

## **A GROUND FOR ETHICS IN HEIDEGGER'S *BEING AND TIME***

DONOVAN MIYASAKI

### *Introduction*

In this essay I suggest that Heidegger's *Being and Time* provides a ground for ethics in the notion of Dasein's 'Being-guilty.' Being-guilty is not a ground for ethics in the sense of a demonstration of the moral 'ought' or a refutation of moral skepticism. Rather, Being-guilty serves as a foundation for ethical life in a way uniquely suited to a phenomenological form of ethics, a way that clarifies, from a phenomenological point of view, why the traditional approach to ethics is misguided. The traditional attempt to ground ethics through demonstration or refutation depends upon a misunderstanding of obligation as an imposition that is distinct from, and inflicted upon, the subject in a way that is in need of justification. Heidegger's conception of Being-guilty, on the contrary, identifies the basis of moral obligation in a form of primary self-obligation that is constitutive of human nature, rather than an imposition upon it. Although primordial guilt or self-obligation does not justify ethical obligation, it does 'ground' ethics. For it is the primary source and support of our ethical activity in two distinct senses. First, it serves as the condition for the possibility of our indebtedness to others—it enables us to be morally obligated. It enables moral obligation towards others by determining Dasein as ontologically indebted to care for its own being—a being which is, in turn, ontologically determined as care for others. Second, Being-guilty provides a criterion for distinguishing what we call ethical and unethical behavior. Ethical behavior is distinguished according to the appropriateness of one's care for the other according to proper recognition of the nature of the Other's Being as Dasein.

### *1. What Calls for Ethics*

Heidegger defines the call of conscience as a call to recognize and take up our "primordial Being-guilty" (*ursprüngliches Schuldigsein*).<sup>1</sup> This primordial or 'existential' guilt is distinct from moral guilt. Unlike moral guilt, it belongs to Dasein ontologically. Dasein is always already guilty, because with every choice and action it effectively nullifies some of its ontical possibilities: "it constantly is *not* other possibilities, and it has waived these in its existentiell projection" (*BT* 285). Existential Being-guilty is an ontological nullity at the very heart of Dasein, consisting of cancelled possibilities that define Dasein's Being just as much as its realized choices and actions do. Drawing on

'*Schuld*'s dual meanings of 'guilt' and 'debt,' Heidegger suggests that this primordial condition, despite its inevitability, is a form of guilt toward oneself, a self-indebtedness. By negating possibilities, Dasein takes away from itself the ability to realize them. Dasein is primordially indebted to itself, because it necessarily exists at its own expense, at the expense of the possibilities that constitute it.<sup>2</sup>

Existential Being-guilty as a form of self-indebtedness in turn grounds a primordial or existential form of self-obligation. Although Dasein cannot be obligated to realize its every ontical possibility, it owes to itself the recognition of this primordial guilt. In everyday existence Dasein often ignores existential guilt; it nullifies possibilities through neglect, choosing without awareness of what it decides against. Consequently, the call to recognize our primordial Being-guilty is a call to recognize and uphold an obligation toward our own being: an obligation to decide how we ought to be while recognizing the possibilities from which we choose.

Heidegger sharply distinguishes primordial or existential Being-guilty from factual moral guilt; consequently his discussion of conscience is not intended to be a theory of moral conscience. However, because the call of conscience is a call to recognize a form of self-obligation, and because the call of conscience presupposes a need for such recognition and a failure to meet that obligation, I believe that Heidegger's treatment of primordial guilt and conscience allows us to identify the foundation of moral guilt in existential Being-guilty. I will argue that the call to conscience is a call to recognize not only primordial guilt but also factual moral guilt.

According to Heidegger, everyday Dasein exists in the averageness and anonymity of the 'they' (*das Man*).<sup>3</sup> Dasein generally understands its own possibilities in light of a leveled interpretation in which Dasein is limited to a 'world' of common activities and concerns. In its extreme form, this leveled self-understanding can become an authentic misunderstanding of oneself as *identical* to the 'they'—having no possibilities outside those recognized and shared by most people, most of the time, in a shared social world of common cares and concerns. This is the condition which Heidegger calls being 'lost' in the 'they.'<sup>4</sup> The call of conscience summons Dasein out of lostness in the 'they'; it gives Dasein recognition of possibilities that are overlooked or covered over by the interpretations of the 'they.' That is, understanding the call involves recognizing the fact that one has understood one's Being in terms of the 'they;' one has misinterpreted oneself as a Being that is reducible to the possibilities of what everyone does or can do. This misinterpretation of one's own Being is, I will try to show, a matter of factual moral guilt. The call of conscience to recognize one's Being-guilty is a call for ethics, in the sense that one is made aware of a need to *become* ethical—because one is already morally guilty.

Primordial guilt concerns a debt that Dasein owes to its own being. Consequently, if the call of conscience is also a call to recognize factual moral guilt, then it concerns a moral guilt that Dasein has incurred toward its own being. But how can one be morally guilty toward oneself? Heidegger describes moral guilt as “Being-the-basis for a lack of something in the Dasein of the Other” (BT 282). Dasein has caused a lack by neglecting to cause something. But we can only understand this neglect by understanding Dasein’s being-a-basis in terms of an ‘ought.’ There is something Dasein ought to do and has not done, and so Dasein can be said to be the cause of a lack by virtue of neglect. If no such obligation or requirement is involved, we cannot make sense of the lack.<sup>5</sup> For example, if it is not the case that I ought not steal, we cannot say that the Other has ‘property’ (that which ‘ought’ to belong to the Other). And if nothing is proper to the Other, then by stealing I have not caused a lack in the Other—nothing can be owed to the Other. So there must be a sense of what is proper to a Being if we are to make sense of a lack in, and a debt toward, that Being.

So, if Dasein, qua ‘lost in the ‘they,’ is morally guilty toward its own Being, what does it owe to itself that it has neglected to provide? It cannot be Dasein’s potentiality-for-Being-itself. This Being-possible *is* Dasein; it belongs to Dasein ontologically, and cannot be lost. Dasein is always potentially itself because it always lags behind its possibilities. It is ahead of itself in always having possibilities, and so cannot ‘catch up’ with itself. Even specific existentiell possibilities cannot, strictly speaking, be a lack in the sense necessary for moral guilt. We lose a possibility by choosing a different possibility that nullifies it. But this is not a lack in the sense of something that *ought* to belong to us. Existentiell possibilities belong to us only insofar as we have them—there are not specific existentiell possibilities which we ought to have and preserve. Qua ‘being-in-the-world,’ existentiell possibilities belong to Dasein, but this or that specific possibility does not. Dasein can be in the world in any number of ways, and consequently, can have any number of different existentiell possibilities.

What does belong to Dasein, and can be lacking, is the possibility of choosing to exist in or nullify a possibility. Dasein can, in a sense, ‘lack’ a possibility by lacking the ability to choose a possibility. Of course, in a very broad sense, Dasein is always already choosing by existing. In Heidegger’s words, Dasein ‘decides’ its existence “whether it does so by taking hold or by neglecting” (BT 12). Neglecting to decide is still choice because it still determines in what way Dasein will and will not be in the world. But this neglect is precisely the lack that we are seeking. When Dasein is lost in the ‘they,’ it is unaware of those existentiell possibilities of its Being that are incompatible with those of the ‘they.’ Without such awareness, Dasein cannot take hold of its decision concerning these possibilities. Dasein nullifies such

possibilities not by deciding to nullify them, but by not deciding about them at all, by not including them in the issue of its Being. The lack of Dasein, as lost in the 'they,' is a lack in its Being qua being-the-basis of itself. Dasein is the basis of its own Being in a lacking way—it causes itself by what it has neglected to do, as well as by what it does. And this lack is caused by neglect in Dasein's self-understanding. As lost in the 'they,' Dasein interprets itself only in terms of the 'they,' and so attributes to itself only those possibilities prescribed by the 'they.' Because it nullifies the possible recognition of its potentiality-for-Being-its-Self qua irreducible to the 'they,' it cannot take hold of its unrecognized possibilities in its decision-making, and thus causes their nullity by neglect.<sup>6</sup> So Dasein has caused, by neglect, a lack in its own Being. Dasein *ought* to have understood itself qua ahead-of-the-they; it *owes* to itself authentic self-understanding, which is the possibility of deciding its existence by taking hold of its possibilities rather than by neglecting them. Dasein ought to be aware of what is being nullified in its choices; it ought to genuinely choose the nullity of certain possibilities, rather than cause this nullity by ignorance or by default.

However, there is a problem in characterizing this debt too quickly as moral guilt. Obviously Dasein cannot understand itself in terms of every existentiell possibility that it possesses at any given moment—this is a practical impossibility. More importantly, Dasein cannot have awareness of specific possibilities that it has not encountered in existence. Dasein knows what possibilities it possesses either because “it has projected itself upon possibilities of its own” or because “it has let such possibilities be presented to it by the way in which the ‘they’ has publicly interpreted things” (BT 270). Dasein knows its possibilities, in other words, because they have already been realized in its own existence or in another's. Dasein can have possibilities that it has not encountered factually in its own or another's existence, but it cannot be aware of such possibilities and thus cannot incorporate them into its decision-making. So, although Dasein's being-the-basis of itself is lacking in this respect – it inevitably causes the nullity of unknown possibilities by neglect – it cannot be morally responsible for such a lack. A Dasein that has been lost in the 'they' cannot be guilty for its neglect of *specific* possibilities of its Being. It becomes aware of specific possibilities too late to be responsible for their neglect. Dasein does not 'owe' to itself self-understanding in the sense of awareness of this or that specific existentiell possibility of its Being; it owes itself the awareness of its potentiality-for-Being-its-Self *as such*. That is, when Dasein becomes lost in the 'they' it equates its own possibilities with those of the 'they.' In doing so, it closes off its receptivity to the recognition of other possibilities. It need not know what specific possibilities it possesses, but only that its possibilities exceed what it has been and what the 'they' prescribes. Dasein, qua lost to the 'they,' is guilty because

it owes to its own Being an *openness*, a *receptivity*, to possibilities of Being it has *not yet discovered*.

Consequently, responding to the call of conscience is not a matter of completely and finally taking hold of one's Being, of knowing *all* of one's possibilities when deciding one's way of being in the world. According to Heidegger, "understanding the appeal means wanting to have a conscience." And "having a conscience," he explains, means "Being-free for one's ownmost Being-guilty" (BT 288). Conscience calls us to be free for our ownmost Being-guilty—that is, to be free for our being the basis of null possibilities, to be free for being the cause of how we are and are not in the world. The 'freedom' at issue here is freedom from the 'they.' We always choose our possibilities, whether by taking hold of them or by neglect, but when we are lost in the 'they' we do not do so freely:

The 'they' has always kept Dasein from taking hold of these possibilities of Being. The 'they' even hides the manner in which it has tacitly relieved Dasein of the burden of explicitly *choosing* these possibilities. It remains indefinite who has 'really' done the choosing. So Dasein makes no choices, gets carried along by the nobody, and thus ensnares itself in inauthenticity. (BT 268)

To be free for one's ownmost Being-guilty would be to not have one's choices determined indirectly by the 'they'—to not choose by default or neglect, but to choose explicitly, with awareness of what is being nullified in one's choice. But this is, as we have seen, practically impossible. We can only choose explicitly in regard to a limited number of possibilities, and we can only be aware of possibilities already encountered in our own or another's existence. Consequently, the call for ethics is answered by "*wanting* to have a conscience" (BT 288, emphasis mine), by wanting to be free for one's Being-guilty. It is a matter of 'wanting to have' because one cannot finally and fully have a conscience or finally and fully be free for one's Being-guilty. In a specific instance, Dasein may find itself struck by conscience, by the recognition that it has nullified a specific possibility of which it had not been aware, but in this recognition Dasein wants to *continue* being struck in this way, to continue being made aware of as-yet-undiscovered possibilities of its Being. Dasein is guilty not of neglecting this or that specific possibility, but of neglecting its potentiality-for-Being-itself as such. Dasein is guilty, not of being without a conscience, but of not *wanting to have* a conscience. And it repays this debt, not by developing an exhaustive understanding of its every possibility, but by wanting to be receptive to the call of conscience, by wanting to be continually vulnerable to the discovery of the possibilities it has nullified.<sup>7</sup> What does this involve? Wanting to be vulnerable to conscience must involve wanting to continually recognize in understanding and in activity the non-identity of one's Being with the 'they.' This must mean something like leaving an 'empty space' in one's interpretation of self and world—an

interpretive and existentiell space that corresponds to the 'ahead' in 'being-ahead-of-itself.'

## 2. *An Example of Moral Guilt Toward One's Own Being*

Heidegger's analysis of conscience is extremely complicated and by no means lucid, but my claim that conscience can be interpreted as recognition of factual moral guilt toward one's own Being can be clarified by a concrete example. We will take for our example a world in which it is uncommon for women to take up a full-time profession. If we imagine a woman in such a world, her everyday self-understanding is formed in terms of the average everyday activities and possibilities of that world. In her everyday existence, she understands her own possibilities in terms of what 'one' [*das Man*] does. 'One,' as a woman in such a world, simply does not have a career. She is perpetually choosing among any number of possibilities, but having a career is not one of them. She chooses by neglect not to have a career. In other words, what she does choose to do nullifies the possibility of taking up a profession. But she does not knowingly make any such choice, having never even considered the option. She has never had a career, and the average woman in such a world does not have one, so the possibility is constantly overlooked. And if we assume, further, that she is 'lost in the 'they'' (as in Heidegger's account), then she not only generally understands herself in terms of the 'they,' she does not even recognize that she might have other possibilities.

But it is still possible that she can be startled out of her lostness in the 'they' by the call of conscience. She might, for example, encounter an exception to the rule—a woman who has, in fact, taken up a profession. And in this encounter, she might recognize the Other's possibility as her own. By discovering her own nullified possibility for having a career, she becomes 'free' for her own Being-guilty in relation to this specific existentiell possibility. She was already 'guilty,' already the basis of the nullity of this possibility, but she was not free for her guilt—she was not even aware that she had nullified the possibility. The choice was made indirectly by the 'they' (by herself *qua* they-self), but now she can explicitly take hold of the decision. With this freedom for Being-guilty in relation to this nullified possibility, the choice to have or not have a career becomes authentically her own; her Being-guilty, at least in respect of this specific possibility, is authentically her own.

But why is she also *morally* guilty? She is guilty for being lost in the 'they.' It should be emphasized, however, that being lost in the 'they' is not to be contrasted with being liberated from the 'they' entirely: "Authentic Being-one's-Self does not rest upon an exceptional condition of the subject, a condition that has been detached from the 'they'; it is rather an existentiell modification of the 'they'—of the 'they' as an essential *existentiale*" (BT 130). We are essentially 'in' the 'they' and cannot get 'out.' The true alternative to

being lost in the 'they' is being *found* in the 'they.' To find oneself in the 'they' is to distinguish between one's own Self and the they-self; it is to recognize that one's Being is not exhausted by the they-self.<sup>8</sup> This is the recognition of the possibility of authenticity, of the existentiell possibility for being the 'they' in a different ('modified,' in Heidegger's words) way.

This does not, however, mean that authenticity is equivalent to finding oneself. When Dasein finds itself, it does not become authentic; it is "shown to itself in its *possible* authenticity" (*BT* 268, emphasis mine). This is an important distinction, because Dasein is not morally guilty for being inauthentic—inauthenticity is its everyday way of Being. On a daily basis, we make minor decisions about our usual possibilities—the possibilities we generally share with everyone else. We are not morally guilty for this, but for having lost ourselves among such possibilities—for thinking of ourselves as being *nothing but* such common possibilities and activities. That is, Dasein is guilty, not of inauthenticity, but of not recognizing the possibility for authenticity.

For the woman in our example, authenticity is choosing while being free for the choice of having or not having a career. Heidegger calls this "making up for not choosing" by "choosing to make this choice" (*BT* 268). She exists authentically when she chooses with recognition of the possibility at issue—when she is free for her guilt. Previously she had existed inauthentically. She had chosen, and had caused the nullity of the possibility, but she did not choose freely. In other words, although she did choose not to have a career, she did not choose to make such a choice. She could not do so, because she did not know what she had chosen to nullify.

However, she cannot be morally guilty of this lack of freedom. Her being-free for her Being-guilty of this choice came only with the call of conscience, and she cannot cause the call of conscience at will. She cannot choose to have a conscience, but only to want to have one. She cannot attest to herself a possibility of which she is unaware. She becomes aware—has a conscience—only by the action of another. So the moral issue is not whether or not she is authentic or has a conscience, it is whether or not she recognizes the possibility of authenticity, and whether or not she wants a conscience.

The woman in our example is morally guilty of not wanting a conscience. It is not a matter of moral guilt that, in her everyday existence, she has existed as the 'they,' making choices from possibilities delineated by the 'they.' She is morally guilty because she assumed that these day-to-day possibilities of the 'they' were the only ones she could have: she assumed she did not *need* to have a conscience. That is, she believed she already knew her possibilities, and thus that she had no need to be made aware of them. She is morally guilty as the negligent basis of a lack in her own Being. She neglected to recognize that she had possibilities excluded by the they-self. Because she neglected to recognize

this, she closed herself off to the discovery of the specific possibility of having a career. She was the negligent cause of her lack of openness to the discovery of nullified possibilities of her Being. She did eventually receive the call of conscience, but not of her own will—she did not want it, seek it, or expect it.

### 3. *What is Called 'Ethics'*

The analysis of Being-guilty has provided us with something like a moral 'ought.' One ought to understand one's own Being as ahead-of-the-they; one ought to be open to the call of conscience—to the discovery of possibilities that are already one's own. Does this require a 'ground' in the sense of the justification of an 'ought'? Such a demand is, in this case, a misunderstanding of what is meant in this case by 'ought.' The justification of an 'ought' is a response to the question 'why ought I do this?' But we cannot ask such a question here, since it is Dasein's own Being that makes this demand upon itself. The claim is not that Dasein ought to want to have a conscience, but rather that Dasein does want to have a conscience—it is Dasein that calls the they-self to its potentiality-for-Being. An 'ought' enters the picture because Dasein can mistakenly believe that it *already does* have a conscience and that it already does understand its potentiality-for-Being-its-Self. In the case of such self-misunderstanding, we can, in a certain sense, say that Dasein 'ought' to want a conscience and 'ought' to understand its potentiality-for-Being-its-Self. But this merely means that Dasein would want a conscience and would seek appropriate understanding of its potentiality-for-Being if it were aware that it did not already have them. Once it has been made aware of this fact, Dasein does want a conscience: "understanding the appeal' means 'wanting to have a conscience'" (BT 288). Dasein becomes guilty by not continuing in this wanting, by forgetting its continued need for a conscience.

This is, of course, not what is usually called an 'ought' or what is usually called 'ethics.' This 'ought' follows from Heidegger's description of Dasein's Being as being an issue for itself. Because Dasein cares about how it will be in the world, Dasein 'ought' to properly understand what its possibilities are. But because Dasein cannot fully understand its own possibilities—because it is always in need of a conscience, never fully possessing it—Dasein 'ought' to want to be receptive to the call of conscience. The form of this 'ought' is a hypothetical, not categorical, imperative. Dasein cares about its Being; it wants to understand its possibilities in order to genuinely choose its Being. If Dasein does want to understand its possibilities and genuinely choose, then it ought to recognize its difference from the 'they' and be open to the call of conscience. It 'ought' to do so because this is the only way to come to an understanding of its possibilities and genuinely choose. Such a version of the 'ought' is comparable to that of eudaemonism. In its usual form, eudaemonism says that we do have a 'good will,' we do want the good, and consequently



'ought' to act appropriately for attaining it, because we want it. In a similar way, the moral imperative that I am suggesting says that because we do care about our being, we ought to do so appropriately, and doing so appropriately requires recognition of our potentiality-for-Being and receptivity to the call of conscience.

If, as is sometimes assumed, the search for a 'ground' for the 'ought' is what we call 'ethics'—in this case, the ground of our desire to care for our own Being appropriately—then ethics has been presupposed in my position. Heidegger's ontology claims that we do desire to care for our own Being appropriately. If this is 'ethics,' then we are already ethical: we already have a 'good will,' a will to do what we 'ought.' But such an application of the term 'ethics' is only appropriate to an ethics of the categorical imperative. An ethics of categorical imperatives seeks what we ought, first and foremost, to do. But in the case of Heidegger's analysis, we already know what we ought to do. 'Ethics' in this case seeks, not the foundational 'ought,' but the foundational 'how.' We ought, as Dasein, care for our Being, and being Dasein, we already do. But the question of this ethics—the investigation that is to be called 'ethics'—concerns how we can succeed in what we already do. It is a question of the appropriateness of Dasein's care for its Being to that Being. The criterion of ethical and unethical behaviour is not so much, in this case, what one does, but rather how one does it.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4. *Does the Other Call for Ethics?*

The principal difficulty with the kind of moral imperative that I have suggested is not that it is a hypothetical imperative, but that it primarily concerns Dasein's relation to its own Being. It seems unlikely that such a ground of ethics can provide an imperative for our treatment of others. But this is a misunderstanding. The call of conscience to Dasein's Being-guilty, to the issue of how it is and can be, is a call to Dasein's Being as care. As Heidegger puts it: "The appeal to the they-self signifies summoning one's ownmost Self to its potentiality-for-Being, *and of course as Dasein, that is, as concerned Being-in-the-world and Being with Others*" (BT 280, emphasis mine). When Dasein authentically takes up the issue of how it will be in the world, it is taking up the issue of how it will care for others and concern itself with the world. Again, the 'ground' is presupposed. There is no question of whether Dasein will or will not, ought or ought not, care for Others and be concerned about its world.<sup>10</sup> The ethical issue, as far as the relation of Dasein to Others is concerned, is how Dasein should care for Others.<sup>11</sup>

I have already suggested that responding to the call of conscience by wanting to have a conscience, and thus by recognizing one's non-identity with the 'they,' is what Dasein owes to itself. This is the criterion of ethical behavior toward one's own Being. Because Dasein cares about how it will be in the

world, its Being demands that it be free for its choices by knowing what it is choosing and what it is nullifying. The understanding and openness owed are a moral obligation because they are necessary for enabling, to whatever extent possible, this freedom that is demanded by Dasein's Being. These ethical obligations of Dasein toward itself, in turn, provide clues for understanding what Dasein owes to the Other. According to Heidegger, Dasein's authenticity makes possible authentic care for Others:

Resoluteness, as *authentic Being-one's-Self*, does not detach Dasein from its world, nor does it isolate it so that it becomes a free-floating 'I.' And how should it, when resoluteness as authentic disclosedness, is *authentically* nothing else than *Being-in-the-world*? Resoluteness brings the Self right into its current Being-alongside what is ready-to-hand, and pushes it into solicitous Being with Others. (BT 298)

Far from being a matter of self-interest or self-involvement, authenticity somehow enables, even 'pushes' one into, care for Others. But why should this be so? Why should one's Being-one's-Self allow one to care for the Other in an appropriate way? Heidegger says that Dasein's authenticity "first makes it possible to let the Others who are with it 'be' in their ownmost potentiality-for-Being" (BT 298). Apparently, in authenticity Dasein does for Others what it has done for itself—it enables them to be free for their ownmost Being-guilty. Heidegger never sufficiently explains how this is so; the discussion of 'authentic solicitude,' or 'leaping-ahead' is quite brief and notoriously ambiguous.<sup>12</sup> However, it can be clarified without relying upon Heidegger's discussion of 'leaping-ahead.'

The crucial issue is that Dasein, when called by conscience to its ownmost Being-guilty, has recognized its own Being as ahead-of-itself, as potentiality-for-Being-its-Self, and thus has recognized its Being as possessing possibilities excluded by the 'they.' In making this recognition, Dasein opens its own existence to the discovery of its own possibilities; it wants to have a conscience. But this is also a recognition of what it is to be Dasein, an understanding of the kind of Being Dasein has. Consequently, it must also change the way in which Dasein cares for Others. It now recognizes that the Other too has existentiell possibilities for Being that are not identical to its own possibilities or reducible to the interpretations of the 'they.'<sup>13</sup> Just as authentic care for its own Being means wanting to have a conscience, wanting to be receptive to the discovery of its own possibilities, authentic care for the Other demands the same. Insofar as Dasein authentically recognizes the Other qua Dasein, it wants the Other to have a conscience too, and wants the Other to be receptive to its ownmost possibilities as well.

This is the basis of a possible moral imperative toward the Other, grounded in Heidegger's analysis of Being-guilty. Dasein's care for the Other demands that it care for the Other appropriately, qua Being-ahead-of-itself. Dasein owes it to the Other to maintain the Other's potentiality-for-Being-itself. That is, we

owe it to the Other not to reduce her possibilities to either our own possibilities or those of the 'they.' And Dasein can only recognize this obligation by continuing to recognize its own possibility for authenticity. If it loses itself in the 'they,' it loses its understanding of what it is to be Dasein. So we also owe the Other our recognition of our own possibility for authenticity, since that recognition is prerequisite for the recognition of the Other's possibility for authenticity. Generally speaking, the 'ought' of Dasein's care for the Other is twofold. First, we are obligated to maintain our authentic understanding of Dasein (our own and the Other's) qua potentiality-for-Being-itself—i.e., to continue wanting to have a conscience. Second, we are obligated to care for the Other in a way appropriate to this understanding—i.e., to care for the Other qua its-Self, qua its own potentiality-for-Being rather than caring for the Other qua identical to ourselves (qua 'human') or qua identical to the 'they' (qua 'one,' or the average human). So the ground of ethical responsibility for the Other is, in effect, to care for the Other qua Other, or in its Otherness.<sup>14</sup>

This should not be too surprising, since Dasein's appropriate care for itself is also care for its own Being *in its otherness to itself*, care for possibilities of its Being that have not yet been realized or discovered. In both cases, that of Dasein's own Being and that of the Other's Being, the 'otherness' at issue is one and the same: the otherness of Dasein as such from the 'they,' or the integral possibility of Dasein to be otherwise than the 'they.' In this way, the call of conscience is a call that proceeds simultaneously from both my own Dasein and from the Other. For as possibility for authenticity, my own Dasein and that of the Other are identical; they are Dasein as such in its potentiality-for-Being, as distinct from the ontical possibilities of any individual Dasein or of the 'they.' The call to conscience is a call to ethics because the call is made by, and on behalf of, a part of Dasein's Being that is essentially the Other.

This is a very broad sketch of the ethical 'ought' toward the Other. What does such an obligation require in concrete existence? Heidegger has given us one possible example. He has said that Dasein can, by authentically Being-its-Self, "become the 'conscience' of Others" (*BT* 298). We can understand this in light of our earlier example of a woman who is guilty of lostness in the 'they.' In that example, a woman who does not recognize her own possibility for taking up a profession experiences the call of conscience when she encounters an Other existing in precisely such a possibility. The Other, by defying the possibilities prescribed by the 'they,' became her conscience—that is, became the opportunity for her to have a conscience. Because we cannot choose to have a conscience—we cannot awake ourselves to possibilities of which we are not aware—others must present such possibilities to us in their existence. We can then, by existing authentically, enable an Other to recognize its own possibility for authentic existence. We owe it to the Other to uncover the possibility of authenticity by existing publicly in our own authenticity. This is

the primary import of Heidegger's discussion of 'leaping ahead' or 'authentic solicitude.' However, I will leave it aside because it is an obligation to Others that does not significantly differ from our obligation to our own selves. An ethics of care for the Other must involve more than just an ethical obligation to 'be ourselves'—especially considering that we cannot always be authentic, that our everyday mode of Being is inauthentic.

While the possibility of "leaping ahead" or becoming the conscience of another may not take us beyond a narrow ethic of responsibility toward the self, it does reinforce the deep connection between responsibility to self and to Others in Heidegger's treatment of conscience. The call to conscience can be provoked only by the Other, and the possibility of our own authenticity can only be revealed to us by the Other, precisely because the call to conscience is on behalf of an aspect of our Being that can be actualized only in the existence of the Other: our potentiality-for-Being. It is only through the encounter with the Other that I am forced to recognize my own authentic potentiality-for-Being-myself, because it is only in the concrete existence of the Other that I am able to encounter my own Dasein in its otherness to itself: as the actualization of what is, in my own Dasein, a mere possibility.

For this reason it would be a mistake to see Heidegger's understanding of conscience as fundamentally oriented toward the 'self.' If the call to conscience is a call to Dasein to care for its own being in its potentiality-for-Being, it is also a call for Dasein to care for that aspect of its Being that exceeds, and even endangers, the 'self' that is the center of truly egoistic forms of ethical thinking. The ground of ethics suggested by Heidegger's analysis of conscience is that of a primary egoism upon which a derivative altruism can be built, but a responsibility toward the peculiar nature of human being as such, a more fundamental form of ethical responsibility that includes the care of individual Dasein, both of my own and the Other's, within its scope.

##### *5. Destructive Uncovering: The Ground of Positive Moral Responsibility*

I have suggested that we are ethically responsible to recognize the Other's potentiality-for-Being-its-Self and to care for the Other in its otherness, without reducing its possibilities to our own or those of the they-self. This would seem to demand only a negative responsibility—not to interfere with the Other's deciding and discovering of its own Being. However, I will suggest that this non-interference is only possible given a responsibility for positive action. These responsibilities are, more importantly, already hinted at, if not explicitly given, in Heidegger's text in the very form of phenomenological method.

The 'phenomenon' of phenomenology is "that which shows itself in itself" (BT 28). The methodology is an obligation (an 'ought' of sorts) "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself

from itself” (BT 34). The contrary to this letting-be-seen is ‘covered-up-ness.’ Heidegger says that a phenomenon can be covered up either by being undiscovered or by being ‘buried over.’ Something is ‘buried over’ by “putting something in front of something (in such a way as to let it be seen) and thereby passing it off as something which it is not” (BT 33). An example of this is the history of ontology. According to Heidegger, “when tradition thus becomes master, it does so in such a way that what it ‘transmits’ is made so inaccessible, proximally and for the most part, that it rather becomes concealed. Tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence” (BT 21). In this case, it is impossible to simply ‘let that which shows itself be seen from itself.’ The phenomenon, as buried over, is not allowed to show itself, so we cannot allow it to be seen from itself. Letting-be-seen is not sufficient in the case of the question of Being: “we are to destroy the traditional content of ancient ontology” and to “stake out the positive possibilities of that tradition” (BT 22).

As we have seen, Dasein’s Being is also buried over by a tradition. The tradition in this case is the interpretation of its possibilities in terms of the ‘they,’ in terms of the referential totality of significance delineated by the ‘they.’ Consequently, the possibilities of an individual Dasein’s existence take on the semblance of self-evidence. Everyday Dasein understands itself, and is understood by Others, in terms of the obvious: what ‘one’ does. Some of its possibilities may be undiscovered—no one has yet existed in them. Others are neglected because incompatible with the average, or buried over by the ‘they’—a possibility has been realized in rare cases, but it is still not ‘what one does.’ These possibilities cannot show themselves. So how do we care for such a Being? To care appropriately, we must understand it in its Being, including its potentiality-for-Being. But if the Other does not show itself, how can we let it be seen, as phenomenological method demands?

The Other’s potentiality-for-Being-its-Self can become public, or show itself, in two ways. Either the Other must discover and choose to exist in some possibility that is undiscovered or buried over, or the Other must reveal such possibilities in self-interpretation that has become public. Two obligations to the Other follow. First, we must let the Other speak, let it interpret itself, allowing it not only to discover those possibilities excluded by the ‘they’ but also to make them public. This is the demand to let the Other show itself in itself, rather than be covered over by another’s interpretation. But we must also *destroy what conceals* the Other’s possibilities from itself and from us. This is an obligation to let that which shows itself be seen as it shows itself.

The first obligation to let the Other show itself is, in fact, only possible given the second obligation to let the Other be seen. The Other can only truly be allowed to speak if we allow ourselves to hear. But the Other’s recognition of a possibility that is incompatible with the ‘they’ is necessarily silenced

because it is incompatible with the 'they.' We can passively allow the Other to speak on its own behalf as much as we like, but what the Other says will be incomprehensible insofar as it is incompatible with the referential totality of significance in terms of which we understand our world and ourselves. The Other's speech, in its Otherness, necessarily cannot be received in a 'world' delineated by the interpretations of the 'they.' So the task of destruction is, in fact, a task of reception. The Other qua other's possibilities are by definition incompatible (in both understanding and practice) with the possibilities of the 'they.' The Other can become seen, become public, only by ceasing to be Other. So either the Other's self-interpretation or the 'they's' referential totality must be altered if the speech of the Other is to be received.<sup>15</sup>

Reception is not simply letting the other's potentiality-for-Being be, but letting it be *in the world*. If the Other's self-interpretation is modified in such a way as to become compatible with the 'they,' then the Other's possibility for showing itself is buried-over once more. The Other is seen, but not qua itself; it is seen in terms of the 'they'—its Otherness is excluded. We can, then, only care for the Other qua Other by making our referential totality compatible with it. That is, we can only preserve the Otherness of the Other by becoming Other. The Other can only be incorporated into the 'they,' qua itself, by a change in the 'they.' In order for the Other to be received in our world, we must make space for its otherness. This is the destructive aspect of a phenomenological way of being ethical. One might view it as analogous to the actual reception of a guest in one's home. There must, quite literally, be space for the Other to occupy. One prepares by having a 'receiving-room,' a 'guest-room,' an extra place at table, etc.—these are all positive activities of reception. One's own dwelling place must be altered to accommodate the guest. It is altered in such a way that a space is made and preserved that is not strictly part of one's home—not part of one's daily activities and concerns. Part of one's home is 'destroyed' by emptying a place for the potential reception of persons external to one's home. Pushing the analogy a bit further, if one is receiving someone in one's home to stay—for example, a roommate—this destructive aspect becomes transformative. If the Other is not a guest, but one with whom we will dwell, then the entire home, not just specific spaces, must be made compatible with the Other's possibilities and concerns.

In the case of the ethical reception of the Other, 'destruction' in both senses is required. In the first sense of 'destruction,' the space for receiving guests is equivalent to something I hinted at earlier—an 'interpretive' space for the 'ahead' of being-ahead-of-itself. This is an indeterminate space, since the Other qua Other is as yet unknown. It is, quite simply, an obligation to view our referential-totality, our 'world,' as open-ended, as permanently possessing the possibility for transformation. Because the Other qua Other is unknown, our general understanding of Dasein and the world cannot be finally modified

for the accommodation of every Other.<sup>16</sup> When and how we must change our understanding of ourselves and our world must be determined entirely by the Other. In the second sense of ‘destruction’—the transformation of a home to receive a co-dweller rather than a guest—the modification requires major structural changes in our understanding of Dasein. A specific example of such a change would be our culture’s reception of non-heterosexuality. We cannot, in this case, simply ‘let be.’ The Other can only authentically be received into our world, be-in-the-world, given dramatic changes in our understanding of ourselves. Reception of the Other in this instance requires dramatic changes in the way we understand gender, sexuality, love, and morality. We cannot passively ‘let be,’ because the Other can be itself only if we transform our understanding of ourselves as well. If we do not transform our own self-understanding, then the non-heterosexual Other can be-in-the-world only under the cover of our interpretations. Without changing our referential totality to accommodate non-heterosexuality—without changing our understanding of sexuality and love—the Other’s Being-in-our-world can only be interpreted as Being-in-the-world immorally, pathologically, criminally, etc.<sup>17</sup>

Another example, and a particularly difficult one, is that of the religious Other. Much is said about ‘religious tolerance,’ but the issue is not, again, simply one of ‘live and let live.’ The fundamental difficulty is that many religions in their traditional forms do not fulfill the first obligation—that of viewing our ‘world’ as open-ended. By prescribing a definitive world-view, they force the religious Other to become compatible with the ‘they.’ We can, of course, ‘tolerate’ the religious Other by allowing them to exist in their own possibilities of religious practice and belief, while still refusing to alter our own practices and beliefs to make them compatible with the Other’s. But this is not authentic reception. Rather than letting the Other be-in-the-world in its own potentiality-for-Being-itself, we are, in such cases, allowing other ‘worlds’ to exist *alongside* ours. The problem with this response to Otherness is that one cannot in this way care for the Other in its otherness or qua itself. If one’s own world is preserved as-is, the Other is no longer allowed to appear to us in itself, in its own self-interpretation. The Other in that parallel ‘world’ must be interpreted in light of our referential context, the only one we understand. The Other is, in effect, allowed to be immoral, allowed to worship a false God, to be mistaken or in the wrong, etc. In other words, the Other is allowed to be-in-the-world only insofar as it remains ‘in the closet’—covered over by our interpretation of its possibilities, and not appearing as itself.

This brings us to a fundamental objection to positions such as the one I have presented—the danger of relativism. I cannot treat it in detail, but I do hope to give a brief explanation of why such an objection may be a misunderstanding. The basic point in such an objection is that, if the Other’s possibilities and self-interpretation determine our ethical obligations, then we cannot make sense of

our ethical condemnations of the Other. If we cannot do so, then whatever the Other says goes. This is clearly a practical impossibility, because incompatible interpretations cannot all be held true, and incompatible activities cannot all be permitted.

The basic misunderstanding in such an objection is the assumption that we are ever obliged to ethically ‘condemn’ the Other qua Other. What is here called an ‘ethical condemnation’ is rarely that, but in fact an ethical defense and reception of someone else. For example, one does not, in the position I have presented, refuse to receive the Other if the Other is a racist. On the contrary, one receives Others of every ethnic background, and that reception demands destructive modification of our referential totality. Part of this modification includes the removal of any interpretation of our world that necessarily excludes existentiell possibilities of persons of another race. But one does nevertheless receive the Other who is a racist.

The basis of the misunderstanding is that we overlook the fact that our obligation is to receive the Other in its potentiality-for-Being-*its-Self*. That is, we receive its self-interpretation into our understanding of the world. What is objectionable in racism is not a self-interpretation at all, but a silencing of the self-interpretation of others. If our obligation is to listen to and receive the Other, then in the case of racism there is nothing to listen to and no one to receive. Racism does not speak, and it is not an Other qua itself. One simply cannot ‘hear’ the silencing of another. Nor does receiving the Other’s interpretations (coverings-over) of someone else qualify as receiving the Other qua Dasein. The Other qua racist does not ask us to receive itself, but instead asks us *not* to receive someone *else*. The Other qua itself is received, but receiving the Other does not include receiving interpretations on behalf of someone else’s being. Nothing about this ethic of the Other demands that we modify our understanding of the world to be compatible with such views.<sup>18</sup> On the contrary, it demands that we destroy them insofar as they cover, rather than reveal, Dasein. What could be called the ‘ethical condemnation’ of a racist Other is not a condemnation of that Other in its being-itself, but a destruction of a false interpretation. And the interpretation is necessarily excluded from reception for what are, in effect, phenomenological reasons. Just as a phenomenon must be allowed to ‘show itself in itself,’ so must Dasein be allowed to interpret itself, to appear as itself. Receiving racist views is not in any way a reception of an Other—the racist Other is not, in its being, equivalent to its views of other races. Put another way, the Other qua Other’s potentiality-for-Being is its *positive* possibilities, its possible ways of being, not its possibilities for nullifying. But the possibility of racism is the negative possibility for nullifying the possibilities of another. To receive the Other is to receive Being, not nullity. One can authentically listen to speech, not to the silencing of speech; one can authentically receive possibilities, not the nullification of possibilities.



This is a brief overview of how such objections to an ethics of the Other qua Other might be addressed. The crucial point is to distinguish what we are obliged to receive, namely the Other's *self-interpretation* and positive potentiality-for-*being-its-Self*. The Other as such is never condemned, but its speech can be impossible to receive ethically because it silences rather than discloses. Obviously the issue is a complex one—it can be extremely difficult to tell when the Other's speech is an interpretation of its Self and when it is the silencing of another, disguised as self-interpretation. But even if this distinction is difficult to make in practice, the defense of such a distinction could serve as a possible refutation to the accusation of relativism.

University of Toronto

### References

1. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, San Francisco: Harper Collins 1962, p. 284. Hereafter referred to as *BT*. All references are to the pagination of the German edition, given in the margins.
2. For a more detailed discussion of primordial 'Being-guilty,' see Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991, p. 306: "Existential guilt reveals not inauthentic Dasein's moral lapses, or its essential failure to choose; it reveals an essentially unsatisfactory structure definitive of even authentic Dasein. Even if Dasein has done nothing wrong there is something wrong with Dasein—its being is not under its own power." The pejorative language ("essentially unsatisfactory," "something wrong") is rather misleading, since primordial guilt, as an ontological condition, should be strictly separated from the moral sense of 'guilt.'
3. I will refer to "*das Man*" as 'the they,' in keeping with the Macquarrie and Robinson translation. For a thoughtful argument on behalf of translating this term as "the one," see Dreyfus, p. 151.
4. See *BT* pp. 126-30, 176-80, and 268-72.
5. In *Heidegger and the Ground of Ethics: A Study of Mitsein*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998, Frederick A. Olafson uses a similar point to argue the priority of virtue over vice in a Heideggerian-based ethics. See p. 75: "the very possibility of wrongdoing is dependent on there being in place something like a common norm of expectation in relation to which certain actions have to count as violations."
6. For a more detailed analysis of Heidegger's discussion of 'the they,' see Dreyfus pp. 154-58, especially p. 157: "What gets covered up in everyday understanding is not some deep intelligibility as the tradition has always held; it is that the ultimate 'ground' of intelligibility is simply shared practices. There is no *right* interpretation. Average intelligibility is not inferior intelligibility; it simply obscures its own groundlessness." See also p. 235: "the one offers its norms as guidelines that seem to follow from human nature, and its for-the-sake-of-whichs seem to offer an identity to the self."
7. Many commentators on Heidegger's discussion of conscience emphasize the role of authentic choice in the present moment. I wish to emphasize, on the contrary, the response to the call of conscience as an anticipation of, and commitment to, *future* choice through recognition of the *continued* need for a conscience, not simply a past need for one. Cf., for example, Richard Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1999, p. 90: "The authentic style of existence involves 'choosing to choose' [...] Conscience asks us to *own up* to our guilt. It asks us to make our actions our *own* (*eigen*, in German) and thus to exist *authentically* (*eigentlich*). Cf. also Dreyfus, p. 308: "The existential meaning of conscience is the call, not to do this or that, but to stop fleeing into the everyday world of moral righteousness or of moral relativism and to face up to Dasein's basic guilt" and

- Olafson, p. 47: “we do constitutionally owe something [...] and what is due from each of us is a choice [...] This is a fact that we chronically try to hide from ourselves; but it is also possible to accept it or, as Heidegger puts it, to choose choice as the governing modality of one’s active life. When we do that, we may be said to ‘want to have a conscience’ in the sense of being prepared to supply, out of one’s own resources, what is not in any case forthcoming from any other source. It is this willingness that constitutes authentic responsibility.”
8. *BT* p. 273.
  9. Cf. Olafson, p. 7: “a ground of ethics, as I conceive it, is a distinctive relation between human beings rather than a supreme moral truth from which rules of conduct could be deduced.” Although I think Olafson is right to treat the ground of ethics as a relation rather than a moral truth, I have emphasized Dasein as Care and its relation to the Other as Being-ahead-of-itself—that is, in its uncommon-ness to itself and to the Other. Olafson, on the contrary, emphasizes *Mitsein*, or Dasein as intersubjectivity and Being-together-in-the-world, thus the relation to Dasein in its commonness to the Other.
  10. See Polt, p. 79: “we cannot help caring about our own Being and the Being of other entities, because we are such that beings *matter* to us, they make a difference to us [...] Although Heidegger does not directly say so, his language of ‘care’ is an implicit criticism of all philosophies of detachment.”
  11. Commentators who overlook Heidegger’s *identification* of the Being of Dasein with care are forced to find necessary but indirect connections between Dasein’s self-interest and the well-being of others. But this is unnecessary since the Heideggerian Self already has an interest in the well-being of the Other. Cf. Olafson, p. 82: “What is now required is that *Mitsein* be shown to be deeply implicated in the conditions of our own and everyone’s well-being or happiness. What this amounts to is the claim that the happiness of each one of us stands in a relation of interdependence to that of others, so that the well-being of Alter cannot in principle be indifferent to that of Ego, even if there is no sign of reciprocating interest on Alter’s part.”
  12. As Olafson points out in his discussion of Heidegger’s general notion of solicitude [*Fürsorge*], “it remains a good deal clearer what this kind of *Fürsorge* is not than what it is” (Olafson, p. 46).
  13. Olafson’s attempt to base “an ontologically based ethic of the ‘We’” (Olafson, p. 5) upon the concept of *Mitsein* is in danger of overlooking this priority of *non-identity* in Heidegger’s understanding of Dasein. His approach emphasizes Dasein’s identification with the Other in respect of shared concerns and a shared world, while my approach emphasizes Dasein’s identification with the Other in its potentiality for difference from itself and from the subject (or, generally, from ‘das Man’). Cf. Olafson, p. 56: “for all the great differences that set one human being apart from others, any human being as an entity that has a world is the same as any other because that world is the same for every human being. We may have wildly different ‘beliefs’ about the world and it may be impossible in practice to resolve those differences; and yet this is not enough to make us give up the idea of a single world that is, in principle, the same for all.”
  14. Cf., for a contrary view, Olafson, p. 58: “[a moral community] can be formed only if both sides can reach a single version of the truth about who they are and can also in that sense accept the equivalence of the one and the other in their understanding of that truth.”
  15. Olafson seems to believe that moral behaviour requires altering the subject’s self-understanding and corresponding actions if they are incompatible with the shared world of *Mitsein* – which is, I would argue, precisely that of the ‘they.’ I argue, on the contrary, that it is the responsibility of the ‘they’ to alter its self-understanding in order to receive the Other in its incompatibility. Cf., Olafson, p. 56: “just as, in the case of things in the world, what I disclose must be compatible with what other people disclose and is ideally complementary to it, so in the domain of action I can be responsible only if I can show that the action I propose to take stands in some compatible/complementary relation to the actions of others who may be affected by it, provided their actions satisfy the same criterion.”

16. This includes the accommodation of the Self in its otherness to itself: one's own potential for authenticity. We have seen that the Other can provoke the call to conscience by revealing, in her individual existence, unrecognized existentiell possibilities of my own Dasein. Thus the reception of the Other through the modification of the 'they' is not a self-sacrificing mode of ethical obligation to others. By receiving the Other in its otherness, I become open to the call of conscience concerning possibilities of my own Being.
17. This is an important point of contrast to those who interpret Heidegger's use of 'letting be' as passivity. Such a view, for example, leads Olafson to conclude that "if 'letting entities be' is the only way to avoid subjectivism, we would have to give up the active life altogether and adopt a wholly passive stance as satellites of being." (Olafson, p. 4, note 5). This overlooks the fact that 'letting be' requires letting-be-seen, since being is always Being-in-the-World.
18. Consequently, the ethics I am arguing for would ensure 'compatibility' of actions, but as a consequence of affirming the Otherness of Dasein to itself and to the Other rather than as a negation of that Otherness. For the opposite approach to moral compatibility, cf. Olafson, p. 54: "we will be concerned to produce an understanding of what is the case that both of us (and anyone else who may happen along) can share. In this sense, *Mitsein* and we ourselves must be familiar with the business of arriving at a disclosure that is as close as possible to being genuinely common and neutral as between the persons concerned."