psychology of moods...it is necessary to see this phenomenon as a fundamental *existentiale*, and to outline its structure (BT 172-173/134, translation modified).

In his analysis of *Befindlichkeit*, Heidegger starts from the ordinary of understanding of what it is to be in a mood, or to put it in more colorful language, to be attuned to the world. Mood here is not to be taken merely as a mental state of a subject. For Heidegger moods are much broader than this. Taking this notion of being-attuned quite literally, we can think of moods as the background tones operative in our existence that always provide the backdrop for our understanding of the world. Heidegger wants to push beyond our ordinary understanding of moods to the consideration of the underlying structures of our existence that are indicated by the fact that we have moods.

Heidegger picks out three “essential characteristics” of having moods that point to important underlying ontological aspects of our existence. The first essential characteristic is thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) (BT 175/136). He clarifies what he means by thrownness by stating that the “expression ‘thrownness’ is meant to suggest the *facticity*

*of [Dasein's] being delivered over*" (BT 174/135). Heidegger is trying to capture the sense in which we have been thrown into a world and a life that we have not chosen and to a large extent cannot really control. In this way, we can be said to be delivered over to the world in which we find ourselves. Moods reveal this aspect of thrownness because "[i]n having a mood, Dasein is always disclosed moodwise as that entity to which it has been delivered over in its Being; and in this way it has been delivered over to the Being which, in existing, it has to be" (BT 173/134). Heidegger's meaning seems to be that when we find ourselves in a particular mood, this is an experience of the fact that we do not and cannot completely control the situation in which we find ourselves or even our reactions to this situation. We find corroboration when we consider moods as passions, something which comes over us and something which to some extent we cannot control, or as emotions, which move us in certain ways. What this shows, according to Heidegger, is that we cannot understand ourselves as perfectly encapsulated, willful subjects that are at least initially closed off from being affected by things in the world. Heidegger is trying to emphasize that it is a fundamental aspect of our being that we are open to being affected by things we encounter in the world. In other words, moods reveal the fundamentally passive aspect of our existence.

It is not just the fact that we are open to being affected by the world around us that Heidegger is pointing out here. When he says that Dasein "has been delivered over to the Being which, in existing, it has to be," he is also claiming that we always find ourselves thrown into a certain way of being that we have to deal with in some way. To take a more biological example, we all find ourselves as creatures that require food. We have

been delivered over to this way of being, and our lives are to some extent conditioned and controlled by this fact, even if we choose to reject this aspect of our being as animals by refusing to eat. Similarly, we always find ourselves to have been thrown into certain ways of understanding ourselves. For example, by being born when and where I was, I have been thrown into the understanding of myself as an American living in the late Twentieth- and early Twenty-First-Centuries. I can, of course, reject this way of understanding myself, but this does not negate the fact that I must start from something like this self-understanding.

The second essential characteristic of disposition is that having a mood always discloses the world as a whole and “makes it possible first of all to direct oneself towards something” (BT 176/137). Remember that in his discussion of his conception of the world Heidegger maintains that we do not create the relations of significance that guide our activities and allow us to encounter things in their readiness-to-hand. Rather, we disclose a relational context in which we find ourselves. Disclosing this relational context is what first allows us to orient ourselves in whatever situation we find ourselves and to direct ourselves towards something.

The third essential characteristic of disposition is that it allows things encountered in the world to matter to us. In the course of going about our everyday activities, we are affected by things we encounter because they can be “unserviceable, resistant, or threatening” (BT 176/137). In other words, in trying to accomplish certain things, we can run into obstacles. These obstacles affect us by giving rise to moods of frustration, anger, fear, etc. For Heidegger, this signifies a deeper ontological component of our being,

namely, being in such a way that entities encountered in the world can matter to us in one way or another. For example, when considered in the context of building a house, a broken hammer can affect the builder by giving rise to frustration or anger. That is to say, the hammer matters to us in some way.

If we again shift these considerations to the level of the goals towards which our actions are directed, we can discern a parallel structure. Depending on that for the sake of which we act, certain intermediate goals and actions will affect us because they matter to us. Returning to the example of being a philosopher, we can say that the activity of submitting articles to journals matters to me because of my understanding of myself as a philosopher. To say that this activity matters to me is to say that the activity and the goal towards which it is directed are able to affect me. I am drawn towards this activity with the aim of accomplishing the goal of publishing something. It is this basic openness to being affected by or drawn towards certain goals and activities that Heidegger here locates in his conception of disposition.

Putting these three essential characteristics together, Heidegger, by way of summation, characterizes disposition as follows: “*Existentially, disposition [Befindlichkeit] implies a disclosive submission to the world, out of which we can encounter something that matters to us*” (BT 177/137, translation modified). Disposition is disclosive. This means that it reveals to us the world in which we find ourselves. This disclosure of the world is also a submission to the world. We find ourselves in an already-existent world whose dictates and demands we must accommodate. It is the disclosure of this already-existent world that allows us to encounter something that

matters to us. We find ourselves in a world that is already polarized in such a way that in every situation we encounter things, actions or ways of existing that appear important and worthwhile. Because we encounter these as already mattering to us and in terms of the relational context of the world, we are able to direct ourselves towards those goals and activities that matter to us.

### *Understanding (Verstehen)*

Let us now turn to the active aspect of agency in *Being and Time*, which is captured in Heidegger's conception of understanding (*Verstehen*). He does not use the term 'understanding' in the traditional sense, in which it has a cognitive connotation. In fact, in his lecture course, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (which he gave in 1927, the same year as the publication of *Being and Time*), Heidegger claims that understanding is the "authentic meaning of action" (BPP 277). In this section, we will show how we can make sense of this claim.

As in his discussion of the existential significance of moods, Heidegger starts from a very broad sense of understanding and then seeks to pick out the existential structures that underlie this sense of the term. Heidegger says:

When we are talking ontically we sometimes use the expression 'understanding something' with the signification of 'being able to manage something', 'being a match for it', 'being competent to do something' [*etwas können*] (BT 183/143).

It is this last sense of the term that Heidegger emphasizes. A key component of our being as humans is that we are able to enact possible ways of being. Heidegger makes this clearer by stating:

In understanding, as an *existentiale*, that which we have competence over is not a “what”, but Being as existing. The kind of Being which Dasein has, as being able to [*Seinkönnen*], lies existentially in understanding. Dasein is not something present-at-hand which possesses its competence for something by way of an extra; it is primarily Being-possible (BT 183/143).

The key term here is *Seinkönnen*, which literally means ‘being able to.’ What Heidegger is claiming here is that being human is to be able. Taken at the level of a formal structure of human being (i.e. as an *existentiale*) that ‘being able to’ does not refer to a particular range of tasks, but rather refers to an essential general feature of being human. This is what prompts Heidegger to claim that Dasein is primarily being-possible. We can understand better what Heidegger means here by connecting his discussion of understanding with the previous discussion of the for-the-sake-of-which. At the beginning of his discussion of understanding, Heidegger reminds us that, “in the ‘for-the-sake-of-which’, existing Being-in-the-world is disclosed as such, and this disclosedness we have called ‘understanding’” (BT 182/143). He goes on to say that,

The Being-possible which is essential for Dasein, pertains to the ways of its solicitude for Others and of its concern with the ‘world’, as we have characterized them; and in all these, and always, it pertains to Dasein’s ability for being towards itself, for the sake of itself (BT 183/143).

When Heidegger says that we are being possible, he means that we *are able to* carry out and enact the various self-understandings that serve as that for the sake of which we act.

For example, we are able to enact various possible ways of being like being a philosopher, being a mother, being a creature that needs shelter, etc. In other words, we are able to act for the sake of something, and it is this ability to enact these possible ways of being that discloses the world in its structure of towards-which/in-order-to relations.

Heidegger deepens his conception of understanding by analyzing its structure in terms of what he calls projection (*Entwurf*) (BT 185/145). We can get some clue about what he means by this by looking at the word '*Entwurf*'. The noun '*Entwurf*' is connected to the verb '*entwerfen*', which means literally to throw (*werfen*) away or off (a directionality signified by the prefix *ent-*). Heidegger goes on to say that we project ourselves upon a for-the-sake-of-which (BT 185/145). By this I take him to mean that our being is such that we can be said to throw ourselves out towards certain ends. We are able to be in different possible ways by directing ourselves out towards the enactment of these possibilities. If we again return to the example of being a philosopher, we can say that by understanding myself as a philosopher, I am projecting myself towards the enactment of this particular way of being. This does not imply that being a philosopher is a goal that is currently not actualized and thus must be striven after. I could very well already be a philosopher, but in order to maintain this way of being, I must be continually projecting myself towards this self-understanding and performing the intermediate tasks and actions that constitute being a philosopher. Heidegger makes it clear as well that this projection need not take place, and in fact does not originally take place, at a cognitive or thematic level. Rather, this projection involves the whole of my being. Understanding myself as a philosopher involves more than a mental decision to do so. It involves letting

all aspects of my being (thoughts, emotions, social relations, etc.) be directed by this self-understanding.

It should be emphasized again that because understanding is the way in which we direct ourselves towards some for-the-sake-of-which, it is understanding ourselves in terms of these various possible ways of being that is going to disclose the relations of significance that constitute the world. Heidegger will explicitly maintain, as mentioned in our discussion of the *History of the Concept of Time*, that it is understanding that first articulates the world and allows us to distinguish something as something useful, threatening, detrimental, etc. (BT 190/149). Here we see Heidegger taking his interpretation of Aristotle's conception of *noūs* as the ability to distinguish things encountered in the world as such and such (*krīnein* for Aristotle) and re-conceiving it at the existential level of this projective self-understanding. We also find here the existential appropriation of Aristotle's basic understanding of life as self-directed. When Heidegger characterizes understanding as projection, he is once again alluding to his conception of human existence as being fundamentally directed out towards something, in this case a possible way of being. When we project ourselves onto a for-the-sake-of-which, we are taking up a particular directionality. Our existence becomes oriented towards the enactment of the possibility of being we take up.

*The Interdependence of Disposition and Understanding and the Resulting Conception of Action*

At this point we can begin to see how Heidegger conceives of the unity of disposition and understanding. In order for things to matter to us, i.e. to be significant, we must already have taken up a certain understanding of our being. But Heidegger also maintains that in order for us to be able to direct ourselves towards something there must first be something that matters to us. There is an interdependent, reciprocal relation between understanding and disposition operative in human agency.

There seems to be a tension here. On the one hand, Heidegger seems to be saying that we find ourselves thrown into a world in which things already matter to us and that this is disclosed to us through our moods. This makes our actions appear to be dictated by the situation in which we find ourselves. In other words, it makes human action seem responsive and passive. On the other hand, Heidegger seems to be saying that we can in fact control the relations of significance that dictate what matters to us and how we act through our projection towards a possible way of being. In this sense, it seems Heidegger is maintaining that we can willfully determine our actions through the choice of our self-understandings.

The way to resolve this tension is to remember the earlier discussion of Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle and to mention another aspect of Heidegger discussion of worldhood that we have neglected up to now. Remember that for Aristotle it is the object of desire that initiates movement. There has to be some object or goal that is seen as desirable for movement, or more specifically action, to occur. In a similar way,

we can say that for Heidegger there must be something that matters to us in order for us to act. Before any cognitive, abstract reflection, we already feel pulled towards certain goals or activities because we feel that they matter to us in some way. Remember also that for Aristotle, at least on Heidegger's interpretation, an object of desire can only be desirable, and thus initiate movement, if the object is seen *as* something desirable. Some distinguishing or articulation must be performed in order for an object to be seen as desirable. Similarly for Heidegger, for something to matter to us, there must be a projection upon some for-the-sake-of-which that articulates the situation in which we find ourselves and first allows an activity to matter to us insofar as it is something that we should do in order to enact the possible way of being that we have taken up.

Crucially for Heidegger this does not mean that we can willfully and arbitrarily fabricate these relations of significance, and thereby choose what should matter to us without constraint. Rather, the articulation that occurs through our projective self-understandings *lets things matter to us* in a way that we cannot willfully and arbitrarily change. Heidegger says something similar in regard to entities encountered in the world as useful (ready-to-hand). In our everyday interaction with things in the world, we let something that is ready-to-hand "be so-and-so as it is already and in order that it be such" (BT 117/84). This means that "letting something 'be' does not mean that we must first bring it into its Being and produce it; it means rather that something which is already an 'entity' must be discovered in its readiness-to-hand, and that we must thus let the entity which has this Being be encountered" (BT 117/85). By using wood to build a house or put siding on a house, we do not make the wood useful for building a house through our

activity. Rather, it is through our activity that we let the being of the wood as something useful for building appear or manifest itself.

We can find some useful clarification of what Heidegger means when he says that we let entities be in John Haugeland's essay "Letting Be."<sup>15</sup> As Haugeland points out, the verb 'let' (or *lassen* in German) can be understood in several different ways. Haugeland identifies four different ways of understanding what it means to let something be.<sup>16</sup> We can understand letting be as acquiescing or giving up. For example, when we give up in a struggle with someone, we might say that we are letting her win the fight. We can also understand letting as granting permission, e.g. "I let my friend borrow my car." A third way of understanding letting is effecting or causing something. To illustrate this sense of letting Haugeland gives the example of "ball players," e.g. players organizing a game of backyard football, saying something like "Let this sidewalk be the goal line." Here the players could be thought of as causing the sidewalk to be the goal line. Finally, letting can be understood as enabling in the sense of making possible. We often hear it said of various high-level athletes that their natural athletic ability lets them make incredible plays, i.e. their athletic ability makes it possible for them to make incredible plays. Haugeland argues (persuasively in my opinion) that it is the final sense of letting as enabling that best captures how Heidegger typically uses the term.

We can make use of this clarification of what it means to let something be to clarify the Heideggerian account of the structure of action put forward here, particularly

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<sup>15</sup> This essay can be found in *Transcendental Heidegger*, eds. Steven Crowell and Jeff Malpas, 93-103 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Haugeland, 94.

the way in which understanding and disposition are in fact interdependent. By projecting ourselves towards various possible ways of being, we let certain activities matter to us. In so doing, we make it possible for certain things to matter to us on the basis of already established relations that we cannot arbitrarily change. When trying to use wood to build a house, our using it for this purpose cannot change the fact of its suitability or unsuitability for this project. In the same way, in my understanding of myself as philosopher, I cannot arbitrarily decide which activities are important in order to enact this possible way of being. Enacting the possibility of being a philosopher just entails certain activities like finishing my dissertation or teaching Introduction to Philosophy courses. I do not decide which activities are going to be important or are going to matter to me, but my understanding of myself as a philosopher lets these things to matter to me in a way that they would not for someone who did not understand herself in this way.

We can now give a preliminary general description of this Heideggerian conception of the structure of human action. We are initially drawn towards some activity or goal that matters to us in some way. This can be seen as the passive or responsive side of agency. However, activities and goals can only matter to us if we let them matter to us through the articulation of the situation in which we find ourselves that comes from our projection towards a particular possible way of being. This can be seen as the active aspect agency, albeit in a strange way. According to this Heideggerian conception, the active aspect of agency is a letting or allowing.

## Potential Problem Cases for this Conception of Action

We can sharpen this conception of action and add more substance to it by considering some examples that seem to be potentially problematic for this view. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of potential counter-examples, nor are the responses to these counter-examples exhaustive. In this section I am aiming for the more modest objective of refining and clarifying the Heideggerian conception of action put forth in this chapter through some brief consideration of potential problem cases.

### *Non-Productive Activity*

It could be objected that the preceding conception of action is based solely on an analysis of our concrete, productive activity that aims at the accomplishment of specific goals, e.g. building a house. Can a conception of action based on our productive activity also help us understand other forms of human activity that do not aim at the production of something? There are two common types of action that could be seen as clear cases of non-productive activity, and thus as counter-examples to the conception of action developed here. To begin with, we normally do not consider all of our interaction with other people to be productive activity in the same way that building a house or writing an article is. Of course, we can and do interact with people in the course of our actions that are aimed at producing something, but we tend to think that performing an action like comforting a distraught friend is different from building a house. Secondly, we can think of various activities that we engage in everyday that do not seem to be goal-directed at all. For example, we often spend time surfing the internet or watching television, and

when doing so, we often have no specific aim. Heidegger discusses both of these types of actions and analyzes both of them in terms of the preceding conception of the structure of action. In this section, we will consider what he says about our interaction with other people. The discussion of the second type of non-productive action, actions that seemingly have no specific aim, will be put off until the third chapter.

Heidegger maintains that we encounter other people in the course of our everyday productive activities and that the way in which we understand other people differs from the way in which we understand things encountered in the world. Returning to Heidegger's earlier interpretation of Aristotle's intellectual virtues, we could say that there are different modes of understanding, i.e. different ways of articulating things we encounter in the world, that guide our actions. Productive activity, as we saw when considering the *Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy*, is guided by the intellectual virtue *tēchne*. Heidegger calls the mode of understanding that guides our productive activity circumspection (*Umsicht*) (BT 186/146). He distinguishes this from the mode of understanding that guides our interactions with other people—considerateness (*Rücksicht*). Although considerateness does not appear to be a direct appropriation of one of the Aristotelian intellectual virtues, Heidegger still seems to be following the general contours of his reading of Aristotle.

Heidegger calls our interaction with other people solicitude (*Fürsorge*) (BT 157/121). He makes it explicit that solicitude, like our productive activity, must still be understood in terms of care (BT 157/121). This means that our interactions with other people can ultimately be understood in terms of the same structure of disposition and

understanding that can be found in our productive activities. Heidegger provides the following examples of solicitude: “Being for, against, or without one another, passing one another by, not 'mattering' to one another” (BT 158/121). People and our interactions with them matter to us, but not merely in terms of their usefulness in our productive activity. Similarly, it is possible for us to understand ourselves as beings that are engaged in actions other than purely productive actions. For example, we understand ourselves as members of families or groups of friends. These self-understandings allow people and activities to matter to us in a way that is different than what occurs in productive activity. When I meet a friend for coffee to discuss her problems, we could say that it is the understanding of myself as a good friend that allows that action to matter to me.

#### *Actions that Involve Explicit Deliberation*

This conception of action as described up to this point seems to be able to account for things that we do with little or no deliberation. To repeat a prior example, I submit articles to journals for publication because I allow this activity to matter to me based on the way my understanding of myself as a philosopher articulates the situation of action. There is no mention here of deliberation that takes places prior to the activity of submitting articles. The potential problem is that many times when we do something, we go through a fairly explicit deliberative process before we act. With regard to this example, we could very easily alter it so that deliberation plays a greater role. For instance, before submitting an article to a specific journal, I could deliberate about whether in fact this journal is the best one for my article or whether it is best for me to

submit an article at all or if I might be best served by concentrating all of my time and energy on my dissertation. What is potentially problematic about these examples for the Heideggerian conception of action outlined above is that when explicit deliberation is involved in action, it seems like the action ultimately comes about as a result of the deliberative process and that this way of conceiving agency as allowing things to matter to us is a tangential, background issue at best. In other words, the claim could be made that the best way to understand action would be to focus on the deliberative process, its outcome and the way in which actions follow on from this. We find that this Heideggerian conception of action as it has been construed up to this point still faces one of the main problems for the Dreyfusian understanding of action discussed in the Introduction. The challenge for this Heideggerian conception of action would not necessarily be to show that deliberation is not important for understanding action, but rather that explicitly deliberative action can be accounted for within the more general conception of action laid out in the previous sections of this chapter.

Let me start by stating what I think would be the Heideggerian response to this challenge in its general form. As we have seen, according to this Heideggerian conception of action, it is our pre-thematic, pre-cognitive understanding of our existence that articulates the world we live in and allows certain activities and goals to matter to us. Explicit, cognitive deliberation can be fit into this conception of action if deliberation is seen as a more abstract and explicit form of this basic articulation. We can understand deliberation, from a Heideggerian perspective, as a way of refining particular aspects of our self-understanding. When we deliberate, we are engaged in articulating the situation

in such a way that a certain action will come to matter to us more than alternatives by the end of the deliberative process. Deliberation will have allowed this action to matter most to us. Seen in this way, explicitly deliberative action does not represent a serious counter-example to the Heideggerian conception of action. Instead, explicitly deliberative action can be understood as a special sub-species of action that still can be understood within the general framework of the Heideggerian conception.

In order to understand how this response is grounded in Heidegger's thought, we can begin by considering what Heidegger has to say about the connection between understanding and interpretation in *Being and Time*. Heidegger characterizes interpretation as the possibility of understanding to develop itself (BT 188/148). By this he means that interpretation is the further "working-out of possibilities projected in understanding" (BT 189/148). Understanding is the initial projection of ourselves toward some possible way of being that first structures the relations of significance that make up the world. Interpretation is the process of further refining and articulating what is already laid out in this initial projection. In interpretation we understand something as something to be used or manipulated in a certain way given the tasks and activities in which we are involved. Heidegger emphasizes the way explicit interpretation is grounded in his basic conception of understanding by saying that in an explicit interpretation of something as something, the "as' does not turn up for the first time; it just gets expressed for the first time, and this is possible only in that it lies before us as something expressible" (BT 190/149).

Heidegger understands deliberation as a form of interpretation (BT 410/359). In his earlier lecture course *Plato's Sophist*, Heidegger identifies two different types of deliberation (PS 35). The first type of deliberation is associated with the virtue of *tēchne*, the knowledge that guides our productive activity. Heidegger characterizes the form of this deliberation as follows: “if such and such is to come to be, then this or that must happen” (PS 35). This formulation is very close to the description of the structure of deliberation found in *Being and Time*. There Heidegger describes deliberation as having an 'if—then' structure, which generally takes the form of “if this or that, for instance, is to be produced, put to use, or averted, then some ways and means, circumstances, or opportunities will be needed” (BT 410/359). Returning to example of building a house, we can see how this would work. What I want to produce is a house that is secure from the elements. I might deliberate about whether or not wood siding or aluminum siding would be best for achieving this desired result. This deliberation might take the form of “if I want to build a house that is secure against the elements, then I need to have siding that keeps out wind and rain”. Now I have provided the framework for understanding wood and aluminum *as* materials that might be useful for this purpose. In the process of deliberating, I let the wood and aluminum appear as useful.

As we have been doing prior to this point, we can easily find a parallel with the structure of our actions themselves. Within the context of this same example, I could deliberate about what specific action I should take. I could ask myself whether putting up wood siding or aluminum siding would be better for keeping out wind and rain. I could weigh the relative merits of each and come to the decision that I should use wood siding.

This deliberative process results in the action of putting up wood siding as being more desirable than the alternatives. What this deliberative process does is to allow, through a more refined process of articulation, the action of putting up wood siding to have more pull on me than the possible alternatives.

The second type of deliberation that Heidegger discusses in the *Plato's Sophist* lecture is the deliberation associated with the Aristotelian virtue of *phrōnesis* or practical wisdom. Heidegger has a little more difficulty in clarifying the structure of the deliberation of *phrōnesis*. He says that the deliberation of *phrōnesis* has the following structure: “if such and such is supposed to occur, if I am to behave and be in such and such a way, then...” and “if I am to act in such and such a way, then this or that must happen” (PS 35). In order to understand what is meant by this, Heidegger adds that the deliberation of *phrōnesis* is always guided by some for-the-sake-of-which (which is his translation of Aristotle's term *hoū hēneka*). What is different about the deliberation of *phrōnesis* is that it is concerned not with the proper action required to produce or make some external good (e.g. having a house that keeps wind and water out). The deliberation of *phrōnesis* is concerned with acting in a way that is in line with some possible way of being in terms of which the agent understands herself. The if/then structure of this type of deliberation does not have the form of “if I want to do x, then I must first do y”. Rather, it has the form of “if I understand myself as a person of type x, then I must do y”. Returning to the example of understanding myself as a philosopher, we see that when I deliberate about, for instance, whether or not I should devote more time to my dissertation or to my class lectures, I am really deliberating about the best way to enact

the possible way of being that is being a philosopher. In this deliberative process, I am further refining my basic self-understanding of being a philosopher in such a way that the world in which I find myself is articulated in a more fine-grained way. If I ultimately decide that it is more important to devote time to my dissertation, then I have refined and clarified my understanding of what it means to be a philosopher in such a way that working on my dissertation matters to me more than preparing lectures for class. In this way the process of deliberation allows working on my dissertation to matter to me.

More would have to be said about how exactly deliberative action would fit into this Heideggerian conception of action, but I hope to have shown here the general way in which this might be accomplished. I also would suggest that this manner of dealing with deliberative action is more plausible than Dreyfus's relegation of deliberative action to those cases in which we experience a breakdown in the normal flow of our activity.

*Having Different Self-understandings that Give Rise to Allowing Incompatible Things to Matter to Us*

The third type of situation that might be problematic for the Heideggerian conception of action is similar to the second case considered. In the section above, we discussed cases in which there may be two (or more) different things or two (or more) possible ways of acting that matter to us, or in other words, situations which call for explicit deliberation. The Heideggerian response to this sort of problem would be to see deliberation as an explicit, abstract form of the basic articulation of the situation that happens initially at a pre-thematic level. In other words, deliberation would be

understood as fine-grained articulation taking place within the articulated context of significance already established by the possible self-understanding that we have taken up.

Now suppose we vary the example slightly. Suppose that I were to receive a phone call informing me that a fairly distant relative has died. I learn that the funeral is in several days, but unfortunately, the funeral is scheduled to take place on the same day that I am supposed to present a paper at a prestigious conference. I am faced with a situation in which two conflicting actions matter to me. Attending the funeral matters to me insofar as I understand myself as a supportive and dutiful family member. Presenting the paper at the conference matters to me insofar as I understand myself as a philosopher. This sort of example differs from the type considered in the last section because here we have a case in which different things matter to us on the basis of two different self-understandings. The examples considered above dealt with alternative actions that were all to be understood in terms of one self-understanding.

These cases in which we find two different self-understandings that allow two conflicting actions to matter to us may very well prompt us to engage in explicit deliberation to decide what we should do, but the Heideggerian response to these sorts of examples will be different than the one discussed in the previous section. For Heidegger, the self-understanding that is that for the sake of which we act is not a product of deliberation, but rather is chosen in a decision (PS 101). In the *Plato's Sophist* lecture, Heidegger explains Aristotle's claim that a doctor does not deliberate about whether or not to heal someone (NE 1112b11). Here Heidegger says that the doctor "does not deliberate about whether he is going to heal; on the contrary, that belongs to the meaning

of his existence itself, because as a doctor he has already resolved in favor of healing” (PS 111). The self-understanding of being a doctor provides the basic articulation of the world that first allows for meaningful deliberation, so this self-understanding cannot itself have been the product of a deliberative process. We ultimately just have to choose certain basic possible ways of understanding ourselves without being able to rely on a deliberative process to guide our choice. Heidegger repeats this claim in his discussion of resoluteness in *Being and Time* when he asks: “But on what basis does Dasein disclose itself in resoluteness? On what is to resolve? *Only* the resolution itself can give the answer” (BT 345/298).

Our initial reaction to this claim by Heidegger might be to think that it is just obviously false. When considering the example given above, it seems clear that I can deliberate about whether understanding myself as a philosopher or understanding myself as a supportive family member is more important to me. Heidegger could respond to this by saying that as long as deliberation is still possible, the possible self-understandings being considered are not for-the-sake-of-whichs in the proper sense of the term. If we reflect on the deliberation that might take place in the above example, we see that this deliberation between understanding oneself as a philosopher or as a supportive family member really is taking place in light of a more general self-understanding to which both of these self-understandings are subordinate. Remember that for Heidegger, a for-the-sake-of-which is supposed to be something for the sake of which we act that does not refer further to anything else beyond it. If I can deliberate about whether to understand myself as a philosopher or as a member of a family in this case, then I am doing so in

light of some more general self-understanding to which both of these ways of understanding myself refer. In this case, we might say that the most general, basic self-understanding operative here is that of understanding myself as a good person generally. I would be deliberating about whether or not going to the funeral or going to the conference would be the best way of being a good person. This understanding of myself as a good person is, in this case, a for-the-sake-of-which in the strict sense in that it does not refer to anything beyond itself. This type of deliberation then takes much the same form as the deliberation discussed in the previous section. We allow one action to matter more to us through the deliberative process by eventually deciding which way of understanding myself (as a philosopher or as a family member) is most in line with my basic understanding of myself as a good person.

It might seem that this resolution of the problem provides support for the decisionist interpretation of Heidegger's understanding of action. There are, however, several important differences. The decisionist interpretation of Heidegger maintains that Heidegger endorses a conception of authentic action that actively advocates the abandonment of social norms and the deliberation that takes place within their parameters. The type of example in question here merely acknowledges the fact that in some (most likely rare) cases, we will simply have to choose one self-understanding over another without recourse to a more general deliberative framework. In addition to this, the decision between two possible self-understandings discussed in this section is not an abandonment of the social norms that usually guide our actions in favor of a determination of the guidelines for our actions at the purely individual level. Rather, the

type of decision being discussed here is the decision between various possible self-understandings that could serve to guide our actions. There are norms and expectations that go along with my understanding of myself as a philosopher or a family member. In choosing one self-understanding over the other, I am choosing which sets of norms will guide my actions, not rejecting all socially-based norms.

*Actions that Do Not Seem to Involve Movement*

Another potential problem for the Heideggerian conception of action is presented by cases that we would normally consider to be actions, but that do not involve any overt physical movement. It might seem that since this Heideggerian conception of action is grounded in Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle's conception of the movement of living beings, there would be problems accounting for actions that do not involve movement. For example, suppose that during a presidential election year I am equally disgusted with all the candidates on the ballot. In order to demonstrate my disapproval of all of the candidates, I stay home on election day and do not vote. If someone were to ask me what I was doing, I could say that I was protesting against the potential candidates. In other words, I was actively not voting. This seems to be an action that is in fact characterized by a lack of activity or movement.

In a later paper in which he discusses Aristotle's conception of nature<sup>17</sup>, Heidegger makes it clear that rest, or the lack of movement, is still to be understood in

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<sup>17</sup> Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence and Concept of Phūsis in Aristotle's Physics, B, I," trans. Thomas Sheehan in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill 183-230 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

terms of movement. When discussing Aristotle's understanding of plants and animals in terms of movement, Heidegger maintains that "[r]est is a kind of movement; only that which is able to move can rest."<sup>18</sup> As Heidegger points out, it is "absurd to speak of the number '3' as resting."<sup>19</sup> Rest can only be understood as a cessation of movement or as a pause in the midst of an ongoing motion.

What does this tell us about action, specifically action that involves no movement? Suppose we consider the opposite of the above example. Suppose that instead of not voting, I am very enthusiastic about one candidate, and I do in fact go to the appropriate polling station and vote. We could analyze this positive action fairly easily using the conception of action developed in this chapter. We could say that I have an understanding of myself as a responsible citizen, which then allows the activities of picking a preferred candidate and voting for that candidate to matter to me. There is clearly movement involved with this action, e.g. driving to the polling station, registering my vote on the voting machine, etc. Now let us return to the original example of not voting. Here too we could say that it is my understanding of myself as a responsible citizen that lets a certain action matter to me. The difference in this case is that I am drawn towards expressing my dissatisfaction with the available candidates by not voting (never mind whether or not this is an appropriate way of expressing the dissatisfaction). Instead of my self-understanding allowing for me to be drawn into a particular movement, here my self-understanding actually allows me to be drawn towards non-

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<sup>18</sup> Heidegger, "On the Essence and Concept of Phūsis in Aristotle's *Physics*, B, I," 189.

<sup>19</sup> Heidegger, "On the Essence and Concept of Phūsis in Aristotle's *Physics*, B, I," 189.

movement. When it is realized that this non-movement can be understood only as a deficient sort of movement, we realize that these sorts of actions involving no movement can still be understood using the Heideggerian conception of action developed here.

## Conclusion

Let us now summarize the Heideggerian conception of action that has been developed in this chapter. Agency in general is characterized by being pulled by various things and activities encountered in the world (the passive aspect) and taking up a particular self-understanding that lets these things and activities matter to us in a specific way (the active aspect). In the following chapters, we will examine how this general conception of action is carried into Heidegger's distinction between inauthentic and authentic ways of acting and the way in which consideration of Heidegger's understanding of inauthentic and authentic action can help us to further expand and clarify this general conception of action.

## CHAPTER 2. UNDERSTANDING THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN AUTHENTIC AND INAUTHENTIC ACTION

In the previous chapter, I attempted to give a broad outline of a general conception of action drawn from Heidegger's early thought. In his early thought, and especially in *Being and Time*, Heidegger makes an important distinction between inauthentic existence and authentic existence. In the following chapters, I intend to build upon this general conception of action by considering Heidegger's distinction between authentic and inauthentic action and what each mode of acting can add to the preceding characterization of the general structure of action. Before turning to the more detailed analysis of authentic and inauthentic actions in the following chapters, it is important to briefly consider what exactly Heidegger means by the terms 'authentic' and 'inauthentic,' especially when these terms are used to describe action. It is this broader consideration of how to understand Heidegger's conceptions of authenticity and inauthenticity and the distinction between them that is the focus of this chapter.

Heidegger's distinction between authentic and inauthentic ways of existing has always been somewhat unclear and contentious. I will not pretend to solve all of the difficulties associated with interpreting this distinction here. In this section I will focus on two broad distinctions that can be drawn between authenticity and inauthenticity. The first distinction is that in authentic agency we come to take over or own our actions in a

way that we do not when acting inauthentically. In other words, when acting authentically we become responsible for our actions in a way that we are not when acting inauthentically. The second distinction between authentic and inauthentic agency is that in authentic agency we disclose the structure of our being as agents in the proper way, while in inauthentic agency, we do not. In other words, we achieve a sort of self-knowledge in authentic action that is lacking when we act inauthentically.

The general aim of this chapter is to provide a preliminary outline of what is meant by each of these ways of distinguishing authentic and inauthentic action and to briefly show that Heidegger does in fact distinguish between authentic action and inauthentic action along these lines by considering some relevant passages from his texts (specifically *Being and Time*). The detailed explanation of why exactly Heidegger thinks certain ways of acting are inauthentic or authentic (e.g. why our everyday productive activity is inauthentic) will be left to the following chapters. Similarly, a detailed explanation of how Heidegger thinks different modes of acting accomplish what he says they do (e.g. how the structure of our being is supposed to be revealed to us in authentic action) will be left to the following chapters. Let us now consider both of these two distinctions between authenticity and inauthenticity in greater detail.

### The First Distinction between Authentic and Inauthentic Action: Responsibility

Before proceeding to consider what responsibility would look like within the context of Heidegger's thought, it might be helpful to first discuss what we mean by responsibility generally. Ishtiyaque Haji provides a succinct description of the two main

schools of thought about the nature of the responsibility. According to Haji the traditional view of responsibility holds that in order for us to be responsible for our actions, there must be the “availability, at various points in our lives, of genuinely accessible alternative possibilities.”<sup>20</sup> We might generally think that for someone to truly be responsible for her actions, she had to have had the possibility of acting differently. A second common way of understanding responsibility according to Haji is the view that someone is “morally responsible for her behavior only if the antecedent actional elements, like her values, desires, or beliefs that cause that behavior, are ‘truly her own’; they are not, for example, the product of direct surreptitious implantation.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, we often think that in order for someone to be responsible for her actions, the decision to perform that action, the desire to perform that action, etc. must stem from the agent herself and cannot be the products of any external force.

It is something like this second understanding of responsibility that we find in Heidegger’s thought. As we saw in the first chapter, on the Heideggerian conception of action, it is the various self-understandings that we take up that articulate the situation of action and let things matter to us. Responsibility on the Heideggerian conception of action would then entail that the self-understandings that articulate the situation of action are drawn from the agent herself in each case and not from some external source. This very general characterization of what responsibility would be like on the Heideggerian

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<sup>20</sup> Ishtiyaque Haji, “Compatibilist Views of Freedom and Responsibility,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane, 202 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> Haji, 202.

conception of action will suffice for now, but we will have much more to say about it in the following chapters.

This first distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity on the basis of having or lacking responsibility comes from the existentialist reading of Heidegger. Understanding the difference between Heidegger's conceptions of authenticity and inauthenticity in this way has probably been the most common way of interpreting this distinction. As we saw in the Introduction, Richard Wolin characterizes Heidegger's conception of authentic action as advocating a sort of decisionism. Wolin describes Heidegger's conception of authentic action as the complete determination of an individual's action purely from the will of the individual agent that rejects all traditional social norms as inauthentic. In Wolin's words:

[O]nce the inauthenticity of all traditional social norms has been existentially unmasked, the only remaining basis for moral orientation is a *decision ex nihilo*, a *radical assertion of the will*; a will, moreover, that is pure and unconstrained by the impediments of social convention."<sup>22</sup>

On this reading of Heidegger, when acting authentically, our actions are grounded purely in our own will, while in inauthentic action we let our actions be determined by the prevailing social norms. According to the criterion established above for responsibility, this would mean that we are responsible for our actions when acting authentically, but not when acting inauthentically.

Heidegger does indeed provide ample evidence for this reading of the distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity. In various passages in *Being and Time*,

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<sup>22</sup> Richard Wolin, *The Politics of Being* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 39.

Heidegger makes it clear that when acting inauthentically, we are not the agents of our actions in a strict sense. He expresses this in several different ways. “When Dasein is absorbed in the world of its concern,” says Heidegger, “it is not itself” (BT 163/125). In our everyday performance of actions in the world, we are, according to Heidegger, not really the ones acting. In fact, he goes on to claim that “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 165/127), and that in our everyday activities “everyone is the other, and no one is himself” (BT 165/128). This leads Heidegger to claim that since we are not the agents of our own actions when acting inauthentically, we are deprived of responsibility (*Verantwortlichkeit*) for our actions (BT 165/127, translation modified). If we are not really the agents of our actions, i.e. if our actions are not really our own, then we cannot really be said to be responsible for them.

Heidegger’s account of authentic action can be understood as his attempt to develop a conception of that mode of acting in which we ourselves are the agents of our actions and come to be responsible for our actions. Heidegger describes authentic action as a “way of letting one’s ownmost Self take action in itself of its own accord” (BT 342/295). For Heidegger, guilt and a certain understanding of what it really means to be guilty play a large role in his account of authentic action. When discussing the meaning of being guilty, Heidegger points out that “‘Being-guilty’ also has the signification of ‘*being responsible for*’—that is, being the cause or author of something, or even ‘being the occasion’ for something” (BT 327/282). He proceeds to say that generally, “to the idea of ‘Guilty!’ belongs what is expressed without further differentiation in the

conception of guilt as ‘having responsibility for’—that is, as being the ground [*Grundsein*] for...” (BT 329/283, translation modified). When Heidegger claims that in authentic action we really are the agents of our actions, i.e. that it is our own selves acting here, not others, he is saying that in authentic action we are responsible for our actions because we are the ground for our actions in a way that we are not when acting inauthentically.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the consideration of Heidegger’s distinction between authentic and inauthentic action is supposed to help refine and expand the general Heideggerian conception of action developed in the first chapter. As we will explain more fully in the next chapter, one potential problem for this Heideggerian conception of action as formulated up to this point (which Heidegger himself clearly recognizes) is that it seems that in most (if not all) of our actions, the self-understanding that articulates the situation is drawn from the social context in which we find ourselves. In other words, the self-understanding that is the active part of the action comes not from the individual agent, but from an external source. If this is the case, then it is difficult to see how we could be responsible for our actions.

This problem is further exacerbated when one takes into consideration the meaning of human action or agency as such. Remembering Frankfurt’s statement of the issue from the Introduction, the “problem of action is to explicate the contrast between what an agent does and what merely happens to him, or between the bodily movements

that he makes and those that occur without his making them.”<sup>23</sup> If we are to have a meaningful conception of action or agency, we have to be able to explain the difference between those movements that are grounded in the agent herself, i.e. the movements that the agent herself owns, and those movements whose ground is not in the agent herself. In other words, the problem of action is the problem of explaining how we can have responsibility for actions, at least if we have an understanding of responsibility like the one outlined above. If Heidegger thinks that our everyday actions are for the most part inauthentic in the sense described above, then the question of whether or not there is some way of acting in which we are the agents of our actions, and thus are responsible for our actions, becomes rather pressing.

The potential problem for developing an account of responsibility in the context of the Heideggerian conception of action is that although in *Being and Time* Heidegger makes it clear that responsibility for our actions is a concern and is a key distinction between authentic and inauthentic action, there is little explicit discussion of responsibility in *Being and Time*, and the limited discussion of the subject found there are often rather opaque. In his 1930 lecture course, *The Essence of Human Freedom*, Heidegger devotes the second half of the course to a detailed interpretation of specific aspects of Kant’s practical philosophy, culminating with an account of what it means to be truly responsible for our actions. In the fourth chapter, I will show how the questions raised about our responsibility for our actions when Heidegger distinguishes between authentic and inauthentic action in *Being and Time* can be answered by Heidegger’s later,

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<sup>23</sup> Frankfurt, “The Problem of Action,” 42.

Kantian account of responsibility in *The Essence of Human Freedom*. In the course of this more detailed consideration of Heidegger's understanding of responsibility, we will see that the existentialist reading of Heidegger as described in this section is not quite correct, even though it is a useful starting point.

#### The Second Distinction between Authentic and Inauthentic Action: Self-Knowledge

As stated above, the second distinction that I would like to draw between authentic and inauthentic action is that in authentic action the structure of our being is properly revealed to us, while in inauthentic action, the structure of our being is not revealed to us. That is, we achieve a certain level of self-knowledge in authentic action that is not attained in inauthentic action. This way of understanding the distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity may seem somewhat strange and is admittedly more difficult to see in *Being and Time* when compared to the first distinction between authentic and inauthentic action based on whether or not we have responsibility for our actions.

There are, however, a fair number of commentators that hold something like this view of the distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity. For example, in his commentary on *Being and Time*, Michael Gelven maintains that “[a]uthentic existence is characterized by an explicit awareness of what it means to be,” and “[i]nauthentic existence is that mode of existence in which one has hidden or forgotten what it means to

be.”<sup>24</sup> Gelven adds that for Heidegger, “before it is possible to analyze what it means to be, the interpretation of Dasein must also yield positively what it means to be authentic Dasein,” which implies that authenticity involves self-knowledge.<sup>25</sup> More recently, Taylor Carman has argued that Heidegger’s aim in his development of his conception of authenticity is to show that the traditional metaphysical understanding of the self is inadequate and that the self is such that it can never be understood through third-person, objective accounts of what it is to be a self.<sup>26</sup> On Carman’s read we achieve a proper understanding of the nature of the self in authentic existence insofar as we understand that the first person view is irreducible, i.e. second- or third-person accounts of self-hood can never adequately capture that first-person relation of the self to itself.

There is a good deal of textual support in *Being and Time* for this interpretation of the distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity. It is clear that Heidegger thinks that we do not properly understand the structure of our being in our everyday existence. According to Heidegger, in our everyday existence, we tend to cover over, distort or generally misunderstand the structure of our being. Heidegger explicitly expresses this in multiple passages like the following:

If Dasein discovers the world in its own way and brings it close, if it discloses to itself its own authentic Being, then this discovery of the ‘world’ and this disclosure of Dasein are always accomplished as a clearing-away of

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<sup>24</sup> Michael Gelven, *A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1989), 142.

<sup>25</sup> Gelven, 142.

<sup>26</sup> See Carman’s *Heidegger’s Analytic: Interpretation, Discourse, and Authenticity in Being and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), especially Chapter 6, “Authenticity and Asymmetry,” 264-314.

concealments and obscurities, as a breaking up of the disguises with which Dasein bars its own way (BT 167/129).

Here he characterizes our disclosing of our own being as clearing away “concealments and obscurities.” He also frequently makes it clear that these distortions of our understanding of our being stem from the everyday way in which we exist. According to Heidegger, “our everyday environmental experiencing, which remains directed both ontically and ontologically towards entities within-the-world, is not the sort of thing which can present Dasein in an ontically primordial manner for ontological analysis” (BT 226/181). In other words, in our everyday existence we are directed towards the things in the world with which we are concerned. This preoccupation with our worldly concerns and projects does not allow for a proper understanding of our own existence. The explanation of why exactly Heidegger thinks that our everyday activities do not allow us to properly understand our being will come in the next chapter. For now, I just want to make the point that one distinguishing characteristic of inauthentic action for Heidegger is that when acting inauthentically, we fail to properly understand the structure of our being.

There are also several passages in *Being and Time* in which Heidegger is fairly clear that authentic existence is supposed to be that way of existing in which we reveal the structure of our being to ourselves. We can find a first indication of this possibility of disclosing the structure of our own being by considering Heidegger’s discussion of understanding. When explaining what he means by understanding in Division I of *Being of Time*, Heidegger says that we can think of understanding as a sort of sight (BT

186/146). He lists three main types of sight: circumspection, which is the sight that guides our productive activity, considerateness, which is the sight that guides our interaction with other people and a type of sight that is “directed upon Being as such” (BT 186/146). It is worth quoting Heidegger’s further description of this third type of sight at length. Heidegger describes this third type of sight as follows:

The sight which is related primarily and on the whole to existence we call ‘transparency’ [*Durchsichtigkeit*]. We choose this term to designate ‘knowledge of the Self’ in a sense which is well understood, so as to indicate that here it is not a matter of perceptually tracking down and inspecting a point called the ‘Self’, but rather one of seizing upon the full disclosedness of Being-in-the-World throughout all the constitutive items which are essential to it (BT 186-187/146).

In this passage, Heidegger clearly indicates that there is a way of understanding ourselves that makes our own being clear (i.e. transparent) to us.

He is also careful to say that this self-knowledge does not take the form of traditional reflection on an ego or point of consciousness. Rather, the type of self-knowledge Heidegger is talking about here takes into consideration the fact that, as we saw in the last chapter, our being is such that we are always pushing forward towards possible ways of being and are simultaneously open to being affected by things in the world. Heidegger goes on to make it clear that it is in authentic existence that we are able to clearly and properly understand the structure of our being. Heidegger claims that in authenticity, “Dasein is revealed to itself in its current factual potentiality-for-Being, and in such a way that Dasein itself *is* this revealing and Being-revealed” (BT 355/307), and that “we have reached a way of Being of Dasein in which it brings itself to itself and face

to face with itself” (BT 357/309). I will leave the detailed explanation of how we are supposed to reveal the structure of our being to ourselves in authentic existence until the fifth chapter. It is enough here to establish that Heidegger thinks that one of the distinctive aspects of authentic existence is that it is that way of existing in which our being is revealed to us.

At this point it could very well be asked what this second distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity has to do with action and what it could add to the development of a Heideggerian conception of action. These questions can be answered in two stages. First of all, we can show that there are reasons internal to the development of Heidegger’s thought that lead him to conceive of authentic action as mode of acting in which we achieve a proper knowledge of ourselves as agents. When Heidegger develops an account of authenticity in Division II of *Being and Time*, he focuses on concepts that are typically associated with action (e.g. guilt, conscience and resoluteness). Heidegger focuses on the way in which the structure of our being is revealed to us in the experience of these phenomena. His focus on the sort of self-knowledge that can be drawn from these experiences stems from his rejection of the traditional philosophical method for attaining knowledge of ourselves.

The traditional philosophical method for understanding our own being is to cognitively reflect on the structures of consciousness that are typically taken to be definitive for human beings. For our purposes, the most relevant instance of this method is found in Husserl’s phenomenological methodology, which of course greatly influenced Heidegger. Husserl’s main objective, at least in his early years at Freiburg when he

worked closely with Heidegger, is to develop a philosophy that is a rigorous science.<sup>27</sup>

For Husserl, the way to make philosophy into a rigorous science is to focus on our immanent experience of the structures of our consciousness as opposed to our transcendent experience of things in the world. This understanding of the structures of our consciousness is not something easily attained for Husserl. Rather, Husserl spends a great deal of time trying to develop the proper way of focusing on the structures of our consciousness and purifying our awareness of any focus on external objects. Husserl calls the process of properly becoming aware of the structures of our consciousness the phenomenological reduction. Husserl describes the reduction as follows:

The so-called *phenomenological reduction* can be effected by modifying Descartes's method, by carrying it through purely and consequentially while disregarding all Cartesian aims; phenomenological reduction is the method for effecting radical purification of the phenomenological field of consciousness from all obtrusions from Objective actualities and keeping it pure of them.<sup>28</sup>

The Cartesian method to which Husserl is here referring is, of course, the radical doubt of the existence of objects in the external world. Husserl modifies Descartes's radical skepticism by claiming that the phenomenologist is not doubting the existence of objects in the world in any radical sense, but rather the phenomenologist is "bracketing" or "putting out of action" her convictions concerning the objective existence of things in

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<sup>27</sup> See for example, Husserl's "Philosophy as Rigorous Science", trans. Quentin Lauer in *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 71-148 .

<sup>28</sup> Edmund Husserl, "Pure Phenomenology, its Method, and its Field of Investigation," trans. Robert Welsh Jordan in *The Phenomenology Reader*, eds. Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney (New York: Routledge, 2002), 129.

the world.<sup>29</sup> When the objective existence of objects is bracketed, we are left with “consciousness in itself” as a “residuum”.<sup>30</sup> When we have performed this act of bracketing, we can then focus on the structures of consciousness itself and the phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness. We are no longer directed outwardly towards objects in the external world, but rather we are brought back to the structure and processes of our consciousness itself.

We can understand Heidegger’s opposition to this traditional philosophical method, especially in the form of Husserl’s phenomenological methodology, and his motivation for developing an alternative way of coming to understand our being by briefly considering the objections to Husserlian phenomenology raised by Paul Natorp.<sup>31</sup> Natorp’s two objections to phenomenology are that 1) by reflecting on our experience and our cognitive acts, we necessarily hypostatize and still something that is fundamentally dynamic, thereby distorting it and precluding any direct access to the dynamic nature of our experience and 2) by using concepts to describe our immediate experience, we are already objectifying it and interpreting it in terms of the mediation of abstract concepts, thereby losing the immediate access to our experience that is supposed to be the bedrock of phenomenological reflection. In order to develop a version of phenomenology that avoids Natorp’s objections, Heidegger seeks to develop a mode of understanding our own being that is itself fundamentally dynamic and pre-theoretical so

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<sup>29</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson (New York: MacMillan, 1958), 108.

<sup>30</sup> Husserl, *Ideas I*, 113.

<sup>31</sup> Here I am relying on Theodore Kisiel’s account of Natorp’s objections and their influence on Heidegger’s early thought, which can be found in *The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 46-50.

that it can adequately capture the dynamic nature of our being without recourse to abstract, theoretical concepts.

In Heidegger's early lecture courses leading up to *Being and Time*, we can see him beginning to develop this alternative way of coming to understand our being that overcomes Natorp's objection to Husserl's phenomenology. In his 1921-1922 lecture course, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, Heidegger describes philosophical inquiry not as a static, conceptual and cognitive procedure, but rather as a sort of movement arising out of life itself that counters our normal tendency to be absorbed in the world of our practical concerns and to not endeavor to understand our own being. Heidegger describes this countermovement as a "genuine questioning" that "consists in living in the answer itself in a searching way" (PIA 114). Heidegger provides a more detailed conception of his understanding of this way of acting in the 1924 lecture course, *Plato's Sophist*, when discussing Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and Aristotle's conception of the intellectual virtues. Heidegger considers the intellectual virtues to be ways in which we disclose the world and our own being, paying particular attention to *phrōnesis*. Heidegger maintains that *phrōnesis* is a "disposition of human Dasein such that in it I have at my disposal my own transparency" and that *phrōnesis* "lives in action" (PS 37). He notes pointedly that "understanding does not primarily mean just gazing at a meaning, but rather understanding oneself in that potentiality-for-Being which reveals itself in projection" (BT 307/263). In other words, Heidegger does not want to rely on the sort of abstract theoretical reflection that is characteristic of philosophy. He does not want to merely posit that human existence is constituted by disposition and

understanding. Rather, he is seeking to develop a mode of existing in which we clearly experience this constitution of our being in our lived existence as agents immersed in our world of practical concerns.

If this then provides some explanation of why Heidegger connects the attainment of the proper sort of self-knowledge with authentic action, we can move on to the second question posed above—the question of what the consideration of this second distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity can add to the development of a Heideggerian conception of action. To answer this question, we will attempt to show how this second distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity in terms of self-knowledge can be connected to the first distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity in terms of responsibility. We showed above why being able to explain when and how we can be responsible for our actions is essential to the development of a conception of human action. Now the aim is to show that acting with a certain degree of self-knowledge is required in order to be truly responsible for our actions. Once again, the more detailed consideration of this connection in Heidegger's thought will have to wait until the later chapters, but here we can at least try to show the plausibility of this connection through some very general considerations.

In the previous section, we gave the very general characterization of responsibility as acting in such a way that the action can be said to somehow be grounded in the agent herself. That is, being responsible for an action means that the antecedent decision, desire, belief, etc. (or self-understanding of the Heideggerian conception of action) that brings about the action is the agent's own, not the product of some external force. At a

very general level, we can see how a certain self-knowledge could be important here. For example, if while driving I were to hit a pedestrian crossing the street, the degree to which I am held to be responsible for this action would depend at least in part on whether I had knowingly made the decision to run over the unfortunate pedestrian or not. We typically think that people are more responsible for those actions that stem from decisions that they explicitly and knowingly make. The degree of self-knowledge people have when acting does make a difference when it comes to determining to what degree they are responsible for their actions.

This is not quite the connection that we want to make between self-knowledge and responsibility on the Heideggerian conception of action. As we have seen, Heidegger does not emphasize the role of mental states like desires and beliefs in his conception of action, and he makes it clear that his conception of authentic self-knowledge is not an internal inspection of these mental states. Is there a way of finding a connection between authentic self-knowledge in Heidegger's sense and responsibility? In other words, can we find a way of connecting acting with an understanding of the structure of our being with being responsible for our actions? We can use the general existentialist conception of freedom and action to see how this might work, even though we will see that this connection cannot quite be made in the same way for Heidegger. At least according to the superficial, pop-culture understanding of existentialism, we act authentically and become fully responsible for our actions when we realize that the social, religious and/or historical norms that typically guide our actions are completely baseless and arbitrary and that we must create for ourselves the standards according to

which we should live. When we recognize that we as human beings are “condemned to freedom,” to use Sartre’s expression, then we become truly responsible for our actions. The sort of self-knowledge involved here is knowledge of the essential nature of human beings, not merely a sort of internal awareness of the mental states that we typically associate with taking action.

Once again, these considerations are only used to show the general plausibility of the connection between responsibility and self-knowledge. We are not here concerned with the details of this connection within the context of the Heideggerian conception of action being developed here. In the fifth chapter, I will show in more detail how Heidegger finds the template for this dynamic, pre-conceptual mode of self-knowledge in Aristotle’s conception of *phrōnesis* and how Heidegger uses his interpretation of *phrōnesis* to develop his conception of authenticity as a way of acting in and through which we reveal the structure of our being to ourselves, thereby becoming responsible for our actions.

## Conclusion

Let us summarize the most important results of this chapter. There are two main distinctions between authentic action and inauthentic action for Heidegger. The first distinction is that when acting authentically, we are responsible for our actions in a way that we are not when acting inauthentically. We are responsible for our actions when those actions stem from ourselves, when they are not determined by something else. The second distinction between authentic and inauthentic action is that when acting

authentically, we reveal the structure of our being to ourselves in the proper way, i.e. that we achieve a particular form of self-knowledge.

As mentioned above, the more detailed discussion of authentic action will take place in chapters four and five. In chapter four, we will show how we are able to become responsible for our actions when acting authentically. The fifth chapter will then focus on how Heidegger thinks that the structure of our being is revealed to us in authentic action. The next chapter, chapter three, will discuss Heidegger's understanding of inauthentic action, specifically in terms of how inauthentic action prevents us from understanding the structure of our being and taking responsibility for our actions.

### CHAPTER 3. INAUTHENTIC ACTION

Now that we have said something about how to understand the distinction between authentic and inauthentic action generally, we can turn our attention to the main focus of this chapter, Heidegger's analysis of inauthentic action. While Heidegger does discuss this topic in his early lecture courses, it is again in *Being and Time* that we find the fullest analysis of inauthentic action. Accordingly, most of our analysis here will focus on *Being and Time*.

In the first chapter, we developed a general Heideggerian conception of action using as a basis Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle's understanding of the movement of living things. Fittingly, Heidegger describes inauthentic action in terms of a certain form of movement, which he calls falling (*Verfallen*). We will begin our discussion of inauthentic action by considering the structure of falling and showing how the structure of falling gives rise to the two distinguishing characteristics of inauthentic action established in the last chapter—the failure to be responsible for our actions and the failure to properly understand the structure of our being. From there we can move on to consider the different general types of inauthentic action discussed by Heidegger in *Being and Time* and show how these general types of inauthentic action exhibit the structure of falling and the two distinguishing characteristics of inauthentic action.

## The Movement of Inauthentic Action—Falling

To begin with, it is important to point out that despite our inclination to do so, Heidegger claims that we are not to understand his use of the term ‘falling’ as conveying a “negative evaluation” of the type of action that has this structure (BT 220/175). Rather, falling is meant to describe the way in which we are drawn or pulled into the world of our concern. As we saw in the first chapter, Heidegger maintains that as human beings, we are naturally drawn towards certain things and activities that matter to us. Most of the time, we have a tendency to be drawn towards those activities that constitute our everyday life in the world, e.g. doing the dishes, teaching classes, buying groceries, etc. Additionally, the term ‘falling’ is meant to describe our tendency to become absorbed in “Being-with-one-another” (BT 220/175), i.e. being drawn towards social interaction with other people, having an interest in “public affairs”, etc.

One might then think that falling is just another term for disposition, the way in which we characterized our general tendency to be pulled towards things that matter to us in the first chapter. The difference between disposition and falling is that disposition is an essential feature of all human movement or action, while falling is restricted to our tendency to become completely absorbed in our worldly concerns. As we will see when we consider the possibility of authentic action, Heidegger maintains that we can be drawn towards a way of existing and acting that is not drawn from the world of our concerns or our social world but rather stems from our own being.

Heidegger proposes to further elucidate the structure of the movement of falling by considering four phenomena that are characteristic of this movement. The first of

these phenomena is temptation (BT 221/177). With this term, Heidegger is again describing the way in which the world of our everyday concerns and social interactions always seems to beckon us or draw us towards it. Most of us have some sense of what Heidegger is trying to get at here. We often find ourselves caught up in and in fact drawn towards our various everyday activities like meeting friends for dinner, picking out a new painting for the living room wall, etc.

The second phenomenon that Heidegger uses to characterize the movement of falling is tranquility (BT 222/177). With the term tranquility, Heidegger is pointing to the way that even (or perhaps especially) when we are caught up in the hectic flow of our everyday activities, we have a sort of tranquility insofar as we do not have time to question why it is that we do what we do and what it really means to be a human being. When immersed in our everyday actions, we operate with an assurance that we are “leading and sustaining a full and genuine ‘life’,” which “brings [us] a *tranquility*” (BT 222/177).

The third phenomenon characteristic of falling is alienation (BT 222/178). To fully understand why Heidegger maintains that alienation is involved in the movement of falling, we need to understand his conception of *das Man* (the “they” or the “One”). In the first chapter, we discussed Heidegger’s analysis of solicitous activity, i.e. our interaction with other people. We also saw how Heidegger comes to see being with other people, i.e. being part of a social context, as a fundamental aspect of our being. Being a part of a social context is essential for our being as agents, since it is from the social

context in which we find ourselves that we draw the self-understandings that allow things to matter to us.

Now Heidegger is going to say that “When Dasein is absorbed in the world of its concern—that is, at the same time, in its Being-with towards Others—it is not itself” (BT 163/125). In other words, when we are engaged in our everyday activity (i.e. absorbed in the world of our concern), we are not really ourselves. Why is this? We can begin to see why Heidegger would say that we are not ourselves when engaged in our everyday actions when we consider the following passage:

[P]roximally and for the most part everyday Dasein understands itself in terms of that with which it is customarily concerned. ‘One is’ what one does...Here one Dasein can and must, within certain limits, ‘be’ another Dasein” (BT 283-284/239-240).

How does this passage help? If we return to the general conception of action developed in the first chapter, we can say that when we act, we are drawn towards things that matter to us on the basis of the self-understanding(s) towards which we direct ourselves. Another way of formulating this is to say that when we are acting, we are doing what is prescribed by the self-understanding(s) that we have taken up. We might then ask where these self-understandings come from, or from where do we draw these self-understandings. As we discussed briefly in the first chapter, these self-understandings are drawn from the social and historical context in which we find ourselves. When I understand myself as a philosopher and let things matter to me on the basis of this self-understanding, I do not have complete control over everything that matters to me as a philosopher. Rather, I have a general sense of what is required to be a

philosopher in our current social/historical context. If we want to know more precisely where this understanding of what is required of a philosopher comes from (i.e. who exactly defines or has defined what it is to be a philosopher), the most we can say is that if one wants to be a philosopher in our current historical situation, there are just certain things that one must do. For example, it is understood that to be a philosopher today more or less requires that one be affiliated with some sort of institution of higher learning, publish papers in academic journals, attend academic conferences, etc. The origin of these requirements is vague and ultimately cannot be pinned on one person or even group of people.

This leads to Heidegger's conception of *das Man* (the one, or "the they" in the Macquarrie and Robinson translation of *Being and Time*). When answering the question of who is really acting in our everyday actions, Heidegger says that, the "'who' is not this one, not that one, not oneself, not some people, and not the sum of them all. The 'who' is the neuter, *the 'one' [das Man]*" (BT 164/126, translation modified). We can understand our everyday actions on this view not as the actions of discrete, autonomous agents, but rather as the enactment of various social roles and behavioral norms. When understood in this way, it can be said that in our "everydayness the agency through which most things come about is one of which we must say that 'it was no one'" (BT 165/127). In our everyday actions, there is no real agent for Heidegger since we are "for the sake of the 'one' in an everyday manner, and the 'one' itself articulates the referential context of significance" (BT 167/129).

This makes sense when considered in light of the conception of action developed in the previous chapter. Action is to be understood as letting things and activities have a pull on us on the basis of our self-understandings (for the sake of which we act). These self-understandings come from the social context in which we find ourselves. Furthermore, we see that ultimately the particular actions required to enact these possible self-understandings are determined by no one in particular, or put another way, they are determined by *das Man*. Following the connections being made here, we can conclude that ultimately, the active aspect of agency (i.e. letting things matter to us) is performed by *das Man*, i.e. no one in particular. In this way we can be said to not really be ourselves when engaged in our everyday activities. That is, our everyday actions exhibit a movement of alienation in which we are drawn out towards various activities through the articulation of the situation provided not by ourselves but rather by the social context in which we find ourselves. Alienation is a movement away from ourselves that is not even guided by ourselves.

Heidegger calls the fourth and final characteristic of falling entanglement (BT 223/178). By characterizing the movement of falling as entanglement, Heidegger seems to be making sure that we do not misunderstand what he means by alienation. He says that:

It [alienation] does not, however, surrender Dasein to an entity which Dasein itself is not, but forces it into its inauthenticity—into a possible kind of Being of *itself*. The alienation of falling—at once tempting and tranquilizing—leads by its own movement to Dasein's getting *entangled* in itself (BT 222-223/178).

Here Heidegger is saying that alienation is indeed part of our being as humans. In a sense, we are ourselves in our very tendency to become alienated from ourselves. The term 'entanglement' is meant to capture the seemingly paradoxical nature of falling.

Now that we have seen how Heidegger describes the movement of inauthentic action, we can show why action exhibiting this structure is considered to be inauthentic based on the two distinguishing characteristics of inauthenticity discussed in the last chapter. The first distinguishing characteristic of inauthentic action is that when acting inauthentically, we are not responsible for our actions. We stated that at a general level, an agent is not responsible for her actions when the actions do not stem from the agent herself. According to the Heideggerian conception of action developed in the first chapter, for an agent not to be responsible for her actions, the articulation of the situation that allows things to matter to her would not really be performed by her. As we have seen here, this is exactly what happens in the movement of falling. We have a tendency to be absorbed in the world of our everyday concerns and social interactions. The determination of which everyday activities matter to us is performed not by us as individual agents but rather by the impersonal social norms that make up the various possible ways of understanding ourselves.

The second distinguishing characteristic of inauthentic action is that when acting inauthentically, we fail to properly understand the structure of our own being. When our actions have the structure of falling, we are drawn out into and absorbed by the world of our concerns. We are concerned with the tasks we are to accomplish, not the structure of our being as agents. We also become tranquilized insofar as we are content with being

absorbed in our everyday activities, leaving little time or energy to attempt to cultivate the proper understanding of the structure of our being.

### The Three General Types of Inauthentic Action

Let us now look at the various types of inauthentic action found in *Being and Time*. By looking at these types of inauthentic action, we can gain a more concrete understanding of the movement of falling and can better understand why Heidegger considers most of our everyday activities to be inauthentic. There are three basic types of everyday activities discussed in *Being and Time*. Two of these types of everyday action have been discussed in the first chapter in the course of the development of the general Heideggerian conception of action. In that first chapter, we saw that Heidegger draws most of his examples from what can be called productive activity, i.e. actions directed toward the accomplishment of some specific goal or task. We also showed how the general analysis of action drawn from productive activity also can be applied to our interactions with other people, a type of action that is not aimed at producing anything. Productive activity and interaction with other people will be considered in the first and second sections of this chapter, respectively.

There was also a third type of activity at which we hinted in the first chapter, but whose discussion was postponed until this chapter. In addition to productive activity and interactions with other people, we might also want to say that we perform actions that are directed neither towards any specific goal (as is the case in productive activity) nor towards the enactment of any specific self-understanding (as may be the case in our non-

productive interactions with others). Here I am thinking of activities like surfing the internet, watching television, chatting with friends, etc. We will consider this third type of activity in the third section of this chapter.

### *Productive Activity*

As we have already seen, the first sort of activity discussed by Heidegger in *Being and Time* is productive activity. The question to be considered here is why this type of activity would be considered inauthentic. In other words, we must show how productive activity exhibits the movement that is characteristic of falling and how, when engaged in productive activity, we fail to properly understand our own being and to be responsible for our actions.

We already have shown how this type of activity can be understood in terms of the general conception of action developed in the first chapter. Productive action involves a passive aspect through which we encounter things and actions as mattering to us in some way and an active aspect through which we let these things matter to us by taking up various ways of understanding ourselves. For example, my understanding of myself as a philosopher lets the action of writing my dissertation matter to me in such a way that I am drawn towards this action.

How does productive activity exhibit the movement of falling? We can say that in general we are drawn towards various productive activities, even if they are as mundane as mowing the lawn or making the bed. We typically have a feeling that there are many “thing to be done”. It seems to be a bit of stretch to say that mowing the lawn

is “tempting”, but it makes sense when we consider Heidegger’s characterization of temptation as the tendency to get caught up in all the various everyday activities that we feel need to be done.

For this reason productive activity is also tranquilizing in the sense discussed above. When someone undergoes a traumatic emotional experience in her life, e.g. the death of a close friend or the end of a long relationship, the advice often given is to get back to work, to get involved in some sort of activity. When we are engaged in productive activity, we tend to get absorbed in the activity, and concern for our own being fades into the background. Heidegger makes this point by analyzing Aristotle’s account of *poīesis* (productive activity) and *tēchne* (the knowledge that guides productive activity). “In *tēchne*,” says Heidegger, “the know-how is directed toward the poieton, toward what is to be first produced” (PS 28). In productive activity we are directed toward what is to be produced, something which is external (*parā*) to the process of acting itself. Heidegger contrasts productive activity and *tēchne* with genuine action (*prāxis*), which is guided by *phrōnesis*. Heidegger maintains that *phrōnesis* is directed towards the being of the agent herself, since *phrōnesis* is concerned with “what is conducive to the right mode of Being of Dasein as such” (PS 34). However, “in the case of *poīesis*, the *tēlos* is something other, a worldly being over and against Dasein” (PS 36).

We can also see why productive activity would be alienating. When engaged in productive activity, our movement is out into the world of our concern and away from the consideration of ourselves. In addition to this, most of the self-understandings that we take up that let things matter to us are drawn from the social context in which we find

ourselves. Because of this, our productive activity cannot even be seen as an expression of ourselves in our actions, but rather is to be understood as our enactment of the impersonal social norms that guide our activities. For instance, we can say that it matters to me that I mow my lawn because I understand myself at least in part as a responsible homeowner, and part of what it means to be a responsible homeowner is to have a well-maintained lawn. This requirement has not been determined by me or any other specific individual, but instead is one of those social norms that is just understood and accepted.

Given these considerations, it is easy to see why productive activity is inauthentic according to the criteria established in the last chapter. When engaged in productive activities, we are not responsible for our actions because the articulation of the situation that lets us be drawn towards certain activities stems not from us as individual agents but rather from the impersonal norms of the socially derived self-understandings that we take up. In this type of activity, we also fail to properly understand the structure of our own being. This is not because we engage in any willful distortion or inadequate reflective technique. Rather, as we have seen, when we are busy doing all the things that we do on a daily basis, the structure of our own being is just not an issue for us at all. We are directed out towards the accomplishment of various tasks and not towards achieving a proper understanding of what it means to be human.

### *Interaction with Other People*

Our consideration of this type of action can be fairly brief. In the first chapter, we showed how our interactions with other people can be understood in terms of the general

conception of agency worked out there. The difference between productive activity and our interaction with other people is that when interacting with other people, we are not necessarily directed towards completing a specific task like writing a dissertation. Rather, when interacting with others, our actions can often be better described as being directed towards the enactment of an understanding of ourselves that we hold. For example, if I am traveling and call periodically to check in with my wife, my action can be understood not as an action merely aimed at producing in my wife a sense of ease and assurance. We can perhaps better understand this action as mattering to me insofar as I understand myself as a good husband and try continually to enact this possible way of being.

Why does Heidegger consider this form of action to be inauthentic for the most part, and how does our social interaction with other people exhibit the movement of falling? The answers to these questions are fairly clear given the discussion of the preceding section. Instead of characterizing the world of our everyday tasks and activities as tempting, here we can characterize social interaction with other people as tempting. We have a tendency to get caught up in various forms of social interaction. We feel that we need to stay in touch with friends and family, meet friends for dinner, post comments on internet message boards, etc. Our social interaction is also tranquilizing in much the same way that productive activity is. When involved in our many social activities, the structure of our own being is simply not an issue for us, and when engaged in these activities, we usually have a sense of assurance that this is what life is all about. For example, we often hear the opinion, repeated until it becomes

unquestionable, that spending time with one's family is the most important thing in life. We typically accept and repeat this view and others like it without really reflecting on what it is about being human that might make this statement true. Finally, we can see why interaction with other people is alienating in the same way that productive activity is. When interacting with other people, we are directed out towards the people with whom we are interacting and out towards the enactment of a certain self-understanding that is drawn from the social context.

We can also easily see why Heidegger would think that we are not really responsible for our actions when interacting with others based on our prior discussion of productive activity. When interacting with others, the self-understandings that allow certain activities to matter to us are drawn from the social context in which we find ourselves. For example, when I meet my friend at a bar to discuss his problems, I am letting this action matter to me on the basis of my understanding of what it is to be a friend. My understanding of myself as his friend prescribes this action to me. Who has decided that being someone's friend involves comforting him when he is distraught? Heidegger, as we saw when considering productive activity, can again answer that it is impossible to really pin this understanding of friendship on any single person or group of people. We can merely say something like "That's what friends do," or to phrase it in a way more in keeping with Heidegger's terminology, that is what one does when one is someone's friend. The articulation of the situation that allows the action of comforting my friend to matter to me is really performed by the vague general understanding of friendship. This articulation is not performed by me. Once again, we can see that, given

the conception of action worked out in the first chapter, this means that we are not really performing the active part of agency. This in turn means that we are not really responsible for our everyday interactions with others.

We can also see why we fail to properly understand the structure of our own being when interacting with other people. As in the case of productive activity, when engaged in social activity, we do not usually engage in willful neglect of proper reflection on what it means to be human, but rather we are so immersed in our activity that the structure of our being is simply not an issue for us.

#### *Non-Goal-Directed Action*

In the first chapter, we briefly discussed the potential problem for the Heideggerian conception of action that it seems to be based exclusively on Heidegger's analysis of productive activity. If this is the case, one might ask whether this conception of action can be applied to different types of action. In the first chapter, we discussed how social interaction can be understood according to the same conception of action. Both productive activity and social interaction share the characteristic of being directed towards something, either the accomplishment of a specific task (e.g. writing a dissertation) or the enactment of a particular self-understanding (e.g. being a good friend). At that time we postponed the consideration of any actions that might not share this characteristic of being directed towards something.

Now we are in a position to consider actions that do not seem to be directed towards any clear goal or enactment of some self-understanding. These actions do not

comfortably fit into the categories of productive actions or interactions with others.

Suppose that after coming home from class, I spend an hour surfing the internet, visiting various news and sports websites. How are we to analyze this sort of action given what has been said so far concerning the general structure of action? We could say that I understand myself as a sports fan or someone concerned with current events, and it is this self-understanding that allows the action of reading these websites to matter to me. Or perhaps we could say that these activities matter to me insofar as I understand myself as someone who works hard and therefore requires some relaxing activities, which are not aimed at accomplishing anything in particular. These analyses, however, seem somewhat inadequate.

We can see how to analyze activities of this sort according to the Heideggerian conception of action by further considering Heidegger's characterization of *das Man* and our tendency to be absorbed into the world of our everyday concerns and social interactions, specifically his discussions of curiosity, idle talk and ambiguity. There is a potential problem with limiting the scope of the phenomena of curiosity, idle talk and ambiguity to non-goal directed activity. Heidegger seems to want to say that these phenomena are characteristic of all inauthentic activity, not just what we are calling non-goal directed activity. For instance, Heidegger maintains that the structure of the movement of falling is revealed by the consideration of the interconnections between curiosity, idle talk and ambiguity (BT 219/175). If the movement of falling is characteristic of all inauthentic action (as we have attempted to demonstrate here), then

this implies that curiosity, idle talk and ambiguity are characteristic of all inauthentic action.

However, as we have also seen, Heidegger maintains that in our everyday activities, different types of understanding are operative. He seems to want to make a distinction between the types of understanding that guide productive activity and social interaction and curiosity. As we have seen, our productive activity is guided by a practical understanding of things and actions in terms of tasks to be accomplished and goals to be met. Heidegger calls this type of understanding circumspection (*Umsicht*). Our interaction with other people is guided by a type of understanding that Heidegger calls considerateness (*Rücksicht*). At times, making use of the German stem *-sicht*, Heidegger describes these different types of understanding as types of sight. Heidegger also considers what sort of sight is operative when we are not engaged in productive activity or interaction with others (although Heidegger does not explicitly mention the latter type of action). He states that “[i]n rest, concern does not disappear; circumspection, however, becomes free and is no longer bound to the world of work” (BT 216/172). It is this form of sight that is operative when we are not engaged in productive activity that Heidegger calls curiosity (BT 214/170). Heidegger further describes curiosity as follows:

When curiosity has become free, however, it concerns itself with seeing, not in order to understand what is seen...but just in order to see. It seeks novelty only in order to leap from it anew to another novelty. In this kind of seeing, that which is an issue for care does not lie in grasping something and being knowingly in truth; it lies rather in its

possibilities of abandoning itself to the world (BT 216/172).

It seems that curiosity as described here is something quite different than the type of sight or understanding operative in productive activity and social interaction.

Describing the carpenter's understanding of a nail in light of its usability for his projects in terms of curiosity does not seem quite right. For this reason, we will treat the phenomena of curiosity, idle talk and ambiguity as being characteristic of non-goal directed activity but not productive activity or social interaction with others.

With this in mind, we can now move on to consider how non-goal directed activity can be understood in terms of the Heideggerian conception of action developed in the first chapter and in terms of the movement of falling. We can begin by further considering curiosity. As we have said above, when we are no longer concerned with our productive activities, we shift to looking at things and activities not in terms of their usefulness for reaching some further end, but rather we look just to look. This tendency we have to want to experience and see new things can help explain activities like aimlessly surfing the internet or flipping through television channels. Heidegger maintains that we are just drawn towards these sorts of activities because we have a tendency to always want to know the latest news and to be abreast of the latest trends. If we reflect on the general conception of action developed in the first chapter, we can see that this tendency to be curious accounts for the passive aspect of these sorts of non-goal-directed activities. These activities matter because as human beings we have a tendency to be curious.

We can expect to find some way of articulating the situation in which we find ourselves that allows these activities to matter to us. The articulation that guides our tendency to be curious is what Heidegger calls idle talk (*Gerede*). “Idle talk,” says Heidegger, “controls even the ways in which one may be curious” (BT 217/173). It is idle talk that “says what one ‘must’ have read and seen” (BT 217/173). Heidegger maintains that we necessarily, due to the very nature of our being as creatures that are fundamentally social and open to being affected by our social context, understand ourselves and the world in terms of the public ways of interpreting things that are deposited like sediments in language itself (BT 211/168). When Heidegger says that idle talk controls the ways in which we are curious, he means that our curiosity is aroused and guided by what is currently held to be interesting and important in the court of public opinion. If I am aimlessly surfing the internet, I find myself looking at things that are deemed currently to be important by public opinion. For instance, I might end up looking at election results or the latest sports scores not because I have any real interest in these topics, but rather because they are simply what one talks about and what public opinion deems to be interesting. In this way idle talk articulates our situation and lets us be drawn towards seeing what is going on with regards to the latest news and trends.

We can then characterize non-goal-directed actions as having the same general structure as the other types of action discussed. The way in which things matter to us in these non-goal-directed activities is explained by Heidegger’s conception of curiosity, which is understood in the sense of the desire to seek out and see new things. The articulation of the world around that guides curiosity and lets it be directed towards

specific things is performed by idle talk, which can be understood as our immersion in the public opinions about what is currently important and interesting.

We can see easily enough how non-goal directed activity exhibits the movement of falling. The tendency to get caught in up whatever is new and interesting, captured in the phenomenon of curiosity, exhibits the movement of temptation that is characteristic of falling. We often find ourselves tempted to check up on the latest news and be up on the latest gossip. Non-goal directed activity also exhibits the movement of alienation. When engaged in this sort of activity, we are drawn away from ourselves and become immersed in whatever is determined to be interesting and important by the general public.

Following our program for this chapter, the next task is to show how this non-goal-directed type of action is inauthentic on the basis of the two distinctive characteristics of inauthentic action. This distinctive characteristic of inauthentic action is, again, that when acting inauthentically, we are not responsible for our actions. We have already seen why Heidegger thinks that we are not responsible for our actions when we are engaged in productive activity or when we are interacting with other people. In the cases of productive activity or social interaction, the self-understandings that articulate the situation in which we find ourselves and allow things to matter to us are drawn from the social context in which we are immersed, so that Heidegger thinks we must ultimately conclude that the One (*das Man*) ultimately is responsible for allowing things to matter to us. In other words, the real agent in these forms of everyday action is no one in particular.

Based on this it is easy enough to see why Heidegger would also maintain that when engaged in non-goal-directed activities like surfing the internet or gossiping with friends, we are not responsible for our actions. Remember that when we are engaged in these non-goal-directed activities, we are drawn by curiosity towards seeing and experiencing new things that are commonly considered to be interesting and worthwhile. As individual agents, we do not determine what is interesting and worthwhile. Rather, we are drawn towards those things that public opinion, or idle talk in Heidegger's terminology, has deemed to be interesting and important. In this case the articulation that guides the activity and allows certain things to arouse our curiosity comes directly from the vague, non-descript zeitgeist and is not located in any single individual or group of individuals. For Heidegger, this means that we are not responsible for actions when engaged in non-goal-directed activities.

Again, the second distinctive feature of inauthentic action is that when acting inauthentically we fail to properly understand the structure of our own being. How is non-goal-directed action inauthentic in this way? For Heidegger, this sort of action by its very nature tends to constantly move from one subject to another, never dwelling on one issue long to gain anything more than a superficial understanding of it. Curiosity has the character of "never dwelling anywhere" (BT 217/173) and is "concerned with the constant possibility of *distraction*" (BT 216/172), so that curiosity "concerns itself with knowing, but just in order to have known" (BT 217/172). Similarly, idle talk by its very nature is superficial and fails to provide any deeper understanding of the subject being discussed. Idle talk takes the form of "*gossiping and passing the word along*", which

“spreads in wider circles and takes on an authoritative character” (BT 212/168). This leads Heidegger to maintain that curiosity and idle talk are always accompanied by ambiguity. “Everything,” says Heidegger, “looks as if it were genuinely understood, genuinely taken hold of, genuinely spoken, though at bottom it is not; or else it does not look so, and yet at bottom it is” (BT 217/173). When we constantly move from one subject to another, relying primarily on what is said about that subject for our understanding of it, we lose the ability to discern the difference between a genuine understanding of something and a superficial understanding of something.

With regards to our understanding of our own being, this means that we are drawn by our curiosity towards currently interesting, yet superficial ways of understanding of our own being. For instance, we find in the “metaphysics” section of any large bookstore a variety of books that expound on the nature of the human soul and our “higher selves” without engaging in any sort of rigorous reflection on the subject. Worse still, we tend to lose the ability to understand the difference between these vague, superficial accounts of what it is to be human and more rigorous attempts to grasp the structure of our being. This is again reflected in the common absence of a distinction between popular “metaphysics” and rigorous philosophical reflection on the same topics. When we are engaged in these non-goal-directed activities like watching television or chatting with friends in a café, to the extent that we do concern ourselves with the structure of our own being, we are drawn toward superficial understandings of our being and furthermore, fail to differentiate between superficial and genuine attempts to understand what it is to be human.

## Conclusion

Now we have shown how productive activity, social interaction and non-goal-directed activity exhibit the movement of falling that is characteristic of all inauthentic action. We have also shown how non-goal-directed activities can be understood in terms of the general conception of action developed in the first chapter and why Heidegger considers these three types of action to be inauthentic based on the two distinctions between authentic and inauthentic action that were discussed in the second chapter. In addition to this, our analysis of non-goal-directed activities has expanded the number of different types of action that can be understood in terms of the general conception of action from the first chapter and has shown why non-goal-directed activities are not counter-examples to this general way of understanding action. The challenge for the next two chapters has now been made clear. In those two chapters, we will attempt to show how Heidegger develops an account of authentic agency in which we transform our action in such a way that we not only become responsible for our actions, but also reveal the structure of our being.

## CHAPTER 4. THE POSSIBILITY OF BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR ACTIONS

Perhaps the main problem for the Heideggerian conception of action that we have been developing here is that it seems to leave no way in which we can be responsible for our actions. It is the task of this chapter is to show how it is possible to be responsible for our actions on the Heideggerian conception of action developed in the preceding chapters.

To begin with we should review the reasons for not thinking that we are responsible for our actions when acting inauthentically. Remember that on the general conception of action developed in the first chapter, human action can be understood as having interdependent passive and active aspects. The passive aspect of action is that we are drawn to certain goals and activities available to us in the situation in which we find ourselves. The active aspect of action is that we take up certain ways of understanding ourselves that articulate the situation and allow things to matter to us. These ways of understanding ourselves are drawn from the social context in which we find ourselves (e.g. understanding oneself as a philosopher). The problem then is that in either case it seems that the self-understandings that articulate the situation of action do not stem from the person acting. If this is the case, it seems that the so-called active aspect of action is not actually performed by the agent herself. This calls into question the possibility of

being responsible for our actions, or even the possibility of acting in the true sense of the term.

The structure of the problem for the Heideggerian conception of action is similar to that of the traditional conception of the problem of free will. On the traditional formulation of the problem of free will, the threat to free will comes from the possibility of a physicalistic or naturalistic determinism. The problem then becomes how to incorporate freely determined actions into what seems like a causally-closed physical system. A common solution to the free will problem (compatibilism) is to maintain that determinism is true, but that there is also a meaningful sense of freedom that is compatible with determinism. For Heidegger, the problem is not naturalistic determinism, but rather the possibility that all of our actions are ultimately determined by the norms and practices of the social context in which we find ourselves. The Heideggerian solution to the problem is similar to that of compatibilism in that Heidegger would want to show how we can have a meaningful sense of responsibility for our actions that is compatible with Heidegger's view that all possible ways of articulating the situation of action are drawn for the impersonal norms and practices of *das Man*.

In order to see how a Heideggerian response to this problem can be developed, we will turn to Heidegger's 1930 lecture course, *The Essence of Human Freedom*, in which he gives a lengthy interpretation of Kant's practical philosophy, culminating in an analysis of responsibility.<sup>32</sup> There are two objectives to be achieved by the consideration

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<sup>32</sup> This strategy of turning to Heidegger's interpretation of Kant to develop a way to account for responsibility on the Heideggerian conception of action involves its own difficulties. In the beginning of

of Heidegger's interpretation of Kant in this lecture course. The first, as mentioned above, is to give an account of how we can be understood as responsible for our actions while still maintaining that actions are determined by the fundamentally social self-understandings that guide our actions. We will develop this account of a Heideggerian "compatibilism" through discussion of some of the central aspects of Heidegger's interpretation of Kant's treatment of the third antinomy in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The second objective is to show how Heidegger seeks to go beyond merely establishing how we can be responsible for our everyday actions to develop an account of authentic action in which we are responsible for our actions in a stronger sense. We will develop this Heideggerian conception of what I will call the strong sense of responsibility by considering the second part of Heidegger's interpretation of Kant from *The Essence of Human Freedom*, which focuses on Kant's discussion of practical freedom in the *Critique of Practical Reason* and *The Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*.

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our development of a Heideggerian conception of action, we endeavored to show how Heidegger's understanding of action comes about through his early interpretation and appropriation of certain Aristotelian concepts. These Aristotelian concepts are transformed into Heidegger's distinctive terminology in *Being and Time* and in the lecture courses leading up to its publication. In this terminological transformation, Heidegger is explicitly trying to distance himself from the traditional ways in which philosophers have understood and described human existence. When giving an interpretation of Kant's practical philosophy in *The Essence of Human Freedom*, Heidegger employs many of the Kantian terms and concepts that are paradigmatic examples of the sort of traditional philosophical discourse that Heidegger eschews in *Being and Time*. The danger here for us is that in relying on Heidegger's interpretation of Kant for an understanding of Heidegger's conception of responsibility, we will be misled into transforming the Heideggerian conception of action developed here into a conception of action that is based on the exact way of understanding human agency that Heidegger is trying to avoid. To avoid this potential problem, we will attempt to show (in this chapter and the following chapter) how the conceptual moves made by Heidegger within his interpretation of Kant can be translated back into the concepts and terminology of the Heideggerian conception of action that stems from his early interpretation of Aristotle and *Being and Time*.

Specifically, we will focus on Heidegger's interpretation of Kant's conception of autonomy, i.e. the way in which we are subject to and authors of the moral law.

### Developing a Heideggerian Version of Compatibilism

Before beginning to discuss the details of Kant's conception of freedom as it is developed in Kant's analysis of the third antinomy, Heidegger provides some background information that helps to set up and clarify the antinomies in general and the third antinomy in particular. Heidegger reminds us that all of Kant's antinomies are discussed in the section of the first *Critique* dedicated to the consideration of the cosmological ideas (EHF 144). According to Kant, our faculty of reason is such that we always are compelled to attempt to intellectually unify our experience of the world as whole. In attempting to bring about this unification of experience, we are compelled to employ concepts beyond the realm of experience, which is their proper domain. This compulsion of our faculty of reason gives rise to four antinomies, i.e. four ways in which our compulsion to unify our experience leads to us to hold two antithetical positions.

The third antinomy, which is the one that interests Heidegger, deals with the way we experience the world in terms of causality. What exactly is meant here by world? Heidegger begins with Kant's definition of nature as the totality of appearances and uses the term 'world' synonymously with Kant's term 'nature' (EHF 144). To be more precise, Heidegger adds to this definition by saying that the world is the totality of appearances in their temporal succession (EHF 145). In other words, the world is the totality of things as they come to appear to us, change into other things or disappear.

What does it mean to say that we experience the world in terms of causality? When we say that we experience the world in terms of causality, this means that we experience every present appearance as having been determined by some prior thing or event. If we experience every appearance in the world as having some prior thing or event as its cause, we are forced to think of an infinite string of cause and effects. In order to put a stop to this infinite regress, we are compelled to think of there being something or some event that has no prior condition as its cause. Our faculty of reason is forced to think of there being some unconditioned cause that is the beginning of the whole string of appearances of things.

It is from this idea of an unconditioned cause that we first begin to develop a conception of freedom. Heidegger is able to explain Kant's point here by reminding us of Kant's general definition of action. For Kant action is first understood in the very broad sense of bringing about an effect in general (EHF 137). An action that brings about an effect but is not itself caused, i.e. an action that originates a causal sequence, would be a free action (EHF 147). Freedom comes to be thought of as a special type of causality—an ability to originate a causal sequence. Kant refers to freedom understood in this way as transcendental freedom. Our idea of freedom as an uncaused cause is transcendental because it makes it possible for us to intellectually unify our experience of the world (EHF 147). From this point on, we can distinguish natural causality, i.e. the causality operative in our experience of the temporal succession of appearances, from the causality of freedom, i.e. the idea of an uncaused cause that makes it possible for us to unify our experience of the world. Heidegger is careful to point out that up to this point,

Kant has not proven that there are beings in the world that have freedom (EHF 151). Rather, Kant has proven that it is necessary for us to think of there being some being or beings that have freedom. This means that Kant has only established the possibility that human beings have freedom and has shown in a general, theoretical way the structure of this possible freedom.

This, in brief, is the argument for the thesis of the third antinomy, i.e. the argument for why we must think that freedom is possible. The problem is that it is equally necessary for us to think that it is impossible for freedom to be operative in the natural world. To see why this is so, let us begin by assuming that the causality of freedom is operative in the natural world. The causality of freedom is the ability to bring about an effect without any prior cause. The world is the totality of things as they appear in accordance with causal laws. If something is brought about through the causality of freedom, there is no cause prior to this originating cause. That means that this originating causation is not itself governed by the laws of causality. Therefore, this sort of causality can never be part of the natural world. (EHF 152, CPR A 445, B 473)

Kant tries to resolve this problem in what Heidegger terms a negative way (EHF 156). What Heidegger means by this is that Kant's solution is to show how and why we get caught in this antinomy rather than showing how we can in fact think of the two types of causality being operative simultaneously. Heidegger wants to go beyond Kant here and show that a positive solution to the third antinomy is possible. That is, Heidegger wants to show how both types of causality can be thought of as operating simultaneously. In order to provide a positive solution, we have to consider the possibility that an event in

the natural world can be determined by both natural and transcendental causality (EHF 164).

At this point we should pause to point out that the way in which Heidegger tries to extend Kant's conception of transcendental causality seems to contradict what Kant explicitly says in the development of the third antinomy. It is precisely Kant's point in the explanation of the antithesis of the third antinomy that transcendental causality can never be operative in the phenomenal realm. In order for it to be possible to unify our experience of the phenomenal world, we must think of there being some a cause that itself has no prior cause. It seems that Heidegger wants to collapse the Kantian distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal by attempting to show that the causality of freedom, which according to Kant is strictly noumenal in the sense that it can only be thought and not experienced at the phenomenal, is somehow operative at the phenomenal level. However, it is this separation of the phenomenal and noumenal that allows Kant to satisfactorily solve the problem posed by naturalistic determinism. Heidegger would appear to lose the justification for using the concept of transcendental causality if he seeks to employ this concept in such a clear perversion of its role in Kant's thought.

Is there anything to be said in defense of Heidegger's reading of Kant here? While it seems clear in this case that Heidegger violates Kant's basic intention and gets something fundamental about Kant's thought wrong, it should be pointed out that Heidegger is never particularly concerned with getting philosophers "right" in his interpretations of them. Instead, Heidegger seems to employ figures from the history of

philosophy as interlocutors whose thought he selectively uses as a springboard to the development of his own ideas. In this case, Heidegger is interested in exploring the possibility of there being a mode of causality other than the traditional understanding of efficient causality that is also operative in our experience of the world. While Kant's discussion of causality in the first *Critique* does not give Heidegger the solution he wants, Kant's thought does provide the impetus and background for Heidegger's attempt to say something about what this other type of causality might be, even if Heidegger distorts Kant's thought in the process.

With this caveat in mind, we can move to the consideration of how we can understand that an event in the world can be determined by a natural cause and a transcendental cause. Heidegger maintains that the answer can be found in Kant's thought, even if Kant himself does not proceed towards a solution in this way. According to Heidegger, if we accept Kant's separation of the phenomenal and noumenal, we see that two types of causality are at work in all appearances of things in the natural world. All events in the world are conditioned by prior events. This is natural causality. However, events in the natural world are not things in themselves, but rather appearances. We have to think of there being some noumenal object or thing-in-itself that is the ground for the appearance of things in the natural world. This is intelligible or transcendental causality. This is the sort of unconditioned causality that we are looking for. Since the thing-in-itself is outside the succession of appearances that is the natural world, we are not forced to think of there being some prior state that is the cause of it. If this is the

case, then we see how we can think of there being two types of causality operative in the world, at least within the context of Kant's thought.

Although there is no evidence to suggest that Heidegger himself was particularly concerned with showing how it might still be possible to have a weak sense of responsibility for our everyday actions (he seems only to have been interested in what I am calling the strong sense of responsibility achieved in authentic action), we can provide an account of how we can be seen to have responsibility for our everyday actions by using some of Heidegger's interpretation of Kant. The use of the qualifier 'weak' is simply meant to distinguish this sort of everyday responsibility from the stronger sense of responsibility developed in the next section.

To see how we can find a weak sense of responsibility in our everyday actions, we can begin by considering the way in which Heidegger tries to show how two types of causality are operative in the occurrence of events in the world. Remember that for Kant, the problem is to show how freedom is possible even though we have to experience events in the world as being determined by prior events, i.e. as subject to natural causality. According to Heidegger, Kant provides us with an outline of what the causality of freedom would have to look like, but Kant does not do enough to show how the causality of freedom could actually be operative in the natural world. Heidegger tries to resolve this issue in a more satisfactory way by using Kant's conception of the thing-in-itself as the ground for all appearances to show how we can think of a transcendental causality being operative at the same time as natural causality.

We can use Heidegger's illustration of the operation of these two types of causality in human action to further clarify the Heideggerian conception of action developed in the first chapter and to develop a Heideggerian version of compatibilism. There are also two types of causality operative in the Heideggerian conception of action, or to use a more neutral term, there are two components that determine our actions. As we have seen, on the Heideggerian conception of action, our actions can be understood as involving a passive aspect (being drawn towards things and activities that matter to us) and an active aspect (the articulation of the situation of action that makes it possible for these things to matter to us). Here we find a parallel to the Kantian distinction between natural causality and transcendental causality and the connection between the two types of causality. On the Heideggerian conception of action, we are affected by things and people that we encounter in our environment. This is similar to the way in which Kant maintains that we are subject to natural causality insofar as we are beings that appear in the realm of nature. The active aspect of the Heideggerian conception of action can be understood as similar to transcendental causality. The articulation of the situation of action through taking up various possible self-understandings *makes it possible* for things in the environment to affect us.<sup>33</sup> Our actions are always co-determined by these two aspects of our being.

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<sup>33</sup> It is instructive here to remember our discussion of Haugeland's interpretation of Heidegger's use of the verb '*lassen*' in the first chapter. Haugeland argues that the best way to understand Heidegger's use of *lassen* (or the English 'to let') is as enabling or making possible. When we say that our self-understandings let things matter to us, we mean that these self-understanding make it possible for things to matter to us.

As is obvious from our prior discussions of inauthentic action, simply showing how transcendental and natural causality can be operative simultaneously is not enough to show how we can be responsible for our actions on the Heideggerian conception of action. Heidegger maintains that the self-understandings that articulate the situations in which we find ourselves in our everyday activities are all drawn from the social context in which we are immersed. This means that for any given action, the situation of action has been articulated not by the individual agent, but rather by nebulous and impersonal social norms. Because of this, it still appears that we as individuals cannot be responsible for our actions. What is supposed to be the active part of action, the articulation that makes it possible for things to matter to us, still is not grounded in the individual agent.

To solve this problem for the Heideggerian conception of action, we would need to show that the possibility of articulating any situation, i.e. the possibility of taking up any self-understanding whatsoever, is grounded in the individual agent. In effect, we would be moving our consideration back to a second transcendental level by asking what it is that in general makes possible the articulation of the particular situation of action by *das Man* that makes it possible for certain things, people and activities to matter to us. In order for us to be responsible for our inauthentic actions, this second-order transcendental causality must be shown to be grounded in the individual agent. We find the solution we are seeking in Heidegger's discussion of death in Division II of *Being and Time*. The analysis of death reveals to us that our being is such that we always transcend any particular, concrete way of understanding ourselves and that our being is fundamentally constituted by projecting out towards possible ways of existing right up to the very

instant of death. Moreover, for Heidegger death is that one possible way of being that completely individualizes us and pulls us out of all the possible self-understandings available in our social context.

Before saying more about the features of Heidegger's analysis of death that are especially relevant to our concerns here, it is important to discuss how Heidegger's conception of death differs from our normal ways of understanding death. The initial problem that confronts Heidegger is the difficulty associated with actually experiencing death. At the individual level, we can never experience our own death. At the very moment of death, we cease to exist and thereby lose the ability to really experience what death is. In Heidegger's words: "When Dasein reaches its wholeness in death, it simultaneously loses the Being of its 'there'. By its transition to no-longer-Dasein, it gets lifted right out of the possibility of experiencing this transition and of understanding it as something experienced" (BT 281/237). Heidegger's subsequent analysis of death is initially oriented by the need to overcome this seeming impossibility of truly grasping what death is.

The first potential solution considered by Heidegger is that we can come to understand death by experiencing the death of other people (BT 281/237-285/241). However, experiencing the death of others does not allow us to really grasp what it is like to make the transition from life to death. Heidegger states:

Death does indeed reveal itself as a loss, but a loss such as is experienced by those who remain. In suffering this loss, however, we have no way of access to the loss-of-Being as such which the dying man 'suffers'. The dying of Others is

not something which we experience in a genuine sense; at most we are always just 'there alongside' (BT 282/239).

If we cannot experience our own death and we cannot truly experience the death of others, what possibilities of understanding death remain open to us? Because of the above considerations, Heidegger determines that we cannot think of death as our lives being at an end if we are ever to really understand it. Rather, death must be thought of as being towards the end (BT 289/245). "Death," according to Heidegger, "is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is" (BT 289/245). Being-towards-death means that we are being-towards the possibility of death. As we saw in the first chapter, Heidegger makes it clear that we are always projecting ourselves towards some possible way of existing. We always understand ourselves in terms of one or more possible ways of being that we are enacting at any moment. As we have also seen, these possible ways of being can be rooted in our biological existence. For example, when Heidegger discusses the activity of hammering in order to make a dwelling secure against inclement weather, he claims this activity is guided by our possible understanding of ourselves as beings that require shelter. Being-towards-death as a possibility can be thought of as understanding our existence in terms of the fact that we are mortal beings who will die. In other words, being-towards-death is Heidegger's expression used to signify that way in which we understand ourselves as mortal beings as opposed to the other possible self-understandings that we have discussed earlier, e.g. being a philosopher, being a husband, etc.

Now that we have some understanding of why Heidegger talks about death in terms of being-towards-death and what this might mean, we can return to the consideration of the two most important aspects of being-towards-death for our discussion of responsibility. First we must consider how being-towards-death as a possible way of understanding ourselves is supposed to show that our existence is such that we always transcend any particular, concrete way of understanding ourselves. This would show that it is our fundamental ability to project ourselves towards possible ways of existing that makes possible the articulation of any situation of action whatsoever, and indeed, makes possible the anonymous, impersonal articulation of *das Man*.

Heidegger characterizes death as a possibility. In fact, Heidegger maintains that dying is a unique possible way of existing. Unlike all other possible ways of existing that we might take up, the possibility of dying gives us nothing to actualize. Heidegger says that normally “‘Being towards’ a possibility—that is to say, towards something possible—may signify ‘Being out for’ something possible, as in concerning ourselves with its actualization” (BT 305/261). In our everyday existence we are constantly directed towards the actualization of the projects in which we are engaged. We are also directed towards actualizing or enacting the various self-understandings that we take up, e.g. one might be directed toward being a student, which would mean doing all those things that serve to actualize or enact this possible way of being. When we are directed towards the actualization of possibilities, we are directed towards concrete actions in the world and come to understand entities and ourselves in terms of our worldly projects. However, Heidegger states that the possibility of dying gives us nothing to actualize. He

says, “[d]eath, as possibility, gives Dasein nothing to be ‘actualized’, nothing which Dasein, as actual, could itself *be*” (BT 307/262). Death is the complete annihilation of our existence. There is no positive state of existence associated with it that we can expect to be actualized.

This leads Heidegger to make a distinction between our normal mode of comportment towards our possibilities that is focused upon their actualization and the mode of comportment we take up in authentic being-towards-death that is focused not on the actualization of possibilities, but rather on our pushing forward into possibilities as such. He calls the first mode of comportment expecting (*Erwarten*) and the second mode of comportment running ahead (*Vorlaufen*). Expecting is not “just an occasional looking-away from the possible to its possible actualization, but is essentially a *waiting for that actualization*” (BT 306/262). With the term *Vorlaufen*, Heidegger seeks to capture the sense in which, in authentic being-towards-death, we concretely experience how it is constitutive for our being that we are always existing out beyond ourselves (i.e. running ahead of ourselves), a fact that is obscured by our normal focus on actualization. The possibility of death “offers no support for becoming intent on something, ‘picturing’ to oneself the actuality which is possible, and so forgetting its possibility” (BT 307/262).

In authentic being-towards-death, we experience the projective aspect of our existence in its pure form. We realize that even when all other possibilities have become unavailable to us, we still project towards the possibility of death. It is this projective aspect of our existence that makes possible any self-understanding whatsoever. The articulation of the situation of action is made possible in each particular case by our

essential ontological characteristic of projecting ourselves towards some possibility. Because our ability to project ourselves towards possibilities is always what makes any particular action possible, we are responsible for all of our actions, even the inauthentic actions. Even in the most irresolute actions in which we merely do what one does and avoid making any decisions on our own, we are still responsible for our actions in the weak sense because it is the projective aspect of our existence that makes that articulation of the situation by *das Man* possible. Our ability to project ourselves out towards possibilities always transcends any particular possibility.

Furthermore, it is from the fact that we are finite beings who will die that we get a sense that we are unified, individual selves, engaged in action. Heidegger refers to death as our ownmost possibility and as non-relational (BT 307/263-308/264). These two characteristics of death are connected insofar as they both stem from Heidegger's discussion of our ability to be represented (*vertreten werden*) by others in our everyday existence. As discussed in the previous chapters, Heidegger maintains that in our everyday existence, we primarily understand ourselves in terms of our projects and the social roles and responsibilities that we fulfill. In our everyday existence, "Dasein understands itself in terms of that with *which* it is customarily concerned. 'One *is*' what one does" (BT 283/239). From this it follows, according to Heidegger, that "representability [*Vertretbarkeit*] is not only quite possible but is even constitutive for our being with one another. *Here* one Dasein can and must, within certain limits, 'be' another Dasein" (BT 283/239-284/240).

It is easy enough to follow Heidegger's line of thought here. If, in our everyday existence, I *am* what I do, e.g. I can teach, drive, cook, etc., which makes me a teacher, driver, cook, etc., then anyone who performs the same activities I perform can, in a sense, *be* me. That is, anyone who performs the same role as me and does the same things as me can effectively represent me or stand in for me. When we understand our being in terms of what we do, we do not really understand our *own* being. Rather, we always understand our being insofar as we can be represented by another person. Death, however, is that one possibility in which we cannot be represented by another person. Death is always individualized—no one can stand in for us when we are about to die. Being-towards-death authentically then forces us to understand our being without recourse to our everyday understanding of ourselves in terms of our roles and activities, i.e. it makes our *own* being the issue, not our being in which we can be another person. We can also see why Heidegger would characterize being-towards-death as a possible way of being that is non-relational. When we grasp that in dying we cannot be represented by someone else, we are individualized. That is, I experience acutely my existence as an individual when I understand that when I die, it is I alone who am dying. No one can take my place, and no one can accompany me. When dying, one's career and worldly ambitions are no longer of any import—death comes all the same.

We can consider an example here to show how we can understand ourselves as being responsible in a weak sense for everyday, inauthentic actions. Consider your average undergraduate student. She probably is only marginally interested in the material presented in her courses and puts forward the minimum effort required to earn

respectable (but not outstanding) grades. She probably never spent much time considering whether or not to go to college. It was just understood that if one is an American high school student from a certain socio-economic bracket, one goes to college after high school in order to earn a degree, which is in turn supposed to secure respectable future employment. The student's actions are guided by her understanding of herself as a certain sort of person. This self-understanding allows certain things like going to college and earning a degree to matter to her. We might claim that her actions are determined by the social norms that prescribe to her what a person of a certain sort ought to be doing. However, what we have attempted to show in this section is that in order for these social norms to hold any sway with her, the student must, if even at a completely tacit level, understand herself as a person of a particular section of society. That is, the student must be projecting herself towards the enactment of this particular way of being. It is this individualized projective capacity that makes it possible for any social norms to have any influence on her at all. In this way, we can see her actions as socially determined, and yet maintain that the student, as an individual agent, is still responsible for her actions, at least in a weak sense.

#### Achieving Responsibility in the Strong Sense in Authentic Action

Now we can consider what it would be like to be responsible for our actions in the strong sense. If the student in the previous example, who goes about doing what a college student does without any explicit commitment to the enactment of this self-understanding, is responsible for her actions in the weak sense, we can ask what it would

look like for a student to be responsible for her actions in the strong sense. One option would be to claim that she would be responsible for her actions in the strong sense if she were to reject the social norms guiding her actions and base her actions completely on her own decisions and preferences. This would be something like the decisionistic interpretation of Heidegger's account of authentic action. As we discussed in the Introduction, this interpretation is neither philosophically viable nor textually supported. The other option would be to imagine a student who makes an explicit commitment to understanding herself as a college student. In this case the student is not rejecting the social norms that prescribe her actions as a student to her. Rather, she is actively taking on or owning these norms. In other words, she is actively giving herself over to being bound by certain social norms rather than passively letting her life be dictated by these norms while avoiding any explicit personal commitment.

We can flesh out this rather intuitive portrayal of responsibility in the strong sense by considering Heidegger's interpretation of Kant's practical philosophy in *The Essence of Human Freedom*. Specifically, we want to focus on Heidegger's discussion of Kant's conception of autonomy. On Heidegger's reading of Kant, it is in the performative act of putting oneself under the legislation of the moral law that we achieve true self-responsibility (EHF 201). By considering Heidegger's interpretation of Kant on this point, we can see how responsibility in the strong sense for Heidegger can be understood as the performative act of explicitly committing oneself to a certain self-understanding, which entails committing oneself to be bound by certain social norms.

We can begin by considering Heidegger's brief outline of the structure of human action as found in Kant's second *Critique* and the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Heidegger begins by examining Kant's conception of will-governed action. He reminds us that action in the general sense for Kant is the "relation of a subject of causality to the effect" (EHF 189). When we are talking about specifically human action, we call this praxis. Praxis is the "particular kind of action made possible by a will, i.e. such that the relation of the subject of the causation, the determining instance, to the effect, occurs through will" (EHF 189). In other words, praxis, i.e. human action, is distinguished by the fact that the will determines the action. Heidegger then proceeds to Kant's definition of the will as a "power to act according to concepts" (EHF 189). What is meant by acting according to concepts here? "A concept," says Heidegger, "is the representation of something, being able and willing to act according to what is thus represented" (EHF 189-190). Will-governed action is action that is determined by a representation of something. Heidegger gives us a somewhat unhelpful example of will-governed action (EHF 190). He says that we could have a representation of the "scientific education of humans [*des Menschen*]" (translation modified), and this representation can determine an action. What Heidegger seems to mean by this is that we could have an idea of how to educate people in a "scientific" manner (or alternatively, an idea of how to teach people science). When our actions are determined by this idea, we act in such a way that our actions are aimed at educating people in a scientific way.

Heidegger goes on to explain what Kant means by practical reason and how Kant's concept of practical reason is connected to will-governed action. Reason is

involved in will-governed action because, whenever our representations are the “determining instance” of an action, reason is involved. In will-governed action, our action is determined by a conceptual representation. Since a conceptual representation is involved in will-governed action, the faculty of reason must be involved in some way. For Kant, practical reason just is the will because practical reason provides the principles that are the determining grounds for human action, which is exactly the function performed by the will.

As Heidegger points out, on this Kantian conception of action, our actions are often determined by conceptual representations that are drawn from the realm of our empirical experience (EHF 190). For instance, we could say that when I am teaching a class, my action is determined by my representation of what it means to be an instructor. However, it is also possible for our actions to be determined by representations drawn purely from practical reason itself. On Heidegger’s reading of Kant, the only representation that can be drawn from pure practical reason is the representation of the moral law, which, as we know, is the categorical imperative (EHF 193). When our actions are determined by the categorical imperative, we understand our actions to be determined (by the moral law), but we also understand this determining ground for our actions to be the essence of practical reason itself.

This performative act of letting one’s actions be determined by the moral law, while simultaneously understanding that the moral law is grounded in the structure of one’s own faculty of reason is, for Heidegger, the essence of being responsible for one’s actions in the strong sense. In his words, “self-responsibility” is “to bind oneself to

oneself” (EHF 201). Acting with self-responsibility is binding oneself to act according to the moral law. It is this act of representing to oneself the moral law and placing oneself under the moral law that is a free action, or the action that is determined purely from the agent herself. The achievement of responsibility in the strong sense for Heidegger is not about overcoming or rejecting normative constraints, but rather it is about explicitly placing oneself under normative constraints.

We must exercise some caution when applying these aspects of Heidegger’s interpretation of Kant to the Heideggerian conception of action we have been developing here. The role of conceptual representations in the Kantian and Heideggerian conceptions of action is very different. On the Kantian conception of human action, conceptual representations provide the determining grounds for actions. That is, on Kant’s view we form conceptual representations that provide us with the goal of our action or the desired effect to be brought about. On the Heideggerian conception of human action, we take up various ways of understanding ourselves that allow goals and activities to matter to us. This need not take place at the conceptual level. In fact, as we have seen, Heidegger claims that these self-understandings are operative at a pre-conceptual level more often than not. When compared to Kant, Heidegger downplays the explicit operation of reason in human action. It is also important to note that Heidegger is fairly dismissive of Kant’s first formulation of the categorical imperative<sup>34</sup>,

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<sup>34</sup> “So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same as the principle of universal legislation” (EHF 196, *Critique of Practical Reason* V, 31).

maintaining that this specific formulation as a relic of the thinking of the Enlightenment (EHF 197).

Even while bearing these important differences in mind, we can, at this point, draw a parallel between the initial intuitive conception of what responsibility in the strong sense would be like on the Heideggerian conception of action and Heidegger's interpretation of Kant. The student considered in the example at the beginning of this section who actively commits herself to the self-understanding of being a student is binding herself to certain public norms. Insofar as she performs the performative act of binding herself in this way, she can be seen as being responsible for her actions in the strong sense. In effect, Heidegger substitutes the normative constraints of the moral law under which one places oneself on the Kantian conception of action with the normative constraints placed on one's actions by the situation in which one finds oneself.

It is important to point out that the particulars of the actions of the student who is weakly responsible for her actions might be very similar or even identical to the actions of the student who is strongly responsible for her actions. One way of explicating the difference between the weak and strong senses of responsibility might be to say that the first-order choices of the student who is weakly responsible for her actions might be the same as the first-order choices of the student who is strongly responsible, but the student who is strongly responsible for her actions has made a second-order choice, while the

student who is weakly responsible has not.<sup>35</sup> Both the student who is weakly responsible and the student who is strongly responsible might make the choice to go to class or study for a test, but the student who is strongly responsible has also made the second-order choice to commit to this understanding of herself as a student. The student who is weakly responsible has not made any second-order choice whatsoever. It is perhaps something like this that Heidegger has in mind when he characterizes authentic action as “choosing to choose” (BT 313/268). In other words, for Heidegger, the important choice is not the first-order choice of which particular action one should undertake, but rather it is the second-order choice of choosing to take ownership of one’s actions.

Another important point should be considered here. We mentioned in the Second Chapter that, for Heidegger, the existence of viable alternative courses of action is not a requirement for responsibility. Now we are in a position to clarify and further explain this claim. We can do this by considering the example of Martin Luther, particularly his famous proclamation at the Diet of Worms, “Here I stand. I can do no other.” Various philosophers have made use of this example to show that we can be responsible for our actions even when there are no viable alternatives, which is presumably the case with Luther if we take him at his word.<sup>36</sup> We can analyze Luther’s situation using the Heideggerian conception of action as follows. We could say that Luther understands himself as a Christian of a certain sort. This self-understanding articulates the situation in

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<sup>35</sup> Here I am drawing on Harry Frankfurt’s distinction between first-order and second-order volitions in his “Freedom of the will and the concept of a person” in *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 11-25.

<sup>36</sup> For example, see Frankfurt’s “The Importance of What We Care About” in *The Importance of What We Care About*, 80-94.

which he finds himself in such a way that he sees no other choice but to stand firm at the Diet of Worms. In this way the combination of the situation of action and Luther's particular self-understanding demand a certain action from Luther. On the Heideggerian conception of action, there could very well be cases like that of Luther in which there really are no viable alternative actions. This would mean that there is really no first-order choice, i.e. the choice of which course of action to take, to be made. However, on the Heideggerian conception of action we could maintain that Luther can still be responsible for his actions in the strong sense if he makes the second-order choice of explicitly committing himself to this understanding of himself as a Christian of a certain sort. In making this choice, Luther binds himself to have his actions determined by the demands of the situation.

We can now add a further consideration concerning what is required for responsibility in the strong sense, a consideration which also serves as a connection to the following chapter. The focus of the following chapter will be the explanation of how we achieve a certain sort of self-knowledge when acting authentically. From our consideration of strong responsibility in this chapter, we can see that acting in such a way that one is responsible for one's actions in the strong sense requires the agent to act with a certain sort of knowledge.

To see why this is, we can begin by returning to Heidegger's interpretation of Kant. At the very end of his interpretation of Kant, Heidegger suggests that for Kant the self-consciousness of practical reason is identical with acting with responsibility (EHF 203). Without going into too much detail, we can provide some general explanation of

Heidegger's claim. From what we have already discussed, it seems clear that action in the strong sense requires some degree of self-awareness on the part of the agent. On Heidegger's interpretation of the Kantian conception of action, we are responsible in the strong sense when we bind ourselves to ourselves, i.e. when we place ourselves under the legislation of the moral law of which we ourselves are the authors. There are several things of which we must be aware for this self-binding to take place. We must have some knowledge of what the moral law actually is if we are to place ourselves under its legislation. We must also have some understanding of the structure of our being as rational agents in order to understand that we are the type of beings that can (and should) determine their actions through reason. Additionally, we must have some knowledge of how the moral law is in fact grounded in our own faculty of reason so that placing ourselves under the moral law is truly understood as an autonomous action.

We can again find some parallels in the Heideggerian conception of actions. The previously mentioned points of difference between the two conceptions of action of course still apply. Most importantly in this case, Heidegger will insist that there is non-theoretical form of knowledge operative in action itself. Heidegger maintains that willing itself is a form of knowing. He states:

Knowledge of the determining ground of action belongs to willing as effecting through representation of what is willed. Actual willing is always clear about its determining grounds. Actual willing is a specific kind of actual knowing and understanding. It is a kind of knowing that cannot be replaced by anything else, least of all through (e.g. psychological) knowledge of human beings (EHF 198).

We can see what Heidegger means by this and why he might make this claim by returning to the example of Luther. In order for Luther to be responsible for his actions in the strong sense, he has to act with knowledge of certain things. Luther must have some knowledge of the self-understanding, e.g. being a Christian of certain sort, to which he is committing himself. He must also have knowledge of the situation in which he finds himself, particularly knowledge of the situation as articulated by Luther's understanding of himself as a Christian of a certain sort. That is, in order for Luther to understand the demands placed on him by his situation, he must understand what is required of a Christian of a certain sort who finds himself in this situation. Finally, Luther must act with some understanding of what it means to be a human agent. This last point is perhaps a little more difficult to see. Luther could see himself as being helplessly determined in his actions by larger social and historical forces. In this case he could not ever be responsible for his actions in the strong sense, since it would never occur to him that he could make the second-order choice to take ownership of his actions. In other words, Luther would have to have some understanding of the way in which our ability to understand ourselves in certain ways allows for the demands of the situation to hold any sway with us.

It is admittedly rather implausible to suppose that Luther acted with any explicit knowledge of any these of things, especially explicit knowledge of the Heideggerian conception of action. Heidegger, however, is going to maintain that we all act with this sort of knowledge. He is going to maintain that a careful examination of our experience of familiar phenomena like death, conscience and guilt will reveal that in these

phenomena there is a pre-conceptual knowledge of the structure of human agency, the situation of action and the self-understanding that guides one's action. In the course of our everyday (or inauthentic) actions, this knowledge remains at the tacit level. It is in authentic action that we come to achieve the clear and explicit level of self-knowledge required for being strongly responsible for our actions. It is to the consideration of Heidegger's account of how we achieve this self-knowledge in authentic action that we now turn.

CHAPTER 5. BECOMING RESPONSIBLE IN THE STRONG SENSE—  
REVEALING OUR BEING IN AUTHENTIC ACTION

In the last chapter, we showed how Heidegger's interpretation of Kant's practical philosophy can lead to an understanding of how we can be responsible for our actions achieved when acting authentically. We saw that according to Heidegger's reading of Kant, self-responsibility in the sense of pure willing can be understood as acting with the proper sort of self-knowledge, specifically knowledge of being bound by the moral law and the fact that one is also the author of this law. In the second chapter, there were two main distinctions drawn between authentic and inauthentic action. It was maintained that when acting authentically, we are responsible for our actions and we reveal the structure of our being to ourselves.

In this chapter we will be in a position to see the interconnection of these two distinctions between authentic and inauthentic action. We will see that on the Heideggerian conception of action, in order to achieve responsibility for our actions, we need to act with the proper knowledge of our own being. In the last chapter, we established that responsibility is achieved when the self-understanding taken up by the agent that articulates the situation of action is drawn from the agent's own being as opposed to the social context. At least according to Heidegger, the only possibility that is drawn purely from our being as individual agents is the possibility of death. We become

responsible for our actions in the strong sense when we authentically take up the possibility of understanding ourselves as being-towards-death. In this chapter we will endeavor to show that authentic being-towards-death is a way of existing in which we properly reveal the structure of our being to ourselves. Our “ownmost” possibility, i.e. death, comes to be understood as the possibility of achieving a clear and ontologically appropriate understanding of our own being.

We can orient ourselves with respect to this analysis of authentic action by first briefly reminding ourselves of the ways in which we fail to properly understand our being when acting inauthentically. When engaged in productive activity or when interacting with other people, we are directed out towards the completion of the tasks with which we are engaged or the people with whom we are interacting. In these types of activities, our own being does not become an issue for us at all because our actions have this direction out towards things and people in the world. When engaged in non-goal-directed activities, we are drawn towards whatever is new and interesting and do not develop anything more than superficial understandings of ourselves and things in the world, merely relying on what is commonly said about things.

We might then think that we should extricate ourselves from all of these types of activity and attempt to engage in pure theoretical reflection on the structure of our being. However, as we have shown in the second chapter, Heidegger, taking seriously Natorp’s critiques of Husserlian phenomenology, maintains that theoretical reflection will inevitably distort our understanding of our being by attempting to grasp our being as something static and present-at-hand and by attempting to describe the structure of our

being through the use of concepts (e.g. soul, mind, consciousness, etc.) that inevitably carry with them unfounded presuppositions.

If we are able to reveal the structure of our being to ourselves when acting authentically, i.e. when authentically being-towards-death, authentic action must overcome all of these obstacles to properly understanding our being. This means that authentic action must have the following characteristics:

1. When engaged in authentic action, our being itself must be the focus of our actions. Authentic action cannot be directed solely towards things that are external to the acting itself as is the case with productive activity and interaction with others.

2. When engaged in authentic action, our understanding of our being cannot be drawn from the superficial ways of understanding our being as is the case in our non-goal-directed activity, which is directed by idle talk.

3. Authentic action must provide with a way of understanding our being that adequately captures the essentially dynamic and temporal structure of our being and does so without the use of conceptual description.

At this point it is not at all clear how we reveal our being to ourselves in this way in authentic being-towards-death, nor is it at all clear how authentic being-towards-death has anything to do with action. In the first section of this chapter, we will consider how Heidegger thinks we come to properly understand the structure of our own being in authentic being-towards-death. Heidegger himself is aware that his account of authentic being-towards-death might seem overly abstract and disconnected from our concrete, phenomenological experience, as he asks, “What can death and the ‘concrete Situation’ of

taking action have in common” (BT 349/302)? That is why, in the sections of *Being and Time* immediately following his account of being-towards-death, Heidegger attempts to show how his account of being-towards-death can be concretized in the experience of the conscience when engaged in resolute action. Accordingly, the second section of this chapter will be dedicated to an interpretation of Heidegger’s conceptions of conscience and resoluteness. In the third section of this chapter, we will show how Heidegger’s understanding of authentic being-towards-death and the experience of conscience in resolute action can be combined to give an account of how we achieve the self-knowledge of our own being in action that makes us responsible for our actions in the strong sense.

#### Revealing the Structure of Our Being in Authentic Being-Towards-Death

When discussing Heidegger’s analysis of death in the last chapter, we did so for the reason that death is the one possibility that is grounded completely in the being and individual agent and thus provided us with the possibility of understanding how we could be responsible for our actions. In other words, death was approached from the standpoint of responsibility. The approach in this chapter is different. Here we are considering Heidegger’s analysis of death to see how he thinks it is possible for us to come to properly grasp our own being in authentic action. This means that the first question to be considered here is the general question of why Heidegger thinks death is at all relevant when it comes to grasping the structure of our being. We can answer this question by remembering some of our considerations from earlier chapters. As we discussed in the

first chapter, one of the essential aspects of our being is that we always are projecting ourselves out towards the completion of some project or the enactment of some possibility more generally. In the third chapter, we discussed how our being directed out towards possible goals and possible ways of being makes us fail to focus on the structure of our own being when acting inauthentically.

When first discussing death, Heidegger brings up the same problem in slightly different terms. If we really are to understand our being, we need to be able to grasp our being in its totality (BT 275/232). However, if one aspect of our being is that we are always directed out towards something, it seems difficult, if not impossible, to really grasp our being in its totality because we are always on the way to doing something or being something. In Heidegger's words:

“[I]f existence is definitive for Dasein's Being and if its essence is constituted in part by potentiality-for-Being, then, as long as Dasein exists, it must in each case, as such a potentiality, *not yet be* something. Any entity whose Essence is made up of existence, is essentially opposed to the possibility of our getting it in our grasp as an entity which is whole” (BT 276/233).

We typically understand the end of our existence to be death. By understanding what it means to come to an end and what it means to die, we can come to grasp our being in its totality. As we saw in the last chapter, when it comes to grasping what death really means, we face the problem of the seeming impossibility of ever experiencing death. To overcome this problem, Heidegger proposes that we understand death as a possible way of being, which he calls being-towards-death.

For Heidegger, we can take up being-towards-death as a possible way of existing authentically or inauthentically. Based on our previous discussion of the differences between authenticity and inauthenticity and the character of inauthentic action, we can already see what inauthentic being-towards-death would be like for Heidegger. When being-towards-death in an inauthentic way, we have a tendency to understand death and the fact that we are mortal in terms of the prevailing public ways of interpreting death, e.g. by acknowledging the certainty of death, but not ever believing that death is imminent or by maintaining that thinking about death is pointless and perhaps even cowardly. These inauthentic ways of being-towards-death serve to distort our understanding of the phenomenon of death and divert our attention from it.

Here we are interested in how the structure of our being is revealed to us in authentic being-towards-death. In the previous chapter, we mentioned Heidegger's characterization of authentic being-towards-death as a running ahead (*Vorlaufen*), in which we understand that our projective capacity transcends the actualization of any particular possibility. This is Heidegger's general conception of authentic being-towards-death—existing in such a way that we are given nothing to actualize. Heidegger then proceeds, in ¶ 53 of *Being and Time*, to lay out the “concrete structure” of authentic being-towards-death. In other words, he sets out to more fully describe the different aspects of this more general conception of authentic being-towards-death and attempts to ground it in our normal understanding of death (BT 307/263-310/266). This further analysis of authentic being-towards-death also shows how we are able to disclose our own being in this mode of existence. Let us first list these different aspects or ways of

characterizing death and then proceed to analyze the way in which each of them contributes to the disclosing of our being in authentic being-towards-death. The list is as follows:

- 1.) Death as Dasein's ownmost (*eigenste*) possibility
- 2.) Death as non-relational (*unbezüglich*)
- 3.) Death as the possibility that cannot be overtaken (*unüberholbar*)
- 4.) Death as certain (*gewiss*)
- 5.) Death as indefinite (*unbestimmt*)

We discussed the first two characteristics, death as our ownmost possibility and death as non-relational, in the last chapter, specifically with regard to how we can get an understanding of a unified self that makes it possible to be responsible for our everyday actions. Now we can say a little more about these two characteristics of authentic being-towards-death with respect to the way in which they contribute to our attaining a proper understanding of the structure of our being. Heidegger says that authentic being-towards-death “discloses to Dasein its ownmost ability-to-be [*Seinkönnen*], in which its very Being is the issue” (BT 307/263). The key point here is that in authentic being-towards-death, our own being becomes an issue for us. It is tempting to understand Heidegger as advocating the cultivation of a reflection on one's life and achievements in light of the fact that everyone will at some point die, thus motivating ourselves to seize the moment and live life to the fullest. This, however, is not Heidegger's intention here. As we have seen in the previous chapters, Heidegger maintains that in our everyday existence, we primarily understand ourselves in terms of our projects and the social roles and

responsibilities that we fulfill. When we understand our being in terms of what we do, we do not really understand our own being. Rather, we always understand our being insofar as we can be represented by another person. Death, however, is that one possibility in which we cannot be represented by another person. Death is always individualized—no one can stand in for us when we are about to die. Being-towards-death authentically then forces us to understand our being without recourse to our everyday understanding of ourselves in terms of our roles and activities, i.e. it makes our own being the issue, not our being in which we can be another person.

When we grasp that in dying we cannot be represented by someone else, we are individualized. That is, I experience acutely my existence as an individual when I understand that when I die, it is I alone who am dying. No one can take my place, and no one can accompany me. When dying, one's career and worldly ambitions are no longer of any import—death comes all the same. As morbid and common as this consideration might be, Heidegger tries to emphasize the positive methodological aspect of this experience. He maintains that death “makes manifest that all Being-alongside the things with which we concern ourselves, and all Being-with Others, will fail us when our ownmost ability-to-be [*Seinkönnen*] is the issue” (BT 308/263). By understanding ourselves in terms of this non-relational possibility, we see that our everyday understanding of ourselves in terms of our activities, projects and the idle talk of *das Man* is ultimately of no help when it comes to understanding our own being.

The next characteristic of death that Heidegger considers is that death is the one possibility that cannot be overtaken or outrun, i.e. death is *unüberholbar*. Heidegger here

is making use of the common understanding of death as something that no one can escape. There are two methodological consequences to be drawn from this characteristic. The first consequence is that in authentic being-towards-death we are able to grasp the whole being of Dasein. As mentioned above, this is a problem for Heidegger because he has already established that a central feature of Dasein's being is that it always is ahead-of-itself (*sichvorweg*). As we have discussed above, in our everyday existence, we are directed out towards the accomplishment of projects and the achievement of goals. In other words, in our present state we are always directed out towards bringing about some future actualization. This is problematic because it seems to make it impossible for us to ever grasp our whole being, since our being is fundamentally constituted by always being beyond itself. In authentic being-towards-death, Heidegger finds his solution to this problem. It is precisely because death gives us nothing to actualize that being-towards-death allows us to grasp our being in its entirety. Death is of course something that is still impending as long as we are alive, but by understanding ourselves in terms of this possibility, our tendency to always be directed towards the eventual actualization of our possibilities, and thus not be able to completely grasp our being, is thwarted. This does not mean that in authentic being-towards-death our being loses that quality of being-ahead-of-itself and becomes something completely present before us. Rather, in authentic being-towards-death, the pure pushing forward into possibilities that is constitutive of our being is experienced, not the directedness towards the actualization of these possibilities, which always leaves something beyond our grasp. In authentic being-

towards-death, there is literally nothing beyond this possibility into which we can thrust ourselves.

The second consequence of our inability to outrun death is that in authentic being-towards-death, we come to realize that our existence ultimately leads to us surrendering ourselves to the fact of our own mortality. Again, Heidegger takes a fairly common and morbid consideration and seeks to bring out what is methodologically beneficial. He states that “running ahead [*Vorlaufen*] discloses to existence that its uttermost possibility lies in giving itself up, and thus it shatters all one’s tenaciousness to whatever existence one has reached” (BT 308/264, translation modified).

To see the importance of this idea for Heidegger, we must recall his earlier interest in the concept of *Hingabe* in the work of Emil Lask.<sup>37</sup> The idea, insofar as Heidegger appropriates it from Lask, is that phenomenological research must be guided by a giving of oneself to the subject matter under investigation. In other words, we must attempt to cultivate a “pure and undivided dedication to the subject matter.”<sup>38</sup> In authentic being-towards-death, we disclose to ourselves the arbitrary and unfounded nature of our ordinary ways of understanding ourselves and open up the possibility of completely giving ourselves over to the subject matter under investigation, which is in this case our own being. In this way, we allow the being of the subject matter itself to guide our inquiry rather than attempting to force our experience of the subject matter into preconceived and/or inappropriate modes of disclosure. Heidegger comes close to saying

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<sup>37</sup> Here I am relying on Theodore Kisiel’s account of Heidegger’s early thought in his *The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), especially 25-59.

<sup>38</sup> Kisiel, 43.

this when discussing the next characteristic of death, namely, certainty, when he says: “One mode of certainty is *conviction* [*Überzeugung*]. In conviction, Dasein lets the testimony [*Zeugnis*] of the thing itself which has been uncovered (the true thing itself) be the sole determinant for its Being towards that thing understandingly” (BT 300/256).

This brings us to Heidegger’s consideration of death as certain. Of course, everyone will die at some point. In this sense death is certain. However, Heidegger finds a different sort of certainty in authentic being-towards-death. He defines the sort of certainty he is talking about as follows:

To be certain of an entity means to hold it for true as something true. But ‘truth’ signifies the uncoveredness [*Entdecktheit*] of some entity, and all uncoveredness is grounded ontologically in the most primordial truth, the disclosedness [*Erschlossenheit*] of Dasein...The expression ‘certainty’ like the term ‘truth’ has a double signification. Primordially ‘truth’ means the same as ‘Being-disclosive’, as a way in which Dasein behaves. From this comes the derivative signification: ‘the uncoveredness of entities’. Correspondingly, ‘certainty’, in its primordial [*ursprünglich*] signification, is tantamount to ‘Being-certain’, as a kind of Being which belongs to Dasein. However, in a derivative signification, any entity of which Dasein can be certain will also get called something ‘certain’ (BT 300/256).

Heidegger goes on to say that the certainty associated with death “will in the end present us with a distinctive *certainty of Dasein*” (BT 300/256). These passages, combined with Heidegger’s conception of conviction as cited above, provide us with the necessary clues for understanding the type of certainty Heidegger finds in authentic being-towards-death. Certainty in the basic sense refers to a mode of our being in which we hold an entity as true. Holding an entity as true means to hold it in its uncoveredness.

When this is done in conviction, we let the being of the entity under investigation determine the way in which we understand it. The entity under investigation here is Dasein, so in authentic being-towards-death, Heidegger is saying that we achieve a mode of disclosing that is particularly suited to disclosing our own being, insofar as we let our being itself determine how we understand it. This means that we do not employ inappropriate ways of understanding of our being, e.g. understanding our being through conceptual, theoretical reflection or the prevailing superficial ideas of what it is to be human.

To show more precisely what this means, Heidegger compares the certainty achieved in authentic being-towards-death with the traditional paradigm for certainty, namely, the kind of certainty that is attained when we reflect on our own consciousness.

He states:

[T]he evidential character which belongs to the immediate givenness of Experiences, of the “I”, or of consciousness, must necessarily lag behind the certainty which running ahead [*Vorlaufen*] includes. Yet this is not because the way in which these are grasped would not be a rigorous one, but because in principle such a way of grasping them cannot hold for true (disclosed) something which at bottom it insists upon ‘having there’ as true: namely, Dasein itself, which I myself am, and which, as a potentiality-for-Being, I can be authentically only by running ahead [*Vorlaufen*] (BT 310/265, translation modified).

Remember that Heidegger earlier demonstrates the inadequacy of the traditional philosophical method of reflection upon the subject or consciousness for understanding our being. This mode of reflection and its supposed certainty cannot yield certainty in the sense in which Heidegger is now using the term since this reflection presupposes that our

being is already completely laid out and completely present for our inspection. It is only in authentic being-towards-death that we can grasp our being in its wholeness, and thus it is only in authentic being-towards-death that we achieve a mode of disclosure that is appropriate for our being. We achieve our grasp on the whole of our being not through positing it as something present before us, but rather by existing in and running ahead into the possibility of death. It is this appropriateness of the disclosure of our being in authentic being-towards-death that yields certainty with respect to our own being.

The final characteristic of death is its indefiniteness. Death is often thought of as an indefinite possibility because one can die at any time. Death is indefinite in regards to when it can happen. This aspect of aspect of death reveals to us that our very existence contains within itself the threat of its own extinction. In Heidegger's words, in "running ahead of the indefinite certainty of death, Dasein opens itself to a constant *threat* arising out of its own 'there'" (BT 310/265). We can understand the import of this more clearly through Heidegger's connection of this aspect of death with anxiety (*Angst*). Heidegger distinguishes anxiety from fear (*Furcht*) on the basis of the object towards which each mood is directed (BT 228/184-235/191). Fear is always directed towards some definite entity or state-of-affairs encountered (or potentially to be encountered) in the world. Anxiety, on the other hand, has nothing definite towards which it is directed. That which is threatening in anxiety is being-in-the-world as such. What this reveals to us about our being is that we are essentially and constantly open to being affected by the world in which we find ourselves. It is not only occasionally or contingently that we happen to be

open to being affected by the world, rather our being essentially involved this openness to the world, which is experienced most acutely in anxiety and being-towards-death.

Let us then summarize and clarify the results of the preceding interpretation of being-towards-death. For Heidegger, in our everyday existence, we are directed out towards the completion of various projects and the fulfillment of certain ends. In being-towards-death, we are given nothing to actualize, and thus we are brought back to our own being and are able to reveal to ourselves the structures of our being in an ontologically appropriate (i.e. certain) way.

How is the structure of our being as agents revealed in authentic being-towards-death? As discussed in previous chapters, Heidegger analyzes our being in terms of the tri-partite structure of disposition (*Befindlichkeit*), understanding (*Verstehen*) and falling (*Verfallen*). In the first chapter, we established that action for Heidegger is to be understood as essentially containing an active and a passive aspect, which developed from his discussion of understanding and disposition, respectively. In the third chapter, we saw how our everyday, inauthentic action contains within it a tendency to fall into the prevalent ways of acting and various non-goal-directed activities. In his analysis of death, Heidegger is seeking to ground this prior conception of our being and the structure of human agency in our phenomenological experience. He notes pointedly that “understanding does not primarily mean just gazing at a meaning, but rather understanding oneself in that potentiality-for-Being which reveals itself in projection” (BT 307/263). In other words, Heidegger does not want to rely on the sort of abstract theoretical reflection that is characteristic of philosophy. He does not want to merely

posit that human existence is constituted by disposition, understanding and falling. Rather, he is seeking to develop a mode of existing in which we clearly experience this tri-partite constitution of our being in our lived existence. In being-towards-death, we experience our existence as fundamentally and constantly pressing on ahead of itself, a fact that is normally obscured by our focus on the actualization of the possibilities that we take up, rather than the nature of our existence as being possible. Heidegger states that “[t]his item in the structure of care [Dasein’s being-ahead-of-itself] has its most basic concretion in Being-towards-death” (BT 294/251). Similarly, in our everyday existence, the fact that we are fundamentally and constantly open to being affected by the world, i.e. that our being is partially constituted by disposition is covered up. This too is experienced concretely in anxiety and being-towards-death through the experience of the threatening character of being-in-the-world as such. Finally, Heidegger maintains that our tendency to fall into the ways of understanding ourselves and the world provided by *das Man* is also revealed in being-towards-death. When we realize the individualizing and non-relational nature of death, our everyday absorption in *das Man* is revealed.

Now we can make some connections between the way in which we reveal the structure of our being to ourselves in being-towards-death and being responsible for our actions in the strong sense discussed in the last chapter. Remember that in the last chapter, we developed an understanding of what it would mean to be responsible for our actions in the strong sense on the Heideggerian conception of action based on Heidegger’s interpretation of Kant’s practical philosophy. Specifically, responsibility in the strong sense (in Kantian terms) is achieved in the act of representing the moral law to

oneself and placing oneself under this law. We can find some parallels to this conception of responsibility in Heidegger's understanding of authentic being-towards-death. As we have seen, authentic being-towards-death is a form of self-knowledge, even if Heidegger maintains that it is a different form of self-knowledge than the traditional paradigm of mental self-reflection. In authentic being-towards-death, in a way that parallels the consciousness of being bound by the moral law, the extent to which we are subject to world in which we find ourselves is revealed to us, whether this subjection is understood as a subjection to the biological and physiological constraints on our being or as a subjection to the larger social and historical forces under whose sway we live. In this state of existence, we come to understand the essentially limited nature of our being. One might think that this understanding, when applied to our conception of ourselves as agents, would lead us to accepting a thorough-going determinism in which responsibility for our actions is ultimately impossible. However, in authentic being-towards-death, we also reveal to ourselves that it is an equally essential aspect of our existence that we project out towards some possible way of existing, even when all possibilities other than death have become unavailable. When connected to the Heideggerian conception of action, this means that no matter the circumstances in which we find ourselves and regardless of the impossibility of alternative ways of acting, we must always understand ourselves as being responsible for our actions as individual agents, since it is this fundamental, individualized projective capacity that allows anything at all to matter to us. When acting, we are giving ourselves over to situation in which we find ourselves and letting our actions be constrained by what the situation itself demands from us. This is

what is meant by the expression “taking responsibility” on the Heideggerian conception of action—acting with the clear understanding that even the situation in which we find ourselves places constraints upon our actions, it is we ourselves as individual agents that allows these factors to constrain us.

### Conscience and Resoluteness

The problem for Heidegger is that it is still hard to conceive of how we could ever exist in such a way that we are authentically being-towards-death. That is, it is still hard to conceive of what authentic being-towards-death would look like in an actual situation of action. Heidegger has argued that ordinary ways of thinking of death and possible ways of experiencing death are not adequate when it comes to truly grasping and understanding our being. What sort of concrete way of existing can authentic being-towards-death be? How can we actually practice or enact authentic being-towards-death? As discussed above, we cannot experience our own death, and we cannot really experience the death of others. Authentic being-towards-death cannot be our dying or witnessing the death of others. Heidegger also makes it clear that authentic being-towards-death is not a morbid brooding over one’s own mortality (BT 305/261). As Heidegger himself admits, authentic being-towards-death as initially described seems to be too abstract and to have no ground in our phenomenological experience. In Heidegger’s words:

[T]his existentially ‘possible’ Being-towards-death remains, from the existentiell point of view, a fantastical exaction. The fact that an authentic potentiality-for-Being-a-whole is ontologically possible for Dasein, signifies

nothing, so long as a corresponding ontical potentiality-for-Being has not been demonstrated in Dasein itself. Does Dasein ever factually throw itself into such a Being-towards-death (BT 311/266)?

Here is Heidegger is pointing out the need for finding some concrete experience or way of existing in which we see something like authentic being-towards-death as he describes it in its abstract sense.

At the end of his analysis of death, Heidegger states:

[W]e must investigate whether to any extent and in any way Dasein 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 (BT 311/267).

In the beginning of the next chapter in *Being and Time*, he makes it clear that we come to the concrete experience of authentic being-towards-death, i.e. our ownmost potentiality-for-being, in the experience of conscience (BT 313/268). The aim of the present section will be to explain how the experience of conscience is supposed to reveal the structure of our being to ourselves in the way laid out by Heidegger in the development of his account of authentic being-towards-death.

We will use as our clue the somewhat strange claim that *phrōnesis* is the conscience made by Heidegger in his winter semester lecture course in 1924-1925, *Plato's Sophist*, in which he dedicates the first part of the course to an in-depth interpretation of Book VI of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (PS 39). He does not provide much justification or explanation of this claim in either this lecture course or any of his other works. However, Heidegger's conception of conscience in *Being and Time*

bears some striking and important similarities to the understanding of *phrōnesis* that Heidegger lays out in the *Plato's Sophist* lecture. The general strategy in this section will be to examine Heidegger's interpretation of *phrōnesis* in the *Plato's Sophist* lecture course and see how it can be connected to our ordinary conception of conscience and then proceed to consider how Heidegger transforms this ordinary conception of conscience/*phrōnesis* into his own distinctive conceptions of conscience and resoluteness that are found in *Being and Time*.

#### *Heidegger's Discussion of Phrōnesis in the Plato's Sophist Lectures*

Before turning to Heidegger's examination of *phrōnesis* in the *Plato's Sophist* lecture course, let us first consider the broader context of Heidegger's discussion of Book VI of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and what are traditionally referred to as the intellectual virtues (*epistēme*, *tēchne*, *phrōnesis*, *sophīa* and *noūs*). As we briefly discussed in the Introduction, the central theme of Heidegger's interpretation of these virtues is to understand them all as modes of disclosing or revealing (*aletheūein*) something (PS 15). Heidegger, following Aristotle, proposes to distinguish between the different modes of disclosing on the basis of the type of thing that is disclosed in each. The main distinction to be made is between those modes of disclosing that disclose things that cannot be otherwise (*epistēme*, *sophīa* and *noūs*), i.e. those modes of disclosing concerned with necessary truths and beings, and those modes of disclosing that disclose things that can be otherwise (*tēchne* and *phrōnesis*), i.e. those modes of disclosing concerned with things that are contingent and in flux.

Heidegger's interpretation of *phrōnesis* is then oriented by the consideration of *phrōnesis* as a mode of disclosing that discloses something that can be otherwise. What is it that is disclosed by *phrōnesis*? Heidegger maintains that, "*phrōnesis* aims at and makes transparent [*durchsichtig*] precisely...the Being of human Dasein" (PS 43). This is because the "being disclosed by *phrōnesis* is *prāxis*", and "[i]n this [*prāxis*] resides human Dasein" (PS 100). In other words, *phrōnesis* discloses the structure of *prāxis* (action), and the being of humans is *prāxis*, i.e. to be human is to be an agent, to be engaged in action. *Phrōnesis* can be said then, on Heidegger's interpretation, to disclose what it is to be human, specifically what it means to be a human agent.

There are, according to Heidegger, three main aspects of action disclosed by *phrōnesis*: (1) the *agathōn*, the good toward which the action is directed, (2) the concrete situation of the action and (3) the interconnection of the *agathōn* and the situation of action, i.e. the manner in which we, as agents, articulate and disclose the situation of action through our choice of the good towards which the action is directed.<sup>39</sup> We will consider how *phrōnesis* discloses these aspects of action one by one and consider, at each step, how we can find a similar disclosure operative in our ordinary conception of conscience.

There are two different, but connected, senses of the *agathōn* that are disclosed in *phrōnesis*. At the more general level, *phrōnesis* discloses what the agent takes to be the best way to live as a whole. At the more concrete level, *phrōnesis* discloses the particular

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<sup>39</sup> This tri-partite division of the aspects of action is suggested by William McNeill in his *The Glance of the Eye: Heidegger, Aristotle and the Ends of Theory* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999), 41.

good that is aimed at in any given action. Heidegger finds the disclosure of what it is to live well in general in Aristotle's initial discussion of *phrōnesis* in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE 1140a25-b25) and the disclosure of the particular good in what Heidegger calls the "more radical conception of *phrōnesis*" (PS 95) in Aristotle's later discussion of *phrōnesis* in Book VI. These two different senses of the *agathōn* of action disclosed by *phrōnesis* are, of course, connected on Aristotle's view, since all particular goods aimed at in action ultimately refer back to a highest good (NE 1094a17) that turns out to be living well in general, i.e. to live in such a way that one is *eudaīmon*.

Heidegger begins by discussing Aristotle's initial characterization of someone who possesses the virtue of *phrōnesis* as someone who "deliberates in the right way *poīa prōs tō eū zēn hōlos*, regarding 'what is conducive to the right mode of Being of Dasein as such and as a whole'" (PS 34). A standard English translation of this Greek phrase is "what promotes living well in general" (NE 1140a25). Traditional interpretations of *phrōnesis* see this aspect of virtue as the ability to deliberate correctly concerning which course of action in any given situation are in accord with the agent's understanding of what it is to lead a good life in general. For instance, Richard Sorabji describes the role of *phrōnesis* in the following way: "It enables a man, in light of his conception of the good life in general, to perceive what generosity requires of him, or more generally what virtue and to kalon require of him, in the particular case, and it instructs him to act accordingly."<sup>40</sup> David Wiggins offers the following similar characterization of the person

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<sup>40</sup>Richard Sorabji, "Aristotle on the Role of the Intellect in Virtue," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amelie Rorty (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 206.

who possesses *phrōnesis*: “It is the mark of the man of practical wisdom on this account to be able to select from an infinite number of features of a situation those features that bear upon the notion or ideal of existence which it is his standing aim to make real.”<sup>41</sup>

This implies that if the deliberation of *phrōnesis* is concerned with those actions that are required to realize the good life, then in *phrōnesis* there is always some understanding of what it means to live a good life.

To see how *phrōnesis* discloses the particular good aimed at in a given action, we must consider in more detail how the structure of action is disclosed by *phrōnesis*.

*Phrōnesis* reveals the full being of any given action from its *archē* (beginning, basis) to its *tēlos* (end) (PS 101-102). The *archē* of action is the “*hoū hēneka*, the ‘for the sake of which’” (PS 101). Every action begins from and continually takes its direction from the end at which it aims. It is important to keep this equivalence of terms in mind. The good aimed at by an action is the *archē* of the action, which in turn can be thought of as the *hoū hēneka* of the action, that for the sake of which the agent acts. Heidegger, and perhaps Aristotle, has a very specific understanding of the *archē* of an action as the “for the sake of which” of action. As we have already seen in the first chapter, that for the sake of which we act is in each case always a “possibility of Dasein’s Being”, or in other words, a possible way of understanding ourselves (BT 116/84). What Heidegger means by this is made apparent by his discussion of Aristotle’s example of the actions of the doctor and the orator (NE 1112b12). Here Aristotle claims that, “[w]e deliberate not

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<sup>41</sup>David Wiggins, “Deliberation and Practical Reason,” in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, ed. Amelie Rorty (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 236.

about ends, but about what promotes ends.” For example, the doctor does not deliberate about whether or not to heal a patient. Instead, the doctor deliberates about how best to heal a patient. According to Heidegger, this is because the practice of healing is constitutive for being a doctor, which means that healing “belongs to the meaning of his [the doctor’s] existence itself” (PS 111). Again, as we have already seen, the “for the sake of which” of an action is the enactment or the realization of the self-understanding of the agent as being a person of a particular sort or embodying a particular role. The ultimate basis of the actions of the doctor is her understanding of herself as a doctor and her understanding of the actions that are entailed by that conception of herself.

How does *phrōnesis* disclose the *archē* of action? Heidegger (and Aristotle) maintain throughout that *phrōnesis* is carried out in deliberation (*bouleūesthai*). However, as mentioned above, the *archē* of an action (thought of as that possibility of being for which the agent acts) is not subject to deliberation. The *archē* or the “for the sake of which” is always chosen in a decision (*prohairesis*) or resolution (*boulē*) (PS 101, 103, 109). The self-understanding that guides any particular action is always already in place prior to deliberation and provides the framework out of which any deliberation can orient itself. Since *phrōnesis* is always essentially *euboulia* (deliberating well), it constantly operates with a grasp or view of the *archē* of the action. The question is how *phrōnesis* has this view of the *archē* if not through deliberation. To answer this, Heidegger turns to Aristotle’s conception of *noūs*, which, “in the proper sense, aims at the *archai* and discloses them” (PS 98). *Noūs* in general is an “apprehension pure and

simple” of the *archaī*.<sup>42</sup> In *phrōnesis*, this means that *noūs* is a pure and simple apprehending of that for the sake of which the agent acts in any given case. This pure and simple apprehension of the *archē* of the action always guides and informs the deliberation of *phrōnesis*.

Before moving on to consider the further elements of action and how *phrōnesis* reveals them, let us pause and make some preliminary connections between Heidegger’s interpretation of *phrōnesis* and conscience. When we think of having a conscience, we normally think of having a bad conscience. This expression typically means that someone has done something that she now feels she perhaps should not have done. Having a bad conscience is feeling guilty about having done something wrong. Feeling guilty is generally associated with having done something that breaks a rule or law, or something that signifies a failure to do a duty, or perhaps just something that fails to live up to one’s ideals. There does not seem to be any explicit revealing of the proper way to live in general. In other words, there does not seem to be any immediate connection between conscience and the *agathōn* in the general sense. However, it does seem to be the case that all ethical rules or moral guidelines, at least in principle, are there to guide our actions so that we do live the best life possible in ethical terms, i.e. live in the way that is most proper for humans. A certain conception of what it means to live well lies behind any system of rules to live by. A bad conscience then would tell us that our

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<sup>42</sup>Martin Heidegger, “Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle: Indication of the Hermeneutical Situation,” trans. Theodore Kisiel and Thomas Sheehan, in *Becoming Heidegger: On the Trail of His Early Occasional Writings, 1910-1927*, eds. Theodore Kisiel and Thomas Sheehan (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 177.

actions were not in line with living a good life in general. When acting in such a way that we “feel the pangs of conscience”, conscience not only reveals to us that the particular action in question is wrong, but also, at least implicitly, conscience discloses to us what we take to be the right action in this case, and by extension, conscience reveals to us what we take to be the proper way of being human.

Furthermore, when we pay attention to the phenomenological experience of conscience, we see that the disclosure of our understanding of living well does not take place (at least initially) at a theoretical level. Rather, we have an experiential or lived understanding of the fact that our actions are not in line with what we take to be the right way to live. This initial pre-theoretical understanding can of course be analyzed after the fact, and we can attempt to articulate it at the theoretical level, but the initial understanding is akin to the pure and simple grasping that Heidegger finds in *noūs* as it operates in *phrōnesis*.

Perhaps we can better see how this would work by way of a concrete example. Consider the following scenario. Suppose a married man is having a few drinks at a bar after work. He begins talking to a female colleague. At first the conversation is innocent and collegial. At some point, the man realizes that their conversation has become more suggestive and flirtatious in nature, and he begins to feel guilty. In this feeling of guilt, a certain “for the sake of which” is revealed here. When he feels guilty, the man’s understanding of himself as a devoted, considerate husband is revealed to him. This does not primarily take place at a theoretical level. Rather, this feeling of guilt and the inappropriateness (or impending inappropriateness) of his actions in light of his

understanding of himself as a good husband are first felt at an experiential or even bodily level (perhaps as weight in the pit of his stomach). In this sense, it is a simple grasping of the good aimed at in his actions that transcend words. Assuming the man pays attention to this “pang of conscience,” he lets himself be guided by his conscience into acting in such a way that he brings his actions into line with that particular good that is relevant here, namely, being a good husband. This would lead him to perhaps break off the conversation, steer it back towards more innocent territory, leave the bar, etc.

We can also see how the particular good under consideration here (being a good husband) in turn refers even further to the man’s conception of what it means to live well in general. In letting himself be guided in his action by his understanding of himself as a good husband, he is also revealing that being a good husband is more important to him than other possible roles that he could choose (e.g. that of a dashing, care-free womanizer). In effect, his conscience is revealing to him what he takes to be living well in general, something that is at least partly constituted by being a good husband.

Now we can turn our attention to the other end of action, the *tēlos* of the action. The *tēlos* of action (here thought of specifically as *prāxis*) is the “action itself, namely the carried out”, specifically *eupraxīa*, acting well (PS 102). The goal of action here is not the accomplishment of some concrete task or the completion of a specific product as it is in *poīesis*. Rather, the goal of action (*prāxis*) is acting well, acting in a way that is in line with and guided by the *archē* of the action. Acting well is only possible when the agent has a clear grasp of that for the sake of which she is acting. This grasp of the *archē* of the action, however, is not sufficient to bring about *eupraxīa* by itself. Heidegger makes this

clear through his consideration of Aristotle's practical syllogism (PS 109). The first premise of the syllogism is the good at which the action aims. The second premise is that the "circumstances and the situation of the action are such and such" (PS 109). The conclusion is acting, specifically acting in such a way that, given the particular situation in which the agent finds herself, the action is in line with the agent's self-understanding that serves as the *archē* of the action. In other words, in order to act well, the agent must not only have a clear grasp of the good towards which the action is directed, but she must also have a clear understanding of the situation in which she acting.

We must now ask how *phrōnesis* discloses the situation of acting. Again we find that the situation of acting is not disclosed through deliberation. Heidegger identifies disclosing the situation of acting with finding the *ēschaton*, which is the "outermost limit of the deliberation and in that way is the presentifying of the state of affairs with which the action begins" (PS 108). When acting, we always reach a point at which deliberation can shed no more light on things, and we must simply act based on a grasping of the situation in which we find ourselves that, once again, transcends words. Heidegger again maintains that *noūs* is operative here is this direct disclosure of the *ēschaton*. "All deliberating," Heidegger says, "ends in an *aīsthesis* [perceiving]. This straightforward perceiving within *phrōnesis* is *noūs*" (PS 110). The *aīsthesis* operative here is not directed towards some particular object, but rather, it perceives the situation as a whole in its particularity and transience (PS 110). In Heidegger's words, *aīsthesis* in *phrōnesis* is the "inspection of the this here now, the inspection of the concrete momentariness of the transient situation" (PS 112).

We can again attempt to see how something like the disclosure of the concrete situation of action is operative in our normal conception of conscience. Consider again the previously described scenario of the man in the bar. In addition to his understanding of himself as a devoted husband, his feeling of guilt also reveals the inappropriateness of his action with regards to the particular situation in which he finds himself. What makes his behavior inappropriate is the specific way he is acting with a specific person in a specific setting. If the woman to whom he is talking were his wife, he would not feel guilty, or if his conversation had not taken on flirtatious overtones, he would not feel guilty. Feeling guilty reveals something about his relation to the woman to whom he is talking and the sort of conversation they are having. More generally, the feeling of guilt reveals something about the tone of the situation as a whole—a situation that has suddenly changed from innocuous collegiality to something different. Again, this grasping of the change in tone of the situation is not primarily at the linguistic or theoretical level. This change is first encountered and grasped at an experiential level.

Now we have examined two aspects of action and how they are disclosed by *phrōnesis*. We have seen that both the *archē* of the action (that for the sake of which the agent acts or the good towards which the action is aimed) and the concrete situation of action (the *ēschaton*) are disclosed in *phrōnesis* by the direct and simple apprehension of *noūs*. It seems difficult then to see why and how Heidegger maintains Aristotle's emphasis on the importance of deliberation in *phrōnesis*. I would like to suggest that the function of deliberation in Heidegger's interpretation of *phrōnesis* is to provide and maintain the connection between the *archē* of the action and the perception of the

situation of action that will allow the agent to act well, i.e. to act in a way that is consistent with her conception of the good. Putting this in Aristotelian terms, the deliberation of *phrōnesis* would take the form of the practical syllogism.<sup>43</sup>

In order for deliberation to perform this role, deliberation must involve an understanding of the connection between the *archē* of the action and the situation of action. According to Heidegger, what is revealed in *phrōnesis* is that the disclosure of the situation of action is always performed in light of some specific for the sake of which that has been chosen in a *prohaīresis*. Heidegger is clear in maintaining that the *aīsthesis* involved with *phrōnesis* is not a “mere inspection”, but rather a “circumspection,” which grasps objects in terms of their usefulness (i.e. insofar as the objects encountered are *sumphēron*) (PS 112). This means that objects and other aspects of the situation are not observed disinterestedly, but rather always in terms of the ultimate aim of the agent in any situation of acting. “Precisely out of the constant regard toward that which I have resolved,” says Heidegger, “the situation should become transparent” (PS 102). It is the role of good deliberation to maintain that “constant regard” toward the *archē* of the action and make sure that the situation is disclosed on the basis of that. This allows Heidegger to interpret Aristotle’s emphasis on *orthōs lōgos* as deliberation that is always guided by the *archē* of the action and is always directed towards acting in the particular situation in a way that is consistent with the *archē*.

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<sup>43</sup>This interpretation is suggested by McNeill in *The Glance of the Eye: Heidegger, Aristotle, and the Ends of Theory* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997), 41.

This conception of deliberation still does not seem to resemble any normal conception of deliberation. We can understand why this is by briefly considering Heidegger's conception of *lōgos* (speech, discussion) as it appears in the context of his interpretation of *phrōnesis*. Deliberation is ultimately to be understood as a form of *lōgos*. *Lōgos* here, says Heidegger, is "to be grasped as the asserting of something about something" (PS 99). To assert something about something is to "articulate what is spoken about" (PS 99). This asserting is done with an "intention to disclose it [the object of the assertion] in this asserting" (PS 99). *Lōgos* in this very basic, minimal sense is to make an assertion that discloses and articulates the object of the assertion. This is exactly what happens in the *lōgos* of the practical syllogism. The situation of action is disclosed and articulated on the basis of the for the sake of which of the action. This very connection between the *hoū hēneka* and the situation is a form of *lōgos*. A more common understanding of the deliberation associated with action, i.e. deliberation as a consideration and discussion of what is to be done, is a more sophisticated and abstract form of this basic sense of *lōgos*. Heidegger characterizes the deliberation of *phrōnesis* in this normal sense as a "certain drawing of conclusions" that takes the form "if I am to behave in such and such a way, then..." (PS 35). In this form of deliberation, what is discussed is whether or not the action or way of behaving under consideration is in line with the *hoū hēneka*. This discussion is a way of letting the situation be disclosed and articulated in terms of the *hoū hēneka*.

We can return to our example of the man in the bar to see how this might work. In order for him to act correctly, i.e. in order for him to act in accord with his conception

of the good life, he must not only have a grasp of what it means to live well and a grasp of the situation. He must also be able to disclose the situation on the basis of his understanding of himself as a good husband, not on the basis of some other understanding of himself. His feeling guilty is a result of his particular understanding of himself as a good husband being brought to bear on the situation at hand and letting the situation be understood from this basis. The man could conceivably fail to understand himself as a good husband in this situation, which would not result in his feeling guilty and would (at least potentially) not lead to his acting correctly. All of this can occur at an intuitive, pre-theoretical level and still be a form of *lōgos* in the minimal sense outlined above. Alternatively, we could imagine the man engaging in deliberation in a more normal sense and saying to himself something like, “If I continue talking to this woman in this way, then I am not acting in accord with my understanding of myself as a good husband.” This can be understood as a way of making the pre-linguistic articulation and disclosure in the basic sense of *lōgos* explicit.

### *Conscience and Resoluteness in Being and Time*

Let us now turn to Heidegger’s discussion of conscience and resoluteness in *Being and Time*. We have shown above how Heidegger’s interpretation of *phrōnesis* and its connection with conscience can be seen as providing a pre-theoretical understanding of the structure of any given action and how this understanding of action takes place in action itself without having to still the movement of action (thereby providing an alternative to distorting theoretical reflection on our being) . Furthermore, we have seen

that when engaged in genuine action, praxis, as opposed to productive activity, *poiesis*, the aim of acting is the action itself, not something external to the action. This way of acting also then provides an alternative to the inauthentic ways of acting of productive activity and interaction with other people, as both of these modes of action are directed towards something beyond the action itself.

The aim of this section will be to show how Heidegger uses his interpretation of *phronesis* as conscience to develop his account of conscience and resoluteness in *Being and Time* as a way of dynamically and pre-conceptually revealing not only the structure of a given particular action, but also the formal structure of human existence and agency as such. In addition, we need to show how Heidegger's account of conscience and resoluteness overcomes the obstacles to properly revealing our being—our direction out towards things external to our actions and our tendency to fall into the superficial ways of understanding our being found in the public realm in a way that parallels the disclosure of our being in authentic being-towards-death.

We find that Heidegger's development of his conceptions of conscience and resoluteness proceeds in a manner similar to that of his interpretation of *phronesis* in the *Plato's Sophist* course. He begins by stating that, like *phronesis*, “[c]onscience gives us ‘something’ to understand; it *discloses*” (BT 314/269). Like *phronesis*, conscience discloses through a mode of *logos* or discourse (*Rede*). Alluding to the common way of talking about the “voice of conscience” or the “call of conscience,” Heidegger maintains that conscience is experienced as a call (BT 314/269). Instead of deliberation as the form

of *lōgos* that characterizes the disclosure of *phrōnesis*, Heidegger focuses on the call of conscience as the mode of discourse that characterizes the disclosure of the conscience.

Again in a way that parallels his interpretation of *phrōnesis*, Heidegger begins by considering the phenomenon of conscience at a more general level (BT 312/267-325/280) and then proceeds to consider in greater detail what exactly is disclosed by the conscience and how exactly the conscience brings about this disclosure (BT 325/280-348/301). At the general level, conscience discloses what Heidegger calls our “ownmost potentiality-for-Being [*eigenstes Seinkönnen*]” (BT 318/273, 322/277, 324/279). He then proceeds to work out in greater detail what exactly this ownmost potentiality-for-Being is and how it is disclosed by conscience through his analysis of guilt and resoluteness. Our first task is try to come to a better understanding of what Heidegger means by “ownmost potentiality-for-Being” as it comes up in his more general discussion of conscience. There seem to be two main senses in which Heidegger uses the term ‘own’ (*eigen*) or ‘ownmost’ (*eigenste*) here. *Eigen* can mean ‘proper’ in the sense of being appropriate or it can mean ‘own’ in the sense of “I would like to sleep in my *own* bed”.

Let us start by considering the first meaning of *eigen* as what is proper. In Heidegger’s consideration of the general conception of *phrōnesis*, we see the term employed in this way, as Heidegger states that the deliberation of *phrōnesis* is concerned with the “right and proper way to be Dasein,” which is Heidegger’s explication of the Greek *eū zēn*, living well. We saw above how *phrōnesis* and conscience as ordinarily understood can be seen as disclosing what we take to be the best, or most proper, way of living. Something similar is retained in Heidegger’s conception of conscience. The

proper way to be Dasein, for Heidegger, is to exist authentically in Heidegger's sense of the term. Heidegger says that an "authentic [*eigentliches*] potentiality-for-Being is attested by the conscience" (BT 277/234).<sup>44</sup> We find again the root *eigen* in the adjective *eigentlich*, which has traditionally (at least within the context of English language Heidegger scholarship) been translated as 'authentic'.

We can find clarification of the second sense of *eigen* as 'own' by briefly looking at Heidegger's interpretation and appropriation of certain aspects of Kierkegaard's conception of conscience in contrast to Heidegger's interpretation of *phrōnesis*.<sup>45</sup> For Aristotle, the *orthōs lōgos* of *phrōnesis*, its constant directedness towards the good, is endangered by the possibility of its corruption and distortion by pleasure and pain (NE 1140b17-18). Heidegger reads this possible distortion of *phrōnesis* by pleasure and pain as potentially covering over our being, i.e. keeping the structure of our being as agents from being disclosed in *phrōnesis* (PS 36). We can see easily how this might happen. There are many occasions in our everyday activity in which we fail to do something that we know we should do (i.e. we do not pay attention to our conscience) because doing the right thing seems painful or there is a more pleasant option.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger focuses not on the potential distortion of conscience by pleasure and pain, but instead shifts to the potential covering over of our

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<sup>44</sup>John van Buren provides a helpful clarification of what Heidegger means by 'attests' here. According to van Buren, in the context of early Christianity, the conscience "leads to the 'manifestation' of what was 'hidden' and thus performs the function of bearing witness or attesting." See his *The Young Heidegger* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1994), 183. When Heidegger says that conscience attests to our authentic potentiality-for-Being, this is another way of saying that conscience discloses how we can exist in an authentic manner.

<sup>45</sup> I am relying here on van Buren's account of this interpretation. See his *The Young Heidegger*, 184-185.

being due to our tendency to lose ourselves in the superficial ways of understanding ourselves and the world that dominate the public sphere of our everyday existence. It is this focus on the distorting and concealing effect of the public sphere, the sphere of ‘the One’ (*das Man*) that Heidegger seemingly gets from Kierkegaard. Consider the following characterization of Kierkegaard’s conception of conscience from John van Buren:

For Kierkegaard, it is the conscience that leads the individual from ‘being closed off’ to ‘becoming manifest,’ from ‘dispersion’ to self-recuperation, from objective to subjective truth, from the anonymous publicness to the secret of hidden inwardness.<sup>46</sup>

This helps us understand what Heidegger means when he says things like:

And to what is one called when one is thus appealed to [by the call of conscience]? To one’s *own Self*. Not to what Dasein counts for, can do, or concerns itself with in being with one another publicly, nor to what it has taken hold of, set about, or let itself be carried along with (BT 317/273).

Conscience, for Heidegger, calls us back to our own selves in the sense that it calls us to understand ourselves not in terms of what we do publicly or in terms of prevailing ways of understanding our being. Conscience calls us to understand our *own* being in a manner that stems from and is appropriate to our being itself.

We can make a connection here between Heidegger’s interpretations of Kant and Aristotle. The call of conscience calls us to our most proper way of existing. This parallels the manner in which *phrōnesis* reveals to us what we take to be the proper way

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<sup>46</sup> Van Buren, 184.

to live in general. In the course of his interpretation of Kant, Heidegger identifies the most proper way of being human as being self-responsible. We can a further connection in the etymology of the German *'eigen'* when taken to mean 'own'. Becoming responsible is a matter of coming to own one's actions.

The next task is to explain how the call of conscience discloses the structure of our being in greater detail. Heidegger begins by considering our everyday understanding of conscience and the call of conscience. He plausibly maintains that the call of conscience tells us that we are guilty (BT 326/281). From this starting point, Heidegger proceeds to analyze what is really at the core of our normal understanding of guilt. He isolates two main ways in which we (or at least German speakers) understand being guilty. The first common meaning of being guilty is captured by 'owing something' or 'having debts' (BT 327/281).<sup>47</sup> The second common meaning is 'being responsible for something', in the sense of causing something to happen or bringing something about (BT 327/282). Together these two common meanings give us the general idea of "coming to owe something to Others", whether this be by breaking a law, coming to be indebted to other people or being responsible for something done to other people (BT 327/282). It is easy enough to find experiential corroboration for this idea. We often feel guilty when we realize that we have done something that violates some norm or law, or when we realize that we are responsible for doing something that harmed someone else.

Heidegger does not stop here. He attempts to abstract from these normal ideas of being guilty to reach the underlying, unifying essence of what it means to be guilty. In

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<sup>47</sup>This works better in German. The adjective *'schuldig'* means 'guilty', and *'Schulden'* means 'debts'.

other words, he tries to identify the formal structure of guilt. His first pass at a more formal conception of what it means to be guilty is: “*Being-the-basis* for a lack of something in the Dasein of an Other...This kind of lacking is a failure to satisfy some requirement which applies to one’s existent Being with Others” (BT 328/282). The idea is that when we feel ourselves to be guilty, there is a sense of a debt that has not been fully repaid or a rule that has not been followed. When we are addressed as guilty by our conscience, we are brought to an awareness of a certain lack in the way we are acting with respect to other people.

Heidegger wants to further push his conception of guilt past the common ways of conceiving it in order to bring out what is essential to the experience of guilt at the ontological level. He makes this clear by stating that the “idea of guilt must not only be raised above the domain of that concern in which we reckon things up, but it must also be detached from any relationship to any law or ‘ought’” (BT 328/283). Bearing in mind the prior understanding of being guilty as showing some lack in one’s interaction with others, Heidegger defines the existential idea of guilt as “ ‘Being-the-basis for a Being which has been defined by a ‘not’—that is to say, as ‘*Being-the-basis of a nullity*’” (BT 329/283). Here talk of violation of laws or norms or incurring debts with others is dropped, and Heidegger strips the concept of guilt down to what he sees as the essential core of being guilty—being the basis of a nullity or lack. Every time we feel guilty, we feel that we are responsible for (i.e. we are the basis or ground for) some lack or nullity stemming from our violating a norm or law, incurring a debt or doing something that harmed another.

This existential definition of guilt requires further explication. Heidegger does this by moving further beyond the common understanding of guilt by examining the three aspects of our existence—thrownness, projection and falling—and finding in each an essential nullity that is not related to the lack of compliance with moral norms. With regards to thrownness, Heidegger says: “As being, Dasein is something that has been thrown; it has been brought into its ‘there’, but *not* of its own accord” (BT 329/284). By this Heidegger is emphasizing the fact that we come into the world that is not of our own making, and we do so through no choice of our own. Furthermore, “[a]s being, it [Dasein] has taken the definite form of a potentiality-for-Being which has heard itself and has devoted itself to itself, but *not* as itself” (BT 329-330/284). Not only are we thrown into a world without our choice, but also we are always already existing in a certain way before we can actively choose how we want to exist. For example, I was already thrown into being a middle-class American child in the late Twentieth-Century before I was capable of choosing what sort of person I wanted to be. Heidegger makes it clear that we can never go back behind this initial thrownness and appropriate it in such a way that the nullity inherent in it is removed. The socio-historical situation into which we have been thrown is the basis for our being. No matter how we decide to move forward, anything that we do will have been done on the basis of the situation in which we find ourselves. This leads Heidegger to conclude that, “‘Being-a-basis’ means *never* to have power over one’s ownmost Being from the ground up”, and furthermore, this “‘*not*’ belongs to the existential meaning of ‘thrownness’” (BT 330/284).

Nevertheless, this does not mean that we are completely determined by the situation in which we find ourselves. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, we do have to take up one (or several) of the possible ways of living and understanding ourselves that are provided by the situation into which we are thrown. Heidegger asks: “How *is* Dasein this thrown basis?” He answers: “Only in that it projects itself upon possibilities into which it has been thrown” (BT 330/284). Having grown up in middle-class, late Twentieth-Century America provided me with a range of possible ways of living and ways in which I can understand and define my life. Insofar as I have to understand my life in some way, I am limited to the range of possibilities provided by the situation in which I have been thrown. However, it is still the case that “Dasein is its basis existently—that is, in such a manner that it understands itself in terms of possibilities” (BT 331/285). This means that our being is such that we are pushing forward into future possibilities that go beyond the situation in which we find ourselves. Heidegger’s use of the term ‘exist’ and related terms such as ‘existently’ is meant to emphasize the way in which we always are projecting ourselves out beyond the current, actual state of affairs (the prefix *ex-* is used here for this purpose).

Heidegger then turns to the consideration of the nullity essentially involved in this projective aspect of our existence. Here Heidegger says, “in having a potentiality-for-Being it [Dasein] always stands in one possibility or another: it constantly is *not* other possibilities, and it has waived these in its existentiell projection” (BT 331/285). What Heidegger is saying here is that in any given situation, we take up a certain course of action or type of life to live and do not take up other ways of acting or being. At every

given moment there are possible ways of being that we are not taking up. This nullity is contained in the very essence of the projective aspect of our existence. According to Heidegger, we must always “take over Being-a-basis” (BT 330/284), i.e. it is the nature of being human that we must always appropriate or take over the situation into which we have been thrown by taking up certain possible ways of being provided by the situation. The nullity of projection is essential to our ability to take over the thrown basis of our being. This appropriation of the situation is only possible on the basis of taking up certain, concrete possible ways of being, while excluding others. To return to our example, suppose one finds oneself growing up in late Twentieth-Century America. This is a situation into which one has been thrown, without having had a prior say about the matter. Nonetheless, one is obligated to make something of situation, to make something of one’s life by taking up one way of living or another. For example, one could be a lawyer or an engineer, but in doing so one would be excluding the possibility of say being a professional athlete. In a more general way, one could be cynical and anti-social, excluding the possibilities of being optimistic and outgoing. In every way of taking over the situation, there is essentially a nullity.

Finally, Heidegger takes up the third aspect of our existence, falling. With regards to this he says: “In the structure of thrownness, as in that of projection, there lies essentially a nullity. This nullity is the basis for the possibility of inauthentic Dasein in its falling” (BT 331/285). Earlier in *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes falling as our inherent tendency to be absorbed in the world of our everyday concerns, and thus to

“fall” away from our authentic mode of existence (BT 220/175). Here there is obviously nullity involved. Insofar as we are falling, we are *not* ourselves.

Now let us try to bring this discussion of guilt back into connection with the preceding discussion of conscience. As we know from our ordinary experience of conscience, the call of conscience is not normally experienced voluntarily (BT 334/288). That is, we usually do not and cannot willfully ascribe guilt to ourselves. Most of the time, feelings of guilt come upon us during or after action. This means, for Heidegger, that we cannot will ourselves to disclose the structure of our being to ourselves through the experience of the call of conscience. The best we can do is to be “ready to be appealed to” by conscience (BT 334/288). Heidegger characterizes our state of being in which we are ready to be appealed to as resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*); i.e. resoluteness is “wanting to have a conscience” (BT 343/296). Something needs to be said here about the German term ‘*Entschlossenheit*’. It comes from the past participle (*entschlossen*) of the verb ‘*entschließen*,’ which means to resolve. *Entschlossenheit* would then mean something like being resolved or “resolvedness,” so resoluteness works as a translation. However, the root of the original verb ‘*entschließen*’ is ‘*schließen*,’ meaning ‘to close’. By adding the negative ‘ent-’ prefix, the original meaning is negated, so that *entschließen* can also be thought of as meaning ‘to open’. It is this latter meaning of *entschließen* that Heidegger is employing in his initial introduction of the concept of resoluteness (although we will see below that the first meaning of being resolved will be important for

Heidegger as well).<sup>48</sup> Bearing this in mind, resoluteness can at least partially be thought of as an openness to hearing the call of conscience.

It is wrong, however, to attempt to understand resoluteness as a passive withdrawal from acting that merely waits for the call of conscience. The first meaning of resoluteness as being resolved or decided, something which leads to committed action, is also essential here. Heidegger makes this clear by stating that “[t]o hear the call [of conscience] authentically, signifies bringing oneself into a factual taking-action” (BT 341/294) and that “[a]s resolute, Dasein is already *taking action*” (BT 347/300). If we pause to reflect on this, we can see that this makes sense. Our primary experience of the call of conscience occurs during action itself. As we gain more experience, we may experience the call of conscience before or after acting, but the experience of the call is always related to some concrete taking action.

Heidegger further clarifies what he means by wanting to have a conscience by saying that, “this [wanting to have a conscience] is a way a letting one’s ownmost Self take action in itself of its own accord in its Being-guilty, and represents phenomenally that authentic potentiality-for-Being which Dasein itself attests” (BT 342/295). In resoluteness, we are acting in such a way that we simultaneously hold ourselves open to hearing the voice of conscience, i.e. we hold ourselves open for understanding ourselves as guilty. This shows how the structure of resolute action can be understood in terms of the general conception of action developed in the first chapter. Remember that on the

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<sup>48</sup> For a more detailed breakdown of this dual character of resoluteness, see Bret W. Davis’s *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), Chapter 2.

Heideggerian conception of action developed in the first chapter, action involves being drawn toward something that matters to us (the passive aspect) and having a self-understanding that allows these things to matter to us (the active aspect). In resolute action, we allow the call of conscience to draw us to understand ourselves as guilty.

Can we provide a more concrete understanding of what Heidegger means by acting in such a way that we understand ourselves as guilty? The prior discussion of Heidegger's interpretation of *phrōnesis* might be of help here. We attempted to illustrate above how the concrete structure of action is disclosed by the deliberation of *phrōnesis* in the form of the practical syllogism. *Phrōnesis* has the "for-the-sake-of-which" of the action in view and discloses the situation of action on the basis of this "for-the-sake-of-which". This disclosing of the situation on the basis of the for-the-sake-of-which leads to the action. We also saw above how this might be work in a concrete example by considering the married man talking to a woman at the bar. In this example, *phrōnesis* (or conscience) discloses the concrete structure of the particular action. That is, it discloses the way in which the man's understanding of himself as a devoted husband (the for-the-sake-of-which here) discloses the situation in all of its particularity and leads to his breaking off the conversation or leaving the bar.

What gets disclosed in Heidegger's conception of being guilty is not only the concrete structure of this particular action, but also the formal structure of our being as agents as such. When understanding ourselves as guilty in Heidegger's sense, we grasp not only the particular situation of action as it is disclosed by a particular for-the-sake-of-which. We grasp the way in which we find ourselves in situations that *not* of our making

and are *not* in our control. “What one has in view here,” Heidegger says, “is a ‘not’ which is constitutive for this *Being* of Dasein—its thrownness” (BT 330/284). This experience of nullity here is grasping the fact that thrownness is constitutive for our existence. In other words, acting in such a way that we understand ourselves as guilty discloses to us that thrownness is an aspect of our being. As we have shown in the first chapter, to say that thrownness is an essential aspect of our being can be understood as saying that in all of our actions, there is a passive aspect. That is, before we make any decisions, we always already find ourselves in a situation to which we must respond and in the context of which things matter to us.

Similarly, we grasp not only the particular for-the-sake-of-which towards which we are projecting ourselves. Instead, we grasp our being in its general structure as essentially projection out towards certain possibilities. We understand this projective ability as a nullity in the sense that we are always pushing out beyond the concrete situation in which we find ourselves and that this projective ability is constitutive for our existence. We find ourselves obligated to appropriate the situation, to take it over by taking up some particular possibility of being that it provided by it. What is disclosed to us here by acting while understanding ourselves as guilty is that our being is constituted not only by thrownness, but also by our taking up of possibilities provided by the situation, which Heidegger calls understanding. When we take up these possible ways of understanding ourselves, we allow things and activities encountered in the situation into which we are thrown to matter to us. In this way, when understanding ourselves as

guilty, we reveal to ourselves the active aspect of human agency, through which things are allowed to matter to us on the basis of the possible self-understanding that we take up.

Finally, we grasp the way in which this dynamic structure of our being is covered up in our everyday existence by our reliance on the common way of understanding things and ourselves as static and purely present-at-hand. That is, we come to grasp our tendency to “fall” into the superficial, prevailing ways of understanding ourselves and our tendency to become absorbed in our everyday concerns and activities. In other words, we grasp how we are *not* properly ourselves in our everyday existence insofar as we do not properly disclose the structure of our being to ourselves. Insofar as we do this, we come to understand that one constitutive aspect of our existence is what Heidegger calls falling.

It is not enough, however, to understand resoluteness as wanting to have a conscience in the sense of being open to understanding oneself as guilty. Heidegger goes on to say that resoluteness is also constituted by “anxiety as the way of being attuned” (BT 343/296). Once again, a comparison with *phrōnesis* can help us see how anxiety fits into Heidegger’s conception of resoluteness and why “being attuned” by anxiety is important for resoluteness. As mentioned above, *phrōnesis* can be distorted by pleasure and pain. According to Aristotle, temperance (*sophrosūne*) preserves *phrōnesis* from being corrupted by pleasure and pain (1140b11). Heidegger takes this to mean that *sophrosūne* “preserves it [*phrōnesis*] against the possibility of being covered over” (PS 36).

We can think of anxiety performing a similar function in Heidegger's conception of resoluteness. As we have seen for Heidegger, when acting inauthentically, we fail to understand our own being properly because we are either directed outwards towards things and people in the world of our everyday concerns or fall into the tendency to understand ourselves in terms of the prevailing, superficial understandings of our being. This means that when acting inauthentically, we fail to hear the call of conscience, i.e. to fail to properly disclose our being to ourselves. During the experience of anxiety the "totality of involvements of the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand discovered within-the-world, is, as such, of no consequence" (BT 231/186). In other words, when experiencing anxiety, all of the normal daily activities in which we usually involve ourselves come to be seen as completely insignificant. Anxiety thus brings us out of our tendency to understand ourselves "in terms of the 'world' and the way things have been publicly interpreted" (BT 232/187). In this way anxiety can be said to properly attune us so that we are ready to hear the call of conscience, ready to understand ourselves as guilty, insofar as it holds at bay our tendency to cover over the structure of being by being absorbed in the world of our everyday concern. This is why Heidegger says that the "call whose mood has been attuned by anxiety is what makes it possible first and foremost for Dasein to project itself upon its ownmost potentiality-for-Being" (BT 322/277).

*Summary of the Preceding Analysis of Conscience and Resoluteness*

Let us briefly outline the steps taken and connections made in the preceding interpretation. In his interpretation of *phrōnesis*, Heidegger is looking for a way of existing, a way of acting in which our being is revealed to us in the appropriate way. That means this way of acting should allow us to adequately grasp the dynamic nature of our being in its concreteness, thereby avoiding the inevitable distortion associated with the traditional philosophical method of cognitive, conceptual reflection. In addition to this, when acting authentically, our focus should be brought back from the external aims of everyday action onto our own being.

*Phrōnesis* reveals the aspects of any particular action—the good towards which the action is directed, the situation of action and the way in which the situation is disclosed in terms of this good. *Phrōnesis* does this in a way that transcends *lōgos* in the ordinary sense and instead makes use of a practical form of *noūs*, the ability to purely and simply grasp the *archē* and situation of action. As we have seen, *lōgos* in a very basic sense is operative in the disclosure of the situation in terms of the for-the-sake-of-which of the action. This means that *phrōnesis* discloses the structure of action in a way that is pre-conceptual and pre-theoretical. We then endeavored to show how this interpretation of *phrōnesis* can be connected with our normal understanding of conscience. The aim of *phrōnesis* is also the being of the agent himself, unlike in our productive activity during which we are focused on the accomplishing of external goals.

Heidegger transforms the ordinary understanding of conscience in such a way that responding to the call of conscience (i.e. understanding oneself as being guilty) comes to

be understood as acting in such a way that the general structure of our being is revealed to us in the proper way. Being guilty comes to be understood as being the basis a nullity, a nullity that permeates and is in fact constitutive of the three aspects of our being—thrownness, understanding and falling. By acting in such a way that we understand ourselves as guilty, we come to understand how our being as agents is constituted by a passive aspect, an active aspect and our tendency to “fall” into whatever activities and ways of understanding ourselves that are currently prevalent. This disclosure of our being takes place at the experiential, pre-conceptual level in the moment of acting itself. In this way, Heidegger has developed an account of a way of acting in which we overcome the obstacles to properly understanding our own being that are encountered in inauthentic action and finds the phenomenological attestation for the possibility of authentic existence, i.e. authentic being-towards-death.

#### The Connection between Conscience, Resoluteness and Death

Now we are faced with the challenge of explaining how exactly Heidegger connects the phenomena of death, conscience and resoluteness and showing how these phenomena can be put together in an account of authentic action.

As we saw above, it is the conscience that is supposed to attest to an authentic way of existing. This means that conscience points us towards (i.e. reveals to us) our most proper (ownmost) way of existing. We have seen that conscience points us towards understanding ourselves as guilty as our ownmost way of existing. When we understand ourselves as guilty, we reveal to ourselves the nullity that is inherent in the three

ontological aspects of our being (disposition, falling, and understanding). Our ownmost possibility for being is one in which the structure of our being is revealed to us. Being-towards-death is also supposed to be our ownmost potentiality for being. This would imply that the concrete, phenomenological experience of authentic being-towards-death is the understanding of oneself as guilty. The way of acting in which we understand ourselves as guilty is resoluteness. The task is to show how being-towards-death is authentically experienced in resoluteness.

According to Heidegger, the only way of experiencing death, in the sense of being-towards-death, is in the resolute understanding of oneself as guilty. Why is this? When we act in such a way that we understand ourselves as guilty, we experience the way in which our being is permeated by nullity. What is death but the nullity of our existence? When we experience the nullity of our existence when acting resolutely, we find the only possible way to experience our own mortality. Heidegger states:

We have conceived death existentially as what we have characterized as the possibility of the *impossibility* of existence—that is to say, as the utter nullity of Dasein. Death is not ‘added on’ to Dasein at its ‘end’; but Dasein, as care, is the thrown (that is, null) basis for its death. The nullity by which Dasein’s Being is dominated primordially through and through, is revealed to Dasein itself in authentic Being-towards-death (BT 354/306).

Furthermore, “[a]uthentic ‘thinking about death’ is a wanting-to-have-a-conscience” (BT 357/309).

We can see why Heidegger would make this claim when we remember the earlier discussion of the seeming impossibility of ever experiencing our own death. We must

also remember that Heidegger re-conceives death as a possibility, namely, the “*possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all*” (BT 307/262). When we are engaged in resolute action, we act with an acute understanding of the way in which our choice of one possible course of action necessarily closes the possibility of taking another course of action. When considered at the everyday, mundane level, such a consideration appears to be trivial, but when considered from the point of view of an entire lifetime, Heidegger’s connection of resoluteness and being-towards-death becomes much more plausible. As we grow older, certain possibilities are no longer available to us. For example, it might have been possible at one time that I could someday become a professional athlete, but unfortunately that is no longer a possibility for me. As we become older still, the scope of possible actions and ways of living becomes narrower and narrower. What is dying but this closing down of possibilities?<sup>49</sup> Whenever we act with this understanding of the way our current action necessarily closes off the possibility of other courses of action, we act with an understanding of our own mortality. In other words, we achieve authentic being-towards-death.

It might be asked what exactly authentic being-towards-death adds to the conception of authentic action worked out just in terms of conscience, guilt and resoluteness. To begin with we must remember that a strong sense of responsibility for our actions requires there to be some possible self-understanding that is drawn purely from our own being as individual agents and not from the surrounding social context. We

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<sup>49</sup> Here I am indebted to Taylor Carman’s interpretation of Heidegger’s account of death in his *Heidegger’s Analytic: Interpretation, Discourse and Authenticity in Being and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 276-284.

find this possibility in death, but as we have seen, we must still show how authentic being-towards-death can be experienced concretely. Furthermore, Heidegger is clear that authentic being-towards-death, thought of as running ahead (*Vorlaufen*), is the necessary completion of resoluteness. He says, “[o]nly in resoluteness that runs ahead is the ability to be guilty understood *authentically and wholly*,” and “only as running ahead does resoluteness become a primordial Being towards Dasein’s ownmost ability to be” (BT 354/306, translation modified). Why does Heidegger claim that resoluteness only becomes authentic when combined with running ahead towards death? The following passage provides some explanation:

What if resoluteness, in accordance with its own meaning, should bring itself into its authenticity only when it projects itself not upon random possibilities which just lie closest, but upon that uttermost possibility which lies ahead of every factual potentiality-for-Being of Dasein, and, as such, enters more or less undisguisedly into every potentiality-for-Being of which Dasein factually takes hold? (BT 349-350/302)

If in resoluteness we are not projecting ourselves towards the possibility of death, we run into the problems associated with grasping our being in its totality that Heidegger outlines in his discussion of death. If in resoluteness we are still directed towards the normal everyday ways of understanding ourselves (e.g. as philosophers, teachers, husbands, etc.), our actions are still directed out towards something beyond ourselves, and we do not grasp our being in its totality.

## Conclusion

Let us now try to summarize the steps taken to develop an account of authentic action in this chapter and the previous chapter. Based on Heidegger's interpretation of Kant's practical philosophy from the previous chapter, we determined that in order to be responsible for our actions in the strong sense, there had to be some possible self-understanding that was drawn from our own individual existence and not from the social context. For Heidegger, this one possibility is the being-towards-death. We also saw how Heidegger, when discussing Kant's conception of pure willing, found this way of being responsible for our actions in the consciousness of our being bound by the moral law and also being authors of the moral law. Specifically, responsible action occurs in the performative act of binding oneself by the moral law. This binding of oneself requires knowledge of the moral law (i.e. the ability to represent the moral law to oneself) and the knowledge that the moral law is grounded in one's own faculty of reason.

In this chapter we saw how Heidegger conceives of authentic being-towards-death as a form of self-knowledge in which we understand ourselves as being bound by the limits of the situation in which we find ourselves and yet also being the ultimate ground for the possibility of anything encountered in the world mattering to us in any way whatsoever. We also showed how this formal understanding of authentic being-towards-death can acquire some phenomenological concretion in the experience of the conscience and in resolute action. We can now go a step further in clarifying why resolute action is responsible action in the strong sense. Resolute action is the performative act of binding oneself to the prescription for action given by the self-understanding one takes up and the

situation in which one finds oneself. As we have seen from Heidegger's interpretation of *phrōnesis*, resolute action involves a clear knowledge of that for the sake of which one is acting (i.e. the self-understanding that guides the action), the situation of action and the way in which one's self-understanding articulates the situation of action. Kant's binding of oneself to the moral law is transformed into the giving of oneself over to the demands of situation as articulated by the self-understanding one has taken up.

Let us return to the Luther example to better illustrate what this would look like in a more concrete sense. We can analyze Luther's action according to the Heideggerian conception of authentic action as follows. Luther is acting with a clear understanding of the situation in which he finds himself and a clear knowledge of his understanding of himself as a Christian of a certain sort. This knowledge leads him to realize what action the situation demands of him. He achieves responsibility in the strong sense when he allows himself to be bound by what is prescribed by the situation and his self-understanding. Luther need not explicitly formulate this knowledge conceptually or propositionally. Rather, as we have seen in Heidegger's discussion of *phrōnesis*, this knowledge involved in acting is initially pre-conceptual and pre-thematic. Furthermore, the content of the action is unimportant when considering whether or not the agent is responsible for her action in the strong sense. Rather, the action that determines responsibility in the strong sense is the way in which the agent gives herself over to the demands of situation in a clear-sighted way. It is also important to stress that for Luther to be responsible for his action in the strong sense, he must act with knowledge of the way in which it is his projection towards a particular self-understanding that allows for

the demands of the situation to have any claim on him. If Luther feels himself to be completely at the mercy of larger social and historical forces, then he fails to achieve responsibility in the strong sense in his action.

With this example, we finally see the various considerations in our discussion of authentic action coming together. We see here how responsibility in the strong sense requires the proper sort of self-knowledge and how Heidegger develops his account of acting with this self-knowledge through his analysis of death, conscience and resoluteness.

## DISSERTATION CONCLUSION

In the Introduction, I claimed that the aim of this project was to develop an interpretation of the conception of action found in Heidegger's early thought that was more faithful to Heidegger's writings from this period and was a more plausible conception of action than either of the two prevalent interpretations—the Dreyfusian and existentialist interpretations. The problems with the Dreyfusian understanding of action as skillful coping are that this interpretation focuses almost exclusively on Heidegger's account of inauthenticity in Division I of *Being and Time*, ignoring or failing to adequately accommodate Heidegger's account of authenticity in Division II, and that the understanding of action as skillful coping unreflectively guided by impersonal social norms provides no clear way of giving an account of how we can have ownership of our actions or become responsible for our actions. The account of Heidegger's conception of action that I have put forward here provides a solution to these problems by showing how Heidegger's conception of authenticity from Division II of *Being and Time*, coupled with Heidegger's interpretation of Kant's practical philosophy from *The Essence of Human Freedom*, can give us a way of understanding how we can be responsible for our actions on the Heideggerian conception of action.

The existentialist interpretation is in some ways the mirror image of Dreyfus's interpretation. The existentialist interpretation uses sections of Division II of *Being and*

*Time* to argue that action for Heidegger, or at least truly authentic action, takes place when the individual agent breaks free of the arbitrary constraints of social norms and determines her actions purely through her own will. This account of Heidegger's early conception of action largely ignores Heidegger's focus on the passive aspect of human action, both in his early lectures and in *Being and Time*. As we have seen, acting authentically is not a matter of overcoming the constraints placed on the individual by situations of action, but is rather understood as acting with knowledge of the way in which one's actions are necessarily constrained and the way in which one's own being makes this constraint possible. The Heideggerian conception of action put forward here also provides a way of understanding how agents can be responsible for their actions without this strong sense of responsibility collapsing into the decisionism of the existentialist interpretation.

If it is accepted that the Heideggerian conception of action developed here avoids some of the problems associated with the Dreyfusian and existentialist interpretations, the general plausibility of this conception of action considered in its own right, i.e. not merely as an interpretation of Heidegger's thought, is still an open question. Although it is beyond the scope of my current project to consider this question in detail, I would like to conclude this project by making some very preliminary suggestions about how this Heideggerian conception of action might be extended beyond Heidegger's thought and be used as a basis for developing a general conception of human action.

In the last century, there have been two main ways of understanding human action. This is, of course, an over-simplified story of the development of the

philosophical and scientific understanding of action, but it will do for our purposes here. In the first half of the Twentieth-Century, the dominant way of understanding human action, at least in the social sciences, was behaviorism. Behaviorism in its most general form is the view that all human actions can be understood as responses to stimuli encountered in the surrounding environment. Behaviorism has its roots in the attempt to understand and explain behavior in terms of objective and quantifiable phenomena that are empirically verifiable and conform to causal laws. Speaking for proponents of making behavior an object of this sort of scientific study, B.F. Skinner says:

We are concerned, then, with the causes of human behavior. We want to know why men behave as they do. Any condition or event which can be shown to have an effect upon behavior must be taken into account. By discovering and analyzing these causes we can predict behavior; to the extent that we can manipulate them, we can control behavior.<sup>50</sup>

With this aim in mind, behaviorists attempt to explain behavior without recourse to unobservable subjective phenomena such as desires, the will, intentions, etc. The earliest forms of behaviorism attempted to analyze behavior in terms of a fairly simple stimulus/response model, according to which an external stimulus applied to an organism causes the organism to respond in a certain way. This combination of a stimulus and corresponding response is called a reflex, a name which in Skinner's words is used "on the theory that the disturbance caused by the stimulus passed to the central nervous system and was 'reflected' back to the muscles"<sup>51</sup>. The overall picture, then, is that an

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<sup>50</sup> B.F. Skinner, *Science and Human Behavior* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 23.

<sup>51</sup> Skinner, 47.

organism receives some stimulus through its nervous system. This stimulus causes a responsive movement of the muscles of the organism, which is understood as behavior. Notice that everything is accounted for at the physiological, observable level without requiring recourse to subjective, internal phenomena.

In the middle of the century, after devastating critiques had been leveled against behaviorism, we find the resurgence of causal theories of action in the Analytic tradition that focus on understanding human action as being caused by our mental states or mental events (e.g. beliefs, desires, intentions, etc.). The specific version of the causal account that I would like to focus on here is that given by Davidson in his essay, “Actions, Reasons, and Causes.”<sup>52</sup> I realize that there have been many other sophisticated and influential versions of the causal account since this essay was first presented in 1963, and that Davidson modified and supplemented his account in later writings. However, it was this essay that first established the current dominance of the causal account and outlined the basic framework which has guided the debate in the philosophy of action for the last forty plus years.

Davidson’s view of action is not novel or terribly complex, which he readily admits. He begins by carefully defining some important terms that he believes will help us get clear about what we mean we say someone had a reason for doing something. Doing something for a reason amounts to “having some sort of pro-attitude towards actions of a certain kind” and “believing (or knowing, perceiving, noticing, remembering)

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<sup>52</sup> Donald Davidson, “Actions, Reasons, and Causes” in *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3-20.

that [an] action is of that kind.”<sup>53</sup> Pro-attitudes are things like desires, wants, urges, etc. Davidson’s view then is that when someone is said to have a reason for performing a particular action, she has a desire (want, urge, etc.) to perform a certain kind of action and she has a belief (knowledge, perception, etc.) that the action under consideration is of the desired kind. Davidson goes on to define the combination of a pro-attitude with the related belief as the primary reason for an action. It is the primary reason that is the cause of an action. If we can give the primary reason for an action, then we will have explained the action.

At first glance it seems that it might be possible to collapse the Heideggerian conception of action developed here into one of these two general ways of understanding action. The behaviorist might say that what this Heideggerian conception of action really amounts to is saying that we are socially conditioned to respond to certain stimuli in certain ways. Conversely, the Analytic philosopher of action that focuses on the causal efficacy of our mental states when explaining action might say that Heidegger’s conceptions of disposition and understanding can really be cashed out in terms of mental states and their causal powers. For instance, we could return to our earlier example of being a philosopher and being drawn towards publishing journal articles and explain this activity according to Davidson’s causal theory of action. We could explain this on the Davidsonian view by saying that I have a desire to be a philosopher and a belief that publishing articles in respectable journals is an action that will lead to the satisfaction of

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<sup>53</sup> Davidson, 3-4.

this desire. This combination of belief and desire is what causes me to write articles and submit them.

As we have endeavored to show through the previous chapters, the Heideggerian conception of action found in his early thought is not reducible to behaviorism. While the Heideggerian conception of action developed here incorporates the behaviorist claim that our actions are often triggered by things we encounter in the situation of action, we have also maintained that this response to environmental stimuli is made possible by our capacity to understand ourselves and the situation of action in certain ways, thereby allowing things to matter to us or affect us. It is a little more difficult to show why the Heideggerian conception of action developed here is not reducible to the mental causation theory of action. We can say, with Dreyfus, that mental causation theories of action focus too much on the role of explicit mental states in our actions. This strategy does not seem to be completely satisfactory, since it remains difficult to account for cases of explicit deliberation if the role of mental states is completely marginalized.

In the first chapter, we briefly tried to show how explicit deliberation can be seen as a more sophisticated and abstract form of the articulation of the situation of action that is often performed by our largely tacit self-understandings. In this case the deliberation and the accompanying mental states are determinative for the action insofar as they let things matter to us, i.e. the process of explicit deliberation makes it possible for things and activities to matter to us. I have suggested throughout (especially in the fourth chapter in the discussion of the two types of causality found in Kant's practical philosophy) that this capacity to let things matter to us is something different than

straightforward, efficient causality. Taking this approach does not necessarily show that the Heideggerian conception of action cannot be reduced to the mental causation conception of action. Rather, it shows how the mental causation theory of action can be incorporated into the Heideggerian conception of action, albeit in slightly modified form. In effect, the burden of proof would be shifted to the supporter of the mental causation theory to show how much of our seemingly unreflective activity is best understood by the mental causation approach and how mental states can be thought of as causes for our actions.

This leads us to an interesting and important way of distinguishing the Heideggerian conception of action from both behaviorist and mental causation understandings of action. The key conceptual similarity for behaviorist and mental causation theories of human action is that both make use of (at least in their simplest form) a certain conception of causality, namely, efficient causality. In its most basic form, this conception of causality holds that all events are determined by some prior event(s). It is typically thought that all explanation of human action (and indeed all proper explanation of anything) must ultimately come down to a causal explanation of this sort. The behaviorist would hold that human action can ultimately be understood as responses that are caused by prior environmental stimuli. The proponent of a mental causation theory of action would hold that all proper human actions are caused by prior mental events. For the behaviorist, the causality operative in human action works from the bottom up. By that I mean physical stimuli encountered in the environment are perceived or sensed by us, and then the resulting perception or sensation triggers a

response at the mental level. For the mental causation theorist, the process is reversed. According to the mental causation theorist, the causality operative in human action works from the top down. At the mental level, we form certain belief, desires, intentions, etc., and then these mental events bring about our actions. Both behaviorists and proponents of mental causation employ what can be called a linear conception of causality.

The Heideggerian conception of action developed here is different because, as we have seen, action is to be understood as a reciprocal interdependence of active and passive aspects that seems to involve a very different understanding of causality, if it can even be called causality at all.<sup>54</sup> The Heideggerian position is not the self-contradictory view that our actions are efficiently caused by being drawn towards certain things and activities available in a situation and simultaneously efficiently caused by the self-understandings that we take up. Our being drawn towards certain activities can be understood as something like a response to our environment, and as such, can be understood in terms of efficient causality. However, the way in which we articulate the situation of action through taking up various ways of understanding ourselves is not to be understood as a competing form of efficient causality. As we have shown, this articulation is better understood as *letting* things matter to us.

We find then that this Heideggerian conception of action might allow us to combine what seems intuitively right about both behaviorism and mental causation

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<sup>54</sup> In his critique of behaviorism in *The Structure of Behavior*, trans. Alden L. Fisher (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2006), Merleau-Ponty suggests that human action is best understood as involving a circular as opposed to linear type of causality (cf. pages 15 and 130). I am suggesting something similar here, although I am not sure how much Heidegger would even want to apply the term 'causality' to that projective capacity of human beings that allows things to matter to us.

theories of action without feeling obliged to reduce one to the other to alleviate worries about conflicting causal explanations. The Heideggerian conception of action incorporates the behaviorist view that much of our activity can be understood as a response to our environment that takes place without explicit mental awareness. This Heideggerian conception of action can also incorporate the mental causation theorist view that our actions are not completely determined by our environmental setting and that there is a way of understanding actions as being grounded in the individual agent. Much more would need to be said to strengthen and expand this general Heideggerian conception of action, but I would like to think it offers an alternative way of understanding human agency, which has been largely neglected in the past century.

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