1

Death and Demise in *Being and Time*

Mortals die their death in life.

Martin Heidegger[1]

1.1 Introduction: The State of the Debate

This introductory chapter seeks to answer the question of what Heidegger means by "death" (*Tod*) in *Being and Time* – and *begin* to justify that answer.[2] I take up this weighty topic with some trepidation (if not quite fear and trembling) in part because to say that the meaning of "death" in *Being and Time* is controversial is to strain the limits of understatement. In addition to the emotionally freighted nature of the topic itself (to which we will return), I think four main factors contribute to and perpetuate this controversy: (1) Heidegger's confusing *terminology*; (2) the *centrality* of the issue to the text as a whole; (3) the *demanding* nature of what is required to adjudicate the matter; and (4) the radically *polarized* scholarly literature on the subject. One of my main goals here is to suggest a way to move beyond the controversy that currently divides the field, so let me begin by saying a bit about its four main contributing factors.

The first and most obvious cause of the controversy is that those passages in *Being and Time* where Heidegger describes phenomenologically what he means (and does not mean) by "death" are initially quite obscure. Heidegger deliberately employs a non-commonsensical terminology, for example, when he *formally defines* "the full existential-ontological concept of death" in the following important but initially ambiguous terms: "*death, as the end of Dasein, is Dasein's ownmost, non-relational, certain and as such indefinite, and non-surpassable possibility*" (BT 303/SZ 258–9), and again, more notoriously,

[1] "*Die Sterblichen sterben den Tod im Leben*." Martin Heidegger, "Hölderlin's Earth and Heaven [1959]" (EHP 190/GA4 165).

[2] I say "begin" because I think some of the best evidence for the reading advanced here is the revealing light it casts on the interconnected issues taken up in subsequent chapters, which develop and extend aspects of this analysis while also focusing on details and implications of the view not addressed here (as well as addressing some critical responses to it).

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when he characterizes death "*as the possibility of the impossibility of existence in general*" (BT 307/SZ 262 [translations frequently emended]). Conversely, and even more confusingly (at least for unwary readers), he also misleadingly employs an only apparently commonsensical terminology, using ordinary words such as "death," "demise," "perishing," "possibility," and "existence [that is, *Dasein*]" in ways that turn out to have decidedly non-commonsensical meanings. We will therefore need to spend a significant amount of time clarifying some of Heidegger's crucial philosophical terms of art in what follows.

The second source of the controversy is that a great deal turns on Heidegger's phenomenological analysis of death. John Haugeland rightly observes that "death, as Heidegger means it, is not merely relevant but in fact the fulcrum of Heidegger's entire ontology."[3] The main reason death plays such an important part in the overarching ontological project of *Being and Time*, in a nutshell, is that the experience of the phenomenon Heidegger calls "death" discloses "futurity," which (as we will see at the end of this chapter) is itself the first horizon we encounter of *originary temporality*, that most fundamental structure of intelligibility that makes possible any understanding of being at all (or so the early Heidegger of *Being and Time* believes).[4] Even more to the point for us here, death is also crucial to the text's existential ambitions because readers must understand death in order to understand *authenticity* (as well as such other interconnected notions as *anxiety*, *conscience*, *guilt*, and the *solus ipse* or "self alone").[5] This doubly pivotal role played by Heidegger's phenomenology of death in *Being and Time* means that

[3] See John Haugeland, "Truth and Finitude: Heidegger's Transcendental Existentialism," in *Heidegger, Authenticity, and Modernity: Essays in Honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus*, Volume 1, ed. by Mark Wrathall and Jeff Malpas (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2000), 44.

[4] *Temporality* is the most fundamental structure of intelligibility *accessible to phenomenology*, in the early Heidegger's view. (See also William Blattner, *Heidegger's Temporal Idealism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999].) As we will see later, in "genuine anxiety," our being is, or becomes, sheer becoming; we exist as a pure or empty existing, deprived of the practical world. ("As we will see later" – as a phrase by which something still to come enters into and makes itself felt in our present – is not itself a bad indication of what "futurity" means.)

[5] Such "understanding" is not meant by Heidegger to be merely cognitive or intellectual but, rather, primarily something we personally instantiate or *stand-under* (such that our intelligible worlds are implicitly organized in its terms). Indeed (at the risk of being too provocative at the outset), *Being and Time* repeatedly contends that *each of us must pass through existential death in order to reach authenticity*. (But because this is a death of the lived possibilities that organize our worldly selves rather than a mortal demise, Heidegger does not thereby presuppose any kind of metaphysical afterlife.) What is more, I show below (and would try to demonstrate thoroughly, were I offering a broader interpretation of *Being and Time* here) that the multifaceted phenomenon disclosed by death turns out to be absolutely central to almost all of the subsequent phenomenological analyses in Division II of *Being and Time*, many of which disclose interconnected aspects of the same phenomenon (see n. 6) or trace its roots and subsequent implications.

critical readers of the text cannot indefinitely postpone the difficult task of coming to terms with Heidegger's understanding of the phenomenon.

That brings us directly to the third reason for the controversy surrounding the meaning of death in *Being and Time*, which is that the phenomenological method we are supposed to use to adjudicate the matter is particularly difficult to employ in this crucial case. The problem, put simply, is that many readers seem to have trouble experiencing the *phenomenon* that Heidegger describes as "death" for themselves. Without such first-personal experience, however, readers can neither contest nor confirm *Being and Time*'s existential phenomenology of death. It is worth emphasizing that this is a general problem for critical readers of phenomenological works: Absent our own experience of the phenomenon at issue, we can neither attest to that phenomenon and its purported significance (and so confirm or develop it for ourselves) nor testify against it (and so seek to contest, refine, or redescribe it). This general phenomenological problem is greatly exacerbated in the case of death, however, because unlike phenomenological descriptions of more mundane phenomena (such as using a hammer, staring at a Gestalt figure or optical illusion, or even such unsettling experiences as being stared at by a stranger or feeling the pangs of a guilty conscience), the phenomenon by means of which we first encounter what Heidegger means by "death" – namely, the affective attunement of "'real' or 'authentic' anxiety" (*"eigentliche" Angst*), in which, as we will see, we experience ourselves as radically "not-at-home" in the world of our everyday projects – is both quite "rare" (BT 234/SZ 190) and extremely difficult to endure.[6]

The requirement that we must personally undergo an anguished experience of the utter desolation of the self in order to be able to testify for or against the adequacy of Heidegger's phenomenological analysis of death thus seems

[6] As Heidegger puts it, "this primordial anxiety . . . clears away everything covering over the fact that Dasein has been abandoned to itself. The 'nothing' with which anxiety brings us face to face unveils the nullity [or "emptiness," *Nichtigkeit*] by which Dasein, in its very *basis*, is defined; and this basis itself *is* as thrownness into death" (BT 356/SZ 308). Hence: "Being-toward-death is essentially anxiety" (BT 310/SZ 266; see also BT 295/SZ 251). Blattner nicely articulates this connection in terms of Heidegger's three inextricably interconnected *existentials* (that is, structures that condition all existence): "Death is the self-understanding that belongs to this experience, anxiety is the mood, and conscience its discourse" (see William Blattner, *Heidegger's Being and Time: A Reader's Guide* [London: Continuum, 2006], 140). By "primordial" (*ursprüngliche*) or "real or authentic anxiety," Heidegger means anxiety that stems not from individual physiological peculiarities or unrelated neurochemical imbalances but, instead, from the ontological structure of the self, specifically, from what I shall explain as the "uncanny" lack of fit between the empty self at our volitional and intentional, existential core, on the one hand, and the practical world of particular ontic and existentiell choices by which we give this self concrete, worldly meaning, on the other (see also n. 74). This lack of any perfect fit between self and world is common to everyone whether we realize it or not, Heidegger suggests (we will see), and so the source of an ineliminable undercurrent of existential anxiety in all our everyday lives.

excessively demanding. Indeed, Heidegger recognizes this and acknowledges that this demand "remains, from the existentiell point of view [that is, from the ordinary perspective of our individual lives and everyday concerns], a fantastically unreasonable demand [*eine phantastische Zumutung*]" (BT 311/SZ 266).[7] Nonetheless, without experiencing the phenomenon at issue for ourselves, we can at best approach Heidegger's phenomenological descriptions of death from the outside, and so find them, for example, suggestive, impressive, or deep-sounding, or else fanciful, idiosyncratic, or even absurd – all surface-level reactions with which no true *philosopher* (as a literal "lover of wisdom," that is, of *practical*, life-guiding knowledge) and certainly no existential phenomenologist should ever rest content.[8]

I find it revealing to contrast those kinds of superficial evaluations – typical of but not limited to neophyte readings of *Being and Time* – with the critical interpretations advanced in the late 1940s by Heidegger's first "existentialist" readers, especially Levinas but also, to a lesser degree, Sartre. As we will see (in Chapters 6 and 7), both Levinas and Sartre sought to contest and revise Heidegger's phenomenology of death by drawing on their own experiences of the phenomenon at issue (or, in Sartre's case, his experience of an alternative but arguably analogous phenomenon, namely, "the look of the other [person]," which is similarly supposed to result in "the death of my [lived] possibilities").[9] Perhaps the commendable quest for scholarly objectivity, which has yielded important advances in clarity and argumentative precision

[7] Heidegger's use of this term has faint Kierkegaardian echoes, since a *Zumutung* is the kind of completely "*unreasonable* demand" that the Judeo-Christian God legendarily requires of Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice his only son (who is still a child) after having promised the now elderly Abraham that his descendants would one day be as plentiful as grains of sand on the beach or stars in the sky (that is, a demand that goes against the rationality of our preexisting worldly cares and concerns).

[8] For the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, philosophy must be phenomenological: "Ontology and phenomenology are not two distinct philosophical disciplines among others. These terms characterize philosophy itself with regard to its object and its way of treating that object. Philosophy is universal phenomenological ontology" (BT 62/SZ 38). (We return to this point in the Concluding Recapitulations.) As we will see in Chapter 2, Heidegger will later abandon this project of fundamental ontology (the attempt to understand "the meaning of being in general") and, with it, "philosophy" itself (which he will then identify with the pursuit of the very "metaphysics" he later tries to help us *think* beyond).

[9] (See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. by H. E. Barnes [New York: Philosophical Library, 1956 [original 1943]], 271, 288; and Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. by R. A. Cohen [Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987].) When a stranger stares at me, Sartre will argue (using his famous phenomenological example of being caught looking through a keyhole), my subjectivity temporarily becomes objectified by this stranger's gaze; that is, I implicitly experience myself not as stretching out into a world of practical projects that implicitly define me but, instead, as caught and frozen by this stranger's stare like a bug on a pin, transformed by a subjectivity outside myself into one (for me inaccessible and so

over the last century, has also rendered us much more reluctant to inject ourselves into the discussion by testing Heidegger's descriptions for ourselves (where that also means testing them *on* ourselves, that is, comparing them to our own first-personal encounters with the phenomenon at issue). Or perhaps Heidegger's own appalling misadventure with Nazism has led interpreters to distance themselves from the fact that, as he acknowledged in *Being and Time*, "a definite ontic interpretation of authentic existence, a factical ideal of Dasein, underlies our ontological interpretation" (BT 358/SZ 310).[10]

unknowable) objective moment, my lived possibilities suddenly reduced to nothing but an actuality from which I remain alienated. ("In the look, the death of my possibilities makes me experience the other's freedom; . . . and I am myself, inaccessible to myself and yet myself, thrown and abandoned within the other's freedom." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. by Sarah Richmond [New York: Washington Square, 2021[original 1943]], 369.) Levinas, for his part, still explicitly discusses "anguish" and "death" in terms very close to Heidegger's – indeed, much closer than is usually recognized.

[10] This important and often overlooked passage runs, in full (with my explanatory gloss in brackets): "Is there not, however, a definite ontic way of taking authentic existence, a factical ideal of Dasein, underlying our ontological interpretation of Dasein's existence? That is in fact the case. [Here Heidegger is acknowledging that *Being and Time*'s description of the ontological structure of authentic existence is in fact an idealized portrayal drawn from his own particular way of experiencing such a transformation from inauthenticity to authenticity himself.] But this fact is not only one which must not be denied and which we are forced to concede; it must also be conceived in its *positive necessity*, in terms of the object that we have taken as the theme of our investigation. [In other words, phenomenology *always* draws on our own individual experiences of things. Just as we can only work to uncover the fundamental ontological "meaning of being in general" by first drawing on the unthematized, "pre-ontological" understanding of what things are that remains implicit in our own practical knowledge, so, he is suggesting here, we can only develop a formal description of authenticity as a possible existential structure by drawing on our own individual ways of experiencing such a transition to authenticity for ourselves.] Philosophy will never seek to deny its 'presuppositions' [that is, phenomenology should never deny that its insights emerge from the phenomenologist's own individual life and hence particular way of experiencing things], but neither may philosophy simply admit them [in that individual form, because that would risk introducing merely idiosyncratic elements into phenomenology. Rejecting both those options, Heidegger's phenomenology instead pursues the following third path.] Philosophy conceives these presuppositions themselves [that is, phenomenology seeks to rigorously *conceptualize* the basic structures that underlie and condition the phenomena it examines, "ontological" structures that make possible our most common ways of experiencing and describing these everyday "ontic" phenomena] and it unfolds these [ontological structural] presuppositions with increasing vividness together with that for which they are presuppositions [namely, the ordinary, ontic phenomena that these structures purportedly condition]. This is the function that the methodological considerations demanded of us now have" (BT 358/SZ 31. See also BT 360/SZ 312: "Unless we have an existentiell [or particular individual] understanding, all analysis of existentiality will remain groundless.") As a result, there is a (self-enriching) *feedback loop* between individual life and phenomenology (so that everyday life informs phenomenology, which

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Yet, should not Heidegger's admission that his phenomenological analyses derive ultimately from his own idealized personal experiences have precisely the opposite effect? That is, should not Heidegger's demonstration of his own susceptibility to the grossest errors of judgment instead encourage us to subject his phenomenological analyses to the most careful scrutiny for ourselves, as his early existentialist readers undoubtedly sought to do, in part for this very reason?[11] Because it is only by relying on such personal experience that one can develop either an internal confirmation or an immanent critique of Heidegger's phenomenology of death, the post-existentialist interpretations of Heidegger seem to me to have made a significant step backward in this critical regard (with a few important exceptions that we will note along the way), so it will thus be worthwhile to examine those earlier interpretations in some detail.

Finally, the fourth reason for the persistent controversy about the meaning of "death" in *Being and Time* is that, owing to the combined effect of the aforementioned factors, the interpretive field is now radically polarized, with the secondary literature starkly divided into two diametrically opposed and seemingly incommensurable camps. In the first (and much larger) camp, most traditional scholars, critics, and readers of *Being and Time* adopt the straightforward view that, by "death," Heidegger must mean the same sort of things that we normally mean when we talk about "death," such as *demise* (Edwards), *decease* (Hoffman), or *mortality* (Mulhall). In the second (and significantly smaller) camp, a number of cutting-edge Heidegger scholars think that what *Being and Time* means by "death" has almost nothing to do with the ordinarily sense of the word (or that the two senses of "death" share a merely "metaphorical" connection, as Haugeland believes). Instead, Heidegger means something like *the global collapse of significance* typified by a depressive episode (Blattner), *the collapse of an understanding of being* exemplified by a scientific paradigm shift (Haugeland), or *the end of an historical world*, which allows a new historical epoch to take shape (White).[12]

then conceptualizes its conditioning structures in ways that should deepen, enrich, and transform life). Thus, part of the test of any phenomenological analysis will be how well it deepens, enriches, or transforms our everyday experience of the phenomenon whose underlying structures it seeks to conceptualize (as we shall see in the case of death here, and as I showed in the case of art in Iain Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011], chs. 3–4).

[11] On the relation of Heidegger's Nazism to his philosophy, see esp. Iain Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), chs. 3–4, and "Heidegger's Nazism in the Light of His Early *Black Notebooks*: A View from America," in *Zur Hermeneutik der 'Schwarzen Hefte': Heidegger Jahrbuch 10*, ed. by Alfred Denker and Holger Zaborowski (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 2017). (Some of these issues will come back in Chapters 6–8.)

[12] See Paul Edwards, *Heidegger's Confusions* (New York: Prometheus, 2004) (which reprints Edward's incredibly confused articles from 1975 and 1976); Piotr Hoffman, "Death, Time, History: Division II of Being and Time," in *The Cambridge Companion to*

Despite the hermeneutic liberties taken by Haugeland and White (and consequent problems with their readings), I shall argue that the second camp is much closer to Heidegger's understanding of death as an existential phenomenon that stands revealed when the practical intelligibility of our everyday worlds collapses. Still, the interpretations of death in terms of existential world-collapse advanced by this second camp leave it largely baffling why Heidegger should call the phenomenon he is interested in "death." Indeed, his doing so only seems to muddy the waters of *Being and Time*, thereby encouraging the much more commonsensical misreadings of death as mortal demise that are typical of the first camp. To such a charge of misreading, moreover, those in the first camp will respond forcefully that (as Hoffman once objected to me): "One can stretch the meanings of words, but only so far: *Up* cannot mean *down*; *black* cannot mean *white*, and *death* cannot mean *something that you can live through!*"

Though the endeavor might initially seem rather unlikely, in what follows I would like to suggest a way beyond the current deadlock over the meaning of "death" in *Being and Time*. What I shall show is that if we understand the phenomenological method *Being and Time* employs, then we can see exactly how Heidegger is able to move from our relation to the event we ordinarily call *death* (which *Being and Time* calls "demise") to that ontological phenomenon, revealed in world-collapse, which he calls "death." To follow this path, we need to avoid conflating Heidegger's existential conception of death with that experience of the end of our lives that he calls "demise," as the first camp tends to do, but we also cannot treat demise and death as radically heterogeneous phenomena, as those in the second camp tend to do. Instead, we need to understand how "death" is *both distinguished from and related to* "demise" if we want to transcend these long-standing hermeneutic controversies and begin to grasp the full existential-ontological significance of "death" in *Being and Time*. That will be the main goal of this introductory chapter.

Heidegger, ed. by Charles Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 195–214; Stephen Mulhall, "Human Mortality: Heidegger on How to Portray the Impossible Possibility of Dasein," in *Dreyfus and Wrathall, A Companion to Heidegger* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 297–310; William Blattner, "The Concept of Death in *Being and Time*," *Man and World,* 27:1 (1994), 49–70 (Blattner's 1994 article is the seminal work for this way of reading Heidegger); Haugeland, "Truth and Finitude"; and Carol J. White, *Time and Death: Heidegger's Analysis of Finitude*, ed. by Mark Ralkowski (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005). With the exception of Edwards's confused polemics, these are all serious and informed scholars, and a detailed response to their views (which I am simplifying here) would be a worthy but massive undertaking. But for a detailed critique of White's interpretation, see Chapter 5.

1.2 What It Means for Us to *Be*: Dasein (Preliminary Excursus)

Repeatedly in *Being and Time*, "'death' is *defined* as the end of Dasein" (BT 292, my emphasis/SZ 247). In other words, the phenomenon Heidegger calls *death* refers to the particular type of "end" that is distinctive to "Dasein" as the living embodiment of an intelligible world. It will thus help to briefly remind ourselves what Heidegger means by "*Dasein*" (so that we will then be able to understand what it means for our own Dasein to end). It has become standard practice to leave Heidegger's German term untranslated in English, but "Dasein" is his famous term of art for our distinctive kind of "existence" (*existence* is the ordinary meaning of the German word *Dasein*), and he deliberately uses the term to characterize the nature of our existence (in a minimally question-begging way) as an intelligible world disclosing "being-here" (or "*Da-sein*"). As Dreyfus nicely explains, *Being and Time*'s "primary concern is to raise the [ontological] question of being" (that is, "to make sense of our ability to make sense of things"), and Heidegger focuses on our "being-here" as "Dasein" in order to broach "ontological questions concerning the sort of beings we [human beings] are and how our being is bound up with the intelligibility of the world."[13]

As Heidegger's thought develops, he will increasingly hyphenate "*Da-sein*" to emphasize the significance of the two semantic elements from which the word is composed, "here-" (*Da-*) and "being" (*Sein*); as he later liked to put it, we are both *the here of being* and *the being of the here*.[14] In other words, *Dasein* names both (1) the existential place where being takes place (the site where intelligibility becomes an issue for itself, or metaphorically put, where being looks at itself in the mirror and tries to understand itself) and also (2) the specific way

[13] (Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* [Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990], 3, 10.) As Dreyfus suggests, the English "human being" (which can designate both a way of being and an individual) comes closest to Heidegger's use of "Dasein" and "a Dasein" in *Being and Time* (ibid., 14). As is well known, however, Heidegger vociferously rejected "anthropological" misunderstandings of *Being and Time* (which would reduce his work to an attempt to understand "the being of the human," an effort that Heidegger – insofar as he did indeed engage in it – always meant to serve the larger ambition of "fundamental ontology," viz., the attempt to understand "the meaning of being in general," as we will see in Chapter 2). But for this and other reasons, it has now become common to misunderstand Heidegger in almost the opposite terms, as an "anti-humanist." In truth, however, from beginning to end, "*Heidegger is an affirmative thinker of the ontological essence of the human being*, that is, an *ontological humanist* dedicated to disclosively thinking the being definitive of the human being" (as I show in Chapter 4 and in Iain Thomson, "Hearing the Pro-Vocation within the Provocation: Heidegger on the Way to Post-Metaphysical Humanism," *Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle Annual*, XII [2022], 187).

[14] "To characterize with a single term both the involvement of being in human nature and the essential relation of humanity to the openness ('here' [*Da*]) of being as such, the name 'being-here' [Dasein] was chosen" (WBGM 270).

this existential place becomes intelligible to itself (for example, by subconsciously employing a set of universal existential structures, or "existentials," the detailed articulation of which forms the main subject matter of the "existential analytic" in *Being and Time*'s first division, which thereby analyzes the structure of Dasein's "being-in-the-world," to which we will return).[15]

"Dasein" is thus Heidegger's philosophical shorthand for a detailed story in which the intelligibility of the "here" that we *are* (as a first-personal disclosure of an intelligible world) both helps constitute and is partly constituted by our preexisting sense of what it means to *be* anything at all (a prior "understanding of being" that ordinarily passes unnoticed, like the prescription on the lenses through which we see).[16] In *Being and Time*, the early Heidegger shows that

[15] ("Division I" makes up roughly the first half of *Being and Time* as it was published, albeit not as it was planned – an important proviso I will explain in Chapter 2.) Heidegger clearly employs the tools of conceptual analysis in *Being and Time*. He does so, however, not to try to define some new philosophical position into existence out of the logical space of possible options but, instead, to help analyze and develop the larger significance of a momentous phenomenon he has experienced in his own life, since Heidegger's version of existential phenomenology is empty and pointless without such first-personal experience, as we will see repeatedly (see also n. 10).

[16] In fact, Heidegger's account of the relation of mutual conditioning between Dasein and being will turn out to be considerably more complex than he initially recognized in *Being and Time* (though we can bracket most of these complications until Chapters 2 and 4). Put simply, the (more idealistic) early Heidegger of *Being and Time* thinks of our understanding of being as something we unknowingly constitute by subconsciously employing temporal structures as necessary and sufficient *transcendental conditions* that most deeply shape our intelligible worlds (thus Heidegger describes *Being and Time*'s goal to "expose primordial time . . . as the condition which makes the everyday experience of time *both possible and necessary*" [BT 381, my emphasis/SZ 333], although this ambitious goal fails, as we shall see in Chapter 2), whereas the (more realistic) later Heidegger thinks of our understanding of being as shaped by historically changing ontotheological structures that are largely inherited from our historical tradition. But *Being and Time* already begins to recognize that we Dasein are entities whose existence as embodied ways of being implicitly answer the question of what it means for us to be, and also that these particular existential answers always borrow (in multiple ways) from our preexisting answer to the larger ontological question of what it means to be anything at all. Most importantly, for example, *Being and Time* argues (in Division One) that our taken-for-granted *modern* answer to the ontological question (in which we understand ourselves as "subjects" ontologically separated from and so *standing-over against* "objects" [*Gegenstand*]) "disastrously" misunderstands (BT 46/SZ 25) and so obscures our deeper nature *as* Dasein (that is, entities whose "usual and ordinary" practical ways of disclosing being in time "always-already" bridge and so undermine the supposed ontological gulf that post-Cartesian modernity posits between subjects and objects). In *Being and Time*, however, this "disaster" seems to be primarily for our philosophical self-understanding, whereas for the later Heidegger, the broader (and ever more pervasively embodied) ramifications of this philosophical disaster of modern "subjectivism" take on increasingly world-historical proportions, especially as such modern "subjectivism" continues to evolve historically into the late-modern epoch of technological "enframing" in which we now find ourselves

every Dasein already embodies an answer to the question of the meaning of its own being. This largely implicit *existential answer* to the question of the meaning of my own being may or may not be recognized as such, but it is nevertheless embodied concretely in the ways I go about *being* a teacher, father, husband, friend, brother, citizen, nature-lover, bike-rider, and so on. This embodied stand each of us takes on what it means to be can of course be more or less coherent, honest, thoughtful, unique, and so on, but for the early Heidegger the crucial issue here is just whether or not we *own up to* being this

trapped (see Iain Thomson, "Post/Modernity? How to Separate the Stereo from the Styrofoam," *Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle Annual*, XI [2021], 183–97). As a result, *for the later Heidegger (beginning in the late-1930s),* Dasein *increasingly becomes a prescriptive existential achievement* (and eventually even a literally "postmodern" way of being-in-the-world) *rather than just an unbiased phenomenological description of our distinctive way of being.* In other words, as we will begin to see in Chapter 4 (and I argue in Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*), Dasein becomes something we need to understand ourselves in terms of – and so progressively transform ourselves into – in order to find our way beyond the historical "epochs" of modern "subjectivism" and late-modern "enframing," in whose reductive and nihilistic ontologies we all tend initially to understand ourselves, owing to our current place in the "history of being" (*Seinsgeschichte*), the historical succession of different ways of understanding "the being of entities" that the later Heidegger discovers at the metaphysical core of the West. (Heidegger's later *history of being* designates the succession of historical epochs that take shape around the different answers metaphysics gives us to the question of what it means to be anything at all. These typically taken-for-granted, metaphysical answers to the question of what it means to be profoundly shape the history of the West, in which, put simply, to *be* an entity means, successively, to be a presocratic "whooshing-up" [*phusis*], a medieval "creature" of God, a modern "object" for a subject to master and control, a late-modern "resource" ["*Bestand*"] on standby for efficient ordering and enhancement, or even a postmodern, polysemic world-discloser, in tune with being's inexhaustibility and so seeking poetically to compose its polysemic disclosures meaningfully.) In *Being and Time*, Heidegger has not yet situated his existential analysis "ontohistorically" (that is, in terms of that later "history of being"), so his most famous early work suggests that all typical adult humans are basically *already* Dasein (and just need to recognize that to correct the philosophical errors that follow from modern subject/object dualism). The early Heidegger thus lacks most of his later story about the transformative power of metaphysics to reshape entire epochs of intelligibility (as I show in ch. 1 of Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*). But for Heidegger, both early and late, there is still a sense in which we need to doubly *realize* that we are Dasein (that is, both *recognize* what that means and also *embody* that truth in our lives, so that we transformatively "become what we are"), though the difficulties for and consequences of that double realization continue to ramify dramatically as his thinking develops. In the end, however, these two views of what it means to be "Dasein" (that is, his earlier, more *descriptive* view and his later, more *prescriptive* one) are largely compatible, since the later view dramatically builds on and complicates the earlier one. (If that were all the orthodox Heideggerians meant when they asserted that the early and later Heidegger were just saying identical things in different ways, then I would partly agree with them. They go much further, however, and assert that Heidegger never changed his mind about what "being" [*Sein*] means, which is not only false but deeply misleading, as we will see in Chapters 2 and 5.)

individual stand on what it means to be, taking *ownership* of (and so responsibility for) who we are in transformative moments of what *Being and Time* calls "ownedness or authenticity [*Eigentlichkeit*]."

Being and Time's "existential analytic" endeavors primarily to explicate a tripartite group of the universal "existential structures" ("existentials" or "*existentialia*" for short) that underlie and condition *all* our different, particular individual (or "*existentiell*") ways of embodying living answers to this existential question of what it means for us to be.[17] Despite the enduring importance of *Being and Time*'s analyses of Dasein's hidden existential structure, Heidegger originally intended their discovery and articulation to serve primarily as a stepping-stone to his grander *ontological* ambition.[18] Ultimately, *Being and Time*'s guiding hope is that uncovering the three main existential structures that condition all our specific ways of existing (and then tracing these existentials back to the even deeper "temporal horizons" that underlie and condition the existentials in turn) would "prepare" him to answer the most *fundamental ontological* question of "the meaning of being in general," that is, the metaphysical question of what it means to *be* anything at all.

As we will see in Chapter 2, Heidegger is quite clear in *Being and Time* that his ultimate goal is to uncover a "fundamental ontology" that finally answers

[17] I put it this way here because *Being and Time* suggests that this existential question ("What is the meaning of my own being?") is something especially conformist people (for example, those who manage to go about doing everything the way *one is expected* to do things) may never confront at all (see, for example, the first sentence of section 8 [BT 63/SZ 39]). But this embodied question of the meaning of my own being (Heidegger also argues) is rendered not just salient but virtually unavoidable in existential death. That is because (we will see) existential death is a stark, desolate, and aporetic condition of existential breakdown in which we find ourselves at least temporarily unable to be the self that we were *and yet still exist* and *must thus find a way to go on*, a condition that *presses* us into taking an embodied stand on the meaning of our own being – that very stand whereby we achieve "authenticity" (*Eigentlichkeit*, literally "ownedness") by taking ownership of our own existences (however temporarily). The provocative conclusion that suggests itself here is that *das Man* as such never dies in Heidegger's existential sense. (*Das Man* is Heidegger's name for the ubiquitous and superficial understand of things reinforced by "the [anonymous] anyone.") White, Haugeland, and (building on Haugeland's work) Lear (in *Radical Hope*) all rightly recognize that during times of radical historical crisis, the entire understanding of being implicitly guiding an age can break down, but Heidegger's view of *das Man* nevertheless suggests that not everyone living through such a historical crisis will recognize and confront that breakdown individually – although most of them will demonstrate a repressed awareness of the crisis by reactively seeking to deny or prevent it. (We shall come back to some of these issues in Chapter 5.)

[18] This also helps explain why Heidegger often resisted the label of "existentialist" (despite its obvious applicability to his work in many respects); his existential analyses were meant to be in the service of his *ontological* inquiries, and he did not want the former to eclipse the latter. Indeed, even his definition of existence as a "being-here" *is* ontological (as we will see in detail in Chapter 4).

"the question of the meaning being in general." It was only subsequently that the hermeneutic waters were muddied by the facts that (1) Heidegger never delivered that fundamental ontology he sought in *Being and Time* (1927), and (2) by the end of the dramatic "metaphysical decade" that followed he comes to reject *Being and Time*'s guiding project of fundamental ontology as unknowingly committed to an *impossible* metaphysical ambition – indeed, to that same metaphysical ambition which has shaped the core tradition of Western philosophy since its first beginnings.[19] (As Heidegger himself later recognizes: "The Heidegger of *Being and Time* . . . is still stuck in metaphysics, attempts 'ontology' and does not yet clearly see that wherein he moves" [GA102 94].) Indeed, Heidegger's notorious "turn" revolves around his own transformative realization that such metaphysical ambitions need to be transcended and moved beyond (rather than finally vindicated, as *Being and Time* sought to do), thereby giving rise to the "post-metaphysical" (and literally *postmodern*) project that becomes the guiding mission of Heidegger's "later" (c. post-1937) thought (as I have shown in detail elsewhere).[20]

Without downplaying such dramatic transformations in Heidegger's philosophical development (as too many orthodox Heideggerians continue to do, for reasons we will explore in Chapter 5), we can say that for Heidegger, both early and late, "Dasein" designates our distinctive, *ontological* "existence" as beings who implicitly understand what it means to be (both the meaning of our own being and the meaning of anything that in anyway "is"). Such an ontological understanding always plays a fundamental role in constituting the intelligible worlds that we Dasein are as we go about charting our courses through time and history.[21] For both early and later Heidegger, then, to be a Dasein means to be a particular kind of intelligible world that makes sense of itself, its world, and others by building on its own tacit answers to ontological questions about what it means to be.[22]

[19] "Metaphysical decade" is Crowell's apt term (see, for example, Steven Crowell's "Metaphysics, Metontology, and the End of *Being and Time*," *Inquiry*, 44:4 [2001], 433–54).

[20] See, for example, Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, ch. 3 and *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, ch. 1.

[21] The basic difference here, put simply, is that our sense of what it means to *be* anything at all is predelimited by our subconscious employment of (1) a linked triumvirate of temporal horizons in *Being and Time*, as opposed to (2) a tacit ontotheological framework that shapes our shared historical sense of what is and what matters in Heidegger's mature work.

[22] In *Being and Time*, "Dasein" is also synonymous with our "being-in-the-world," another term of art that itself serves as shorthand for his detailed account (in the "existential analytic") of how our living understanding of being is inextricably entwined with the embodied ways we project ourselves into the practical life-projects that implicitly organize the intelligibility of our worlds. Hence the fuller line quoted at the beginning of this section reads: "'death' is defined as the end of Dasein, that is to say, of being-in-the-

Beneath the other changes in Heidegger's thought, our being such a first-personal disclosure of an *ontological* world – in which we *exist* or "stand-out" (from the Latin *ek-sistere*) into "intelligibility" (BT 193/SZ 151) by relating ourselves to the "being" of all the things we encounter (that is, to their ontologically disclosive meaning, sense, or truth) – is what characterizes our distinctive *being-here* as "Dasein." It should thus not be too surprising that this *existential world-disclosure* is precisely what "demise" and "death" both crucially interrupt and bring to an end – as we shall now go on to see by untangling and explaining he specific technical terms Heidegger uses to articulate and develop what he means by "death."

1.3 Rethinking Death: Distinguishing Perishing, Demising, and Dying

Section 49 of *Being and Time* is titled "How the Existential Analysis of Death is *Distinguished from* other Possible Interpretations of that Phenomenon" (BT 290, my emphasis/SZ 246). Here Heidegger first introduces his "existential analysis of death" by acknowledging the need to explicitly disambiguate his own "ontological interpretation of death" from other possible interpretations of the phenomenon. *Being and Time*'s turn toward death starts with the obvious observations that death is something that can only happen to the living ("death, in the widest sense, is a phenomenon of life" [ibid.]) and that, of course, Dasein is a living being too, although for Heidegger being alive cannot define Dasein, not only because lots of entities other than Dasein are alive (including the entire plant and animal kingdoms) but also because it is Dasein that defines what "being alive" *means*.[23]

Moving very quickly,[24] Heidegger points out that all biological accounts of death necessarily presuppose some *ontological* understanding of what death *is*,

world" (BT 292/SZ 247). For Dasein to be at its *end* in death (we will see) is thus for our *practical* "being-in-the-world" to be at an end. That can happen in a way that is still *conceptually* intelligible to us (and hence describable by existential phenomenology), precisely because that "in" (in "being-in-the-world") primarily designates practically "involved with" (in a "ready-to-hand" or *zuhanden* way), *not* cognitively related to (in a "present-at-hand" or *vorhanden* way). To say that death is the end of our Dasein as a "being-in-the-world" thus turns out to mean that death is the end of our being-in-the-world only in its primary, *practically engaged* significance. In death we can no longer connect to our practical projects or relate meaningfully to "ready-to-hand" equipment, but we can still make sense of such objects in a present-at-hand way; their intelligibility does not simply disappear, leaving us in an empty void (as Heidegger will stress when he distinguishes his view of the core of the self from that of Descartes).

[23] As that begins to suggest, Heidegger's consistent critique of Nazi "biologism" develops out of his early critique of the neo-Darwinistic "life-philosophy" of Nietzsche and others. (See Thomson, "Heidegger's Nazism in the Light of His Early *Black Notebooks*.")

[24] We should not allow the fame of the text to make us forget that *Being and Time* was a work written under immense time pressure (dramatic exigencies that mark the text with

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simply in order for biologists to have some idea of what to focus on in their empirical investigations of the biological processes involved in "death."[25] But biologists tend to understand death merely as the cessation of life, and do not (at least not as biologists) try to explain what death itself *is* as a positive phenomenon, let alone begin to explain the broader meaning death holds for us Dasein, the very beings who develop such ontological conceptions of what "life" and "death" *are* as we go about seeking to make sense of the intelligible worlds that *we* are.[26] Dasein must already exist (or "stand-out" into an intelligible world) in order to be able to devise or employ any *concepts* of life or death, and even our most culturally pervasive ways of making sense of death are much broader (and suggestively richer, as we will see) than the strictly functional accounts provided by biology. Indeed, Heidegger boldly asserts, we need to understand what death most fundamentally *is* for us Dasein so that future academic researchers into death's myriad meanings can ground their broad-spectrum investigations in this clear and unambiguous *ontological* interpretation of death.

This missing ontological conception of death will be "*formal* and empty" compared to the specialized research it will ground in such subordinate academic fields as the biology, history, ethnography, psychology, and theodicy of death (*subordinate* fields because they will take over their guiding understanding of what death *is* from Heidegger's ontological conception, which their broad-spectrum investigations will expand and explore).[27] But Heidegger also warns readers that the comparative emptiness and formality

myriad unclarities), as the 37-year-old Heidegger sought finally to publish a major work and so secure (the German equivalent of) his first full professorship. (We return to this point at the end of Chapter 2.)

[25] In fact, this is true of *all* accounts of death, not only biological ones. (For an explanation and critical analysis of Heidegger's general argument in *Being and Time* for the priority of phenomenological ontology over all of the other sciences, see Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, ch. 3.)

[26] "Life is its own kind [or mode] of being [*eigene Seinsart*], but essentially accessible only through Dasein. The ontology of life is accomplished by way of a privative interpretation; it determines what is the case if there can be anything like mere aliveness. . . . Dasein is never to be defined by regarding it as life . . . plus something else" (BT 75/SZ 50). (The early Heidegger is deeply influenced by his reading of Aristotle, as we will see in Chapter 4, but here he also marks his distance from the way Aristotle's view of humanity – as a *zoon logon echon* – is traditionally understood, viz., as living being distinguished by its possession of language or rationality.)

[27] It is this move that Derrida seeks to challenge in *Aporias*, which suggests that anthropological studies of death across different cultures, times, and places (like those painstaking efforts carried out by Philippe Aries, *The Hour of Our Death: The Classic History of Western Attitudes Toward Death over the Last One Thousand Years*, trans. by H. Weaver [New York: Vintage, 2008]) cannot be fully subordinated to Heidegger's phenomenological analysis of death as Dasein's distinctive end. (We return to Derrida's reading in Chapter 7.)

of his phenomenological interpretation of what death *is* for Dasein "must not blind us to the rich and complicated structure of the phenomenon" (BT 292/SZ 248).[28] Heidegger never comes back to address any specific questions concerning how his "superordinate" existential analysis of the being of death will ground and unify all subsequent academic research into death, but he clearly does believe that *Being and Time succeeds* in "defining" just such a "full existential-ontological conception of death" (BT 303/SZ 258), as we will see in detail in this chapter.[29] But in order to articulate this existential interpretation of what death *is* (which can then ontologically *ground* the broader academic study of death), Heidegger points out, we first need to understand Dasein's "basic state or fundamental condition [*Grundverfassung*]," so that we can understand how death (as what Karl Jaspers calls an extreme "limit situation") disrupts, modifies, and so reveals this fundamental condition of our *existential* "being-here" (BT 291/SZ 247).[30] To understand what death *is* as the end of our being, in other words, we first have to understand the nature of that being (namely, our distinctive type of *existence* as "Dasein" or a *being-in-the-world*).

The preliminary goal of Heidegger's "existential analysis of death," in sum, is to understand what death *is* (that is, to develop an "ontological interpretation" of death) by examining *phenomenologically* how death most fundamentally shows up and becomes intelligible for us Dasein (as the *end* of our distinctive being-in-the-world). Such an ontology of death should then be able to serve as the foundation for a much broader academic study of death in the future. (*Being and Time* contains only a few hints on that last score, but the enduring importance of the project to Heidegger is suggested by the fact that when he sketches his vision for an ontologically unified university in the mid-1930s, it includes a new academic field dedicated entirely to the study of

[28] "The existential interpretation of death takes precedence over any biology and ontology of life. But it is also the foundation for any investigation of death which is biographical, or historiographical, ethnological, or psychological" (BT 291/SZ 248). That first sentence suggests that we must understand what death *is* for Dasein in order to understand what life *is* for us, rather than the reverse, as biology assumes. (That follows, in part, because what Heidegger means by "death" turns out to be rather distantly related to life and death in a biological sense, and also because he makes the case that even our ordinary thinking about death as the end of our lives is a kind of motivated confusion.)

[29] We will return to *Being and Time*'s "full existential-ontological conception of death," according to which: "*death, as the end of Dasein, is Dasein's ownmost, non-relational, certain and as such indefinite, and non-surpassable possibility*" (BT 303/SZ 258–9). *Being and Time* also casts some light on the question of why our culture's general understanding of death has taken on some of its specific meanings, including, most importantly, the pervasive view according to which death is anxiety-provoking, something to be fled, repressed, and thought about as little as possible (as we shall see in Chapter 8).

[30] As Heidegger thus schematically explains: "Within the ontology of Dasein, which is *superordinate* to the concept of life, the existential analysis of death is, in turn, *subordinate* to a characterization of Dasein's basic state or condition" (BT 291/SZ 247).

death.)[31] Other than being so highly condensed, Heidegger's ambitious preliminaries should not surprise careful readers of *Being and Time*, because they are perfectly in keeping with the text's grand ambitions for the future of the phenomenological movement, the very movement the early Heidegger still hoped to inherit and helm.[32]

With these ambitious preliminaries quickly sketched and unceremoniously set aside, *Being and Time*'s very next sentence launches into a dense but extremely important passage on death (which I shall refer to subsequently as "D1"), in which Heidegger distinguishes between three terms we might otherwise tend to use interchangeably, namely, "perishing" (*Verenden*), "demising" (*Ableben*), and "dying" (*Sterben*):

> [D1] The ending of that which [merely] lives we have called *perishing* [Verenden]. Dasein too "has" its physiological death of the kind appropriate to anything that lives; however, [the way Dasein "has" (i.e., experiences) such physiological perishing is] not in ontic isolation [like one rock merely bumping into another, or a blood clot blocking the flow of blood to the heart] but, instead, as co-determined by its primordial way of being [namely, "existence," Dasein's distinctive way of "standing-out" (*ek-sistere*) into an intelligible world; in other words, we Dasein *experience* the "perishing" of our physiological systems only insofar as such a strictly organic failure makes itself felt in the intelligible worlds that we *are*].[33] Dasein can also end without genuinely dying [*eigentlich stirbt*], although in this latter case it does not, *qua* Dasein, simply perish. We designate this intermediate phenomenon as *demise* [Ableben]. [Demise is intermediate *between* "perishing" and "death," because in demise we experience our physiological perishing as the approaching end of our intelligible worlds

[31] See Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, ch. 3.

[32] I cannot recapitulate it here, but I have elsewhere detailed *Being and Time's* ill-fated plan to make good on Husserl's project of restoring philosophy, as phenomenology, to its role as "the queen of the sciences," the "torch-bearer" who goes first, lighting the way for other academic "sciences" [or "fields of knowledge," *Wissenschaften*] to follow, rather than the "hand-maiden" or "train-bearer" who follows along behind, straightening out the puzzling tangles these sciences leave in their wake. This ambitious view risks (what I have called) the *ontological imperialism* of a top-down, phenomenological approach (too easily aligned with the rigidly hierarchical political vision of a Führer-Rector), so it is worth pointing out that Heidegger believes that, once the fields researching death have been grounded in his ontological interpretation of death, at least some of them "can obtain results that may be able to become significant ontologically," by feeding back into and reshaping our existential self-understanding (see Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, ch. 3).

[33] The scare quotes Heidegger puts around "has" here signal his awareness of the Epicurean paradox concerning our experience of demise. The paradox (see n. 39 and below), put simply, is: If demise designates the absence of all experience, then how could we experience the absence of all experience? Heidegger frequently uses scare quotes to signal such Epicurean worries [see for example, SZ 251]).

> and yet we do not experience such an *end* itself and so "die" in Heidegger's "genuine or authentic" sense.] Let the term *dying* [Sterben] designate the *way of being* in which Dasein *is toward* its death [*Tod*]. [As we will see, "being-toward" (*Seins zum*) means "pressing" or "projecting" (*Entwurf*) oneself into that existential possibility or project and so existing in terms of it; it does not mean simply thinking about, imagining, or otherwise relating oneself to one's eventual demise.][34] We must thus say: Dasein never perishes. Demising, however, is something Dasein can do only so long as it dies [i.e., dying turns out to be a necessary condition of demising].[35] (BT 291/SZ 247, all emphases in the original)

My bracketed insertions begin to explain Heidegger's deliberately chosen but idiosyncratic (and so initially confusing) philosophical terminology. But we will need to slow down and carefully unpack the phenomenological concepts at work in this dense but important passage in order to understand what

[34] Heidegger explicitly clarifies that "being toward death" does not mean "actualizing" death in the sense of "bringing about one's demise" (as in suicide), nor merely "thinking about death" by "dwelling upon the end in its possibility" or "brooding over death"; instead, death "must be understood *as a possibility*, it must be cultivated *as a possibility*, and we must *put up with* it as a possibility in the way we comport ourselves toward it (BT 305–5/SZ 261). We will see that by "possibility," Heidegger means *existential* (not logical) possibility; that is, such a *possibility* is an existential project into which we project ourselves and in terms of which we thereby come to understand our being. As he explains, "any Dasein has, as Dasein, already projected [*entworfen*] itself and, as long as it is, it is projecting [*entwerfend*]. As long as it is, Dasein always has and always will understand itself in terms of possibilities. [Notice that those two sentences say the same thing in two ways; Heidegger is making clear that *projecting into projects* is Dasein's way of being its existential possibilities.] Furthermore, . . . the understanding does not thematically grasp [that is, conceptually, propositionally, or representationally relate to] that upon which it projects – that is to say, possibilities. . . . As projecting, it *is* its possibilities as possibilities" (BT 185/SZ 145). Hence, being-toward-death means existentially projecting oneself into the phenomenon Heidegger calls *death* (that is, the being at an *end* of Dasein's distinctive being as a primordially practical "being-in-the-world"); it does not mean imagining or adopting some attitude toward one's eventual *demise* (let alone actualizing that mortal demise by committing suicide or otherwise demising [that is, "croaking" or "kicking the bucket"]). This, however, does not negate the fact that Heidegger believes these two phenomena – existential death and mortal demise – remain closely related, and in such a way that understanding death can and should help transform our relationship toward our demise (for reasons we will examine).

[35] I shall suggest that dying (that is, the phenomenon disclosed by death) conditions demising in two related senses (in which the second reiterates and deepens the first): (1) Dasein can experientially approach the end of its own life only insofar as Dasein can experience itself being at an end; for, one can approach something only up until that point at which one has arrived at it. (2) Death discloses the core of the self as a projectless *projecting*, a sheer *projecting* that must be in place in order for Dasein to be able to *project into* the final terminal collapse of its world in demise at all.

exactly *Being and Time* says about the relations between perishing, death, and demise.

Over the last two decades of teaching and writing about this issue, I have found that the primary stumbling block to understanding Heidegger's phenomenology of "death" in *Being and Time* comes from the fact that the phenomenon he is referring to (as the "*way of being*" in which Dasein "*is toward*" its own death) is *not* what we ordinarily mean by *death*.[36] For Heidegger, "death" means *neither* the "physiological" ending of our biological lives, which he calls "perishing," *nor* even our experience of that biological ending of our lives as a terminal collapse of our intelligible worlds, an experience of our lives ending which he calls "demise." Just to make clear that he is indeed drawing this initially strange distinction between *existential death* and *mortal demise*, Heidegger almost immediately adds [and we will call this sentence "D2"]: "Dasein does not only, first, or really die [*erst stirbt*], nor even genuinely or authentically die [*eigentlich stirbt*], in and with an experience of its factical demise [*Ableben*]" [BT 291/SZ 247].[37] *Demise* is Heidegger's term for our experience of that terminal collapse of our intelligible world which (as far as we know and can tell) accompanies our physiological *perishing*, the final cessation of our biological functions.[38] We reach the end of our lives when the

[36] On the meaning of "being-toward" in "being-toward death," see n. 34 and Section 1.4 below.

[37] (Translation emended; the existing English translations have dropped Heidegger's "*erst* [only, first, or really]," a word which rightly suggests that Heidegger thinks of *death* not as that singular end of our lives but, instead, as something each of us can go through multiple times in our lives, an idea apparently too strange for the translators.) Heidegger adds this provocative line to explain his immediately prior claim that "a psychology of 'dying' gives information about the 'living' of the 'dying person,' rather than about the dying itself" (BT 291/SZ 247). In other words, psychological (and other) studies about how we approach the end of our lives are told entirely from the side of life, and so can only illuminate what life is like (as it *approaches* its end); such studies (of *demise*) tell us nothing about *what it is like for our existence as Dasein to be at an end* (which, we will see, is precisely what Heidegger's notion of "genuine or authentic death" seeks to explain). Hence Heidegger's claim that this point (that a "psychology of death" is really a misnamed aspect of a psychology of life) follows from the fact that we do not have to demise (or experience the approach of mortality) in order to experience our Dasein being at an end (in the phenomenon *Being and Time* calls *genuine* or authentic death, that is, the direct phenomenological experience of the end of our distinctive kind of being).

[38] Dasein "demises" insofar as the perishing of its physical body leads it to experience its own terminal world-collapse. The precise physiological mechanisms at work in each case will of course vary, but the general relation between *perishing* and *demise* is suggestively illustrated by a scene in the Wachowski sisters' *The Matrix* (1999) when several minor characters are murdered by being "unplugged" while still in the Matrix world. Their Daseins, cut off from their actual physical bodies, suddenly "demise" in the world of the Matrix, and shortly thereafter their physical bodies "perish," having thus "given up the ghost." (That is, perhaps an intentional pun in this scene, as one of the characters is named "Ghost." Yet, the fact that one's physical body would perish so quickly after being deprived of its Dasein suggests, in good Heideggerian fashion, that being Dasein in the

organic systems that kept us alive "perish" and – if we are awake, aware that our life is coming to an end, and the event is not too sudden – we experience our intelligible worlds terminally collapsing in "demise."

The basic premise underlying Heidegger's strict terminological distinction between *perishing* and *demise*, then, is that we Dasein do not directly or immediately experience the failure of the physiological systems that had been keeping us alive. Instead, we experience the collapse of our sheer physiological functioning only insofar as it is "codetermined by" (*mitbestimmt durch*, that is, "contributes to" or gets taken up into and experienced in terms of) the intelligible worlds that we Dasein are. So, for example, we would not directly experience the capillaries in our lungs failing to adequately oxygenate our blood; what we might experience, instead, are such phenomena as "fatigue," "light-headedness," "shortness of breath," or – less clinically and more aptly in terms of Dasein's existential world – a sudden inability to breathe or sit up in bed, which we might rightly take as heralding the end of our life. In Heidegger's terms, then, we Dasein never directly experience our own biological perishing at all; instead, we experience such perishing only indirectly (that is, as *mediated through* the intelligible worlds that we are) *as* our demise, that is, as an apparently final collapse of the intelligible worlds we *are*.[39] Put simply, *Dasein experiences its perishing only indirectly – as its demise*.[40] So much for Heidegger's distinction between *perishing* and *demise*.

How, then, does Heidegger distinguish his "genuine or authentic" conception of "dying" (*Sterben*) both from "perishing" (*Verenden*) and from "demising" (*Ableben*)? First, he distinguishes dying from perishing in the same way

Matrix world involves much more than what mind/body dualism imagines as the "mind," including all sorts of subconscious and even apparently "autonomic" processes without which the body cannot maintain even its minimal life functions.) The same relation is then enacted in reverse later, when Neo demises in the Matrix but is then "resurrected" there, apparently jump-started (in some unexplained way) when Trinity kisses his physical body, still living outside the Matrix world from which he has been disconnected. (I remain grateful to Hubert Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall for a helpful conversation about this and related matters.)

[39] I briefly defer its discussion for the sake of clarity, but there is an important further complication implicit here: Demise, as "an 'experience' of ceasing to live [*ein "Erleben" des Ablebens*]" (BT 295/SZ 251), turns out to be phenomenologically paradoxical. (Put simply: How can we fully "live-through" [*Er-leben*] our "ceasing to live" [*Ableben*]? How can we Dasein *be* at the very end of our lives?) This apparent experiential *impossibility* will in fact help motivate Heidegger to distinguish our ordinary thinking of death *as mortal demise* from his "authentic or genuine" *phenomenological* conception of death, as our way of being at the end of the world which we are (which he thinks we *can* experience in an extreme and desolate "way of being," and indeed *must* endure the experience of, in order to be able to phenomenologically disclose such crucial structures as *futurity*, and thereby *temporality*, as we will see at the end of this chapter).

[40] I will criticize the overly rigid boundary that Heidegger draws between perishing, on the one hand, and death and demise, on the other, in Chapter 7.4.

he distinguished demising from perishing. We Dasein can demise and die (because, as we will see, terminal world-collapse and world-collapse are both phenomena we Dasein can encounter, at least to some extent, in the intelligible worlds that we are), while our perishing is not something we can experience directly, in its own sheerly physiological terms (for the reasons just explained). Hence Heidegger's stark *provocation* (in D1 above): "Dasein never perishes." *Pace* Derrida, "Dasein never perishes" does not mean that "I do not end, I never end" (regardless of whether this alleged inability to experience our own end is recited as a calming mantra, with Epicurus, or as a heartbroken lament, with Kierkegaard and Blanchot). Here, in fact, Derrida misses a crucial point: Even though Heidegger thinks we Dasein *cannot* experience our lives having *come to an end* in demise (because Heidegger holds that *there is nothing that it is like for me to be demised*, for phenomenological reasons we will soon explore), Heidegger will argue that a living Dasein *can* experience its own intelligible world having come to an end. Indeed, we will see that this crucial experience of my existential world being ended and yet my somehow still being here (like a living witness to the end of the practical world that I was) is the very phenomenon Heidegger designates in D1 as "genuine or authentic dying," Dasein's way of *first* or *genuinely* "being toward" – that is, existentially "projecting into" and thereby undergoing and phenomenologically encountering – its own *death*.[41]

So, "Dasein never perishes" does not mean that Dasein *is endless* (or that I can never experience my own intelligible world having come to an end) but, instead, that to describe the distinctive type of ending that is proper to Dasein as "perishing" is to make the *category mistake* of trying to conceive of the distinctive end of Dasein's existence, the end of our standing out into an intelligible world, in terms drawn from the "worldless" occurrence of objects – which can occur "in ontic isolation" (as D1 put it), that is, without entering into the ontological intelligibility of Dasein's existential world.[42] Put

[41] (On the meaning of Heidegger's "being-toward," see n. 34.) See Jacques Derrida, *Aporias: Dying – Awaiting* (One Another at) 'the Limits of Truth," trans. by T. Dutoit (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 40; Derrida gets this point from Blanchot (see Iain Thomson, "Can I Die? Derrida on Heidegger on Death," *Philosophy Today*, 43:1 [1999], 29–42, a problematic text written while I was still unknowingly in that first interpretive camp discussed in Section 1.1). As I shall show when we return to this issue in detail in Chapter 7, Heidegger is quite right to distinguish Dasein's distinctive mode of being, *existence*, from the on-hand occurrence of objects and the hands-on availability of equipment, but Derrida is also right that these distinct realms obviously interpenetrate and act on one another in a wide variety of ways (to which Heidegger, in his quest for clear philosophical distinctions, does not fully do justice).

[42] This is also why Heidegger argues that if "*death must be conceived as the ending of Dasein*" (BT 289/SZ 244), then we must also recognize that the intelligible world of a Dasein *ends* in a very different *kind* of way than an unfinished road ends, the rain stops, or any other objective entity or process reaches its end (BT 289/SZ 245).

differently, the logic behind Heidegger's distinction between *perishing*, on the one hand, and both *death and demise*, on the other, is that objective processes such as the sheer physiological functioning of our biology can *occur in* us without *happening for* us. When such objective processes both occur in us *and* happen for us, moreover, that phenomenological *happening*, as variously inflected by the light of Dasein's intelligible world, will always be different in kind from their sheer ontic *occurrence* (the very objective functioning that biologists and other natural scientists seek to isolate and study).[43]

For pedagogical expediency, we could thus express Heidegger's first crucial distinction here with a simple mnemonic formula: *Pear trees perish, but Daseins demise and die.* The physiological systems that maintain the life of a pear tree can run their course without anyone taking any notice (say, in the case of a wild pear tree that reaches the end of its life cycle without anyone ever noticing). But when the "physiological" systems that support Dasein's life functions perish, Dasein, as Dasein, does not perish; it *demises*, if this Dasein is conscious, aware of what is happening, and the event is not too sudden. Indeed, in what Heidegger treats as the *paradigmatic* case in which we Dasein are awake, aware, and undeceived, the way we *experience* the final "perishing" of our physiological systems is precisely by "demising," undergoing the terminal collapse of our intelligible worlds (as mentioned earlier). But if a person never experiences their own perishing – for example, if they are in a dreamless sleep when their physiological systems suddenly and unexpectedly stop functioning (and they never wake up) – then this Dasein will have ceased to be without ever experiencing the terminal collapse of its world in demise.

Ironically, our culture euphemistically calls that "passing away peacefully" and presents it as an ideal way to "shuffle off this mortal coil" (without risk of any indecorous last-minute drama to inconvenience the living or embarrass the reputation of the soon-to-be-dead). From the perspective of Heidegger's existential phenomenology, however, that kind of *non-demise* looks more like a thief in the night who steals not just our life but also our demise, along with our ability ever to notice that theft. The wide resonance of this "passing peacefully" euphemism in our culture thus inadvertently testifies to our pervasive fear of demise, subtly reinforcing the existentially cowardly message that it would be better never to experience anything of that final foreclosure of our worlds in demise.[44] Heidegger's suggestion is not that it would be better to go out the way we came in ("kicking and screaming," as it were) but, rather, that our cultural idealization of "passing quietly in your sleep" conveniently

[43] For example, the sheer *occurrence* of a tree falling in the woods (whether or not anyone hears it) generates acoustic waves that could in principle *happen* for a suitably placed and enabled Dasein, and not just as a mere sound but as alarming, gratifying, puzzling, loud, etc.

[44] I return to this point in detail in Chapters 8 and 9.

excuses many people from ever taking up the existential struggle to face up to and reconcile ourselves with a difficult fact: Our inevitable perishing will ordinarily (in the aforementioned paradigm cases) lead to our experience of demising, a final "appointment in Samarra" we certainly cannot count on sleeping through or otherwise dodging entirely (myriad cultural fantasies to the contrary notwithstanding).[45]

In sum, then, our physiological perishing is experienced *as* our mortal demise in the ordinary or paradigmatic case, even though Dasein can also perish without demising (as in that euphemistic ideal of "passing peacefully" while asleep). This ordinary (but contingent) connection between perishing and demise gets mirrored in the relation between demise and death: Just as one can perish without demising, one can also demise without genuinely or authentically dying (as Heidegger directly states in D1). (Thus, neither perishing nor demise is required for what Heidegger calls "death," as we will see.) In the paradigm case, however, perishing leads to demise (that is, the breakdown of our physiological functioning leads to the experience of terminal world-collapse), and demise leads *toward* death (that is, the experience of terminal world-collapse leads *toward* the experience of my intelligible world being at an end). But to understand why I deliberately emphasize "*toward*" here, we need to understand why Heidegger (in D1) calls *demise* "the intermediate phenomena" *between* the physiological occurrence of perishing and the experience of Dasein's being at its own end in the existential world-collapse of *death*.

Put simply, Heidegger's provocative claim is that only existential death gives phenomenology the full experience that demise seems to lead inexorably toward and yet cannot itself deliver (at least not *to phenomenology*), namely,

[45] Of course, this is not to deny that the experience of demising can often be filled with unbearable pain and suffering (although some of that suffering comes from our culture's unfortunate tendency to reduce death to demise, Heidegger will suggest, in a way that leaves us unnecessarily terrified about demise and so often unequipped to be there to support one another with it). There may also be many pain-dominated demises that it might be better to dodge than undergo, and yet the point remains: Absent such an experience of the terminal collapse of our intelligible worlds (in the paradigm case), we will not have experienced our own *demising*, that is, we will not have experienced the approaching terminal collapse of our intelligible world but, instead, will simply have ceased to be (our physiological systems merely perishing, much like that unwitnessed pear tree in the wilderness). Still, the Epicurean paradox implicit in the very idea of *experiencing* our own *demise* helps motivate Heidegger's distinction between such mortal demise and existential death, the latter giving us a way of experiencing our intelligible worlds having come to an end, something we apparently cannot do in the case of our demise, which nevertheless seems to lead inexorably toward such an end. This means, crucially, that only existential death gives us an experience of that end which demise promises and yet cannot deliver (an experience of being at our end that can subtly but profoundly transform our relationship toward demise), as we shall see.

the experience of the intelligible world that we are having reached its own distinctive end. Indeed, that claim is precisely what explains Heidegger's otherwise puzzling assertion (at the end of D1): "Demising, however, is something Dasein can do only so long as it dies." Only existential death allows phenomenology to experience that end of our distinctive kind of being, an end which demise is oriented toward and yet seemingly cannot actually reach (owing to the Epicurean paradox we will address momentarily). Only what Heidegger calls "genuine or authentic death" – "the end of Dasein, that is to say, of [our own] being-in-the-world" (BT 292/SZ 247) – can ultimately show us what it genuinely means for our first-personal existence as a world-disclosive being-here to reach its own end, by undergoing (and subsequently being able to attest to phenomenologically) the experience of its existence as a practical "being-in-the-world" having *ended*.

One of *Being and Time*'s most provocative insights, in other words, is that death and demise come apart phenomenologically. We Dasein can live through our own intelligible worlds having come to an end (in the existential phenomenon Heidegger calls genuine or authentic death) without having to undergo the experience of terminal world-collapse (in mortal demise).[46]

[46] We have seen that one can perish without demising (as in the case of perishing while in a dreamless sleep and never awaking), but can one demise without perishing? That would require a scenario in which one undergoes the terminal collapse of one's intelligible world and yet one's physiological systems somehow continue functioning to support the biological life of their organic system. That might indeed happen if, for example, one experienced some physiological crisis sufficient to catalyze one's demise (so that one rightly recognized that one is demising and one's intelligible world never subsequently comes back "on-line," so to speak) and yet one's physiological systems somehow remain functionally "alive." (This could occur in some subset of those cases typically referred to as "brain death.") Analogously, we have just seen that Heidegger thinks we can die without demising. But can one demise without dying? Heidegger's answer here is "no," because he thinks (as just explained) that "[d]emising ... is something Dasein can do only so long as it dies." We can demise, or undergo the terminal collapse of the intelligible worlds we are, only so long as we die, or undergo the collapse of these worlds we are *and yet continue to be there*, witnessing this collapse of our world. The basic point is clear (albeit initially strange): We can only experience the *terminal* collapse of our worlds so long as we can experience the collapse of our worlds at all. But the deeper question that seems to motivate this one remains: Can we experience demise without experiencing existential world-collapse in a traumatic way? I shall later suggest reasons for thinking that the answer is yes: if one has completely relinquished one's strictly personal attachments to one's world-defining projects, instead identifying entirely with projects that will survive one's own personal demise (as *Being and Time* suggests existential death should indeed help encourage us to do), then the experience of undergoing terminal world-collapse need not lead to one final traumatic collapse of my practical identity (no more than our practical identities must collapse traumatically in order for us to fall asleep). For, if I have come to identify myself with defining projects that will outlive my demise, then I need not experience my final inability to connect practically, ever again, to those projects as a traumatic collapse of my identity. This may well be the best way of

That proves highly fortunate for existential phenomenology since, by all appearances, we *cannot* live through our own *demise* to experience *that* end.[47] With this latter point, Heidegger incorporates his understanding of Epicurus's famous paradox – that I never experience my own demise, since "When I am, death is not, and when death is, I am not" – into his discussion of "demise." As his German nicely suggests, "an 'experience' of [one's own] demise [*ein "Erleben" des Ablebens*]" literally (and paradoxically) means "a 'living-through' of [one's own] ceasing to live" (BT 295/SZ 251), an apparent absurdity.[48] For Heidegger, "demise" designates this ultimately paradoxical "experience" of the end of one's own life (that is, an "experience" of the approaching cessation or *absence of all experience*), a final event that we seem to be able to experience as it approaches but not once it has arrived, because once demise arrives our Dasein is no longer "here" to be anything. From the phenomenological perspective, put simply (albeit provocatively), *our own Dasein cannot be demised*. (Dasein and its own demise are ultimately incompatible, because we cannot both "be here" and *be demised*; to be demised is not to "be here" at all.)[49]

describing what Heidegger will suggest is an authentic relation to demise, a relation that (having passed through and drawn the lessons from existential death) finds a nontraumatic way to integrate the terminal world-collapse of mortal demise into one's practical identity. And yet, the later Heidegger suggests (*pace* the earlier), perhaps we should not invest ourselves so heavily in *surviving* in any form but, instead, find ways to embrace the "letting go" of our worlds one last time, as we turn to welcome the coming immersion into being's inexhaustible riches. I would suggest that the former is close to Heidegger's early view, the latter closer to his later (in which a letting go of the ego turns anxious fear into wondrous openness to the excessiveness of being), and I return to this fascinating issue in detail in Chapter 9. (Thanks to Mark Wrathall for repeatedly pushing me to respond to this difficult but important existential question, which to my recollection Heidegger never takes up explicitly himself and yet does help us think about.)

[47] We will see that Heidegger is aware of the worry that this may seem a little too convenient for more than one reason. (If all you have is a hammer, then everything looks like a nail, as one says; if all one has is phenomenology, then everything shows up as an experience to be entered into and undergone.)

[48] See also n. 39.

[49] It is for this reason that Levinas criticizes Heidegger's phenomenology of death for deliberately remaining one-sidedly "this-worldly," thereby alleging that Heidegger (in an implicit *atheism*) ignores the possibility that one might look back on one's life from some eternal beyond (or perhaps receive divine prophecy about such an afterlife while still alive). But here Levinas seems to confuse death with demise (as we shall see in Chapter 7), and, even if we restrict the question to the phenomenology of demise, is not clear how Heidegger – as *a phenomenologist* who *must deliberately confine himself to what we are capable of personally experiencing of the phenomenon at issue* – could avoid restricting himself to what Dasein can experience *here*, in *this* world. ("Near-death" experiences, for example, – precisely as *experiences* – *show* that Dasein has not yet reached the end of its experiences and so has not yet demised in Heidegger's sense; such experiences thus cannot settle the question of whether there is any other-worldly beyond

This paradox means, Heidegger repeatedly points out, that if death is understood only as demise (that is, as our relation to or experience of our impending mortality), then our being-here as Dasein can *never* comprehend itself *as a whole*. For it appears that, up until we demise, our intelligible worlds will always be constituted by worldly projects that stretch into an unknown future[50] (so that our sense of self will never be fully "transparent to itself [*durchsichtig*]" in a way that enables Dasein to *see through* itself completely – without being stretched out into some always partly unseen future – and so grasp itself in its entirety), but then, once we demise, we will no longer *be here* at all (that is, we will no longer be Dasein). *Being and Time*'s discussion of death begins (§§46–7) by setting up this very problem at great length. In fact, this is the problem that motivates Heidegger's phenomenological distinction between death and demise in the first place: How can Dasein – an entity whose being (or intelligible world) is constitutively organized by life-projects that stretch into an unknown future – ever comprehend itself as a whole?[51] What

on the far side of demise.) For these very reasons, in fact, Heidegger is careful to acknowledge that the phenomenological necessity of methodologically privileging what Dasein can experience (in our *being-here*) with respect to death and demise remains neutral on the religious question of whether or not there is any life after demise (BT 292/SZ 247–8), an issue in terms of which *Being and Time* thereby remains methodologically *agnostic* (rather than either theistic or atheistic, which as would-be philosophical positions – Heidegger provocatively maintains – both equally commit themselves untenably to knowing something unknowable, such as whether or not some afterlife might be found on the far side of Dasein's great experiential beyond). (We return to related issues further in the text and in Chapters 6, 7, and 9.)

[50] This remains true, I think, even if our last remaining existential project is not even tonight's sleep or tomorrow's breakfast but nothing more than demising itself (undertaken, for example, as our last great existential adventure into the unknown – before the undertaker takes our corpse six feet under, as it were).

[51] The issue Heidegger uses to transition from Division I to Division II of *Being and Time* is the question of whether Division I's existential analytic has grasped Dasein in its "most primordial totality" by setting out Dasein's three main "existential structures" (namely, Dasein's affective attunement [*Befindlichkeit*], conversance [*Rede*], and understanding [Verstehen], to which we will return) [BT 273/SZ 230]. Division II of *Being and Time* eventually answers this question in the negative, by phenomenologically discovering a deeper layer of Dasein's structure in the three interconnected temporal horizons that directly underlie these three existential structures. But the way Heidegger tries to motivate this transitional question (of whether he has yet plumbed the bottom of Dasein's existential structure phenomenologically) is by connecting this issue of "primordiality" (*Ursprünglichkeit*) to the issue of Dasein's "wholeness or totality" (*Ganzheit*). His suggestion is that the existential analysis will have hit bottom, as it were, only once we get Dasein's totality in sight (or into our "hermeneutic fore-having," in his terminology). (As he writes: "If . . . the ontological interpretation is to be a *primordial* one, this . . . requires explicit assurance that the *whole* of the entity which it has taken as its theme [viz., Dasein] has been brought into the fore-having" [BT 275/SZ 232, Heidegger's italics].) Taking *wholeness* as a guarantor of *primordiality* is a strange move, for which the best analogue is

most readers seem to miss, however, is that Heidegger is able to solve this problem only by introducing his existential-ontological conception of death – in distinction from our ordinary understanding of death as mortal demise.

The unfortunate fact that Heidegger does not clearly distinguish existential death from demise while setting up the problem is part of what misleads most readers into conflating existential death with mortal demise. It is probably a sign of the speed with which the text was written that Heidegger gets almost halfway through his introductory treatment of death before finally acknowledging that his "analysis cannot keep clinging to an idea of death which has been devised accidentally and at random" (BT 292–3/SZ 248), and so begins to develop existential death in its relation to and difference from mortal demise. Even then, however, the fact that death and demise share the same formal structure (as we will see in Section 1.4), coupled with the strangeness and subtlety of his twofold examination of existential death and mortal demise, makes it less likely that readers who already have conflated existential death with mortal demise will understand how he eventually disambiguates the two

probably weeding: You can rest assured that you have reached the very bottom of the plant you are seeking to unearth only once you can see the entire plant before you (roots and all). It is precisely this "task of putting Dasein as a whole into our fore-having" (BT 276/SZ 233) that allows Heidegger to introduce death and motivate the distinction between death and demise, because that missing wholeness is possible only in existential death and not in mortal demise. Nonetheless, I should also note that I have never found this way of motivating the transition convincing. It works structurally as a convenient way to connect the Kantian-pragmatic analyses of the first Division to the Kierkegaardian-existential ones in Division II, and then to vindicate the turn to temporality as finally securing that promised primordiality and wholeness (all on the way toward the promised fundamental ontology). Nonetheless, *Being and Time*'s strange faith in the connection between primordiality and totality is redolent of *ontotheology* (in which Western metaphysics repeatedly connects the deepest *ontological* ground and the furthest *theological* horizon; see also BT 49/SZ 26). I am not surprised that this way of thinking about Dasein as the temporal ground of being disappears from his later work, as metaphysics (understood as ontotheology) becomes the problem rather than the solution (as I first showed in Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, chs. 1 and 3), but we shall come back to this important issue in detail in Chapter 2. Moreover, Heidegger's focus on Dasein's "wholeness" is potentially quite misleading, as it risks suggesting that he is trying to give an *exhaustive* analysis of Dasein's existential structure, which he is not. Heidegger's articulation of Dasein's existential structures is not meant to be *complete* (in the way Kant's categories are, now rather notoriously). The three main existentials (listed above) are not Dasein's only existentials (in fact, he lists numerous others); they are just the three interconnected existential structures that sit directly atop the three interconnected temporal horizons (which Heidegger is still hoping to leverage in order to disclose a *fundamental ontology*, as we shall see in Chapter 2). This means that it is not, *prima facie*, a telling critique to point out that *Being and Time* ignores or downplays existential structures like embodiment, sex, gender, etc., since his analysis is not striving for completeness in that sense. (See also n. 55 for another sense in which his talk of "wholeness" is misleading.)

phenomena.[52] (For better and for worse, Heidegger is a subtle thinker and writer, and often leaves important philosophical lessons implicit and unstated in his texts for readers to draw out for themselves – lessons and insights that his most careful readers will likely discover, excavate, and debate for years – which is part of what *continues* to make him such an engaging thinker, numerous problems notwithstanding.)[53] Although I do think he should have been much clearer here, I shall also explain the reasons why his phenomenological method leads him deliberately to couple death and demise together so closely, as the two phenomena are indeed related closely (though not inextricably, as we have already seen).

By definition, we living beings cannot experience all our experience having ended in our mortal demise (and so cannot do any phenomenology of our own *being demised*). But Heidegger remains convinced that there is an end proper to (or distinctive of) our Dasein – as a primordially practical "being-in-the-world" embodied in and organized by our life-projects – which we *can* experience, and, moreover, that this is an experience in which Dasein can grasp itself as a whole. As he will thus put it: "In such being-toward-its-end, Dasein exists in a way which is genuinely whole, as that entity which it can be when 'thrown into death.' Dasein does not have an end at which it is simply stops but instead [Dasein has an end in which it] *exists finitely* [existiert endlich]" (BT 378/SZ 329).[54] Dasein "exists at an end" or experiences an

[52] Let me thus emphasize that scholars like me owe a deep debt of gratitude to William Blattner (along with Heidegger's earliest phenomenological readers like Levinas, Sartre, and de Beauvoir, see Chapter 7), for recognizing and first helping clearly to explain the difference (despite the many divergences between our views).

[53] To me, some obvious (if still not widely recognized) examples of Heidegger's subtlety (and perhaps excessive faith in his readers' phenomenological and hermeneutic skills) include Heidegger's widespread, deliberately ambiguous use of "the nothing" (to which we return in Chapter 3), as well as his phenomenological unearthing of a farming woman in Van Gogh's painting of "A Pair of Shoes" (1886); for a detailed treatment of both examples, see Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, ch. 3.

[54] On "being toward death," notice that Heidegger equates it here with "thrown into death" (and see n. 36). As *Being and Time* explained earlier, Dasein is always already "thrown" into "projection" (BT 185/SZ 145), and, in death, we experience ourselves as thrown into *projectless* projecting. In the full experience of existential death, Dasein is still a *thrown projection* structurally, but it discovers itself as "the null-basis of a nullity," that is, as having to take over its own ungrounded facticity (the "null-basis" that it is as *thrown*, that is, as unable ever to understand itself from the ground up and so fully justify its existential choices) in order to resolutely reconnect to a worldly project, inevitably negating (or "nullifying" in its finite *projecting*) all the other projects it could have been (see also n. 56). Just as the ineliminable lack-of-fit between self and world that we discover in *anxiety* helps explain that ungroundedness which Dasein is as a "null-basis" in existential death, so Heidegger's phenomenology of guilt encourages the *solus ipse* we most fundamentally are to embrace its defining finitude by nullifying all that it has chosen not to be so as to become what it is choosing, in Dasein's return to the practical world in resolve (see BT

"end-like existence" in the strange phenomenon of existential death – in which we continue to *exist* and yet find ourselves radically estranged from the practical projects and identities that ordinarily allow us to make sense of our ourselves (as a practically engaged "being-in-the-world"). Existential death's experience of radically *finite existing* – that is, of existing as "a whole," as "transparent" to ourselves, because no longer projecting into worldly projects that (as "something still outstanding" [BT 276/SZ 233]) would conceal our own existence from us – is what Heidegger means when he says that existential death "delimits and determines in each case the possible wholeness of Dasein" (BT 277/SZ 234).[55]

Heidegger's solution to the Epicurean paradox, in other words, is that in the desolate experience he calls "death," the self – temporarily cut off from the world of practical projects in terms of which it usually understands itself – finds itself radically alone with itself (a worldless *solus ipse*), and so can lucidly comprehend itself in its entirety for the first time, since there is no worldly, futural component of itself to elude its self-transparent grasp.[56] When Dasein

333/SZ 287; BT 354/SZ 306). (For a detailed reconstruction of Heidegger's phenomenological move from ontic to ontological guilt, see also Guy Elgat, "Heidegger on Guilt: Reconstructing the Transcendental Argument in *Being and Time*," *European Journal of Philosophy*, 28:4 [2020], 911–25).

[55] For some individuals, it may well be that undergoing this experience of the radical wholeness of the finite self can powerfully carry over into the felt task of conferring some narrative or other unified understanding on one's life as a whole (as Guignon often suggests, and Beauvoir similarly "assumes"; Simone de Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity* [New York: Open Road, 2018], 26), but I do not see Heidegger specifically making *that* argument in *Being and Time*, which instead suggests that authenticity involves *repeatedly* reconstituting my dynamic becoming in lucidly *coherent* ways (disclosively constituting the "constancy" of my self by repeatedly taking a stand on the meaning of my life and its place in history "as a fateful whole" [BT 463/SZ 410]), an enduring struggle which is never accomplished once and for all time (see BT 388/SZ 339, BT 443/SZ 391, and Chapters 4 and 7.4). Indeed, as a later-Heidegger inspired postmodernist incredulous toward the exclusive claims of any such metanarrative, I do not believe we can ever finally tell ourselves our own life stories (especially in their intersections with history) in terms of some single, overarching account (although we can repeatedly learn a great deal from the attempt, and, moreover, Heidegger's own efforts "to sum it all up" conceal as much as they reveal [see, most famously, PLT 4/AED 7]). I think the more direct uptake of this experience of radical wholeness in existential death can be felt in the liberating *wholeheartedness* and "unshakable joy" (BT 358/SZ 310) of the *resolute* decision or lucid commitment that brings us back from such death to the world of projects in *authenticity*. (I am grateful to Charles Guignon, Taylor Carman, and Mark Wrathall for encouraging me to clarify this point.)

[56] One might well object here that, even when (in existential death) the collapse of my defining projects leaves me bereft of that practical world that ordinarily allows me to make sense of myself by pressing forward or projecting into projects that stretch into a partly unknown future, I am still shaped by a past (a "having-beenness") that stretches into distant mists I can never fully comprehend, such that Dasein also disappears (not just ahead of itself in projection but also back behind itself) into a "thrownness" that similarly prevents me from

experiences itself as desperately unable to project into the worldly projects in terms of which it normally makes sense of itself, then "the future itself is closed" for Dasein (even though objectively "time goes on"). Bereft of all its worldly projects in existential death, Dasein can fully grasp itself in its own "finitude" for the first time – and thereby come to understand itself as a "primordial existential projecting" (BT 379/SZ 330), a sheer *existing* (from the Latin *ek-sistere*, a literal "standing-out" toward a world I cannot connect to practically or project into), a desolate condition I call *projectless projecting* (for terminological reasons I shall explain in Section 1.4).[57]

ever being fully "transparent" (*durchsichtig*) to myself in the way Heidegger seeks (in order to get *all* of Dasein into his hermeneutic "fore-having"; see n. 51). But Heidegger is cognizant of this point (see GA2 310, note a) and his response (which he articulates in his related phenomenology of *guilt* and *conscience*) is that my embodied past thrownness shows up not in my practical or conceptual self-understanding (*Verstehen*, since death is primarily the breakdown of such understanding) but, instead, in my affective attunement (*Befindlichkeit*) to the world, which in anxiety and guilt (combined) manifest me to myself as cut off from that past which has shaped me (because I experience my own defining having-beenness as no longer sufficient to tell me how specifically to reconnect to the practical world). Experiencing my having-beenness as no longer determining my to-come (to put it in Heidegger's terms) encourages me to recognize myself *as* the groundless (or "null") ground of my own existential decisions about what to be henceforth, a recognition which helps enable me to forge my own path back to the world of identity-bestowing practical projects in what Heidegger calls resolve (or un-closedness, *Entschlossenheit*). Now, that answer, in turn, raises the oft-discussed problem of Heidegger's apparent *decisionism* (or *voluntarism*), but it also allows us to glimpse a crucial part of his response: Dasein's resolute decisions are *contingent* (hence *free*) but not *arbitrary* (hence meaningless). Dasein's defining decisions (by which we reconnect to the world lost in death) are *neither determined nor completely indeterminate*, because the world of projects that impends toward us (when death discloses futurity as a coming-toward which brings us back before our making present in resolve [as we will see in the final section of this chapter]) is still *partly* shaped or pre-delimited by the "facticity" that we are (the typically unnoticed effect of our pasts upon us), the "having-beenness" still embodied in our affective attunements and dispositions. Hence, as we "open ourselves" (in *Ent-schlossenheit*, "un-closedness" or "resolve") toward the beckoning worlds of those practical projects we *can* become, not every logically possible project shows up (so we are not simply numbed by some overwhelming array of options). Thanks to the enduring effects of our thrownness (not primarily cognitive but attuned and embodied), this finite array of futural projects does not come toward us as all equally attractive, desirable, worthy, and so on, so that we are not permanently paralyzed by existential death – as could happen if those resolute decisions whereby the *solus ipse* reforges its connection to the practical world were just some "frictionless spinning in a void" (to borrow McDowell's famous phrase for the Cartesian divide between mind and world). Instead (to put it in the simplest terms), although I genuinely might not know if I want to be a writer or a philosopher, for example, that decision would take place against a background in which being a lawyer or stockbroker, say, simply do not present themselves to me as live-options (for good or for ill, in cases of entrenched disenfranchisement).

[57] (See also n. 34.) Understanding this point allows us to answer another difficult question careful readers often pose, namely: Why does Heidegger think that the collapse of projects we experience in what he calls "death" has to be *global*? It is necessary that *all* Dasein's projects break down because, as we have just seen, existential "death" is introduced in *Being*

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As that suggests, Heidegger's conviction that there is a kind of end that is distinctive of Dasein – that we *can* experience our intelligible world as having ended and so exist in a way that is radically "finite" (*endlich*) – is what leads him to distinguish this "existential conception of death [*die existenziale Begriff des Sterbens*]" from demise (BT 295/SZ 251). Recall his clear (if initially puzzling) statement (in D2): "Dasein does not only, first, or really die [*erst stirbt*], nor even genuinely or authentically die [*eigentlich stirbt*], in and with an experience of its factical demise [*Ableben*]" (BT 291/SZ 247).[58] The main point behind this provocative assertion that *we can die without demising* is that neither "death" nor "dying" (nor even "genuinely or authentically dying," a

and Time to solve the puzzle of how can have a *complete* phenomenological grasp of our Dasein (or "being-here"), given that there always seems to be something still outstanding about Dasein so long as it exists in the world, and once Dasein demises, it is no longer here at all. A phenomenological grasp of Dasein "as a whole" is only possible, then, if Dasein undergoes an experience in which *all* its existentiell possibilities have collapsed so that it finds itself retracted from the world like a turtle into its shell. (A second reason, I shall suggest, is that fear of demise is ultimately driven by our fear of not being at all, not our anxiety about being diminished – although that can be a real concern too.) It is natural to worry that the idea of total world-collapse is problematic phenomenologically, and so to suspect that Heidegger is either generalizing from his own depressive nature or else letting the hermeneutic dictates of the existential analysis trump phenomenology – which, I think, should instead have led him to recognize that *all* our projects do not need to collapse in order for us to come to understand the existential structure of the self. Nonetheless, undergoing such a global collapse is possible and seems to yield precisely the insight Heidegger suggests, which is all he needs. I think he believes in such global collapse not only because he himself experienced it repeatedly (on this point see my philosophical biography of Heidegger, in progress), but also because he thinks that if Dasein experiences the collapse of its "ultimate for the sake of which" – that is, the single project which ultimately organizes all Dasein's other projects (that is, the project we would give up last) – then its whole world will collapse like a house of cards. (See also the analogy from Gestalt psychology that Sartre uses to argue for Heidegger's same point in Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 469–70.) As this suggests, Heidegger is committed to a robust neo-Kierkegaardian notion of a unified self, not a late-modern fractured self whose identity transforms from one context to the next as it seeks to optimally respond to the shifting demands of its life with maximal flexibility and efficiency (as our technological age of *enframing* increasingly challenges us to do). At any rate, Heidegger seems right that the collapse of our defining projects can easily paralyze our peripheral projects, making us feel like our world has ended (whereas the collapse of peripheral projects will probably only completely paralyze the most neurotic of individuals). (See also n. 72.)

[58] Macquarrie and Robinson render this line more telegraphically (and leave out the important word in brackets, see n. 37): "[W]hen Dasein [first or really, *erst*] dies – and even when it dies authentically – it does not have to do so with an experience of its factical demising, or in such an experience" (BT 291/SZ 247). What is nice about this translation is that their "does not have to" clearly implies *but can*. Death can take place without demise, but the two can at least partly coincide and, by all appearances, will if one is conscious when one demises and one's demise is not too sudden. In such cases, it seems to me that demise and death will at least temporarily coincide in the experience of terminal world-collapse. (But see also n. 46.)

repeated enduring of existential death, to which we will return) requires us to undergo the *terminal* world-collapse of demise. (This is fortunate for phenomenology, because if experiencing "death" in Heidegger's sense required us to experience the permanent foreclosure of our intelligible worlds in demise, then we would have to write our phenomenologies of death from beyond the grave, by séance or Ouija board!)[59]

Heidegger's distinctive contribution here – that we do not need to experience our mortal demise in order to "first or really die" existentially – is so contrary to our commonsensical notions of death that most traditional readers of *Being and Time* seem simply to repress and ignore it; for it suggests that what Heidegger calls "death" is in fact something we can live through. Indeed, despite the forceful protestations of Hoffman and the first camp (described earlier), Heidegger himself is quite clear that existential death does not require mortal demise, our ultimately paradoxical experience of the "event" of the end of our lives (BT 284/SZ 240). Instead, as *Being and Time* plainly states: "Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is" (BT 289/SZ 245).[60] In other words, undergoing the phenomenon of existential "death" discloses and designates a fundamental modality of existence that is ordinarily filled-in – and so covered over – by our everyday worldly experience (as we will see in detail in Section 1.4).

To help accustom his audience to this strange use of the word "death," Heidegger immediately quotes a famous line from the Christian mystic, Jakob Böhme (1575–1624): "As soon as a human being comes to life [*zum Leben kommt*], he is at once old enough to die" (BT 289/SZ 245). Stambaugh translates this important quotation as follows: "As soon as a human being is born, he is old enough to die right away" (BTS 228), but that is a bit misleading

[59] The distinction between the *ends* involved in death and demise, put another way, is that the first-person phenomenology of demise – of terminal world-collapse – leaves no phenomenological record. We might be able to *witness* the terminal collapse of our worlds (Epicurean paradoxes notwithstanding), but we Dasein (or being-here) cannot subsequently bear witness to the "final moment" of our lives, since we will no longer *be here* to do so. (However far we might go into demise, as it were, there is ultimately no phenomenological testimony of what it is like to *be demised*. For, there is nothing that being demised is like, as far as we can tell; being demised is not an *end* at which we Dasein can be here. [On the worry that this entails atheism, see n. 49.]) The search for some intelligible position beyond demise from which to narrate its entire content (*up to and including what it is like to be demised*) probably helps explain the interest in (so-called) "near death experiences," which are really (in Heidegger's terms) *near-demise experiences*. My own favorite example from a neighboring genre (of these experiences on the verge of *nothing*, in Heidegger's dual sense) can be found in Yoel Hoffman's wonderful collection, Yoel Hoffman, *Japanese Death Poems: Written by Zen Monks and Haiku Poets on the Verge of Death* (Rutland, Vermont: Tuttle, 1986), which contains such gems as the fourteenth-century Giun's final lines: "The sky now cracks and falls / The earth cleaves open— / In the heart of the fire / Lies a hidden spring" (98).

[60] See also: "Dasein is dying, factically and indeed constantly, as long as it has not yet come to its demise" (BT 303/SZ 259). Or, as Heidegger wrote in 1925, "I myself am my death precisely when I live" (BH 263; see also Chapter 3).

because Heidegger is not using Böhme to make the morbid suggestion that newborns can die in a way that late-term fetuses cannot. Instead of being born biologically, Böhme's "coming to life" means *entering into the life of the spirit* (or becoming aware of oneself as existing before God, that is, as this particular individual). Heidegger is thus suggesting that one is capable of experiencing the collapse of one's intelligible world as soon as one *has* such a world to collapse, that is, as soon as one has come to embody an existential stand on oneself and thereby become a full-fledged Dasein (which is something a newborn infant has yet to do). As this reference to Böhme indicates, Heidegger's conception of existential death is influenced by the idea of "dying with Christ" or "dying to the world" long familiar to Pauline Christianity (in which, in the archetypal myth of spiritual *conversion*, Saul must *die* to his defining identity as a zealous persecutor of Christians in order to be *reborn* as Paul, the sainted evangelist of Christian faith).[61] Kierkegaard elaborates and describes this same spiritual passage through despair philosophically in *The Sickness Unto Death*. The basic point, *The Sickness Unto Death* explains, is that "in the Christian understanding, *death is itself a passing into life*."[62] To anyone familiar with Kierkegaard's brilliant text (as Heidegger was), it is clear that *Being and Time*'s phenomenology of existential death seeks to secularize the mystical Christian idea that, in order for one to be born truly into the life of the spirit, one must first die to the material

[61] Here, of course, Paul takes himself to be following in the spiritual footsteps of Christ. As Böhme describes his vision of spiritual death and rebirth, Christ's resurrection "is the original of the eternal death or devoration [that is, the *devouring* of the preceding life]; and in this devoration is the highest arcanum or secret, for the true essential lively spirit and understanding proceedeth out of this devoration, and maketh another beginning" (Jakob Böhme, *Mysterium Magnum*, trans. by John Sparrow [San Rafael, CA: Hermetica, 2007 [original 1623]], 15). Such spiritual death and rebirth is thus the "highest secret" of Böhme's *Great Mystery*, and thus a central teaching of Christian mysticism. In so far as this mystery describes a death and rebirth *within life*, Christian mysticism can be thought of as already moving toward phenomenology. (In 1940, Heidegger emphasizes that such a *secularization* of Christian wisdom was not simply a translation of other-worldly myths into the terms of a preexisting secular world; rather, this translation of Christian insights into "this worldly" wisdom helped historically to create and expand the very secular world we now take for granted as having been there all along. (See N4 100/NII 146; cf. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2007], part 1.)

[62] (See Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. A. Hannay [London: Penguin Books, 2004], 47, my emphasis.) As I showed in Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, ch. 4, there is also a structurally analogous conversion narrative in Plato's famous parable of the cave, at least as Heidegger understands and elaborates it. Heidegger's vision of authenticity as entailing a death and rebirth of the self is thus influenced by both the deepest Christian and Greek traditions (as well as by his own personal experience, as I will show in *Heidegger: A Philosophical Biography*).

world – so that one can be *reborn* to this world in a way that will unify the spiritual and material aspects of the self.[63]

Indeed, the influence of Kierkegaard on Heidegger's thinking about death is profound and important. According to the view Kierkegaard (or, more precisely, his spiritually elevated pseudonym, "Anti-Climacus") presents in *The Sickness Unto Death*, when we acknowledge and confront our own despair, we are led to abandon our familiar, everyday self, "the fully clothed self of immediacy" that is constituted by all our worldly "projects." This seemingly disastrous loss of our "actual self" turns out to be our salvation, however, because when despair alienates us from the world of our ordinary projects, we discover that what survives this expulsion from the world is our true or "infinite" self. This infinite self, the "naked and abstract" self at our volitional core, is then able explicitly to repossess its "actual self," the world of its immediate projects, from the perspective it discovers in that very expulsion from the world.[64]

There are significant differences between Kierkegaard's profoundly religious and Heidegger's rigorously phenomenological and thus thoroughly secularized versions of conversion. Grasped in their broad outlines, however, there can be no mistaking the momentous influence on *Being and Time* of Kierkegaard's view that confronting the despair intrinsic to the structure of the self can allow us to pass through a kind of salvific death and rebirth to the public world. It is thus not surprising that Heidegger's notoriously ambivalent acknowledgments of Kierkegaard in *Being and Time* should be so colored by (what Bloom called) "the anxiety of influence" (which leads us to overemphasize our differences from those who shape us most deeply) because Kierkegaard's religious view provides the obvious philosophical prototype for Heidegger's secularized conversion narrative. Kierkegaard paved the way for Heidegger's phenomenological account of the how confronting our inescapable anxiety can allow us to turn away from the world, break its grip on us (in death), so that we can turn back to the world (in resoluteness), and thereby gain (or regain) our grip on the world – which is precisely Heidegger's vision of how Dasein transitions from inauthenticity to authenticity (however temporarily), as we will see in Section 1.4.[65]

[63] As White and others have observed, Heidegger's notion of "being toward death" (*Sein zum Todes*) seems deliberately to echo the title of *The Sickness Unto Death* in its German translation (*Krankheit zum Todes*); see White, *Time and Death*, 61. As White also rightly suggests (60), *The Sickness Unto Death* advances the view that "in 'Christian terminology,' the word 'death' means 'spiritual wretchedness,' not physical dying."

[64] "This self, naked and abstract, in contrast to the fully clothed self of immediacy, is the first form of the infinite self and the progressive impulse in the entire process through which a self infinitely takes possession of its actual self along with its difficulties and advantages" (Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 86).

[65] Interestingly, Kierkegaard's version of conversion seems to leave the world just as it was (as if "rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar's"), whereas Heidegger's core self (the *solus*

In other words, Kierkegaard's view that it is necessary to confront one's own despair and so pass through such spiritual death in order to "become oneself" clearly had a formative impact on what I shall characterize (in Chapter 4) as Heidegger's *perfectionist* account of "how we become what we are."[66] The crucial point for us here is that recognizing Kierkegaard's subterranean but unmistakable influence on Heidegger's thinking helps us to see that Heidegger too conceives of death as something we can live through.[67] So, with Böhme and Kierkegaard having primed the pump, let us delve more deeply into our main question: What exactly does Heidegger mean to designate by the phenomenon of "death" in *Being and Time?* In what sense can Dasein live through such death, and what role does doing so play in *Being and Time*? Why, specifically, does Heidegger say not only that "Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is" but, also (repeatedly, and much more famously), that: "Death is the possibility of the ultimate [in the sense of *quintessential*] impossibility of Dasein [*schlechthinnigen Daseinsunmöglichkeit*]" (BT 294/SZ 250) – that is, more clearly translated, "the possibility of Dasein's impossibility *par excellence*"?

1.4 Death as the Possibility of Dasein's Impossibility Par Excellence

We still need to know what exactly Heidegger means by *possibility* (and hence *impossibility*), so that we can understand what phenomenon he is designating when he calls *death* "the possibility of Dasein's impossibility *par excellence*" (BT 294/SZ 250). How are we to understand the phenomenon – of Dasein's being at its own distinctive *end* (let us recall) – that *Being and Time* repeatedly characterizes as the possibility of Dasein's quintessential or defining impossibility? As *Being and Time* famously maintains, "Higher than actuality stands *possibility*" (BT 63/SZ 38). The sense of "possibility" celebrated here is not

ipse) can (but, *pace* White, need not) choose quite different projects, and so a quite different world, for itself. Sartre notoriously exaggerates this difference even further in his appropriations of Heidegger (which, like Heidegger's appropriations of Kierkegaard, are similarly creative and, when not explicitly critical, typically underacknowledged). Such debts are not terribly important *philosophically* (as I argued in Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*), unless noticing them can help us to better understand their views (but cf. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997]).

[66] On Heidegger's (Plato-influenced) thinking of such a spiritual transformation as the very heart of a genuinely philosophical education (and the pedagogical method whereby we can transcend the nihilism of technological enframing), see Chapter 4 (as well as Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, ch. 4 and "Heidegger's Mature Vision of Ontological Education, or: How We Become What We Are," *Inquiry*, 44:3 [2001], 243–68).

[67] Like Heidegger, moreover, Kierkegaard also uses paradox to distinguish what he means by *death* from our ordinary use of the term – for example, when Anti-Climacus tells readers that "to die death itself means to live to experience dying" (Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 48).

"logical possibility," mere alternatives arrayed in a conceptual space, but rather *existential possibility*, "being-possible" (*Möglichsein*), which is for Heidegger "the most primordial and ultimately positive way in which Dasein is characterized ontologically" (BT 183/SZ 143–4).[68] As the always specific and practical "way in which Dasein is in every case . . . what it can be" (ibid.), our existential possibilities are what we *forge ahead* into: the roles, identities, and commitments that shape and circumscribe our comportmental navigation of our lived environments. Dasein *exists* – *that* is, "stands out" (*ek-sistere*) into intelligibility in a meaningful way – through such a charting of "live options," choices that matter and are made salient to us by these fundamental life-projects, this sense of self embodied and reflected in our practical worlds.

It is important to recognize that Heidegger subtly distinguishes between our "being-possible" (*Möglichsein*) and our "ability-to-be" (*Seinkönnen*) in order to mark a crucial difference between these life-*projects*, on the one hand, and our *projecting* ourselves into those life-projects, on the other. Dasein cannot *be* something the way a physical object like a chair can be a chair (in a continuous substantive identity with itself); instead, Dasein "*is* what it becomes" (BT 186/SZ 145). That is, we can only "be" something – a teacher, father, husband, brother, friend, environmentalist, bicyclist, citizen – by continuing to *become* that, repeatedly "projecting" or pressing ahead existentially into that "project" (*Entwurf*) or practical identity as we go about our lives.[69] This explains why Heidegger writes that "Dasein, as being-possible [*Möglichsein*], *is* existentially that which, in its ability-to-be [*Seinkönnen*], it is *not yet*" (BT 185–6/SZ 145). For example, when I project into the project of being a teacher (by preparing for and teaching a class, meeting with students, carefully responding to their work, answering their emails, and so on), that is my way of *being* a teacher. In Heidegger's terms of art, I *am* that teacher (as the "being-possible" of my defining *life-projects*) which I am thereby *becoming* (in the "ability-to-be"

[68] As Guignon puts it: "What I *am* at the most basic level is a reaching forward into possibilities, not an actualizing of possibilities." (See Charles Guignon, "Heidegger and Kierkegaard on Death: The Existentiell and the Existential," in *Kierkegaard and Death*, ed. by P. Stokes and A. Buben [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011], 197.) In existential death, this "reaching forward" (or "projecting," the term Heidegger and I most often employ) can *fail* to reach into our projects, constituting an experience in which this existential reach that fundamentally defines us completely exceeds our actual worldly grasp (to redeploy Guignon's terms), thereby helping us grasp that reaching out itself.

[69] Because "the being of the here" ("*das Sein des Da*" that defines "Dasein") "receives its constitution through the understanding and its character as projection, it [Dasein] *is* what it becomes" (BT 186/SZ 145). Existential death, we will see, is primarily described as a collapse of the understanding as the existential structure of projecting into projects (though it will also be crucial to recognize that, since the three existential structures are inextricably entwined, the phenomenon death discloses is also felt via our affective attunement as *Angst* and articulated through our *Rede* as conscience [see n. 6]).

whereby I *project into* those roles, goals, and embodied ways of understanding my own being).[70]

Now, usually we project ourselves into our life-projects by skilfully navigating, rather than theoretically deliberating over, the live-options these projects implicitly delimit and render salient for us – except in cases when something goes wrong or breaks down, and we become explicitly aware of what we were previously trying to do. Heidegger thinks it is possible, however, for all of our projects to break down simultaneously; indeed, this is precisely what he thinks will happen to anyone who endures a true confrontation with their existential *Angst*. Rather than acknowledging and confronting the underlying *Angst* that subtly accompanies the thought of death throughout our lives, Heidegger points out, we normally flee this "anxiety" (or "dread") by seeking to adopt *das Man*'s "indifferent tranquillity as to the 'fact' that one dies" (telling ourselves, for instance, that "everyone dies, of course, some day," by which we really try to assure ourselves "but not me, not today"). This repression transforms the existential anxiety that continually accompanies us "into fear in the face of an oncoming event" (namely, *demise*), an event we thereby push off as far as possible into the distant future (BT 298/SZ 254) – as if death could thereby be safely cordoned off from our own existing world. But if we can confront and endure our existential anxiety instead of seeking to deny and tranquillize it (by adopting such common strategies as "hurrying" and "keeping busy"),[71] then it becomes possible, *Being and Time* suggests, for us to trace this baseline anxiety back to its source in our basic "uncanniness" (or *Unheimlichkeit*), the fundamental existential *homelessness* that follows from the fact that there is no life-project any of us can ever finally be at home in, because there is ultimately nothing about the ontological structure of the self that could tell us what specifically we should do with our lives. There is, in other words, no one correct answer about what to do when facing any of the important existential cross-roads in our lives, and insofar as we had been living with the naïve sense that we were indeed doing the right thing simply by doing "what one does" (that is, just following along with *das Man*, the anonymous "anyone"), then recognizing the contingency of our life-defining choices is likely to prove at least temporarily paralysing.[72]

[70] Heidegger's idea that *our being is a becoming* means that, through our existence-defining projecting into projects, we repeatedly change and grow in our very ways of being what we are, sometimes even dying to our defining projects, whether temporarily or permanently (as we shall see in Chapter 4).

[71] Here Heidegger nicely begins to anticipate that widespread and multivalent anxiety-avoidance behavior that has metastasized technologically into our current cultural addiction to micro-dosing miniscule amounts of dopamine via the unsteady drip of the new, endlessly arriving via social media, "the news," etc.

[72] Like Kierkegaard, who famously proclaimed that "purity of the heart is to will one thing" and so believed he had to choose between *either* being a philosopher *or* a husband,

As Heidegger puts it, when we confront our existential *Angst* (that is, when we "pursue what such moods disclose and . . . allow ourselves to confront what has been disclosed" through them [BT 173/SZ 135]), we can come to recognize our essential *Unheimlichkeit*, that is, our "not being at home" in the world, the fundamental lack of fit between our underlying existential projecting and the specific existentiell (or particular individual) worldly projects in terms of which we each flesh out our existence and so give shape to our worlds. (Here again we can see the influence of *The Sickness Unto Death*, which insists on the radical heterogeneity of our "naked and abstract" self before God and our "fully clothed" self of worldly immediacy.[73] More generally, Heidegger's insistence on Dasein's essential "uncanniness" or "not-being-at-home" in the world seems to be his way of secularizing – and so preserving the core phenomenological insight contained in – the Christian idea that we are *in* but not *of* the world.) Heidegger's basic idea here is that there can be no seamless fit between Dasein's existing and the projects that allow us to make

Heidegger too thinks Dasein is implicitly guided (at least in times of great difficulty, when we become like a cutter ship seeking to break through an ice-field) by a singular life-project that all our other projects ultimately serve. (*Being and Time*'s terminology for this life-defining project is Dasein's "ultimate for-the-sake-of-which.") In the case of a self structured according to such a quasi-teleological hierarchy of life-projects, it is not unreasonable to think that if our leading life-project collapses, then all our other projects that exist primarily to support it will come cascading down in its wake, like a house of cards. (This is indeed what happened to Heidegger when he experienced the existential death of what had been his defining life-project of becoming a Jesuit Priest, as I will show in *Heidegger: A Philosophical Biography*). Of course, as Dreyfus often pointed out to his students, we live in a late-modern age too rational and risk-averse to admire this Kierkegaardian ideal, which to us looks like that infamous investment strategy of "putting all your eggs in one basket" – a perilous strategy precisely because it makes it possible for *all one's eggs to break at once* (which here nicely suggests undergoing *existential death*). And yet this is the very mark of Kierkegaardian faith – to see the sword hanging over the head of the beloved and yet risk loving her unreservedly nonetheless – that is, to make just such a risky commitment unconditionally, risking everything and receiving a *meaningful* life in return for this vulnerable but wholehearted commitment, at least for as long as it lasts. (It may be out of fashion today, but Dreyfus makes a strong, Heidegger-inflected case for the thorough secularizability and growing relevance of this Kierkegaardian ideal in Hubert L. Dreyfus, *On the Internet*, 2nd ed. [London: Routledge, 2008].)

[73] Kierkegaard similarly suggests that confronting despair "begins that act of separation in which the self becomes aware of itself as essentially different from the environment and the external world and their effect on it." (See Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 85.) The uncanny "lack of fit" I have in mind between Dasein and its world, to develop the Kierkegaardian metaphor, is a bit like the blob trying to find clothing off the rack that fits, or like trying to fit a water-balloon into a keyhole. But the blob or water-balloon here is what Heidegger describes phenomenologically as the positive *nothingness* of the self, an existing that *is* always more than it can express in worldly terms, as we shall see. (I thank an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to clarify this difficult but crucial point.)

sense of our existing by bestowing our being-here with the shape and content of specific worldly projects (teacher, student, friend, father, brother, citizen), and thus no one right answer to the question of what we should do with our lives. (Our anxiety stems from and so can help reveal this fact that there is no one correct answer about *what* projects to project ourselves into, nor about *how* to project ourselves into whatever projects we have thereby chosen to understand ourselves in terms of.)

Our sense of *uncanniness* or "not-being-at-home" in the world thus derives from and testifies to this anxiety-provoking lack of a fit between Dasein and its world (between, that is, the sheer "projecting" of *existence* as a "standing-out" into intelligibility and the specific worldly projects that shape and circumscribe our existential worlds, rendering these worlds *significant*, as we will see).[74] This means that, insofar as one has been blithely living with an unquestioned sense that one is simply doing what one should be doing with one's life (whether by following the path of least resistance, the guidance of the authority figures in one's life, or the various exemplars our cultures hold up as successful role models to be emulated), confronting one's *Angst* will expose one's fundamental lack of fit with one's practical world and can thereby catalyze the temporary collapse of the life-projects one has been pursuing with a sense of naïve good conscience. Just such a scenario, in which I pursue my anxiety to the point where all my life-projects, foundering on the reef of their own contingency, forfeit their unquestioned inertia and so temporarily break down or collapse – no longer allowing me to project (or "press-ahead") into them and so make sense of myself in their worldly terms – is what Heidegger means by "anticipation" of (or "running-out" toward) death, and it forms the first structural component of *authenticity* understood in its two successive moments as *anticipatory resolution*.[75]

To bootstrap our way into understanding why Heidegger calls death "the possibility of Dasein impossibility *par excellence*," it helps to think, first, of someone whose fundamental life-project was being a teacher (or a priest,

[74] This means, I think, that if one could imagine a Dasein-like being (a kind of android, say) who fit perfectly into its world without leaving any remainder of self (a being for whom one and only one life-project made perfect sense), then this being would not experience any anxiety. Of course, if the world changed, or such a being changed (think, for example, of *Wall-E*), then even such a being could find itself no longer entirely at home in the world (and so subject to existential anxiety).

[75] Heidegger's heroic image of "charging forward into death [*Vorlaufen in den Tod*]" seems to have been drawn from Ernst Jünger's grim yet romantic description of German soldiers charging blindly from the trenches through clouds of poisonous gas meant to cover and aid their *Blitzkrieg* – gas attacks that Heidegger's own "weather service" unit helped plan. (See Ernst Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, trans. by M. Hofmann [New York: Penguin, 2004] and chs. 3 and 4 of Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*. I thank Taylor Carman for originally suggesting this connection to me.)

husband, son, communist, pet owner, or any other identity-defining self-understanding) but who then experiences the catastrophic collapse of this embodied life-project. What is crucial to recognize is that when such world-collapse occurs, we do not instantly forfeit the skills, capacities, and inclinations that this identity previously organized. Instead, in such a situation, we tend to continue projecting ourselves upon an absent project (for a time at least – the time it takes to mourn that project or else replace it, redirecting or abandoning the drives it organized). After that world collapses, we tend to keep pressing blindly ahead (absentmindedly moving to fill the food bowl of a recently deceased pet, for example), even though the project that previously organized this projection is no longer there for us to press-ahead into (since, in this example, one no longer has that pet). Thinking about such a paradoxical (and yet quite common) situation – in which we project ourselves toward a life-project we can no longer project ourselves into – helps us grasp what Heidegger means when he calls death "the possibility of Dasein's *impossibility* par excellence" (that is, the existential impossibility that shows us both what we Dasein essentially are and what "impossibility" most fundamentally means for us, at the very structural core of our existential "being-here"). For when not just one but all of our life-projects break down in what Heidegger calls "anticipation" or "running-out" (*Vorlaufen*) toward death, we experience ourselves as a kind of bare existential projecting without *any* existentiell projects to project ourselves into (and so understand ourselves in terms of). We can thereby come to understand ourselves as, at bottom, a "primordial existential projecting" (BT 379/SZ 330), a brute projecting (or sheer *ek-sisting*) that is more basic than – and independent of – any of the particular projects that usually give our lives content and significance.

To grasp what Heidegger thinks the self ultimately boils down to (in this existential version of Husserl's phenomenological reduction), it is crucial to remember that when my projects all break down or collapse, leaving me without any life-project to project myself into, projection itself does not cease. When my being-possible becomes impossible, I still am; my ability-to-be becomes insubstantial, unable to connect to the world practically, but *not inert*. My projects collapse, and I no longer have a concrete self I can be, but I still *am* this inability-to-be. Heidegger calls this paradoxical condition (of projectless projection) revealed by anticipation "the possibility of Dasein's impossibility," or *death*. In his words:

> Death, as possibility [that is, as something we project ourselves into practically], gives Dasein nothing to be "actualized," nothing which Dasein could itself actually *be*. [I do not experience the messy bed or the coffee beans as things that demand making, for example, because in existential death I can no longer actually project myself into my previous life-guiding project of being a teacher – or whichever practical life-project had previously been my "ultimate for-the-sake-of-which" – so all my

> other subordinate projects, like taking care of my home or preparing coffee for school, no longer solicit my practical engagement.] Death is the possibility of the impossibility of every way of *comporting* oneself toward [*Verhaltens zu*, which in *Being and Time* means *practically engaging with* and thereby relating to] anything, of every [practical or worldly] way of existing. (BT 307, my emphasis/SZ 262)

We can see the phenomenon Heidegger has in mind when we generalize from the case in which one project breaks down to the catastrophic collapse of them all. A student can explicitly encounter his computer, a carpenter her hammer, and a commuter their car as a tool with a specific role to play in an equipmental nexus organized by their self-understanding, precisely when this tool breaks down – when the hard drive crashes the night before a paper is due, the hammer breaks and cannot be fixed or replaced in the middle of a job, or the car breaks down on the way to an important meeting, leaving the commuter stranded by the side of the road. Just so, Dasein can explicitly encounter its structure as the practical embodiment of a self-understanding when its projects all break down in death. Dasein, stranded (as it were) by the global collapse of its practical projects, can come explicitly to recognize itself as, at bottom, not any particular self or life-project but, rather, as a projecting into projects, that is, as *a being who fundamentally takes an engaged stand on its being and is defined by that stand*. Thus, by severing all my practical relations to my world-defining projects, existential death brings the existential structure of my usually implicit and embodied being-in-the-world into focus, allowing me to understand explicitly what usually I am implicitly in my comportmental engagement with things and other people.

Now, among the relatively few who get this far in understanding Heidegger's phenomenological depiction of existential death as a global collapse of my practical being-in-the-world, a fairly common worry is that such a situation is not just extremely rare or unrealistic but, worse, phenomenologically *incoherent*, since (those who advance this objection suppose) such a situation would leave me completely unable even to make sense of the objects surrounding me. Here it is illuminating to see how this objection is based on a subtle but important misreading. The total breakdown of Dasein's being-in-the-world in existential death incapacitates Dasein's "ready-to-hand" (or "hands-on," *zuhanden*) comportmental relations to those networks of equipmental paraphernalia rendered "*significant*" by Dasein's practical world (BT 231/SZ 187); it does not entail a breakdown of our "thematic" or conscious ability to comprehend what entities are as "present-at-hand" (or "on-hand," *vorhanden*) objects (BT 393/SZ 343). So, for example, in the total breakdown of my life-projects in existential death, I can still understand "thematically" (that is, cognitively or representationally) what an alarm clock or an espresso machine is as a "deworlded" *object* (*Gegenstand*) merely *standing* there over *against* me. The real problem is that I cannot "press-ahead" or *project into* any of my usual practical life-projects –

such existential possibilities as being a father or teacher – that would ordinarily make those entities part of my world by endowing them with "significance" (that is, practical relevance for the existential projects I am projecting into, like teacher, father, or homeowner).

As *Being and Time* famously argues (in division one), "ordinarily and usually," the entities that implicitly populate my world have "hands-on" (*zuhanden*) practical "*significance*" as nodal points of engagement in holistically interconnected equipmental nexuses that are implicitly organized by my life-projects. For example, while implicitly projecting into the existential possibility of being a *teacher*, I encounter my bedroom as a quiet place full of useful paraphernalia for sleeping and waking so as to be rested from today's teaching and ready for tomorrow's classes, whereas the "kitchen" shows up as the place full of equipment for preparing the meals or making the coffee I bring with me to school. Deprived of such practical significance in existential death, all such entities become radically "de-worlded" objects – and so merely stand there in their "empty mercilessness" (BT 393/SZ 343), as if their sudden loss of saliency and relevance constituted a silent mockery of my existence as a being who *cares* about its own being. (It is this very same "care" [*Sorge*] that I ordinarily manifest by implicitly taking an embodied stand on what it means to be, a practical stand that discloses entities not as mere *objects* standing over against me but as interconnected nexuses of practical *equipment* implicitly playing some significant role for my projects and thereby soliciting my engagement.)[76]

[76] As Heidegger writes: "The world in which I exist has sunk into insignificance; . . . but this does not mean that in anxiety we experience something like the absence of what is present-at-hand within the world" (BT 392/SZ 343). To briefly address another likely objection here, let me just note that, while it is quite right to point to that Heidegger is describing the phenomenon *anxiety* discloses in some of the passages I draw on here, it is wrong to think that this counts as a telling *objection* to incorporating those insights into my view of *death*. The simple reason for this is that the basic phenomenon Heidegger describes in existential death is *three-sided*, as it were, showing three *inextricably interconnected* and "equiprimordial" aspects, which can nevertheless be analytically articulated in terms of *death*, *anxiety*, and *conscience*. Like any existential phenomenon that discloses Dasein to itself in its inextricably tripartite existential structure, the desolate "*solus ipse* [or self alone]" at Dasein's existential core can be approached through *all three* of Dasein's main existential structures – showing up as *death* when disclosed through the understanding, as *uncanniness* when revealed through our "affective attunement" (or *Befindlichkeit*) of *Angst*, and as *conscience* when encountered through Dasein's "conversance" [or *Rede*]. Dasein's equiprimordial and interconnected tripartite existential structure (along with the similarly interlinked temporal horizons that underlie and condition its existential structure) explains why Heidegger ultimately thinks all three of these existential phenomena *together*, referring, for example, to "anxiety in the face of death" (BT 295/SZ 251), then turning to conscience (which ultimately stems from the *solus ipse*, as we will see at the end of this chapter; see also n. 6 and Chapter 7). (I am grateful to an objection from Mark Wrathall that encouraged me to clarify this point.)

Hence, qualifying his description of Dasein – radically individualized by its confrontation with "anxiety in the face of death" – as a "self alone" (or *solus ipse*), Heidegger distinguishes the existential reduction he is describing from the famous Cartesian reduction of the self to an isolated thing certain only of its own thinking:

> But this existential "solipsism" is so far from transposing an isolated subject thing into the harmless emptiness of a worldless occurring [here "subject thing" is a jab at Descartes' paradoxical conception of the self as a *res cogitans* or "thinking substance"], that what it does is precisely to bring Dasein in an extreme sense face to face with its world as world, and thus face to face with itself as being-in-the-world. (BT 233/SZ 188)

That is, when our worlds collapse in death, we discover ourselves not as a worldless *cogito* (cast out into an empty void of cognitive uncertainty, all objects having dissolved into epistemic uncertainty) but as a "world-hungry" Dasein (as Dreyfus nicely puts it), a "world hunger" we discover explicitly when we find ourselves utterly unable to 'eat' anything – unable, that is, to project into any of the life-projects that ordinarily constitute our worlds (BT 231/SZ 189) – despite our desperate desire to do so.[77] Hence Heidegger's description of this radically individuated "self" of pure "mineness" as "a naked 'that-it-is-*and-has-to-be*'" (BT 173, my emphasis/SZ 134), a being that *must* find a way to go on practically and yet, at least temporarily, cannot.

This strange and dreadful experience of our own *being completely unable* (or *projectless projecting*) explains the phenomenology of existential death as "the possibility of Dasein's impossibility *par excellence*," because it is only through such a collapse of the practical world that we usually are that we first come to *understand* (in Heidegger's primary sense, that is, "stand-under" or encounter for ourselves) the structure of our own being as an existential projecting into worldly projects. Or, to take another example, a student does not usually experience their pen in its implicit worldly significance as an item of equipment they are writing with, in their green notebook, so as to take notes on today's lecture on *Being and Time*, in order to help learn about Heidegger, for the sake of being a good student – until, say, that pen runs out of ink and cannot be replaced in the middle of an illuminating explanation of a difficult and important passage. Similarly, we only *recognize* that we are beings who take such engaged, worldly significance disclosing stands on the meaning of our own being by projecting into life-projects when these projects collapse in existential death.

When we *find ourselves* (pun intended) in this desolate condition – existing as a projectless *solus ipse* deprived of any world of practical life-projects

[77] See Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Foreword" to Carol J. White, in *Time and Death: Heidegger's Analysis of Finitude*, ed. by Mark Ralkowski (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005). See also Steven Crowell's iconoclastic, insightful, and increasingly influential essay, "Subjectivity."

(a world of projects to which we seek desperately to return) – what do we do? Here again Heidegger follows Kierkegaard (and the insight from Christian mysticism portrayed by Dante): *The only way out is through*. (Or as Winston Churchill famously put it: "When you are going through hell, keep going!") By anxiously "running-out" toward death and so embodying this possibility of impossibility par excellence (an embodied existential *possibility* in which we discover what it truly means for our worldly existence to become *impossible*), "Dasein is taken back all the way to its naked uncanniness, and becomes fascinated by it. This fascination, however, not only *takes* Dasein back from its '*worldly*' possibilities, but at the same time *gives* Dasein the possibility of an *authentic* ability-to-be" (BT 394/SZ 344). This idea that anxiously running-out toward death not only radically individuates Dasein but, in so doing, also gives Dasein an authentic ability-to-be brings us back to the point that, for Heidegger, death is something I can live through. (Remember that Heidegger himself stresses the paradox that Dasein lives through its death when he writes, "Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is.") Heidegger's point is that the pure, world-hungry projecting we experience when we are unable to connect to our projects is what is most basic about us. For, this fundamental existential projecting is implicit in all of our ordinary *projecting* into projects, and it also inalienably survives the nonterminal loss of Dasein's any and every particular worldly project.

This is what explains the otherwise puzzling fact that Heidegger often refers to the *projectless projecting* of existential "death" as Dasein's "ownmost ability-to-be" (*eigenste Seinkönnen*); this sheer existential *projecting* is something no Dasein can forfeit so long as it is. Remember that Heidegger distinguishes between our "being-possible" (*Möglichsein*) and our "ability-to-be" (*Seinkönnen*) to mark this crucial difference between our life-*projects*, on the one hand, and our *projecting* ourselves into those life-projects, on the other. Heidegger *frequently* refers to existential "death" in *Being and Time* by calling it Dasein's "ownmost ability-to-be [*eigenste Seinkönnen*]."[78] Why is existential death the "ability-to-be" (that is, the existential *projecting* or pressing-forward) that is *most Dasein's own*? Because existential death phenomenologically discloses that sheer *projecting* or existing (*ek-sisting* as "standing-out" toward a world) that Dasein cannot forfeit without thereby ceasing to be Dasein. Every particular life-project that constitutes our being-possible (*Möglichsein*) can be lost, but this brute projecting or *existing* cannot (so long as we have not demised but are still here as *Dasein*). I thus take Heidegger's frequent use of "Dasein's ownmost ability-to-be" to designate *death* as strong evidence for my phenomenological reconstruction of existential death as *projectless projecting*.

But how, to return to the crucial question, can we "live through" such death? The passage through existential death (and back to the world of

[78] See, for example, SZ 144, 178, 181, 191, 228, 262, 263, 276, 278, 300, 306, 307, and 339.

practical life-projects) is what Heidegger calls "resolve or resoluteness" (*Entschlossenheit*) and it is the *second* part of his full phenomenological account of *authenticity* in its two connected structural moments as *anticipatory resoluteness*. Resoluteness is just as complex a phenomenon as anticipation (or "running-out" into death), and we will explore it in more detail in subsequent chapters. But at its core *resolve* designates Dasein's accomplishment of a reflexive reconnection to the world of projects lost in death, a recovery made possible by the lucid encounter of the self with its own unsinkable core in existential death. On the basis of the insight gained from this radical self-encounter, it becomes possible for us to recover ourselves (from *das Man*'s superficial and homogenizing ways of doing *what one does*) and then reconnect to the practical world we are usually connected to effortlessly and unreflexively. This reconnection turns on our giving up the unreflexive, paralyzing belief that there is a single correct choice to make (about what or how to be), since recognizing that there is no such single correct choice (because there is no sufficiently substantive self to *determine* such a choice) is what gives us the *freedom* to choose among the existential possibilities (the roles, goals, and life-projects) we face as live-options (their full range ordinarily "dimmed-down" by the pervasive conformity of *das Man*), and also what gives us the subsequent "responsibility" for having so chosen (by making us "answerable" for the lives we have thereby made our own).

As Heidegger dramatically puts it:

> If Dasein, by anticipation, lets death become powerful in itself, then, as free for death, Dasein understands itself in its own *greater power*, the power of its finite freedom, so that in this freedom, which "is" only in its having chosen to make such a choice, it can take over the *powerlessness* of abandonment to its having done so, and can thus come to see clearly what in the situation is up to chance [and, correlatively, what is up to Dasein]. (BT 436/SZ 384)

"Resoluteness" (*Entschlossenheit*) is Heidegger's name for such free decisions, by which we recognize that the core of the self, as a projectless projecting, is more powerful than (that is, *survives*) death (the collapse of its projects), and so become capable of "choosing to choose," of making a lucid or deliberate reconnection to the world of our existential projects. The freedom of such lucid or meta-decisions is "finite" because it is always constrained: by Dasein's own *facticity* and *thrownness* (the fundamental fact that each Dasein is, and has to continue to be, as "thrown" into a world that predates and shapes us such that we "always-already" possess a variety of particular talents, cares, and predispositions, an orienting "facticity" that partly constitutes our being and can often be altered piecemeal but not simply thrown off in some Sartrean "radical choice"); by the preexisting concerns of our time and "generation" (to which we cannot but respond in one way or another); by the facts of the specific situation we confront (and which of these facts can be altered, Heidegger

stresses, we cannot fully appreciate until we act and so enter into this situation concretely); as well as by that which remains unpredictable about the future (including the responses of others).[79] Nevertheless, it is by embracing this finitude – giving up our naïve desire for either absolute freedom or a single correct choice between (and within) defining life-projects and instead accepting that our finite freedom always operates against a background of constraint (in which there is usually more than one "right" answer for us, rather than none at all) – that we are able to overcome that paralysis of projects experienced in death. It is thus important that Heidegger increasingly hyphenates "*Ent-schlossenheit*" (literally "un-closedness") to emphasize that the existential "resoluteness" whereby Dasein freely chooses the existential commitments that define it does not entail deciding on a particular course of action ahead of time and obstinately sticking to one's guns come what may but, instead, requires an "openness" whereby one continues to be responsive to the emerging solicitations of, and unpredictable elements in, the particular existential "situation," the full reality of which only the actual decision itself discloses.

In resolve's decisive "moment of insight," Dasein is (like a gestalt switch) set free rather than paralyzed by the contingency and indeterminacy of its choice of projects, and so can project itself into its chosen project in a way that expresses its sense that, although this project is appropriated from a storehouse of publicly

[79] It is that third point that L. A. Paul mainly focuses on in L. A. Paul, *Transformative Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). Paul argues for an extreme view of such future uncertainty, which brings her position closer to that of Sartre or even Derrida (for whom any truly free decision must pass through its own radical undecidability) than Heidegger (see Chapters 6 and 9 and Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death* [Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996]). In Heidegger's view, when we face important existential decisions such as whether to become a parent, it is true that we cannot fully know what that will mean for us unless we do it. But we will in fact have *some sense* of how attractive (or repulsive) such a project is for us in particular (given the "thrown facticity" that always already shapes our own talents, cares, and affective predispositions), so we do not face such decisions from a position of radical ignorance or rational neutrality. (We do not even face the hypothetical decision about whether to choose *immortality* from a position of total ignorance, I argue in Chapter 9, since we can easily imagine how immortality can go terribly wrong, while we cannot convincingly envision how it could possibly go well for us.) Paul, like Derrida, seems to over-correct in response to the type of mistake *one* (as *das Man*) typically makes, which is to blithely assume that important life-decisions are simply obvious or else can be rationally determined ahead of time (or even optimized through some strictly rational calculus). Indeed, that kind of rationalistic confidence is typical of the false "good conscience" we possess (as *das Man*) before recognizing the anxiety-provoking absence of any single correct answers about who or how we should be, that very anxiety which first throws us back upon our *finite* freedom in existential death. From the perspective of the finite freedom of that thrown projecting we are in death, which way to go at the existential cross-roads we come to is *neither* obvious or predetermined and so illusory *nor* merely arbitrary and so relativistic (as explained in n. 56). Instead, our finite but ineliminable margin of freedom is precisely what makes us *answerable* for what and how we ourselves decide to do and be.

intelligible roles inherited from the tradition, it nevertheless matters that this particular role has been chosen by this particular Dasein and updated, *via* a "reciprocative rejoinder" (BT 438/SZ 386), so as, ideally, to develop its particular ontic and factical aptitudes and predispositions as these intersect with the pressing needs of its time and "generation," doing so in a way that is uniquely this Dasein's own even as it reaches back into that public world and thereby connects with the defining projects of other Dasein. (Indeed, *Being and Time* suggests, existential death encourages us to find our own ways of aligning our defining existential projects with the needs of a larger community, our "generation," so that the practical projects we project into and so understand ourselves in terms of do not remain strictly individual and hence cease to be with our own eventual demise (BT 308/SZ 263–4). For, insofar as the existential projects we understand ourselves in terms of can survive our demise by living on in the existential projects of those who survive us, our own demise loses some of its fearsomeness, as we will see.)[80]

Instead of simply taking over our projects from *das Man* (by going with the flow, following the path of least resistance, or simply doing "what one should do"), it thus becomes possible, through resolve, to take over a project reflexively (whether lucidly or explicitly), and so to reappropriate oneself (taking or retaking *ownership* of our own existence), thereby "becoming what we are" by breaking the previously unnoticed grip arbitrarily exerted upon us by *das Man*'s ubiquitous norms of social propriety, its pre- and proscriptions on *what one does and how one should do it*.[81] In sum, then, "authenticity or ownedness [*Eigentlichkeit*]," as *anticipatory resoluteness*, names this double movement in which the world lost in anticipating or running-out into death is regained in resolve, a (literally) revolutionary movement by which we are involuntarily turned away from the world and then voluntarily turn back to it, in which the grip of the world upon us is broken in order that we may thereby gain (or regain) our grip on this world.

1.5 Heidegger's Phenomenological Bridge from Demise to Death: Formal Indication

With this detailed overview in place, let us return to the specific question of how the existential phenomenon Heidegger calls "death" is *both related to and distinguished from* our ordinary notion of "demise." By "death," we have seen,

[80] See also n. 46.

[81] (I develop this line of thinking much further in Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, as well as in subsequent chapters here.) Heidegger's understanding of "finite freedom" is bolstered by Bernard Williams's suggestive speculation concerning the roots of the very idea of "liberty," viz., that "it is a plausible guess at a human universal that people resent being, as they see it, arbitrarily pushed around by others." (See Bernard Williams, "Liberalism and Loss," in *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, ed. by Mark Lilla, Ronald Dworkin, and Robert B. Silvers [New York: New York Review of Books, 2001], 93.)

Heidegger means the experience of existential world-collapse that first occurs when we confront the ineliminable anxiety that stems from the basic lack of fit between Dasein and its world, an anxiety that emerges from the uncanny fact that there is nothing about the structure of the self that can tell us what specifically to do with our lives. By "dying," I have suggested, Heidegger means the mere *projecting*, *disclosing*, or *ek-sisting* ("standing-out") that we lucidly experience when our projects collapse in death (and we encounter ourselves as a projectless projecting). By "genuinely or authentically dying," let me now suggest, he means the *explicit* experience of undergoing such world-collapse and thereby coming to understand ourselves phenomenologically as, at bottom, a mere projecting, that is ("ordinarily and usually"), a *projecting* into projects, a fundamental existential projecting that survives even the (non-terminal) global collapse of the worldly projects that normally constitute and organize our being-here.[82]

If this is right, then (to come back to passage D1 for a final time) Heidegger's claim that "Dasein can demise only as long as it is dies" must also mean that only so long as one is dying, that is, simply projecting, existing, or disclosing at all, can one demise, that is, project into, disclose, or move toward the terminal collapse of one's world. Indeed, we can move *toward* that end of the being that we are in *demise* only so far as we are capable of experiencing that end of our own distinctive being (as a practical being-in-the-world) in the "finite existing" of *death's* projectless projecting. It is thus existential death that lets us experience that distinctive *end* of our own being – that "being here" at an end of our being-in-the-world – which we can only move asymptotically *toward* in demise (at least as far as we can tell phenomenologically, confined as we are in our experience to this side of life's "great beyond").

We have been driven to such an initially strange view of what Heidegger means by "death" by the fact that Heidegger claims not only that we can "die" in his existential sense without having to undergo mortal demise but also, conversely, that most human beings reach their demise without ever undergoing his kind of "death." This functional independence of death from demise (that is,

[82] In "authentic [or *genuine*] death" (Heidegger's potentially misleading name for undergoing an experience with the intention of checking one's phenomenological account of it), I explicitly *repeat* the experience I have previously undergone lucidly (in death); that is, I explicitly project myself into my own brute projecting and (by "enduring" this experience of existential death) I not only come to exist my own existing or become my own becoming but can also come to disclose the temporal horizons conditioning my existence at the very deepest level phenomenology is capable of uncovering. (I explore this difficult view of Heidegger's in the final section of this chapter.) See, for example, §61, where Heidegger rhetorically asks: "What if resoluteness . . . should bring itself into its authenticity only when it projects itself . . . upon the uttermost possibility which lies ahead of Dasein's every factical ability-to-be [viz., the possibility of our impossibility, or death]?" (BT 349/SZ 302). Such "authentic or genuine dying" is thus something one needs to undergo (again) and endure if one is seeking phenomenologically to describe (or check one's own or someone else's previous description of) what exactly the experience of world-collapse discloses about the structure of the selves that we are.

the fact we can die without demising and demise without dying) justifies distinguishing the two phenomena in even a non-commonsensical way, as Blattner, Haugeland, and White have long done well to argue against numerous critics who, like Hoffman, simply cannot accept that Heidegger would be so confusing as to use the word "death" to refer to something we can live through. This is precisely what Heidegger is doing, however, thereby generating the almost inevitable confusion experienced by the legion of readers who enter his hermeneutic circle already armed with the commonsensical (and yet nonetheless false) conviction that "death" *must* mean demise, such that when Heidegger writes about "death," he must surely be describing the phenomenon we colloquially (and euphemistically) call "kicking the bucket," "taking a dirt nap," "buying the farm" (as if finally making good on our "*mort-gage*," our *promise* to demise), or simply "passing away." As we have seen, however, he is not, and Heidegger is quite explicit that his "existential analysis" of such phenomena as Dasein's death "constantly has the character of doing violence [*Gewaltsamkeit*]" to "the everyday way in which Dasein is interpreted" (BT 359/SZ 311). The goal of this acknowledged hermeneutic "violence" (or "forcing-open") is to discover the constitutive ontological structures that underlie and condition our "everyday" interpretations, everyday views that cover over and obscure these structures and so close them off from our understanding. It is thus not to sound radical, different, or original that Heidegger's phenomenological interpretations do "violence" to our ordinary ways of interpreting phenomena like death; instead, that hermeneutic violence results from *Being and Time*'s deeper goal of "*freeing*" the "undisguised" ontological truth of phenomena like death from their concealment beneath our widespread but superficial and confused ways of understanding their meaning (BT 360/SZ 313).

At the same time, however, rightly insisting on the difference between existential death and mortal demise should not lead us to err in the opposite direction (as Haugeland and White clearly do), prying death and demise so far apart that they entirely overlook the crucial interconnections linking the two phenomena together.[83] For, I now want to show, demise and death remain intimately related, of methodological necessity, and these connections are what rightly generate the undeniable *existential pathos* that has led generations of readers to expect to find a discourse about the ontic event of demise (or kicking the bucket) in Heidegger's ontological analysis of death as the type of end most proper to and distinctive of Dasein's being.

We can begin to understand the crucial connection between death and demise if we notice that the six structural characteristics that "define" Heidegger's "full existential-ontological conception of death" – namely, that

[83] Haugeland asserts that: "What is important about these ["demise and perishing"] is *only* that neither is to be identified with death, *existentially* conceived." See Haugeland, "Truth and Finitude," 66 (first emphasis mine). Although I think Haugeland is wrong on this important point, many of his other observations about death remain insightful and suggestive.

"*death, as* [1] *the end of Dasein, is* [2] *Dasein's ownmost,* [3] *non-relational,* [4] *certain and* [5] *as such indefinite, and* [6] *non-surpassable possibility*" (BT 303/SZ 258–9) – are all drawn from a formal analysis of *demise*. This, I submit, is no accident but rather the deliberate result of Heidegger's phenomenological method. The fulcrum of Heidegger's broader method of *phenomenological attestation* is what he calls "formal indication"; formal indication is the pivot that allows Heidegger to move from the ontic to the ontological level of phenomenological analysis (as he does, for example, with ontic and ontological guilt, ontic and ontological conscience, demise and death, and time and temporality). In a formal indication, Heidegger explains, "The empty content, viewed with respect to the structure of its meaning [*das leer Gehaltliche in seiner Sinnstruktur*], is at the same time that which indicates the direction of its fulfilling enactment [*die Vollzugsrichtung*]" (PIA 26/GA 61 33).[84] In other words, "formal indication" enables Heidegger to extract from the ontic phenomenon under consideration only its formal *structures*, which he then fleshes out in quite different senses in his analysis of the corresponding ontological phenomenon (BT 362/SZ 314–5). We then have to project ourselves into this ontological phenomenon in order to be able to understand (in this "fulfilling enactment") both (1) the ontological phenomenon underlying our ordinary ontic and existentiell experience and (2) how that ontological phenomenon actually conditions that ontic one (which ordinarily covers it over and so obscures it from view).

When Heidegger deploys formal indication in *Being and Time* (as he does to describe the formal structures of our ordinary understanding of demise),

[84] (These lectures intended to "initiate" students into the methods of "phenomenological research" are from 1921 to 1922.) As Karin de Boer recognizes, "Heidegger emphasizes that the formal indication, despite its formal character, must *intimate something* about the concrete possibilities that inhere in the concept." (Karin De Boer, *Thinking in the Light of Time: Heidegger's Encounter with Hegel* [Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000], 88, my emphasis, see also 91.) Theodore Kisiel even speculates (a bit wishfully, in my view) that: "Formal indication, as hermeneutic phenomenology's guiding method ... would have become a main theme of the [unwritten] third division" of *Being and Time*. (Theodore Kisiel, "The Demise of *Being and Time: 1927–1930*," in *Heidegger's Being and Time: Critical Essays*, ed. by Richard Polt [Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005], 192.) Kisiel also points to the connection between formal indication as a method and what I call Heidegger's *perfectionism* (see Chapter 4), quoting Heidegger's 1929–30 view that: "The meaning content of these [formally indicating] concepts [and here Heidegger mentions "death," *Tod*, as his first example!] does not directly intend or express what they refer to, but only gives an indication, a pointer to the fact that anyone who seeks to understand is called upon by this conceptual context *to undertake a transformation of themselves in their Dasein*." (See GA 29/30: 428–30; quoted by Kisiel, ibid., 208, my emphasis.) Using formal indication to pass from the ontic to the ontological level of analysis thus requires us to practice existential phenomenology ourselves, moving back-and-forth from the ontic (and existentiell) and ontological (and existential) levels in a way that first points us from the ontic and existentiell structures to the ontological and existential ones, which we must enact and experience for ourselves, and then brings us back, *transformatively*, to the ontic and existentiell level of our ordinary lives (as I shall now show).

doing so gives us "a non-binding *formal indicator* of something that, in its actual phenomenal context of being, may perhaps reveal itself [*enthüllt*, that is, stand fully revealed only when we encounter the phenomenon for ourselves] as being the 'opposite'" (BT 152/SZ 116) – the opposite, that is, of what we will at first naturally assume if we fall into "the trap of starting with the givenness of Dasein and its obvious self-interpretation" (BT 151/SZ 116). Whether the phenomenon initially indicated in its formal structures is selfhood, death, or guilt, we must thus beware of simply relying on the seeming obviousness of our ordinary understanding of it and instead pay maximally unbiased attention to how the phenomenon actually discloses itself to us when we encounter it for ourselves, rather than relying on the hearsay of received wisdom, from which we must nevertheless begin (a common sense view to which the ontological interpretation does that aforementioned hermeneutic "violence" that breaks it open as it frees the deepest structures that condition it).

By providing a bridge from the ontic to the ontological in this way, formal indication allows Heidegger to present an ontological interpretation that is not simply arbitrary, groundless, or idiosyncratic. On the contrary, Heidegger's ontological interpretations may be judged compelling only insofar as we too can experience the phenomenon in a way that enables us to recognize and personally attest that this allegedly more basic but previously unnoticed ontological phenomenon Heidegger describes does indeed condition our own experience of the everyday ontic phenomenon with which we are all familiar and from which the formal features of the more fundamental ontological phenomenon are first drawn.[85] Like Aristotle, who thought philosophy should begin by surveying the expert wisdom of the past that is preserved in common sense, Heidegger maintains that "All ontological investigations of such phenomena as guilt, conscience, and death must start with what the everyday interpretation of Dasein 'says' about them" (BT 326/SZ 281).

Heidegger's phenomenological attestation of *death* thus begins with an analysis of our everyday understanding of *demise*. After isolating and "formally indicating" the most significant structural characteristics of the ordinary ontic phenomenon of demise (formal structures which, when we project ourselves into them, we discover to have quite different meanings), Heidegger then seeks to flesh out these structural characteristics, individually and collectively, in a way that will reveal the heretofore unnoticed ontological phenomenon of "death" that *conditions* the phenomenon of ordinary ontic demise. I try to summarize this rather complex analysis in the following table:

[85] I shall suggest at the end that the force of such an ontological and existential recognition comes from the way that it simultaneously illuminates and transforms our ordinary ontic and *existentiell* experience, that is, our everyday individual experience of the being (or meaning) of that entity which is being formally indicated – in this case, *death*. (See also n. 84.)

Shared formal structures	Demise (ontic)	Death (ontological)
1. End	In demise, I experience the terminal collapse of my world. But this experience is ultimately paradoxical, because I do not live through demise to be there at the end.	Death is the stark phenomenon revealed by a global collapse of my worldly projects, in which, unable to project myself into the projects that ordinarily give my world significance, I experience myself as a mere *projecting*. I do live through death (constantly in my ordinary *projecting* into projects, repeatedly in authentic death – a periodic re-confrontation with the inauthentic one-self I continually accrue, by which I can repossess myself and also subsequently verify my description of the phenomenon).
2. Ownmost	No one can take demise away from me, in the sense that no one can demise in my place. (Even if someone sacrifices his or her own life for me, I still find myself faced with my own demise at the end of my life.)	My very being is at issue in death. When my worldly projects break down in existential death, I can experience myself (lucidly in death or explicitly in genuine or authentic death) as a being whose world is made significant by *projecting* into projects. In death, I discover this *projecting* (existing, or *disclosing*) as the most basic aspect of my self (as "stronger than death"), for I recognize that this projecting can survive the collapse of any and all of my particular projects.
3. Non-relational	No one else can directly experience my demise with me; I demise alone.[1]	In death, I encounter myself as having to project into projects, and thereby choose myself, of my own resources, experiencing the fact that no one else can do this for me. In this moment (of world-collapse), I am radically individuated (as a *solus ipse* or "self alone").
4. Certain	Demise is empirically certain: We know no exceptions to the proposition that "all men are	Death is transcendentally or ontologically certain. The projecting it reveals as my ownmost self is the baseline horizon of all experience, and experiencing this projectless

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(*cont.*)

Shared formal structures	Demise (ontic)	Death (ontological)
	mortal." *Das Man* reduces this to the certainty that *one dies* (someday), or that *we all die* (but not me, not now).	projecting supplies us with the very benchmark of phenomenological certainty. (All worldly significance requires projecting into projects, which in turn presupposes mere projection; so, phenomenologically, nothing could be more certain.)[2]
(and as such)	(and, experienced as the empirical certainty that *one dies* (someday), demise takes on the inevitability of)	(and, recognizing death's sheer *projecting* as the greatest certainty Dasein can ever encounter), we also experience
5. Indefinite[3]	An impending event ("indefinite as to its 'when'"). The *imminence* of demise (in its unpredictable and often sudden arrival) is obscured by the *indefiniteness* of "one dies."	this core of the self (the *solus ipse*) first *come-toward* the worldly self (in the world-collapse of death) and then, second, we can encounter our partly inchoate possible selves *coming toward* this core of the self (in resolve), in both ways experiencing the pure temporal horizon of "futurity" (as the final section will explain). Here, the *indefiniteness* of demise becomes the *immanence* of death, the fact that the sheer *projecting* existential death discloses as the indefinite core of the self underlies and enables all worldly experience (as a projecting into projects).
6. Unsurpassable	Nothing comes after demise; it is the last moment of my life.	Death is not something I can get beyond; rather, I live through what it discloses – again, constantly in my ordinary *projecting* into projects (BT 185/SZ 145), and repeatedly in genuine or authentic death.[4]

[1] Amusingly, this is the reading of Heidegger advanced by Ethan Hawke's character in Ben Stiller's film *Reality Bites* (1994), in response to which Stiller's character suggests that this belief that we all demise alone explains why Hawke's character does not deserve to be in a romantic relationship with Winona Ryder's character. (This problem disappears, however, if one does not reduce death to demise; see n. 39.)

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(*cont.*)

[2] (For more on Heidegger's underexplored view of the paradigmatic *certainty* of death, see below and Thomson, "Can I Die?") It may also be that this recognition empowers the self's meta-choice of its defining project in resolve and is carried over into the joyful "wholeheartedness" of its commitments, as Taylor Carman suggests in Carman, *Heidegger's Analytic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), thereby working in tandem with Dasein's experience of its own radical finitude in existential death (see also n. 55).

[3] By formally "indefinite," Heidegger specifies "the *indefiniteness* of its when [*die* Unbestimmtheit *seines Wann*]," meaning both that it is *imminent*, or always capable of befalling us (even when everything seems to be going smoothly), and also *immanent: "that it is possible at every moment*" (BT 302/SZ 258), which (understood as *existential possibility*) means that we are *always* in the core *projecting* that death discloses, though this "undetermined" existential projecting can be filled in (or clothed) variously by our worldly projects (as we see in the *Augenblick* of resolve).

[4] Heidegger suggests that experiencing authentic death teaches me a kind of existential humility by reminding me that my projects are vulnerable – not just because a successful reconnection to the world through resolve is not guaranteed but, more importantly, because my existence is finite and will predictably end with a terminal world-collapse that will separate me from my incomplete projects for a final time. Recognizing this helps me to acknowledge that others' projecting into projects will continue after mine has ended, thereby encouraging me to recognize the independence of others and treat them as potential collaborators in or heirs to shared projects I cannot complete (BT 308/SZ 264). (On this ideal of existential community made possible by an authentic "being-together" or *Mitsein*, see also the conclusion of Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology* and the opening acknowledgments of Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*.) Moreover, the fact that *what* resolve resolves (beyond any particular project) is *to repeat itself* suggests that this repeated reconnection to the ontological core of the self (a kind of return to dry-dock to remove the barnacles of worldly habit) is part of what makes it possible and important to seek some sense of continuity and coherence in my life as a whole (BT 351/SZ 303–4), a requirement Heidegger also *inherits* from Kierkegaard. (See n. 55.) How frequently, then, is existential death supposed to occur? If we recall the reason that confronting one's *Angst* leads one's world to collapse in the first place – namely, because the confrontation with *Angst* reveals the uncanny lack of fit between the self and its world, revealing a contingency that undermines one's naïve sense that one is doing the right thing with one's life – then we can see that this kind of global collapse can only happen to one *again* insofar as one has settled back into this kind of naïve (or even *righteous*) "'good' conscience" that one is doing the right thing with one's life (BT 338/SZ 189). But that is exactly what we do tend to do (living in the everyday public world of *das Man*), which helps explain why Heidegger specifies that "*authentic resoluteness . . . resolves to keep repeating itself*" (BT 355/SZ 308). This means that we must hold ourselves open to the occasional experience, typically in a moment of radical breakdown, of

experiencing a certain distance with respect to our defining existential projects, a distance from which we can reevaluate, recommit to, or reject them (BT 443/SZ 391). This commitment to such reevaluation is not paralyzing or alienating, I think, both because it is only periodic, dictated by the accumulation of the conformist "one-self" that actually alienates us from *leading* our own unique lives, and also because it is only required for our "ultimate for-the-sake of which," not for every project organized by that ultimate, life-guiding project. (I do, however, think this is a problem for Haugeland and Blattner's belief in the centrality of such defeasibility to our guiding existential projects.) In authentic death and resoluteness, we explicitly re-experience ourselves as a projectless projecting that makes sense of itself by projecting into projects, and we can thereby *explicitly* experience that disconnection from and reconnection to the world that we tend to experience only *lucidly* the first time we undergo it, which is part of why Heidegger suggests that this repetition (of "authentic resolve") is needed in order "genuinely or authentically" to check or evaluate his phenomenology for ourselves. Nonetheless, this methodological requirement of Heidegger's view seems phenomenologically problematic to me; I think we need only live through death at least once, lucidly (and, moreover, that this world-collapse can be partial), to be able, in retrospect, to begin to explicitly understand the structures revealed by the experience thus lived through.

Obviously, this sketch remains incomplete, but I hope it is sufficient to illustrate Heidegger's method and so show that he does not arbitrarily choose to rechristen some unrelated phenomenon "death" and analyze it outside of any relation to what the rest of us normally mean by the word. This is important because it helps us see that, here as elsewhere, the ontic and the ontological are not *heterogeneous* domains (*pace* orthodox Heideggerians and influential critics like Habermas) but, instead, necessarily overlap and interrelate, and must, in order for the method Heidegger uses in *Being and Time* (which I have called *phenomenological attestation*) to work, that is, to be convincing. Indeed, Heidegger's phenomenological method can only be *convincing*, I shall now suggest, by moving back and forth in the right (affectively and cognitively resonant) way between our own individual, everyday (existentiell and ontic) understanding of death as mortal demise and the phenomenological discovery of the ontological structure underlying and conditioning our ordinary relation to demise, as that structure is disclosed in the phenomenon of existential death.[86]

[86] For a detailed explanation of the phenomenological argument that allows Heidegger to move from an ontic work of art (Van Gogh's painting of "A Pair of Shoes" [1886]) to the ontological truth of art in general, see Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, ch. 3. There I also develop Heidegger's later view that art can teach us to embrace the nothing that death discloses (by helping us see this dynamic "noth-ing" as the source of meaningful possibilities for the future), instead of anxiously fearing it (as what reveals the limits of our subjectivistic fantasies of extending total control over our worlds). We return to this topic in Chapter 3.

1.6 Preliminary Conclusions: Fear of Demise and Anxiety about Death

I mentioned at the beginning that a significant obstacle to checking the phenomenological evidence for Heidegger's analysis of death comes from the fact that what he calls "death" – namely, the projectless *projecting* we experience in the wake of the global collapse of the inauthentic one-self each of us continually accrues – seems to be an extremely difficult experience for most people to endure. The magnitude of this difficulty is conveyed by Heidegger's aforementioned acknowledgment that requiring his readers to undergo what he means by death in order to be able to evaluate his account of the phenomenon seems, from the ordinary perspective of our everyday concerns, to be a "fantastically unreasonable demand" (BT 311/SZ 266), as well as by *Being and Time*'s suggestion that the avoidance of a confrontation with our anxiety before death may be the real engine of Western history.[87]

By *anxiety before death*, however, it is crucial to recognize that Heidegger means anxiety about the core self revealed in the collapse of my world, not fear concerning my eventual demise. In fact, Heidegger considers such fear of demise – which "perverts anxiety into cowardly fear" (BT 311/SZ 266) – to be one of the main ways we flee from our real anxiety about death. He goes so far as to assert that even those who seek heroically to confront and overcome their fear of demise (like Spinoza, as we shall see in Chapter 8), in so doing, merely reveal their "own cowardliness in the face of anxiety" (ibid.). Heidegger's startling claim – that our fear of our eventual demise is really just a way of fleeing our anxiety about the core self laid bare by the global collapse of worldly projects in what he calls "death" – is so strange that, as far as I know, no interpreter has explicitly thematized and addressed it. Instead, it is most often miscognized: existential death is misunderstood as mortal demise, and Heidegger's view is thereby reduced to that of Ernest Becker (a later sociologist who taught that we human beings are driven to construct all our systems of meaning in order to deny the demise we nevertheless cannot escape).[88] Upon grasping Heidegger's strange claim, moreover, many readers will suspect the very opposite, namely, that Heidegger himself has just reinterpreted "death" so as to transform it into

[87] On this phenomenological demand, see n. 7. (See also Haugeland, "Truth and Finitude," 74; Robert Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 383, n. 16. I think the larger point Pippin makes here is right and insightful, but we need to emend the details so as not to equate "death" with "mortality," the latter having to do with "demise," because, as I shall now explain, Heidegger himself insists that our fear of demise is a way of fleeing from our anxiety before death.)

[88] Heidegger believes something similar to Becker's "terror management" theory but thinks that this denial of demise is itself motivated by our flight before what Heidegger calls death. (See below and Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* [New York: Free Press, 1973].)

an experience that can be survived, thereby inadvertently exposing his own fear of demise. Further evidence that Heidegger is indeed making the initially strange claim I am attributing to him can thus be found in the fact that he anticipates that table-turning suspicion and goes out of his way to deny it as one of "the grossest perversions," explicitly asserting that: "Anticipatory resoluteness [that is, "authenticity" understood as existential death and rebirth to the world through resolve] is not a way of escape, fabricated for the 'overcoming' of death" (BT 357/SZ 310). Instead, Heidegger thinks, we usually live superficially with an uneasy sense that we are doing the right thing with our lives simply by doing what one should do, and if we dare to endure a genuine confrontation with that underlying existential *Angst*, rather than fleeing it back into *das Man*'s "indifferent tranquillity as to the 'fact' that one dies" – a flight by which we displace "this anxiety into fear in the face of an oncoming event" (BT 298/SZ 254) – then we will end up experiencing a global collapse of our identity-defining life-projects in existential "death."

In my view, then, what will ultimately be decisive in evaluating Heidegger's phenomenological attestation of death is that we be able to recognize the phenomenon he calls *death* as ontologically *conditioning*, and so explaining at a deep experiential level, the main features of our relationship to ordinary demise, including not only the six formal features they share (in the way outlined in the table above) but also, and perhaps most saliently, the widespread *fear* of demise from which, he recognizes, we habitually flee into diversions that keep us busy or otherwise tranquillize that fear and the anxiety beneath it. Accordingly, I want to suggest that the strange provocations on the subject of the relation between death and demise just rehearsed are best understood as Heidegger's attempt to show that our anxiety in the face of *what he calls "death" is what really drives our fear of demise*, and thus that *fleeing demise* is really just a distorted way of *repressing death*. But what exactly does this mean?

We might think that Heidegger is suggesting that what scares us about demise is the fact that, insofar as we experience demise, we will experience a world-collapse without any subsequent reconnection to the world. In this case, we would fear and so flee demise because in it we will suffer an irreversible world-collapse, undergoing the apparently permanent foreclosure of our worlds. If this were what Heidegger meant, then he would be suggesting that our fear of such demise is ultimately a cover for our deeper *Angst* about running-out into death and then failing subsequently to reconnect to the world in resolve. In other words, Heidegger might seem to be suggesting that what drives our fear of demise is our underlying anxiety that (much like the legendary shark that must keep swimming to stay alive) should we ever lose that unquestioned existential inertia driving us through our daily lives, should we ever stop and step back from our

worlds in a radical way, we might lose our worlds never again to regain them.[89]

I do not want to deny that this is a real worry (perhaps even one to which Heidegger's own anxious and depressive nature might have inclined him). But I think it cannot be correct as an attempt to reconstruct Heidegger's analysis of the ultimate motivations behind our own fear of demise. For, if it were correct, then this would actually be an argument in favor of the interpretation Heidegger dismissed as "the grossest of perversions," namely, the view that Heidegger's call for us confront our *Angst* before death is really just his way of repressing his fear of demise. Because demise looks like *terminal* world-collapse, any dread we might feel about *permanently* losing our unquestioned existential inertia seems to stem from our fear of demise, that is, our fear of our intelligible world coming to an *irreversible* end, never to return again. (This haunting fear of demise as eternal nothingness – "faintly . . . tapping at my chamber door. . . / here I opened wide the door; / —Darkness there and nothing more" – is what Edgar Allan Poe captures so brilliantly in his famous poem's discomfiting refrain: "Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.'" Poe's portentous "*nevermore*" succinctly expresses our mortal fear that demise will indeed turn out to be absolutely nothing, just like it appears to be from here.)[90] That, however, is to derive *Angst* in the face of death from our fear of demise, which is exactly the reverse of what Heidegger seeks to do.

For Heidegger to make his case that our fear of demise is ultimately motivated by our anxiety in the face of death, then, his view must be that what we are really afraid of about demise *is* what he calls death, namely, *losing our world and still being here to experience that loss*. In other words, Heidegger is suggesting that what we fear about demise is the same thing that suicidal people desperately hope to gain from it, namely, that in demise we will *be rid of ourselves*, as it were. Yet, as Epicurus pointed out long ago (and as Heidegger

[89] This is close to Thomas Nagel's reason for thinking life absurd. As Nagel puts it: "What sustains us, in belief as in action, is not reason or justification, but something more basic than these . . . If we tried to rely entirely on reason, and pressed it hard, our lives and beliefs would collapse – a form of madness that may actually occur if the inertial force of taking the world and life for granted is somehow lost" (Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979], 20).

[90] Taken out of context, one might similarly misinterpret Heidegger's famous description of death as "the possibility of Dasein's impossibility" to mean something like facing up to the very possibility of this atheistic *nevermore* – *as* if existential death were merely Dasein's confrontation with the possibility that demise might not be followed by an afterlife – a thought that, admittedly, might indeed catalyze the genuine existential death of a certain kind of unquestioned religious belief (as well as its possible rebirth as *faith*, or its lack). (This seems, for example, to be the way Martin Hägglund misunderstands Heidegger on death.) But in fact the question of a possible afterlife is something about which Heidegger remains deliberately *neutral* or *agnostic* (as we saw in n. 49), since phenomenology must confine itself to what it can experience (here, on this side of the mortal veil).

repeatedly stresses in *Being and Time*), we will not be rid of ourselves in demise because, once we demise, we will not *be* at all.[91] If Heidegger is right, in other words, our fear of demise is really our fear of a paradoxical state in which we *are not* – or, more precisely, in which we are not and yet somehow are in order to be aware that we are not. Our fear of demise is thus a *misplaced* fear, but it is not (*pace* Nagel) an *unfounded* one.[92] For there is an experience in which what we are afraid of about demise – namely, not being, or, more precisely, being our own not being – can actually happen to us. As we have seen, this strange experience of *being in a way in which we are not able to be anything worldly* is precisely what Heidegger calls *death*. When all our worldly projects collapse in existential death, leaving a projectless projecting as the sole survivor of the shipwreck of the self, we do indeed experience the paradoxical "possibility of an *im*possibility of existence – that is to say, the utter nullity [*Nichtigkeit*] of Dasein" (BT 354/SZ 306), as Heidegger provocatively puts it – that is, the sheer *nullification* of all the defining life-projects which Dasein suddenly finds itself unable to project into in existential death.[93]

[91] As far as we can tell phenomenologically, in demise we will not "be here" (as Dasein) either to enjoy or to suffer from not being here. Here we come close to the Epicurean argument that we should no more fear our demise than we fear the time before we existed, and also to Kierkegaard's argument for the inevitable failure of suicide. In the view Anti-Climacus presents, the suicidal person does not want to not be, full stop; instead, the would-be suicide really wants to *be* without those aspects of experience that torture them (in "despair"). Moreover, we are all in a similar situation, even if unknowingly, because what ultimately tortures us are contradictions built into the nature of selfhood (the purported fact that the self is both determined and free, finite and infinite, temporal and eternal, etc.), which makes us all want to be what we are not or not want to be what we are, that is, to be in *despair*. Hence his view that "despair is precisely the inability to die," where "to die means that it *is* all over" (Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 48). In the end, Kierkegaard suggests that only faith in a God for whom "everything is possible" – even the resolution of such seemingly intractable contradictions – can save us. Secularizing Kierkegaard, Heidegger suggests that only the radically individualized Dasein can pass through existential death and *resolve* such contradictions for themselves. I would thus also suggest that what it means, phenomenologically, to "reside transparently in the power that created you" (Anti-Climacus's formula for the eradication of despair) is to reside transparently in your own *projecting* into projects, that is, to undergo existential death's projectless projecting and then, from the perspective that discloses, reconnect resolutely to worldly projects.

[92] (See Nagel, "Death," in Nagel, *Mortal Questions*.) Nagel, we might say, did not anticipate Heideggerian *anticipation* or "running-out" into death, in which (as Heidegger already wrote in 1925) "the world withdraws, collapsing into nothingness" (BH 265).

[93] The basic insight behind Heidegger's strange terminology here is that part of what connects (1) the charging-out into death to (2) resolve's reconnection to the world (in this *double* movement of *authenticity*) is that the nullity of worldly projects I discover at the core of my self in existential death is partly taken over in resolve, where (having experienced myself as *being* this "null-basis" of my projects in death) I embrace my defining existential finitude by lucidly affirming that to *be what I become* (when I project into projects) I must also *not be* (or *nullify*) every other live-option (life-project) that

In order to confirm Heidegger's phenomenological analysis for ourselves, then, we would need to be able to attest to the fact that death conditions demise; that is, we would need to recognize that what we are really afraid of about demise is not just losing our world but also being here to experience that loss. So, is Heidegger right about this? I have suggested that this is a *phenomenological* matter and, as such, one that we must each decide for ourselves on the basis of our own experience, but here are some leading questions that I think help make Heidegger's case. In our fear of demise, do we not torture ourselves precisely by paradoxically imagining, that is, trying to project ourselves into, our own non-existence (for example, by imagining what the world will be like after we are gone from it)? Is this paradoxical projection into our own non-existence, perhaps, also what is ultimately so unsettling about *the very idea* of a world in which we no longer exist? (Indeed, so unsettling that, as films like Bay's "*Armageddon*" [1998] and von Trier's "*Melancholia*" [2011] suggest, it sometimes seems easier to imagine the end of all life on earth than to imagine others' living on after we are gone – an undeniably disturbing fact but one that unfortunately only begins to suggest the dangerous thanatological forces unleashed by our failure to confront our anxiety in the face of existential death.)[94] And, finally, does not this phenomenological notion of projectless projecting also help explain what is so dreadful about various forms of dementia such as Alzheimer's disease, which present us with the terrible possibility of being here to experience the gradual disintegration of our

I thereby forgo. In this way, ontological guilt encourages me to let go of the ordinary guilt I otherwise feel at not being able to be who I could have been had I projected into different projects (had I attended that other school, taken that other job, married that other person, etc.), much as ontological death encourages me to let go of my ordinary fear of demise, and this transformative epiphany is part of what makes these ontological analyses *convincing*, phenomenologically. Indeed, for Heidegger, ontological "death and guilt" explicitly come together in the *thrown project* of authenticity, where I lucidly affirm myself "as the null-basis of a nullity" (BT 354/SZ 306), that is, a being whose choices are partly shaped but not determined by a *thrownness* I can never fully understand (or get to the bottom of, such that the real power I do indeed have over my defining choices comes from rejecting the rationalistic fantasy of ever completely understanding myself from the ground up so that I could make the one correct or rationally optimal decision) and who, in projecting into projects, must *nullify* what I am *not* becoming in order to *be* what I *am becoming* instead. (Heidegger's recognition of these interconnections proves important to his phenomenological disclosure of temporality as well, as Section 1.7 will show.)

[94] I think we can also recognize this same dangerous thanatological imaginary at work in the increasingly common phenomena of weaponized nihilism that include not just those old fanatics longing for the war that will signal the apocalypse but also in the murderously suicidal "death by cop" of the "school shooter" and other public mass-murderers who seem only to be able to overcome their own fear of demise (and so of suicide) by taking as many others with them as they can (thereby expressing their nihilistic disdain of human life) and so forcing someone else to kill them in turn. (On suicide, see also n. 91.)

being-here, the slow-motion implosion of our worlds?[95] If we answer "Yes" to such questions, this suggests that the phenomenon Heidegger calls *death* is not only related to but actually conditions our ordinary relation to demise. Indeed, it suggests that projectless projecting, not terminal world-collapse, *is* what we are really afraid of about demise.

I think the best *confirmation* of Heidegger's phenomenology of death, moreover, would come if this existential recognition that death conditions demise can help us no longer to fear demise – which it should do, because *in demise* our own Dasein will not be here not to be here. Interestingly, I have repeatedly been told (after presenting earlier versions of this chapter as a talk) that those wracked by terrible fear on their deathbeds can often be helped by hospice workers, therapists, or others who guide them in visualizing their own demise; when the terminally ill imaginatively project themselves into such projectlessness, they reportedly experience a cathartic release of their mortal fear, which can thus turn into a wondrous openness to the unknown. This is very strong evidence in favor of Heidegger's initially strange but, I think, ultimately quite compelling view. For, part of what Heidegger's phenomenology of death and demise in *Being and Time* seeks to show us here is that, if we want to shed the mortal fear of demise that will otherwise pursue us throughout our lives, then we need to muster the courage to confront our anxiety about death, thereby learning calmly and simply to be here – instead of continuing to rush blindly toward the very thing we fear in our desperate attempts to evade it (BT 477/SZ 425). When we learn to be here in the finite disclosure of existential death, moreover, what we thereby encounter turns out to be those wondrous phenomena Heidegger will call *futurity* and the *nothing* (as we will now go on to see), potentially transformative phenomena that can help us learn to turn our anxiety about demising into a creative embrace of the inexhaustible source of phenomenological intelligibility – or so I shall seek to show in the chapters that follow.

1.7 Ontological Futurity: Situating *Being and Time*'s Phenomenology of Death

Now, revisiting an influential work as we approach the centenary of its publication should perhaps encourage us to take a step back and situate the part of the work we have been focusing on within the larger context of the text's overarching architectonic, understanding not just the pivotal role existential death plays therein (which we have already begun to address) but also existential death's connections to the loftiest philosophical ambitions of the work (which we have only mentioned briefly thus far), thereby examining

[95] We will come back to this issue in Chapter 7 (in part because it suggests that we can *demise* much more slowly than Heidegger recognized).

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some of the most provocative insights to which it helped give rise – all before going on to examine the subsequent influence of Heidegger's rethinking of death on some other important philosophers (to whom we will turn in Chapters 5 through 7). That kind of "big picture" portrait can be quite daunting (especially when it requires us to step back from and simplify a complex work we have been rereading and teaching for decades). But it can also help us "not to lose the forest for the trees," an old hermeneutic warning that rings true when one has primarily been focused on a single important issue within a text that ultimately leverages that issue for larger purposes that go well beyond both that issue and that text. So let me briefly situate *Being and Time's* phenomenology of death within the context of this text's ultimate philosophical ambitions, thereby venturing beyond what I have said about its philosophical context thus far, before turning to examine these larger purposes and issues branching off from death in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3. Doing so will also encourage us to briefly explore two other difficult issues – namely, nothingness and futurity – which can be found at or beneath the very roots (to stay with the metaphor) of the fascinating tree we have been focusing on thus far.

Viewed in terms of *Being and Time*'s largest and most ambitious goals, Heidegger is primarily concerned to understand death *ontologically*. Put simply, he hopes to phenomenologically convince us of two interconnected ontological claims: First, that the phenomenon of existential death can help us uncover the deepest existential structures that ultimately condition our shared way of being ("existence"), namely, the "temporal horizons or ecstasies." (The main reason Heidegger thinks this is that "futurity," the "primary" aspect of this tripartite temporal structure, first becomes visible in the phenomenon of existential death, as I shall show momentarily.) The second, even bigger claim is that understanding these temporal structures that ultimately condition all phenomenological intelligibility can, in turn, enable us to discover "a fundamental ontology," that is, a *single* answer to "*the question of the meaning of being in general*" (BT 61/SZ 37). As Chapter 2 will show, that second and most ambitious hope – Being *and Time*'s ultimate goal of discovering "a fundamental ontology" that will finally *answer* "the question of being" – fails dramatically, and the later Heidegger will abandon it as an "errant" and unwitting last gasp of the very "metaphysical" tradition he characterizes as *ontotheology*.[96] Fortunately, the phenomenology of existential death originally yoked into the service of *Being and Time*'s failed metaphysical ambition to discover a fundamental ontology survives this death of metaphysics – a profound existential death through which Heidegger himself lives and thinks – and continues to be developed in important ways by the later Heidegger himself (as Chapter 3

[96] This is one of the main theses of Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*.

shows), while also fascinating, befuddling, infuriating, and inspiring some of *Being and Time*'s most serious and creative readers for generations.[97] Before examining at least a few important details from those readings (in Chapters 5, 6, and 7), let me very briefly explain these two big ontological claims.

The "*and*" in the title of *Being and Time* does not designate mere succession, as if Heidegger were naming two separate items in a very short list. It is, instead, the "and" of conjunction, designating the *intersection* between *Being and Time*, an intersection the text will name and describe successively as Dasein, *existence*, *being-in-the-world*, and, finally, *temporality*. "Temporality" is Heidegger's name for time as it enters into being by becoming intelligible, and also for being as it enters into time and so gets disclosed.[98] Indeed, one of *Being and Time*'s guiding insights is that *temporality* is the most primordial structure of Dasein's being-here that phenomenology can access. As *Being and Time* claims: "*Ecstatical temporality primordially clears the 'here'*" (BT 402/SZ 351). That is, the "ecstatico-horizonal" structure of temporality – or the way temporality opens and orients our intelligible worlds – is what most deeply discloses that practical understanding of being that originally structures and shapes Dasein's existential "being-here." (How exactly does temporality condition and shape our most basic understanding of being? We turn to that fraught question in Chapter 2.) *Being and Time* thus describes temporality as "the fundamental existential constitution of Dasein in the ultimate foundations of its own ontological intelligibility" (BT 351/SZ 304).

At this primordial layer of Dasein's intelligibility in which being and time most fundamentally intersect, moreover, Heidegger thinks that this *Ur-phenomenon* metaphysics dichotomizes into mind and world, spirit and matter, the mental and the physical, subjects and objects, etc., still remains fundamentally interconnected. Heidegger's thinking of temporality as the allegedly primordial unity of being and time is that deepest insight from which he thinks even "Kant shrank back" (BT 45/SZ 23) when he revised his *Critique of Pure Reason* in a way that effaced the role originally played there (in the first, "A edition") by the faculty of the imagination. In doing so (in his second, "B edition"), Kant abandoned his own earlier attempt to articulate the constitutive role that the imagination's *temporal* "schematism" plays in joining the faculties of understanding and sensibility, uniting the deliverances of "mind" and "world" in a

[97] (We can, of course, only examine a few of these noteworthy readers here.) I have tried to show that the way Heidegger lives and thinks through this "death of metaphysics" is what explains the most dramatic differences between his "early" and "later" work (his so-called turn), as the traumatic and transformative collapse of the metaphysical project that guides his early philosophy eventually gives rise to the post-metaphysical perspective of his later thinking. (See Chapter 3 and Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*.)

[98] See also B. Scott Rouse, "Retrieving Heidegger's Temporal Realism," *European Journal of Philosophy*, 30:1 (2022), 205–26.

way that (Heidegger suggests) might have undercut modern Cartesian dualism. Heidegger's goal of undermining the modern ontological dualism of mind and world may be the most ambitious project that *Being and Time* successfully accomplished (as Dreyfus influentially argues), but it is not the most ambitious project the famous text pursues.[99] That honor (or dishonor, as it *turns* out) goes to Heidegger's ill-fated quest for a "fundamental ontology," in the vain pursuit of which he presents his phenomenology of death.

The main reason Heidegger's phenomenology of death plays that pivotal role in the text (as briefly suggested at the outset) is because, after all the other independently important twists and turns already examined, the phenomenon of death ultimately discloses the temporal horizon of "futurity," that is, the constitutive openness of our intelligible worlds to the perpetual *arriving* of what is not yet fully intelligible.[100] Such *futurity* is itself so important, moreover, because its discovery enables Heidegger to discern all three of the interconnected *temporal* structures that most deeply shape Dasein's being, and *Being and Time*'s ultimate hope is to show how this understanding of temporality's fundamental, constitutive role in shaping the intelligible worlds that we Dasein *are* will subsequently enable him to discover that "fundamental ontology" (or understanding of the meaning of being in general) for which he is searching during this early, pro-metaphysical period of his work. We will explore this attempt in detail in Chapter 2, but let us not skip over "futurity" too quickly, since Heidegger's way of conceptualizing this phenomenon can only be understood through its connection to existential death. Moreover, reconstructing the phenomenological connection between death and futurity is also important because it will help us to better understand the origins of Heidegger's initially strange and provocative insistence on the great philosophical importance of "the nothing," which first opens and begins to anticipate the later Heidegger's central phenomenological insight into being's apparently inexhaustible meaningfulness, as insight utterly at odds with *Being and Time*'s quest for a fundamental ontology (as Chapters 2 and 3 will explain in detail).[101]

[99] This is one of the main theses of Dreyfus's seminal work, Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*.

[100] Five years after that, Heidegger describes it as "the rift structure" at the intersection of "earth and world" (that is, of truth as phenomenological "dis-closure," *a-letheia*), though his later work most often calls this temporally dynamic phenomenon "the presencing of presence" (see Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, ch. 3). Despite subtle and important differences, all these terms of art seek to draw our attention to the continual but (owing to that first law of phenomenology, "the law of proximity" or *the distance of the near*) typically unnoticed phenomenological arriving of what is not yet discretely intelligible as an entity, whereby "being as such" makes itself felt in its difference from the "being of entities" that metaphysics seeks to capture and doubly ground once and for all in an ontotheology. (We shall explore this still too often misunderstood issue in more detail in Chapter 3.)

[101] See also Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, ch. 1.

In *Being and Time*, temporal "futurity" – or the "to-come" (*Zu-kunft*), that is, *futurity* in its sheer *coming toward* us – is first disclosed only by *enduring* the phenomenon of existential death. ("Enduring" such death in order to recognize the full depths of its disclosure requires phenomenologists neither to *inauthentically* rush back into reactionary conformity to escape anxiety in the face of death, nor to immediately find a way back to worldly projects in resolve by taking lucid ownership of themselves in *authenticity*.) By enduring such death phenomenologically, Heidegger suggests, we can uncover not only the bare existential structure of the understanding (as a projectless projecting) but also a deeper temporal horizon that is discernible beneath that core existential structure, conditioning it. *Being and Time*'s basic insight here is that, in enduring the desolate phenomenon of existential death, the "*solus ipse*" of projectless projecting finds itself rebounding back off the world of projects it cannot project into and so thereby *coming back toward* itself, a return from the world empty-handed or "naked" (that is, bereft of the clothing of worldly projects), which renders Dasein's own core structure perspicuous in its sheer "existing" (or *ek-sistere*). As Heidegger puts it (and we should now be better equipped to understand his philosophical terminology):

> Anticipatory resoluteness [or authenticity in its two interconnected moments as death and rebirth to the world] . . . is only possible in that *in the first place* Dasein *can* come toward itself in its ownmost ability-to-be [namely, death], and can endure [*aushält*] this possibility as a possibility in thus letting itself come toward itself [that is, Dasein can endure existential death so as to encounter what this phenomenon discloses about itself], namely, that it exists. (BT 372/SZ 325)

Enduring existential death discloses to *Dasein itself* the brute fact that it "exists" or *stands-out* into the "nothingness of the world," a looming world of indifferent objects, rendered insignificant by Dasein's inability to project practically into any of the worldly projects that ordinarily disclose the significance and salience of those entities as practical equipment.[102] In other words,

[102] It may well seem like a jarring exaggeration to describe the totality of "de-worlded" present-at-hand objects as a "nothingness," but here we need to remember Heidegger's claim in *Being and Time* that: "*Readiness-to-hand is the way in which entities as they are 'in themselves' are defined ontologico-categorially*" (BT 101/SZ 71), which is why he holds that "the [existential] *possibility* of the ready-to-hand in general. . . is the world itself" (BT 231/SZ 187). Heidegger's early view of the being of entities as readiness to hand will become problematic from the perspective of his later history of being, where this (ontologically reductive) understanding of being as equipment looks like the penultimate stage in the history of nihilism (see Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, ch. 1), as well as from a deep ecological perspective (see Iain Thomson, "Ontology and Ethics at the Intersection of Phenomenology and Environmental Philosophy," *Inquiry*, 47:4 [2004], 380–412). More to the point for us here, however, Heidegger's view of this *nothingness* evolves in subtle but important ways over the next few years and into his later work (as we shall see in Chapter 3).

Dasein's being-bestowing rebound – off of the world it cannot project into and back toward itself – is rendered *perspicuous* by enduring existential death, that desolate situation in which I find myself utterly unable to be (that is, to project into and so implicitly *understand* myself in terms of) any worldly self at all.

When entirely unable to project into its practical, worldly projects, Dasein can phenomenologically encounter the way doing so ordinarily discloses the significance of its existence. That much should already be familiar. The new twist, however, is the deeper, temporal insight that Heidegger seeks to convey here – namely, that, in order for existential death to be able to show Dasein the structure of its own naked existing *phenomenologically*, Dasein's projecting must rebound off its failed projecting into worldly projects and so *come back toward itself*. In discerning this phenomenologically, Dasein can thereby encounter and recognize the fact that its experience of this (ordinarily) being-bestowing arrival of meaning is made possible by an even deeper structure conditioning its being, which Heidegger calls the *temporal horizon* of *futurity*. In his words:

> Enduring this distinctive possibility [existential death] in its letting-itself-come-toward-itself [and so recognizing how our being *comes back toward us* from the projects we project into] is the primordial phenomenon of the future as coming toward [*Zu-kunft*, the futural horizon in its *coming toward* us]. (BT 372/SZ 325)

Enduring death, in other words, discloses not only my naked existence, standing out into the nothingness of a world I cannot project into; in so doing, it allows the phenomenologist who endures existential death to recognize an even deeper structure built into its own being, the *temporal* horizon of "futurity" (as sheer *coming toward* me) that enables my projecting into projects to *rebound back upon me* and bestow my existence with significance (or, in death, the lack thereof).

That explains why Heidegger sets up his (admittedly abstract) descriptions of futurity by reminding us that: "The meaning of Dasein's being – is the self-understanding Dasein itself" (BT 372/SZ 325). As we saw earlier, Dasein "understands" (or, better, *takes a stand on*) the meaning of its own being by projecting into practical projects (namely, its embodied, existential "possibilities"). Ordinarily, we press-ahead or project into the practical world of our projects and the meaning of our being implicitly *comes back to* us as the meaningful world that we Dasein are.[103] In existential death, however, we can

[103] In teaching, for example, a teacher *implicitly* presses into a dynamically significant and holistically interconnected world of students to be taught, texts to be explained and explored, ideas to be clarified and questions and other opportunities for learning to be pursued, pens to write on the board in order to clarify such ideas, and so on, and in disclosing such a ready-to-hand world the meaning of the teacher's own being implicitly comes toward them as well. (It is tempting to think of this as Heidegger's secularization of the Christian view of the isomorphic relation between faith and grace.)

explicitly encounter this "coming back to" us, precisely because it is rendered *perspicuous* by its emptiness. In existential death (as a global collapse of Dasein's embodied "understanding" as a projecting into projects), Dasein rebounds off the world of projects it can no longer project into, yet its being still comes back to it (as a sheer existing in the face of that utterly *insignificant* nothingness of the world). No longer covered over (or filled in) by such worldly meaning, Dasein can recognize the deep "temporal" horizon conditioning this existential *rebound*, whereby the meaning of our being comes back to us. As Heidegger expresses the crucial insight:

> Anticipation [our projecting into the projectlessness of death] makes Dasein *genuinely* futural, and in such a way that the anticipation itself is only possible insofar as Dasein *as an entity* is in the first place always already coming-toward-itself, which means it is futural in its very being. (BT 373/SZ 325)

By experiencing our own being-bestowing existential rebound back onto ourselves in its emptiest form (in death), we can discern the temporal horizon underlying the existential structure of our "understanding" as a projecting into projects that, in return, discloses the significance of things and renders us meaningful to ourselves.

To sum up this difficult point, enduring a phenomenological encounter with death discloses the structural rebound whereby the meaning of Dasein's being *comes toward* its existence, and this ontological arrival (by which Dasein's being *comes toward* it) is made possible by the deeper temporal horizon Heidegger calls "futurity." As Heidegger explicitly defines the term: "Here 'futural' ['*Zu-kunft*'] means . . . the coming [*Kunft*] in which Dasein, in its ownmost ability-to-be [death], comes toward itself" (BT 373/SZ 325). The basic idea, then, is that Dasein's reflexive return from the world (by which the projects we project into implicitly *come back* to bestow our existence with the meaning of our being) is itself made possible by a temporal horizon Heidegger calls "futurity" as this "coming toward" (*Zu-kunft*), that is, Dasein's constitutive openness to the *coming toward* itself of the meaning of being (the meaning of *its own being*, implicitly bestowed back upon it or disclosed for it by its projecting into worldly projects, as we have seen, but thereby also – according to the hopeful architectonic we can see Heidegger beginning to sketch out here – the *meaning of being in general*, as we will see in Chapter 2).

For the early Heidegger, the three temporal horizons come together to constitute the deepest substrate of Dasein's being that phenomenology can reach, and temporality's three horizons are just as inextricably interconnected as the three main existential structures that they underlie and condition. As a result, there can be no phenomenological encounter with "futurity" that does not also involve Dasein's "having beenness" and "making present" (BT 373–4/SZ 373–4) – just as there is no "understanding" without its "affective

attunement" (*Befindlichkeit*) and "conversance" (*Rede*), and hence no *death* without *anxiety* and *conscience*.[104] The temporal horizons intertwine, for example, in that what I am becoming (in the projects I project into) *comes back* to shape how I am making sense of who I have been (or, more precisely, of how I *continue* to become what I have been).[105] If a student resolutely chooses to become a philosophy major, to take a simple example, then their felt sense of who they are, as they throw themselves into particularly challenging reading assignment, might tend to be informed by half-forgotten stories they heard about their insatiable childhood curiosity and drive to understand, say, rather than about their prodigious business acumen or athletic talent.[106] In general, as we project into the practical world of projects that make (and remake) us who we are (in our repeated becoming), our future projects shape (and reshape) the way our past continues to shape us. This is what Heidegger has in mind when he sums up his view of Dasein's *temporality*:

> The character of having-beenness arises from futurity, and in such a way that that the coming-toward which has been (or, better, which is in the process of having been) releases from itself the present. This phenomenon has the unity of a coming-toward which makes-present in the process of having-been; we designate this unity as *temporality*. (BT 374/SZ 326)

According to this *unified* account of the three interlocking temporal horizons, Heidegger's vision of the way "futurity releases the present from itself" suggests that, after futurity has been disclosed in death (as the naked existence of the *solus ipse* rebounds off the practical world it cannot connect to and comes toward itself perspicuously), it also gets disclosed, second, through the

[104] We have discussed the role of anxiety in death at length. But it is "conscience" that silently calls us back from thoughtlessly doing *what one does* and so calls us into death as our ownmost ability-to-be (which itself turns out to be the source of the call [BT 320/SZ 275]), and thereby calls for (and enables) Dasein to resolutely reconnect to its world *in its own way*, and therefore become "answerable [*verantwortlich*]" or *responsible* for so doing (BT 334/SZ 288).

[105] Hence Heidegger's aforementioned view that authenticity also helps bestow Dasein with a sense of its own existential "constancy of the self in the dual sense of enduring steadfastness" (BT 369/SZ 322). In other words, Dasein's existential *self-constancy* comes not from staying the same but, instead, from the way we repeatedly continue to *become* what we are as we struggle to remain faithful to our defining projects and identity-bestowing commitments. (See n. 55. Chapter 4, and, on some of the fascinating complexities and challenges facing such commitments, see Chapter 9 and Iain Thomson, "Thinking Love: Heidegger and Arendt," *Continental Philosophy Review*, 50:4 [2017], 453–78.)

[106] As Heidegger expresses the underlying point: "Only insofar as it is futural can Dasein *be* authentically as having-been. The character of 'having-been' arises, in a certain way, from the coming of the future [*Zu-kunft*]" (BT 373/SZ 326). At the most primordial level of originary temporality, our "ownmost having-been [*eigenste Gewesen*]" is first disclosed in death, when death's sheer projecting comes toward our worldly selves as what we have always-already been (BT 373/SZ 326).

multiplicitous arriving of those self-world "possibilities" *coming toward* the *solus ipse* as the different selves we *can be* henceforth, coming toward us as largely inchoate live-options that require us to "open" (or "un-close," *entschlossen*) ourselves to and so let ourselves become just one of them as *resolve* (*Entschlossenheit*) thereby "releases the present [*die Gegenwart*] from itself," letting that originary present it is (literally) "waiting-toward [*Gegen-wart*]" arrive, letting-go of all inchoate others (BT 374/SZ 326).[107] In the desolate perspective first disclosed by the projectless projecting of existential death, then, we experience the multiplicitous and inchoate arriving of those futural selves and their partly glimpsed worlds in a maximally open and unmediated way. "Futurity" comes to describe this futural horizon whereby we phenomenologically encounter this sheer *coming toward us* in death (and then its repeated, *momentous* arriving in resolve, which "allows an unconcealed encounter with that [specific situation] which is seized upon in taking action"), rather than the usual (and "fallen") way in which one usually conceives of the future, as a distant "not yet" somewhere out ahead of us.

It is thus important to notice that, in these two different ways of thinking about the future – namely, as standing out there somewhere ahead of us, on the one hand, and as "always-already" *arriving*, on the other – we can now recognize the temporal conditions that underlie Heidegger's two different ways of relating to the phenomena of our own demise and death, respectively. In light of that first thinking of the future (as standing off somewhere ahead of us), recall the "inauthentic" understanding that "flees" death, vainly trying to radically separate existential death from the self by placing it far off in the distant future *as mortal demise*. This is the very same conflation of existential death with mortal demise that typifies our "falling" into the leveled-down intelligibility of the public world and so, unsurprisingly, shapes those same commonsensical expectations we initially bring to *Being and Time* (as we have seen). Then, in light of that second thinking of futurity (as the "coming" of the future in its perpetual *arriving*), consider the "authentic" existential view which *owns* the phenomenon of death by recognizing that existential death helps disclose the most basic structures definitive of our very selfhood by uncovering the radical existential solitude (or "*solus ipse*") of projectless projecting. This sheer structural "existing" is disclosed by Heidegger's phenomenology of existential death as the most ineliminable, individuating, certain, constant, and unsurpassable core of Dasein's intelligible world, a discovery that helps enable the authentic self-recovery accomplished in resolve. In Heidegger's terms, these different ways of "temporalizing" temporality thus "make possible the multiplicity of Dasein's modes of being,

[107] I am here simplifying Heidegger's phenomenology of Dasein's successful resolution of ontological guilt, whereby we "let go" of what we are not becoming (lucidly embracing our constitutive *nihilating* of those other live-option projects) in order to (wholeheartedly) become what we are. (See also n. 97, BT 330–4/SZ 283–8, and Chapter 4.)

above all the fundamental possibility of authentic or inauthentic existence" (BT 377/SZ 328)

Futurity thus names the *being* of the future as it is disclosed to existential phenomenology, the deep temporal-horizonal orientation whereby our intelligible worlds are fundamentally open to what is continually coming toward us (always arriving from partly beyond what is as already "having-been" and currently "making-itself-present"). Indeed, this phenomenon of *futurity – as* the temporal horizon conditioning our being's "coming toward" us (*Zukunft*) – discloses an otherwise overwhelming "coming toward presence" that our practical identities usually (1) enable us to navigate and orient ourselves within (with the help of our mooded attunements and embodied skills), but thereby also (2) dim-down and so eclipse futurity's perpetual arriving from sight in our ordinary lives.[108] By uncovering such ontological *futurity* from beneath its ordinary existential taming (into those public roles and established ways of doing things that thereby accomplish "a dimming down of the possible as such" [BT 239/SZ 195]), *Being and Time*'s phenomenology of existential death first grants Heidegger access to the most primordial structures of our Dasein, the temporal structures that delve as deeply into our being as Heidegger then believed phenomenology could reach, precisely because "futurity" is just the first of the three interlocking horizons of originary *temporality*, each of which directly underlies one of the three core existential structures (or *existentials*) set out in Division One (BT 479/SZ 426–7).

As that suggests, the three interconnected existential structures, working in concert, are what ordinarily allow Dasein to tame and navigate the broader openness of the temporal horizons beneath them, since these temporal "ecstasies" would otherwise bombard us with too much unorganized phenomenological information for us to cope with successfully.[109] *Understanding*, as the practical identities we "stand under," enables us to orient ourselves within futurity by charting a meaningful course through the continual and manifold arriving of what is *coming* into presence. *Befindlichkeit*, or our affective attunement, describes how our embodied sense of *what has been* continues to shape and circumscribe our intelligible worlds, helping us maintain a grip

[108] Nevertheless, Heidegger thinks the constant background hum of *Angst* in our lives shows that we can never be fully at-home in these ordinary worlds – that we cannot identify with our practical identities the way a chair can be a chair, in some unbroken substantive permanence or coincidence. Instead, we can only *be* something by continuing to *become* it, repeatedly transforming ourselves as our lives and situations continue to change (as subsequent chapters endeavor to show).

[109] Here one can perhaps begin to glimpse the radical neo-Kantianism of Heidegger's phenomenological approach in *Being and Time*. (See Blattner, *Heidegger's Temporal Idealism*.) But one can also begin to recognize another sense in which Heidegger conceives "primordial time as the condition of the possibility and necessity of the everyday experience of time" (BT 381/SZ 333), the ambitious *transcendental* project that, Blattner convincingly argues, fails.

on what *matters* to us.[110] And *Rede,* or our skilful *conversance* with things, articulates the embodied and linguistic ways we skilfully navigate the manifold significations of all that *makes itself present* in our intelligible worlds.

Among these three interlocking temporal "ecstasies," Heidegger thinks futurity is "primary" (BT 378/SZ 329). This is not because his existential phenomenology discovers it first but, rather, because "the present arises from futurity" (BT 479/SZ 427), in the sense that our life-projects orient and circumscribe what shows up for us while also helping attune us to what matters most from the having-been that we continue to be, as we repeatedly reshape that living past we always carry with us (a "having-beenness" that *tunes us in* variously, as Wrathall and Londen suggest, and so helps filter what is salient to and so discernible by us).[111] But we should not let this relative priority of futurity in orienting our existential odysseys through time lead us to forget that the three interconnected temporal horizons always work together as a whole (just like the three existentials they underlie and condition). Hence Heidegger's notoriously recondite formula, which does not describe the *linear* passage of time (as a future that slips through the present into the past) but, instead, the underlying horizons of primordial temporality that condition all our experiences in time (as we have seen): "Temporality temporalizes itself as a coming-toward that makes present in the process of having been [*Zeitlichkeit zeitigt sich als gewesende-gegenwärtigende Zukunft*]" (BT 401/SZ 350).[112] The fact that the three temporal horizons underlie the three main existential structures that *Being and Time* primarily focuses on explains why Heidegger mainly develops just these three essential existentials (*Befindlichkeit*, *Rede*, and *Verstehen*), even while frequently mentioning and partly describing numerous other existential structures. He does not think *Being and Time*'s three main

[110] See Mark A. Wrathall and Patrick Londen, "Anglo-American Existential Phenomenology," in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy: 1945–2015*, ed. by Becker and Thomson.

[111] "'As long as' Dasein factically exists [as a "thrown project"], it is never past [*vergangen*, that is, gone into the past], but is always already *having-been*, in the sense of 'I *am*-as-having-been'" (BT 376/SZ 328). Heidegger's prioritization of futurity over having-beenness (which Arendt famously criticized for opening the door to a historically dangerous *revisionism*) helps explain why he often makes such paradoxical-sounding pronouncements as: "What has been comes to meet us from out of the future," or: "Where we come from remains always still to come [*Herkunft stet bleibt immer Zukunft*]." Nevertheless, existentially, our mooded attunements accomplish "the primary discovery of the world," taking the deepest ontological cut out of what we encouner and in so doing reaching deeper than words can ever fully recapitulate (BT 176–7/SZ 137–8). See also Mark A. Wrathall and Patrick Londen, "An overview of *Being and Time*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Being and Time*, ed. by Mark Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[112] Book 4 of Division II even distinguishes our inauthentic, intermediate, and authentic modes of making sense of ourselves through these temporal horizons. (For a careful reconstruction and critique of Heidegger's complex view of their interrelations, see Blattner, *Heidegger's Temporal Idealism*.)

existentials are *exhaustive* (or a *complete* list of all the constitutive structures universally conditioning Dasein's existential world) but, instead, that these three existential structures of Dasein play a crucial role precisely as the three "essential existentials" that directly emerge from and so help disclose the three primordial temporal horizons underlying them. Those three existentials are nothing more nor less than "the main structures of the most importance in the framework of this problematic" (viz., the pursuit of fundamental ontology) because they help disclose the temporal "horizon within which the concept of being in general becomes intelligible" [BT 133/SZ 100], or so the early Heidegger hopes.[113]

Such big picture sketches inevitably require us to proceed too quickly (tormenting our scholarly and pedagogical consciences, which rightly want to qualify and explain such fascinating issues in detail), but the biggest of several deep problems here is that, in *Being and Time* (and all the way through 1929's *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*), Heidegger also believes that the temporal horizons *constitutively condition* what shows up through the existential structures. Indeed, as we shall see in Chapter 2, it is the early Heidegger's neo-Kantian view – that the three temporal horizons fix some of the fundamental terms for any ontology we disclose through the three existential structures – that (temporarily) props up his false and politically disastrous belief that he will be able to disclose "a [*einer*] fundamental ontology" (a *single* "understanding of the meaning of being in general"), which will *answer* the question of being in a way that will enable Heidegger to reunify the university and, behind it, Germany itself (by answering the very question of what it means to *be* German).[114] It is to the philosophical foundations of this large problem that we shall now turn; for, doing so will also enable us to understand how the most important transformation in the development of Heidegger's own thinking required him to find his way through a prolonged and profound philosophical instance of such existential death and rebirth.

[113] This means that *Being and Time* does not at all preclude the possibility that sexuality, gender, ethnicity, class, etc., could be existentials. See my "Ontopoliticosexual Pro(-) vocations" (206–210; cf. Tina Chanter, *Time, Death, and the Feminine: Levinas with Heidegger* [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002] and Marianna Ortega, *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self* [New York: SUNY, 2016]).

[114] See Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, ch. 3.