

“Massive Voluntarism” or Heidegger’s Confrontation with the Will

Vincent Blok

Wageningen University / Radboud University Nijmegen

Abstract: One of the controversial issues in the development of Heidegger’s thought is the problem of the will. The *communis opinio* is that Heidegger embraced the concept of the will in a non-critical manner at the beginning of the thirties and, in particular, he employed it in his political speeches of 1933–1934. Jacques Derrida for instance speaks about a “massive voluntarism” in relation to Heidegger’s thought in this period. Also Brett Davis discerns a period of “existential voluntarism” in 1930–1934, in which Heidegger takes over a notion of the will in a non-critical manner. In this article, this interpretation is challenged and a stronger interpretation of Heidegger’s concern with the will is developed. Our hypothesis is that Heidegger’s concern with the will at the onset of the thirties is brought about by his confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) with the concept of the will. Based on his lecture courses from 1930 and 1936/37 and his Rectoral Address from 1933, enables us to discern three main characteristics of Heidegger’s deconstructed concept of the will in the early thirties.

Keywords: Free will, will, confrontation, Heidegger, Derrida

Introduction

One of the controversial issues in the development of Heidegger’s thought is the problem of the will. Already in *Being and Time* of 1927, the role of the will is quite ambiguous. Although he is silent on the question about the will in *Being and Time*—he only assures us that the will has no ontological significance at all—concepts like the resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) of human being can be seen as a resolute will. While the concept of the will played an implicit

and ambiguous role around the time he wrote *Being and Time*, in the early thirties Heidegger explicitly confronted this concept.¹

The *communis opinio* is that Heidegger embraced the concept of the will in a non-critical manner at the beginning of the thirties, and employed it as such in his political speeches of 1933–1934. Jacques Derrida for instance speaks of a “massive voluntarism” in Heidegger’s thought in this period (Derrida 1989: 46). More recently, Bret Davis wrote a monumental study on Heidegger’s treatment of the problem of the will. He distinguishes between a period of *political* and *existential voluntarism* in which Heidegger took over a concept of the will in a non-critical way—this constituting “the absolute zero point in Heidegger’s (lack of) thought with regard to the problem of the will”—followed by a stage in which he attempted to conceive of a proper sense of the will—will as reservedness (*Verhaltenheit*)—a stage which was finally followed by a period in which he dropped the concept of the will completely.² Around 1938–39, he realized that the concept of the will is anchored in the human being of a *subject* that is willing. In his later thought, one of the main issues is the releasement from the wilful way of thinking and the exploration of the possibility of a *gelassen* or non-willing way of philosophical thinking.

In this article, we challenge this interpretation of Heidegger’s treatment of the problem of the will and develop a stronger one. My hypothesis is that Heidegger’s concern for the will at the onset of the thirties does not testify to a “massive voluntarism” or “existential voluntarism”, as Derrida and Davis have suggested, but is rather due to his *confrontation* (*Auseinandersetzung*) with, and *destruction* of, the concept of the will. In this article we shall inquire into the development of Heidegger’s confrontation with the will in the thirties.

In section 1 we start with Heidegger’s lecture course in 1930, in which he challenged the “pure will” of Kant’s practical philosophy. In the early 1930s, Heidegger destructed the concept of the will and developed his own proper concept of willing in confrontation with Kant. We will discern three main characteristics of Heidegger’s concept of the will. These three characteristics will be subsequently traced in his critical engagement with the will in the mid-thirties (1936/37) (§2). The elaboration of Heidegger’s destructed concept of the will in §1 and §2, enables us to understand what Heidegger had in mind with his destructed concept of willing in the thirties. In section 3, we finally test our hypothesis by tracing Heidegger’s concept of the will in his *Rectoral Address* (1933), and draw some conclusions.

¹ For the ambiguous role of the will in *Sein und Zeit*, see Davis 2007: 73.

² Davis 2007: 73. In his study of the twists and turns in Heidegger’s thought with regard to the problem of the will, Davis does not take into account the possibility that Heidegger’s profound *Auseinandersetzung* with the concept of the will is phenomenologically motivated. In this article, we focus exactly on this aspect of Heidegger’s *confrontation* with the issue of will.

1. Heidegger’s confrontation with the issue of the will in his *Auseinandersetzung with Kant (1930)*³

Prior to his Rectoral Address of 1933, Heidegger held a lecture-course in 1930 on the essence of human freedom. In the final part of this course, Heidegger discusses Kant’s conception of the “pure will”. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* of 1788, Kant showed that the pure will provides the basis for practical freedom by revealing universal laws (the categorical imperative).

In his study on *Heidegger and the Will*, Brett Davis argues that Heidegger “is more interested in the autonomy and the purity of the will” in this lecture course on Kant, “than he is with its disclosure of universal rational laws” (Davis 2007: 67); whilst for Kant the pure will and the law of practical reason cannot be separated, for Heidegger, the pure will unilaterally determines the law of practical reason. To support his claim, Davis refers to Heidegger’s lecture course from 1930: “What is genuinely law-giving for willing is the actual pure willing itself and nothing else” (GA 31: 279). For Davis, the primacy of “actual pure willing” is an indication of Heidegger’s *existential voluntarism*, which is defined as the “resolute will to take on the burden of imposing meaning on an otherwise meaningless world” (Davis 2007: 42).

But the question is whether the primacy of “actual pure willing” is indeed an indication of Heidegger’s *existential voluntarism* or is rather due to his way of philosophical methodology in the thirties. In this section, we will argue for the latter possibility and reject Davis’ thesis. Furthermore, by discussing Heidegger’s confrontation with the concept of the will, we are able to distinguish three main characteristics of Heidegger’s deconstructed concept of the will.

In the thirties, Heidegger characterized his own philosophical method as a confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*). In his lecture course of 1930 for instance, he claims with regard to Kant that he did

not problematize in a sufficient primordial manner the finitude of man. [...] To show this is the task of a Kant interpretation, which, however, does not have the pseudo-philological aim of presenting the “correct” Kant—there is nothing of the sort. [...] as long as we do not resolutely enter into the occurrence of philosophy by means of a philosophizing confrontation, everything remains closed to us. [...] To be sure, confrontation does not mean what the common understanding assumes, i.e. criticizing and contradicting. Instead, it is a bringing back of the other, and thereby also of oneself, to what is primary and originary, to that which, as the essential, is itself the common, and thus

³ Parts of this and the next section were published earlier as Blok 2013. While that paper is concerned with a *systematic* and critical reflection on Heidegger’s phenomenology of the will, and offers our own thoughts on how to build on Heidegger’s phenomenology of willing, this paper purely focuses on the *historical* development of Heidegger’s phenomenology of the will in the thirties.

not needful of any subsequent alliance. *Philosophical controversy is interpretation as destruction.* (GA 31: 168; cf. 292)

In another article, I elaborated three main characteristics of Heidegger's method of confrontation in the thirties, which can be identified in the quote above.⁴ First of all, the method of confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) makes an effort to halt at the other or the difference (*auseinander*) without reconciling this difference, for instance, between Kant's and Heidegger's concepts of the finitude of man. The second characteristic of confrontation is that we are involved (*einbegriffen*) in the confrontation; it concerns the finitude of man and *my* finitude at the same time. The third characteristic of confrontation is its momentous character; it involves a resolute occurrence of philosophy, which the thinker has to enact every time again by everyone for himself or herself. It is this kind of interpretation as destruction which takes place in Heidegger's confrontation with the concept of the will in the thirties. We will follow for a moment Heidegger's confrontation with the concept of the will in his lecture course of 1930.

According to Kant, the will is "a faculty ..., either of bringing forth objects corresponding to representations, or of determining itself, i.e. its causality to effect such objects" (CPR: 128). Kant's distinction between two capacities of the will is rooted in the philosophical tradition. Plato can be seen as the founder of the concept of the striving will (*boulèsthai*), which brings forth objects that correspond to (rational) representations (Gorg: 455d6–e2). In addition to this first capacity of the will, Aristotle discerns the freedom of the will. According to Aristotle, a human being is the principle, master or cause of his own actions. This distinguishes man from animals and plants (EE: 1222b17; 1224a28–30).

In his confrontation with Kant's concept of the freedom of the will, Heidegger asks what causes freedom, when it has no external cause. "Now if will can determine its own causation, it has the possibility of determining itself in its causation through itself. ... In this case willing takes its determining ground not from somewhere else but *from itself*. And what does willing take from itself? It takes itself, in its essence" (GA 31: 276–277). Although it is not directly clear why willing takes its determining ground from itself, and not, for instance, from the world, in this section, as we said, we follow Heidegger's line of reasoning in his confrontation with the will. For Heidegger there is no external cause of willing, which means that the cause of willing is the *actual willing* itself: "Pure willing is the willing of one's own essence as will" (GA 31: 278).

This primacy of actual willing doesn't indicate an *existential voluntarism*, as Davis suggests. On the contrary, Heidegger asks what kind of will it is which purely wills itself. Following Kant, Heidegger argues that such a will unconditionally determines its own willing. "It cannot help but be in harmony with

⁴ Blok 2009: 43–57. See there for an extended elaboration of the method of confrontation.

itself, its pure essence, i.e. it cannot but be good. And a will that cannot but be good is a perfectly good will, or as Kant says, a holy, divine will" (GA 31: 280). So if any, only a divine will can be seen as "existential voluntaristic". But in case of finite beings like humans, the will is not in harmony with itself because it is determined by other motives too, and by its sensibility. So for Heidegger the question remains what causes the pure willing of finite beings like humans, when it has no external cause?

Following Kant in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, Heidegger argues that the causality of something has to be understood as the law of the existence of something; it is the law according to which something comes into existence.⁵ From this Heidegger concludes that the cause of finite pure willing is the *law* for the existence of the will. And, according to Heidegger, this law is the actual pure willing itself (GA 31: 278). So unlike the existential voluntarism of divine willing, finite pure willing is found in "the ought of pure willing" (GA 31: 280); the law-giving of finite pure willing has the character of an *imperative*, i.e. of a "you oath".

And now we reach the point where Heidegger's destruction of Kant's concept of the will commences. According to Heidegger, "the decisive point for the understanding of the whole problem" (GA 31: 285) resides in the question about the *actuality* of the law of finite pure willing. Kant didn't ask this question:

However, Kant remains a long way from explicitly making this factuality as such into a central metaphysical problem, i.e. from bringing its conceptual articulation over into the essence of man and thus arriving at the threshold of a fundamentally different problematic (GA 31: 294).

According to Kant we become conscious of the categorical imperative "as soon as we construct maxims for the will" (CPR: 53): "This principle needs no search and no invention, having long been in the reason of all men and embodied in their being. It is the principle of *ethics*" (CPR: 59).

To Heidegger these statements sound quite peculiar. Is the law of finite pure willing undeniably and immediately evident to the most common reason? Is it a fact embodied in the essence of man? Is it always present and can we confirm it at any time, as if with our nose and ears? Heidegger does not agree with Kant's understanding of the *actuality* of the law of finite pure willing as an object present-at-hand (*vorhanden*). "It could also be conceded that this fact represents a specific kind of factuality quite different from that pertaining to present things..." (GA 31: 291). And this rejection of the *self-evidence* of the law of finite pure willing is phenomenologically motivated. If we observe ourselves in a completely unprejudiced way, we do not discover this law as a present-at-hand object within ourselves.

⁵ In this article, we focus on Heidegger's confrontation with the will. Therefore, we do not ask whether Heidegger's interpretation of Kant is correct or not. For this, see the study of Davis 2007: 65–71.

For Heidegger, therefore, the question remains what is the ontological status of the *actuality* of the law of finite pure willing. To answer this question, once again Heidegger takes up a notion of Kant: as for Kant we become conscious of the law “as soon as we *construct* (*entwerfen*) maxims of the will” (emphasis added). This condition of the possibility of experiencing the factuality of the law means, that we betake ourselves into the specific realm of such facts, i.e. that we actually will. The law of finite pure willing *is* solely in willing it.

According to Heidegger, this actuality of the law of finite pure willing is actual in a twofold sense. Firstly, the actuality of the law only gives itself through and in our willing it. Secondly, it is only this actuality of the law that is proper to our will as will. The law of finite pure willing *is* in fact only because and insofar the will wills it, and the will *is* only in the *ought* demanded by pure willing, i.e. the law of finite pure willing. Pure will and the law of finite pure willing are therefore interconnected and interdependent.

Before we elaborate on this interdependency and interconnectedness of pure will and the law of finite pure willing (cf. §2), we come back here to Davis’ (and Derrida’s) claim that Heidegger’s embrace of actual pure willing in the early thirties is an indication of his massive or existential voluntarism. When Heidegger rejects the *evidence* of Kant’s law of finite pure willing, this doesn’t imply he *distinguishes* between finite pure willing on the one hand and its rational law of willing on the other, that he thereupon *rejects* the primacy of the rational law and instead claims that the pure will “*unilaterally* determines the law of practical reason”, as Davis suggests (Davis 2007: 68). First of all, when finite pure willing and its law are interconnected—and this is the case according to Heidegger—they cannot be separated. Moreover, when they are interdependent, neither does the will conform unilaterally to the law nor is the law forced unilaterally to conform to the will. In other words, when finite pure willing and its law are interconnected and interdependent, there is no starting point for any voluntarism or determinism of the will.

The concept of the will is rather destructed in order to remind us of three main characteristics of the will: 1) the self-orientation of willing consists in the fact that the cause of willing is the actual willing itself. This characteristic is indeed acknowledged by Davis (Davis 2007: 67), but cannot be interpreted as existential voluntarism because of the other two characteristics of the will: 2) In actual willing, the one who wills and that which is willed are interdependent and interconnected. 3) This interdependency of the one who wills and that which is willed has the character of law-giving, i.e. of a “you ought”. When Heidegger uses the concept of the will in the beginning of the thirties, it is characterized by these three elements and only used in this destructed manner.

More important than our rejection of Davis’ interpretation of Heidegger’s concept of the will is the fact that as early as 1930, so prior to his Rectoral Address, he developed his own concept of the will and that this proper concept of willing was phenomenologically motivated. In his confrontation with Kant’s

concept of the pure will, he realized that the law of willing is not something present-at-hand within us, but accessible only via a knowledge that arises from such willing: "the fact of the ought *announces* itself in the actual willing" (GA 31: 290; emphasis added). According to Heidegger this factuality of the ought can never be encountered as long as we consider and analyse the law of finite pure willing and ourselves as present-at-hand objects⁶.

2. Heidegger's confrontation with the will in his *Auseinandersetzung* with Nietzsche (1936–1937)

Before we trace Heidegger's concept of the will in his *Rectoral Address* (see §3), we focus on Heidegger's confrontation with Nietzsche's concept of the will in the mid-thirties. By focussing on Heidegger's confrontation with the will in his lecture course of 1936/37, it will become clear that Heidegger's destruction of the will in the early thirties is *continued* and *developed* further in the mid-thirties.⁷ On the basis of this elaboration, we are able to understand what Heidegger had in mind when he developed his concept of willing in the thirties.

According to Nietzsche, will doesn't indicate a psychological phenomenon, but rather the Being of beings: "Only where there is life is there also will; not will to life but—thus I teach you—will to power".⁸ In his lecture course Heidegger stresses the ontological status of Nietzsche's concept of the will: if, according to Nietzsche, will to power is the basic character of all beings, then

⁶ In a lecture course from 1914, Heidegger's tutor, Edmund Husserl, developed also a phenomenology of the will. But his phenomenology of the will does not show this fact of the ought in actual willing. For Husserl, the will is a type of act embedded in consciousness. To distinguish between the act of willing and the desiring acts (joy, wish), he shows that both are acts of reaching for..., but in case of willing, something is missing: "Das Wünschen vermeint ein "<Es> möge sein", das Wollen ein "Es soll sein", wobei das "Es soll" freilich in bestimmten Sinn zu nehmen ist. Der Wille, sagt man, geht auf Verwirklichung" (Hua 28: 105). For Husserl, it is not the *actual willing* that is characterized by the fact of the ought, but rather the *willed object*. According to Heidegger's argument, the reason why Husserl didn't see the fact of the ought in actual willing is that, for him, the will is located in a present at hand object (consciousness), which is reaching for... a willed object (cf. GA 60: 57–63). A more detailed comparison of Heidegger's and Husserl's phenomenologies of the will is, however, beyond the scope of this article.

⁷ This goes against Davis's view; he claimed that, in this period, Heidegger first destructed the traditional concept of willing and tried to work out a proper sense of the will (Davis 2007: 73).

⁸ KSA 4: 149. Nietzsche's characterization of Being as will is rooted in the German philosophical tradition. Not only Schopenhauer, whose main work was of major importance for the thinking of Nietzsche, understood Being as will, but also Schelling, who says in his *Abhandlung über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*: "Es gibt in der letzten Instanz und gar kein anderes Sein als Wollen. Wollen ist Ursein" (Schelling 1856: 350). In the end, this characterization of Being as will goes back to Leibniz, who saw it as the original unity of *perceptio* and *appetitus*, as the unity of representation and willing.

its definition cannot appeal to a particular being or a specific circumstance in the world (GA 43: 44). Heidegger illustrates this with an example.

Normally, the will is taken to be a faculty of the soul.⁹ The soul is a particular being, distinct from body and mind. However, if the will provides the essence of *every* being, then it does not pertain to the soul. Rather, the soul, the body and the mind pertain to the will, inasmuch as such things *are*. If every being is willing, then it cannot be derived from the soul. Neither can the will be understood as an ability or power of the soul, in contrast to, for example, the ability to perceive. According to Heidegger, each ability is already a power to do something, and as such already a will to power. The will can not be therefore further characterized by defining it as a faculty of the soul, because the essence of every faculty is already grounded in the essence of the will to power: “If will to power characterizes Being itself, there is nothing *else* that will can be defined *as*. Will is will”.¹⁰

Because the will cannot be identified with a being that is willing something, or with something that can be willed, Heidegger’s confrontation with the will starts with the phenomenon of *willing*. Willing is a kind of behaviour directed towards something, a going after. Now it seems to be obvious that the essence of willing as directedness towards something would be grasped most purely by distinguishing it from other modes of directedness towards something, like representing or wishing, for instance.¹¹ However, this approach is inappropriate according to Heidegger: “No, willing is not wishing at all. It is the submission of ourselves to our own command, and our exposure (*Entschlossenheit*) to such self-command, which already implies our carrying out the command“ (GA 43: 47).

⁹ This characteristic of the will goes back to Aristotle. He defines will (*boulēsis*) as a striving (*orexis*) which is connected to a rational representation and is located in the rational part of the soul (OS: 432b5–7). According to Heidegger, this definition of the will is decisive for the rest of the philosophical tradition. For Nietzsche’s own destruction of the will as a characteristic of the soul, see KSA 5: 31–34. For a comprehensive study of the will in the Western philosophical tradition, see Pink & Stone 2004.

¹⁰ GA 43: 45. Although Heidegger is not explicitly referring to the issue, his discussion of Nietzsche’s concept of the will implies much more than appears at first sight. According to Heidegger, it is typical for the metaphysical tradition from Plato on to assign priority to beings in the determination of the Being of beings. Also Nietzsche uses concepts which seem to be derived from a psychological state, when he characterizes the will as an affect or passion. However, Heidegger makes clear that Nietzsche doesn’t derive Being from beings. This means that Nietzsche, according to Heidegger, already said farewell to the metaphysical way of asking about Being (without implying that Nietzsche found the appropriate way of asking about Being) (cf. GA 43: 46): “Nietzsche hat zwar diese Sachlage nie grundsätzlich und systematisch entfaltet, aber er weiß doch klar, daß er hier steht” (GA 43: 44; cf. 59).

¹¹ This is for instance the approach of Husserl in his lecture course on the will from 1914. The starting point for his phenomenology of the will is the distinction between wishing and willing directedness (cf. Hua 28: 105).

Heidegger recognizes that this account of willing seems to be unphenomenological at first sight, that it cannot be derived from the willing directedness towards something. But, according to Heidegger, it is rather the isolation of willing (relation) of the one who wills, and that which is willed (relata), and the comparison of this “pure” relation with other relations—the representing or wishing relation for instance—which is unphenomenological. Willing doesn’t exist without the one who wills and that which is willed; that which is willed and the one who wills are brought into the willing, “although not in the extrinsic sense in which we can say that to every striving belongs something that strives and something that is striven for” (GA 43: 48). In this characterisation of the will in his lecture course of 1936/37, we recognize the same interconnectedness and interdependency of the one who wills and that which is willed in willing that we encountered already in the 1930 course. The question is this: how does the one who wills and that which is willed belong together in willing according to Heidegger? How are the one who wills and that which is willed related? Heidegger explains this interdependency by discussing Nietzsche’s characterisation of the will as affect and feeling.

When Nietzsche defines will in relation to concepts such as affects and feelings, there’s a temptation to connect the psychological quality of these terms with man as the subject of the will. Yet Heidegger keeps open the possibility that the will is not primarily the will of the subject: “Will as mastery of oneself (*Über-sich-Herrssein*) is never the encapsulation of the ego from its surroundings”.¹² Just as Heidegger tries to conceive the will out of the willing relation, and not out of the relata (the one who wills or that which is willed), he also understands affects and feelings primarily as *relational* phenomena: We must above all see that here it is not a matter for psychology It is a matter of the basic modes that constitute Dasein, a matter of the ways man confronts the *Da*, the openness and concealment of beings, in which he stands (GA 43: 52). An affect is primarily a mode of being (*Seinsweise*), in which the one who wills and that which is willed are interconnected. We follow Heidegger’s lecture course for a moment to develop an answer to our question, how the one who wills and that which is willed belong together in the willing relation.

An affect, anger for instance, comes over us, seizes us, affects us. Our being is moved by a kind of excitement, something stirs us up and lifts us beyond ourselves. Heidegger conceives the first essential moment in the affect by appealing to popular speech:

¹² GA 43: 56. According to Heidegger, it is not necessary to explain the will as subjective will, because Nietzsche himself says that the will is something very complicated, something that is a unity only as a word. According to Heidegger, Nietzsche doesn’t provide a clear answer to the question what an affect is. He only assumes that it is a configuration of the will to power. In fact, this finding is incorrect, because Nietzsche explains the will to power out of his reflections on the essence of the affective (cf. KSA 5: 54–55).

Popular speech proves to be keen-sighted when it says of someone who is stirred up and acts in an excited manner, “He isn’t altogether himself”. When we are seized by excitement, our being “altogether there” vanishes; it is transformed into a kind of “falling apart” (*auseinander*) (GA 43: 53).

According to Heidegger, Nietzsche has in mind this first essential moment in the affect, when he calls the will an affect. Willing is being lifted beyond oneself (*über-sich-hinaus-wollen/sein*), insofar as the one who wills and that which is willed “fall apart” in willing, and as such is characterized by an *über-sich-hinaus-wollen/sein*. The one who is willing is lifted beyond oneself, namely towards that which is willed (GA 42: 217).

According to Heidegger, Nietzsche has also the other essential moment in the affect in mind when he calls the will an affect, the moment of seizure in the affect by which something comes over us. When the will assaults or comes over us, this doesn’t mean we first exist, and then will something. We are always in the scope of willing, even when we are unwilling. “That genuine willing which surges forward in our exposure (*Entschlossenheit*) to it, that ‘yes’, is what instigates the seizure of our entire being, of the very essence within us” (GA 43: 54–55). Heidegger conceives the *being-beyond-oneseif*, which characterizes the will (first essential moment in the affect), as ex-posure (*Entschlossenheit*).¹³ *Ent-schlossenheit* means the will already said farewell to “the encapsulation of the ego from its surroundings” (subjectivity) and exposes itself to “the *Da*, the openness and concealment of beings, in which he stands” (*Dasein*). “Willing is the ex-posure toward oneself, but as the one who wills what is posited in the willing as willed” (GA 43: 48).

It is striking that, according to Heidegger, it is not the one who wills or that which is willed which is *entschlossen* (relata), but willing itself (relation). Willing ex-poses itself towards the one who *wills*, as the one who is *willed* in willing. And here we find the answer to our question about how the interconnectedness of the one who wills and that which is willed has to be understood. The one who wills and that which is willed are interconnected in the exposure (*Entschlossenheit*) of willing. Heidegger states that this interconnectedness has the character of law-giving; “Willing is the ex-posure to self-command” (GA 43: 47). Although Heidegger doesn’t explain here why willing should

¹³ With the concept of *Entschlossenheit*, Heidegger brings one of his own basic concepts of *Being and Time* in connection with Nietzsche’s concept of the will. Normally, this word means *resoluteness* and indicates the resoluteness of the will of the subject. Literally, nevertheless, *Entschlossenheit* means *Ent-schlossenheit*, “unclosedness,” i.e., not exactly will as the resoluteness of the subject, but *exposure* to the openness and concealment of beings, in which the one who wills and what is willed are interconnected. “Das Wesen des Wollens wird hier in die Ent-schlossenheit zurückgenommen. Aber das Wesen der Ent-schlossenheit liegt in der Ent-borgenheit des menschlichen Daseins für die Lichtung des Seins und keineswegs in einer Kraftspeicherung des Agierens. Cf. *Sein und Zeit* §44 und §60. Der Bezug zum Sein aber ist das Lassen.” (GA 40: 23)

be understood as self-command, our discussion of the lawgiving character of willing in §1 can be helpful. There we saw that finite pure willing has the character of lawgiving, which solely *is* in willing it. We saw there that the law of finite pure willing is actual in a twofold sense. The law of finite pure willing *is* in fact only because and insofar as the will wills it, and the will *is* only in the *ought* demanded by pure willing, i.e. the law of finite pure willing.

In his lecture course of 1936/37, this lawgiving character of willing is understood as the self-command of willing. This exposure to self-command is, on the one hand, the exposure to the command of the one who wills to *be* that which is willed; on the other hand it is the exposure to that which is willed, as that on which the self-command of the one who *wills* is focused. Willing wills the one who wills as that which is willed. It is in this sense that Heidegger speaks about the *self-command* of the one who wills in willing, namely the self-command to the one who wills, to be that which is willed.¹⁴ In this characteristic of the will as self-command, we recognize the lawgiving character of willing that we encountered already in the 1930 course.

Heidegger distinguishes two aspects of this self-command of willing to be that which is willed in his confrontation with Nietzsche. The one who wills can only *will* to be the willed when both are not identical. If the one who wills were identical to that which is willed, then there would be no necessity for him to be the willed in willing. *Ent-schlossen* is willing when that which is willed is beyond the one who is willing and, as such, awakens the willing directedness towards the willed¹⁵; in willing, the one who wills determines that which is willed (*Sichbefehlen*). At the same time, the one who wills is not an isolated being who decides to will that which is willed. "Only he can truly command [...] who is always ready and able to place himself under command. By means of such readiness he has placed himself within the scope of the command as first to obey, the paragon of obedience" (GA 43: 49). It is not our decision to will the willed, according to Heidegger. Will itself has a moment of seizure, that comes over us: "That we can be beyond or outside ourselves in this or that way, and that we are in fact constantly so, is possible only because will itself—seen in relation to the essence of man—is seizure pure and simple" (GA 43: 54). In the self-command of willing, that which is willed determines the one who wills (*Sichbefehlen*).

Here, we not only get an answer to our question how the character of law-giving of Heidegger's concept of the will needs to be understood; we also encounter the self-orientation of willing in Heidegger's concept of the self-command. To understand the self-orientation of willing, we return to our earlier characterization of willing as "willing out beyond ourselves". There we

¹⁴ As early as 1930 Heidegger sees this character of the will: "Everyone who actually wills knows: *to actually will is to will nothing else but the ought of one's existence*" (GA 31: 289).

¹⁵ "Im Willen als Mehr-sein-wollen, im Willen als Wille zur Macht liegt wesentlich die Steigerung, die Erhöhung" (GA 43: 70).

saw that the destructed concept of the will is not just ecstatic or lifted beyond itself. Heidegger is quite specific here and understands “being lifted beyond ourselves” as a way of “losing *ourselves*”. So in one way or another, willing is connected with the question about *ourselves*¹⁶; the “falling apart” of the one who wills and that which is willed in willing, is the falling apart or cleavage between “self” and (authentic or original) “self”. And this cleavage or difference is the impetus for the directedness of willing to bring the self to the (original) self: “But such reaching out in passion does not simply lift us up and away beyond ourselves. It gathers our essential being to its proper ground” (GA 43: 56). Heidegger’s primary concern is self-assertion (*Selbstbehauptung*): “Power is will as willing out *beyond itself*; precisely in that way to *come to itself*, to find and *assert itself* in the circumscribed simplicity of its essence, in Greek, *entelecheia*” (GA 43: 74, my emphasis). Heidegger’s destructed concept of willing is characterized by a circular movement, in which the one who wills (self) and that which is willed (original self) are interconnected. “Willing always *brings the self to itself*; it thereby finds itself out beyond itself. It maintains itself within *the thrust away from one thing toward something else*” (GA 43: 61, my emphasis).

The self-orientation of willing consists in the interest to bridge the gap between self and (original) self, and must be understood as the “gathering of our essential being to its proper ground” or as “a *going back* into its essence, into the origin” (GA 43: 70, my emphasis). Moreover, it becomes clear that willing is primarily concerned with the unity of *self* and original *self*. Again, however, it becomes clear that the self-orientation of willing cannot be interpreted as existential voluntarism, exactly because of the interconnectedness of the one who wills and that which is willed in willing, on the one hand, and the law-giving character of willing, on the other.

3. Conclusions: Heidegger’s confrontation with the will in his Rectoral Address (1933)

From the analysis in sections one and two, we have to conclude that, as early as 1930, so prior to his *Rectoral Address*, Heidegger developed his own destructed concept of the will: the self-orientation of willing consists in the fact that the cause of willing is *actual* willing itself. In actual willing, the one who wills and that which is willed are interdependent and interconnected. This interdependency has the character of law-giving. Heidegger’s destructed concept of willing is further developed in the mid-thirties: the one who wills

¹⁶ Cf. “Das Wesen der Person ist die Selbstverantwortlichkeit: sich an sich selbst, nicht egoistisch und in bezug auf das zufällige Ich, binden. Selbstverantwortlichkeitsein, nur antworten und d.h. zuerst immer nur fragen nach dem Wesen des Selbst. Diesem zuerst und in allem das Wort geben, das Sollen des reinen Wollens wollen“ (GA 31: 293).

and that which is willed are interconnected in the exposure of willing. This exposure is, on the one hand, the exposure to the *self*-command of the one who wills to *be* that which is willed, and, on the other hand, the exposure to that which is willed, as that on which the *self-command* of the one who is willing is focused. We have seen that in willing, the one who wills determines that which is willed (*sichbefehlen*) and at the same time, that which is willed is determining the one who wills (*sichbefehlen*). It is in this sense that the will concerns the unity of *self* and original *self* and is therefore characterized by self-orientation.

The elaboration of Heidegger's concept of the will enables us to answer the question whether his concept of the will is *new* when we compare it with other conceptions of the will in the philosophical tradition. First of all, we recognize Heidegger's general critique of the metaphysical tradition in his conception of the interconnectedness of the will. According to Heidegger, the question of Being in the metaphysical tradition does not ask thematically about *Being*. What is asked about is *beings* as such; the point for departure in the metaphysical tradition is beings, and what is asked for is the Being of these beings (cf. GA 40: 14). In the same way, beings are also the point for departure concerning the will in the metaphysical tradition (the one who wills or that which is willed). Unlike the metaphysical tradition, Heidegger is asking for the will as such, i.e. *willing*. And because of this radically different orientation in his question of Being, Heidegger encounters the *interconnectedness* of willing, the one who wills and that which is willed. Also the second characteristic of willing—its law-giving character—is quite new when we compare it with the metaphysical tradition. Of course, also Kant and Nietzsche pointed to the law-giving or commanding character of the will (cf. §1), but the *interdependency* of *Sichbefehlen* and *Sichbefehlen* in willing signifies that the human being is neither the subject nor the object of the will. According to Heidegger, the factuality of the ought can never be encountered as long as our point of departure is a being, i.e. a subject who wills or an object that is willed.

Only the self-orientation of willing is quite traditional. In modern philosophical tradition—from Kant to Nietzsche—the freedom, self-determination and selfhood of willing is in the centre of philosophical attention. According to Fichte, to give only one example, the will is "the authentic basic root of human being". When we will something, we simultaneously will ourselves as a free being: "I find myself, as myself, only in willing", i.e. only in willing do we have an experience of ourselves according to Fichte.¹⁷ This example illustrates the self-evident connection between will and self in modern philosophical tradition. On the one hand, the self-orientation of Heidegger's

¹⁷ Quoted in Ritter et al. 1971–2005: 784.

concept of the will seems to be rooted in this tradition.¹⁸ On the other hand, the other two characteristics of Heidegger's concept of the will make clear that his destructed concept of willing cannot be understood in an existential-voluntaristic or subjective way.

The final test of our hypothesis, that Heidegger's embrace of the will in the beginning of the thirties doesn't testify to a massive or existential voluntarism, but is rather due to his confrontation with the will, can be found in Heidegger's *Rectoral Address* from 1933.

In the opening paragraph of *Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität*, Heidegger starts with the „spiritual mission“ of the university, which must be willed (GA 16: 108). This will arise from “the resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) of the German students to stand firm in the face of the extreme distress of German fate” (GA 16: 112). Heidegger calls for a *true will*: “This will is a true will, provided that the German students, through the new Student Law, place themselves under the law of their essence and thereby delimit this essence for the first time. To give law to oneself is the highest freedom” (GA 16: 112–113). He ends this lecture with the remark that “it is our will that our people (*Volk*) fulfil its historical mission”: “We will ourselves!” (GA 16: 117). We encounter the same vocabulary as in the lecture courses of 1930 and 1936/37; *Wille, Entschlossenheit, Selbstbefehl, Selbst das Gesetz geben* etc. Is there any reason to understand the *Rectoral Address* as existential voluntarism and as the unbounded employment of the will in Heidegger's political speeches of 1933–34, as Davis suggests (Davis 2007: 72)?

As I elaborated elsewhere, *Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität* is inquiring into the identity of human being (*Dasein*) in connection with the question about *das Eigene* (the Germans) and *das Fremde* (the Greeks) (Blok 2010: 273–292). This opposition structures the confrontation with the beginning of philosophical thinking in the *Rectoral Address*. Because a full discussion of *Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität* is beyond the scope of this article, we have to restrict ourselves here to discussing Heidegger's concept of the will in the *Rectoral Address*.

¹⁸ Jacob Rogozinski admits the difference between the modern philosophical interest in the human subject and Heidegger's interest in *Dasein*, but nevertheless points to the “existential solipsism” in his understanding of *Dasein*: “A voice from Outside, which is nevertheless not the voice of Another, of ‘a foreign power which would penetrate Dasein’, which is the call of No Other, that is, of Self: ‘in *Gewissen*, Dasein calls itself’. It calls itself away from its inauthentic and fallen Self to its possible authenticity—it calls on itself to come back to itself from its alienation, its foreignness. Everything happens as if, having detected the original phenomenon of the call in its pure, indeterminate form, Heidegger rushed to submit it to a certain determination, to impose on it the structure of a recall to oneself, to either reappropriate it for or repatriate it to the Self. And this is because he understands the phenomenon of the call from within the horizon of being-toward-death, the ‘existential solipsism’ where Dasein, isolating itself in its ‘ownness’, projects itself toward its own-most possibility” (Rogozinski 2002: 52–53).

Heidegger argues that the will of *das Eigene* (the Germans) requires that "we again place ourselves under the power of the beginning of our spiritual-historical existence (*Dasein*)" (GA 16: 108). For Heidegger, this beginning is the first beginning of Greek philosophy. If Heidegger relates the will to this beginning of philosophy, then this concept has to be destructed in his Rectoral Address. Why? Normally, willing is directed to something in the future that becomes present through the act of willing. The past is closed off for willing¹⁹; we cannot will the beginning or *Anfang*. When Heidegger therefore argues that the willing of *das Eigene* requires that we place ourselves under the power of the *Anfang*, he is willing something which is impossible in ordinary (voluntaristic) willing. This impossibility shows already that also in his *Rectoral Address* the concept of willing is destructed and is used only in this destructed manner.

But there is also another reason why the will is already destructed in Heidegger's *Rectoral Address*. Traditionally, the will is without a beginning because the will is only willing itself (power). Because of this self-interest of willing, the will is always already away from the beginning and, therefore, away from any possible limitation of willing by this beginning. When Heidegger therefore says that the will of *das Eigene* requires from us that we place ourselves under the power of the beginning, then the self-orientation of willing has to be destructed and is only used in this destructed non-voluntaristic way. Only such a destructed concept of willing is able to place us under the power of the beginning, submit ourselves (*Fügen*) to the distant command (*ferne Verfügung*) of the first beginning (GA 16: 110–111).

Later on—around 1938—Heidegger realized that the concept of the will is anchored irrevocably in human being as the subject of willing. In his lecture *Nietzsches Wort "Gott ist Tot"* from 1943, based on the Nietzsche lectures delivered between 1936 and 1940, he writes the following about the essential character of the will:

To will is to will-to-be-master. [...] Will strives for what it wills not just as for something that it does not yet have. What the will wills it has already. For will wills its willing. Will wills itself. It exceeds itself. In this way will as will wills above and beyond itself, and therefore at the same time it must bring itself beneath and behind itself (GA 5: 234).

Heidegger realizes now that the circular movement of willing is dominated by the third characteristic of willing, i.e. the self-orientation or self-interest of willing; the will always wills out beyond itself (ecstatic) and brings the

¹⁹ Cf. Husserl's concept of willing: "Der Wille, sagt man dann, kann nicht auf Ideales gehen, sondern nur auf Reales, und nicht auf Vergangenes, sondern auf Künftiges; im Gegensatz zur Freude und zum Wunsch. Jemand kann sich freuen, dass sich ein ideales mathematisches Verhältnis, dass sich die Geltung eines Satzes und Beweises herausstellt bzw. es wünschen" (Hua 28: 106).

other-than-itself back into the domain of this self (incorporation). “Since will is the overpowering of itself, no richness of life will satisfy it. It has its power in overreaching [*im Überreichen*]*—namely, in reaching over its own will. Thus it, as the same, is constantly coming back unto itself as the same*” (GA 5: 237). He now understands that the concept of the will is anchored in a “*menschlicher Vorgriff*”, i.e. in the human being as a *subject* that is willing something²⁰: “With the subjectivity of the subject, will comes to light as the essence of that subjectivity” (GA 5: 243). At that time, he realized that the self-orientation of willing can be seen as the essence of subjectivity, and dropped the concept of the will completely.²¹

One of the main issues in his later thought is the releasement from the wilful way of thinking and the exploration of the possibility of a *gelassen* or non-willing way of philosophical thinking (GA 77: 309). For Heidegger, it is clear that our generation is not yet able to think non-willingly. At best we are on the way to *Gelassenheit*. On this way, the incessant problematization of our philosophical concepts—Will, Self, Own—is the main task of thinking.

Vincent Blok
 Rozenboomlaan 27
 2271 VR Voorburg
 The Netherlands
 vincent.blok@wur.nl

Abbreviations

- EE = Aristotle. 1935. *Eudemian Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- CPR = Kant, Immanuel. 1949. *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. L. White Beck. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- GA 5 = Heidegger, Martin. 1977. *Holzwege*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann.
- GA 16 = Heidegger, Martin. 2000. *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges*, ed. Herman Heidegger. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann.
- GA 31 = Heidegger, Martin. 1994. *Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*, ed. Hartmut Tietjen. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann.
- GA 40 = Heidegger, Martin. 1983. *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, ed. Petra Jaeger. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann.

²⁰ „Jener erstanfängliche Vorgriff des Denkens als Leitfaden der Auslegung des Seienden kann freilich vom anderen Anfang her begriffen werden als eine Art der Nichtbewältigung des noch unerfahrbaren *Da-seins*“ (GA 64: 179–186). In this article, we do not elaborate on the reason for Heidegger’s changed appreciation of the will. For this, see Blok 2011: 194–208.

²¹ In a more systematic reflection on Heidegger’s concept of the will, I criticized the self-orientation or self-interest of Heidegger’s concept of willing and introduced world-interest as the main characteristic of a proper concept of willing (Blok 2013).

- GA 42 = Heidegger, M. 1988. *Schelling: Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*, ed. Ingrid Schüssler. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann.
- GA 43 = Heidegger, Martin. 1985. *Nietzsche: Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst*, ed. Bernd Heimbüchel. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann.
- GA 60 = Heidegger, Martin. 1995. *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens*, ed. Claudius Strube. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann.
- GA 65 = Heidegger, Martin. *Beiträge zur Philosophie (vom Ereignis)*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann.
- GA 77 = Heidegger, Martin. 1995. *Feldweg-Gespräche*, ed. Ingrid Schüssler. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann.
- Gorg = Plato. 1925. *Gorgias*, trans. W.R.M. Lamp. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hua 28 = Husserl, Edmund. 1950. *Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre 1908–1914*. Den Haag: Nijhoff.
- KSA 4 = Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1988. *Also sprach Zarathustra*. München: DTV/de Gruyter.
- KSA 5 = Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1988. *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*. München: DTV/de Gruyter
- OS = Aristotle. 1936. *On the Soul*, trans. W.S. Hett. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Works cited

- Blok, Vincent. 2009. Communication or Confrontation: Heidegger and philosophical Method. *Empedocles. European Journal for the Philosophy of Communication* 1(1): 43–57.
- Blok, Vincent. 2010. Heideggers “National Sozialismus” oder die Frage nach dem philosophischen Empirismus. *Studia Phaenomenologica* 10: 273–292.
- Blok, Vincent. 2011. An Indication of Being—Reflections on Heidegger’s Engagement with Ernst Jünger. *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 42(2): 194–208.
- Blok, Vincent. 2013. Towards the Rehabilitation of the Will in Contemporary Philosophy. Heidegger’s Phenomenology of the Will revisited. *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 44(3) (forthcoming)
- Davis, Brett. 2007. *Heidegger and the Will. On the Way to Gelassenheit*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1989. *Of Spirit. Heidegger and the question*, transl. G. Bennington and R. Bowly. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Pink, T., Stone, M.W.F. (ed.). 2004. *The Will and Human Action: From Antiquity to the Present*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Ritter, J., et al. 1971–2005. *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. Basel: Schwabe Verlag.
- Rogozinski, J. 2002. Hier ist kein warum. Heidegger and Kant’s Practical Philosophy. In *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, ed. F. Raffoul, D. Pettigrew. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Schelling, Friedrich von. 1856. *Abhandlung über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände*, Sämtliche Werke, Band 7. Stuttgart.