

## Freedom and the ‘Choice to Choose Oneself’ in *Being and Time*

*NB: This is a penultimate version which may differ from the published paper in minor ways. The published version should be considered authoritative.*

What Heidegger means by ‘freedom’ in *Being and Time* (henceforth ‘BT’) is somewhat mysterious: while the notion crops up repeatedly in the book, there is no dedicated section or study and the concept is repeatedly connected to a new and opaque idea, that of the ‘choice to choose oneself’. Yet the specificity of BT’s approach to freedom becomes apparent when the book is compared to other texts of the same period, in particular *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, *The Essence of Grounds* and *The Essence of Freedom*. Although there are some differences, the definition of freedom which can be found there identifies it with ‘existence’ or ‘transcendence’<sup>1</sup>, Dasein’s ek-static opening onto the world. Thus ‘being in the world must also be primordially bound up with or derived from the basic feature of Dasein’s existence, *freedom*. (...) Dasein’s transcendence and freedom are identical! Freedom provides itself with intrinsic possibility: a being is, as free, necessarily in itself transcending’ (MFL: 184, Heidegger’s italics). Note the apodictic modality of the claim: it is not simply the case that Dasein, as transcending, is free. Anything that has the structure of being in the world *must* be free: freedom is co-extensive with Dasein. Yet Dasein is often pictured in BT as anything but free: it ‘ensnares itself’ (BT: 267), is ‘lost’ (BT: 264), ‘alienated’ (BT: 178) and needs to be ‘liberated’ (BT: 264, 303). Thus comparison between BT and other texts on freedom yields an important paradox: although by definition it transcends towards the world, the Dasein of division One is deprived of freedom. It must be free, and yet phenomenological analysis shows that it is not free. To understand the specific meaning of freedom in BT, one has to square this circle.

The most likely candidate for such resolution is to view the paradox in light of the ontological difference and to understand the apodictic claim as pertaining to Dasein’s ontological structure on

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<sup>1</sup> Note that etymologically the two are very closely related: *ek-sistere* means to stand forth from a static or standing position (*stare*) and *trans-scandere* means ‘to climb over or beyond’. In both cases the prefix indicates a dehiscence from a fixed or enclosed position.

the one hand, and the phenomenological observations as relevant to Dasein's ontic situation on the other. This is suggested by Heidegger's own remark that 'it is unimportant here [in MFL] to what extent something defined as free is, in fact, free, or to what extent it is aware of its freedom. Nothing is said regarding the extent to which it is free or only latently free, bound or enthralled by others (...). Only a free being can be unfree' (MFL: 191). So to understand BT's particular approach, we need to distinguish between two sorts of freedom: on the one hand, ontological freedom (transcendence), which is the condition of possibility of ontic or existentiell freedom, itself the main concern of BT on the other hand. Heidegger states this relation of ontological dependency as follows: 'in being ahead of oneself as being towards one's ownmost potentiality for being [ontological freedom as transcendence] lies the *existential ontological condition* for the possibility of *being free* for authentic existentiell possibilities' (BT: 193, first italics mine).<sup>2</sup> Since by definition Dasein cannot but be in the world, ontological freedom is inalienable: it consists in having a projective understanding of oneself and of the world focused by having oneself as one's for the sake of which: 'it is Dasein's defining character that it is concerned with this being, in its being, in a specific way. Dasein exists for the sake of Dasein's being and its capacity for being. (...) This selfhood, however, is its freedom' (MFL: 186). Although I do not have the space to develop this here, for Heidegger being ontologically free entails: a) that Dasein can comport itself, as opposed to animal behaviour, b) that in doing so it opens up a normative space<sup>3</sup>, and c) that it has alternative possibilities.<sup>4</sup> In short, it is the condition of possibility of *all* forms of Dasein's agency, including existentiell freedom. However distinguishing between these two levels only solves the paradox formally: much remains to be asked, and said, about freedom.

Hubert Dreyfus, one of the few interpreters who noticed the need to make this distinction, briefly defines ontological freedom as 'Dasein's ability to take part in the opening of a world' and

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<sup>2</sup> Lest one should put too much weight on the word 'ownmost', the rest of the passage goes thus: 'for the sake of its potentiality for being, any Dasein is as it factually is. But to the extent that this being towards its potentiality for being is itself characterised by [ontological] freedom, Dasein *can* comport itself towards its possibilities, even *unwillingly*' (BT: 193, Heidegger's italics).

<sup>3</sup> See: 'within the particular comportment and ability that can spring from freedom and with which we are now solely concerned (...), something like conforming to... or being bound to... is possible such that what this binding binds itself to, namely beings, are announced in their binding character. And this is possible only if there is an underlying freedom that is structurally articulated in this way, and for its part articulates' (FCM: 339).

<sup>4</sup> See for example: 'in every case Dasein, as essentially having a state of mind, has already got itself into definite possibilities. As the potentiality-for-being which it *is*, it has let such possibilities pass by; it is constantly waiving the possibilities of its being, or else it seizes upon them and makes mistakes' (BT: 144); or 'projection always pertains to the full disclosedness of being-in-the-world; as potentiality-for-being, understanding has itself possibilities which are sketched out beforehand within the range of what is essentially disclosable in it' (BT: 146).

adds that ‘the power of the particular Dasein to press into some possibilities rather than others is ontic freedom, or transcendence’ (HD: 302). Yet as such this cannot be right. MFL and ER state unambiguously that transcendence *is* ontological freedom. So while Dreyfus’ first claim is correct, the assimilation of ontic freedom with transcendence is not. Furthermore, the proposed definition of ontic freedom is strongly reminiscent of the lowest degree of Cartesian freedom: in Heidegger’s own words (which closely follow Descartes’ in the Fourth Meditation), ‘being able to do and not to do one and the same thing set before us’ (IPR: 110). Yet even the enthralled Dasein of division One is able to press ahead into some possibilities rather than others: it can have its lunch at its desk, or at the cafeteria, or skip lunch altogether to write its paper. So there must be more to existentiell freedom than a modified interpretation of the Cartesian free arbiter — but what?

There is a further puzzle. Heidegger repeatedly links ontic freedom to the ‘choice to choose oneself’. But why the doubled structure? Both Kierkegaard and Sartre talk about a ‘choice of the self’. But Heidegger himself feels the need to distinguish between a first and a second choice. So what does each choice refer to, and how do they relate to each other? Furthermore, given his rejection of rationalist themes such as the primacy of consciousness and epistemic self-transparency, why use the vocabulary of choice, which is central to the tradition that runs from Descartes to German idealism, at all? *Prima facie* the idea of a choice, both in its common use and within the rationalist strand, involves at least three aspects: I must know a) *that* I choose since otherwise I would simply be moved causally one way or another, for example by my drives or my desires; b) *what* I choose, even if I am mistaken about it, as otherwise the choice would be void; finally, c) that *I* choose, as otherwise I could not be held responsible for my choice. All three aspects put a high premium on reflective awareness, both about the choice and myself. They also rest on a voluntaristic conception of choice as decision-making. Yet much of BT is intended to bypass the primacy of consciousness and to show that being in the world, in its everyday forms, does not require self-awareness (on the contrary, this would prevent us from responding appropriately to the affordances of the world). If the ‘choice to choose oneself’ turned out to involve a rationalist model of choice then the definition of ontic freedom would bring back to the heart of BT some of the very themes that the book was meant to criticise, a risk which is made even more salient by the consideration of Sartre’s hyper-rationalistic reformulation as the radical choice of *Being and Nothingness*.

It is perhaps in implicit recognition of this danger that most interpreters do little more than mention the notion. Yet the vocabulary of choice crops up so often in BT that it seems hermeneutically wrong to ignore it. Dreyfus and Rubin, to their credit, do acknowledge the

importance of the theme but raise three objections: a) as a world-defining choice, it is contradictory because one cannot choose the criteria according to which the choice itself needs to be made; b) since ‘inauthentic Dasein fails to make the choice, and authentic Dasein is produced by the choice’, there is no one to make the choice except, most implausibly, ‘some sort of noumenal self’ (HD: 317); c) it is unclear when the choice would take place, ‘again and again or (...) in and for eternity’ (ibidem). These are important objections which will need careful consideration. But they are taken as decisive without discussion (except for the first) and crucially, are addressed to the choice of the self, not the choice *to choose* the self. Dreyfus and Rubin reject the idea of a choice and conclude that ‘as we might expect, the ‘choice’ of authenticity is not a *choice* at all. (...) Heidegger (...) describes the “choice” of authenticity as a “way of letting the ownmost self take action in itself and of its own accord (342 [295])” (HD: 317, Dreyfus and Rubin’s italics). Yet the end of the same passage takes us back to the idea of a self-defining choice: ‘...in terms of that potentiality for being which it has *chosen*’ (BT: 295, my italics). Clearly more needs to be said about what such choosing amounts to: thus I shall try in this paper to make sense of the choice of choosing the self in its relation to existentiell freedom while rescuing it from its rationalistic overtones.

### *Anxiety and the choice to choose oneself.*

The section on anxiety plays a genetic part in the emancipation process by allowing Dasein to see for the first time that it is both ontologically free and ontically unfree. By breaking down its involvement with the world, anxiety enables Dasein to become pre-reflectively aware of its self-interpretative nature and faces it with an ultimatum: Dasein has to choose to choose itself, or not. In the first case, it will become existentiell free: but either way, it will be irreversibly transformed.<sup>5</sup>

So ‘anxiety makes manifest in Dasein its *being towards* its ownmost potentiality for being — that is, its *being free for* the freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself. Anxiety brings Dasein face to face with its *being free for (propensio in...)* the authenticity of its being’ (BT: 187,

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<sup>5</sup> By ‘pre-reflectively aware’ I mean: firstly that such awareness doesn’t involve any thematising form of intentionality: it is not representational (self-)knowledge. Secondly, that although it is not at the time reflectively available to Dasein, this awareness it is not *structurally* inaccessible to it. Dasein may retrospectively become aware that it acted with a pre-reflective awareness of its having made the choice of the self, perhaps when challenged about the reasons for an action by someone else or through introspection. Equally, such full awareness may never arise, or the reasons for its actions may never be fully articulated, and Dasein would still be existentiell free. Yet the possibility of such awareness arising explains why the choice cannot be said to be unconscious.

Heidegger's italics). The doubling 'being [ontologically] free for the [ontic] freedom...' indicates the dependency of existentiell freedom on its ontological counterpart as the condition of possibility of all forms of Dasein's comportment. But the further characterisation of ontological freedom as a '*propensio in*' authenticity is rather puzzling: why use Latin? Why talk of a 'propensio' at all? This is, somewhat surprisingly, a reference to Descartes. In his study of Cartesian freedom in the *Introduction to Phenomenological Research*, Heidegger had made the following comment: 'in order to be free, it is not required that I can move in both directions but rather: *quo magis in unam propendeo eo liberius* (the more I incline to the one, the freer I am). Here the Augustinian concept of freedom comes to the fore: the more primordially the *propensio* is for the *bonum*, the more authentic the freedom of acting. (...) I am genuinely free if I go towards what I understand' (IPR: 111, Heidegger's italics). So freedom of indifference is only the bad textbook version of Cartesian freedom: the highest degree of freedom is achieved when the human will is fully enlightened by our understanding of the good. That my will should be 'inclined', as opposed to 'determined', makes this higher degree of freedom consistent with its lower form by allowing it to fit the model of free choice as having alternative possibilities central to *liberium arbitrium*: in theory, one could refuse to follow the inclination, although there is little reason to do so.<sup>6</sup>

This characterisation of ontological freedom as a 'propensio' towards authenticity is interesting in at least two respects. Firstly, in Cartesian fashion it suggests that freedom is structurally inclined towards authenticity. Seen on the background of the tripartite structure of care, i.e. 'facticity (thrownness), existence (projection), and falling' (BT: 284), such inclination could have the functional role of preventing ontic fallenness from being unavoidable by providing a counterweight to falling as an 'ontologico-existential structure' (BT: 176). If falling is indeed the 'downward plunge (*Absturz*) (...) [which] constantly tears the understanding away from the projecting of authentic possibilities' (BT: 178), then the counter pull of ontological freedom as a *propensio towards* authenticity may be what enables Dasein to resist falling and to make the existentiell choice of ontic freedom. Secondly, the reference to Augustine suggests that authenticity is Dasein's good (since for the early Augustine of the *De Libero Arbitrio* (c. 387 AD) the will is naturally inclined towards the good, although in its post-lapsarian state the latter has

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<sup>6</sup> See for example Letter to Father Mesland, Feb 9<sup>th</sup>, 1645: 'When a very obvious reason inclines us towards something, although from a moral point of view we can hardly go the other way, absolutely speaking we still could. Indeed, it is always possible for us to refrain from pursuing a clearly known good or to accept an obvious truth, provided that we think that it is a good thing that we should assert our freedom in this way' (my translation).

become harder to see and to understand)<sup>7</sup>. This confirms that, as pointed out by T. Carman (Carman: 2003), Heidegger's views on authenticity are not neutral but evaluative. It may also help in answering the somewhat vexed question of why Dasein should be authentic, at least formally: there is no need for a specific motivation if Dasein is structurally inclined towards authenticity simply by virtue of its transcending towards the world and towards itself. Note, however, that this suggestion comes at the cost of the possible reintroduction of a form of essentialism. The claim that ontological freedom is a *propensio* to authenticity suggests that Dasein can derive a priori ethical guidance from its very constitution. But the idea that Dasein should have such a constitution is in tension with Heidegger's pronouncements about Dasein's essence residing in its existence (see for example BT: 12). Even on a transcendently-inclined reading which would understand the concept of essence in a non metaphysical way, as a set of existential conditions which must apply on anything that is Dasein rather than as the core properties of a substance, the idea that Dasein is inclined towards authenticity by virtue of being ontologically free represents a further step in that it involves a moral, and not just transcendental, form of normativity: it does not simply uncover the existential conditions on being Dasein, it also tells us what Dasein ought to be. Perhaps Heidegger is right to make this claim but he provides no argument for it and does not say anything more about ontological freedom as a *propensio*.

Regardless of the status of ontological freedom, anxiety also gives us our first insight into existentiell freedom: it is 'the freedom of choosing [oneself] and taking hold of [oneself]' (BT: 197). Such choice is further specified by several passages as a 'choice to choose oneself': thus Dasein must 'make up for not choosing (...) [by] choosing to make this choice' (BT: 267). Its 'finite freedom (...) 'is' only in having chosen to choose such a choice' (BT: 343) and conversely, one must 'choose the choice which makes one free' (BT: 385). This peculiar, doubled structure is echoed in MFL by the oft mentioned idea of 'choosing oneself *expressly*' or of making an '*express choice*' (MFL: 189 sq, my italics). So why would it not be enough for existentiell freedom that Dasein should simply choose itself, as in Kierkegaard? A first answer is that the doubled structure allows Heidegger to account for the difference between authenticity, inauthenticity and undifferentiatedness in a way a single choice could not. To see this, it is useful to look at the

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<sup>7</sup> Note that by the time Augustine wrote the *De Civitate Dei* (427 BC) his views had changed significantly: the consequences of the fall are now seen as so severe that the human will has been irremediably damaged and is only free to sin. Ignorance has become an unsurpassable obstacle and only grace can transfigure our will towards the good again. See for example Rist (1972): 223 sq.

double choice in the negative. Call the first and second choices ‘C1’ and ‘C2’ respectively.<sup>8</sup> Anxiety makes manifest the possibility of performing C1(C2), which section 40 suggests (and we shall explore further) is a necessary condition for authenticity. But Dasein could very well choose *not* to choose itself [C1~(C2)]. Although this would not result in the sought after existentiell modification, it would still be a choice, and it would still have transformative power. Indeed, once Dasein has seen in anxiety that there is a choice to be made, it cannot return to its pre-anxiety state. Yet explicit awareness of its having shied away from the choice of the self C2 would be painful, for it would reveal to Dasein that it is not up to embracing an authentic way of life. So if Dasein chooses in C1 not to perform C2, presumably because it is too hard or the cost is too high, the only way it can avoid facing its open disavowal of existentiell freedom is to deceive itself into taking itself as a sort of being who does not need to choose at all — an attitude which Sartre will expound on as bad faith.<sup>9</sup> Thus the choice not to perform C2 can be seen as involving the following steps (separated for clarity’s sake): (1) Dasein pre-reflectively understands the double choice disclosed by anxiety as threatening and difficult; (2) this affect hints at something unpleasant about Dasein, perhaps that it is not resolute enough to make such a choice; (3) to

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<sup>8</sup> It may be tempting to conceive of the two choices in analogy to desires, in terms of a first and second order hierarchy (respectively: choosing oneself and choosing to choose oneself). However there are reasons to think that such temptation should be resisted. In the case of preferences, desires, etc., the second order desire is most often formed *in response* to a first order desire: thus I may desire to read a novel and form the second order desire to work on this paper instead. But in the case of freedom it would not be true to say that the ‘second order’ choice is formed in response to the making of the ‘first order’ choice; it is not the case that I need to choose myself first in order to have a choice about that. On the contrary, the ‘second order’ choice would *open up the possibility* of making the ‘first order’ one, hence the breakdown of the analogy.

<sup>9</sup> Self-deception is a notoriously problematic topic in that it is equally hard to describe the phenomenon appropriately and to present a coherent account of the psychological factors that supposedly make it possible (on the so-called ‘static’ and ‘dynamic’ puzzles which challenge any account of self deception, see for example Mele (2001): 6 ff). Furthermore, the sort of description and explanation available varies considerably depending on how weak or strong the cases envisaged are: instances of weak self-deception are very close to wishful thinking in that they can be construed as requiring no self-deceptive intent and no violation of our normal epistemic standards (see for example Mele 1997: 91 sq). By contrast, strong cases are often said to exhibit both an intention to deceive oneself (although it does not take the self-defeating form of a deliberative choice) and a failure of reflective self-knowledge. For an illuminating account of the structure of strong self-deception, see Gardner 2006: 17–32. According to Gardner, strong self-deception can be distinguished both from its weaker counterpart (i.e. motivated self-misrepresentation) and from neurosis by two key features: the first is that it requires an intention to deceive oneself (‘a subject is self deceived when he believes one thing in order not to believe another [. . .]). Self-deception is a structure of motivated self-misrepresentation in which S and S’ are beliefs and the process occurs through an intention of the subject’ (Gardner 2006: 18)). The second is that strong self-deception involves two distinct beliefs, one which is false but useful to the subject, and another which is true but painful (‘let’s call the psychological states S and S’ which are involved in strong self-deception the promoted and buried beliefs respectively’(Gardner 2006: 21. For a discussion and defence of these two claims, see Gardner 2006: 23–6). Note that in the case of C1(–C2), the intentional structure of the choice C1 suggests that the appropriate model is that of strong self-deception.

prevent these negative affects and what they express from coming to awareness, Dasein persuades itself that there is no choice to be made (most likely by understanding itself as causally determined by its idiosyncrasies and a situation it cannot change).<sup>10</sup> Consequently it exonerates itself from all responsibility in the matter, but at the cost of an intentional misinterpretation its own ontological make-up and thus of inauthenticity.<sup>11</sup>

So anxious Dasein can choose to choose itself [C1(C2)] and become existentially free, or choose not to choose itself [C1~(C2)] and become self-deceived. But the double choice opens up yet another, important option: it is equally possible and even common for Dasein not to perform C2, but this time *without having chosen to do so* [~(C1(C2 ⊕ ~C2))], simply because the possibility of C1 hasn't been disclosed to it.<sup>12</sup> Then Dasein is not self-deceived but, in Heidegger's words, 'undifferentiated': it is absorbed in its world and in particular with 'being with one another insofar as the latter is guided by idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity' (BT: 175). Not having been faced with explicit anxiety, it does not have enough self-awareness to realise, even at a pre-reflective level, that there is a choice to be made. Note that it doesn't follow from this that the 'undifferentiated' mode is evaluatively neutral. In line with the deflationary account of self-deception presented by Mele, undifferentiatedness can be construed as a motivated failure of self-knowledge.<sup>13</sup> On such a picture, the undifferentiated mode is also inauthentic but to a lesser degree, the significant difference with fully fledged inauthenticity being that undifferentiatedness does not involve a violation of Dasein's epistemic standards, nor any deceptive intent: Dasein is motivated by its desire to maintain the more comfortable *status quo* of its immersion in the They

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<sup>10</sup> Note that the process differs from sublimation in that the negative affect is not displaced or discharged by being transformed into another emotion or attached to another object. Although it is not recognised as such, the negative affect remains (and keeps motivating the process of self-deception).

<sup>11</sup> The whole process is made logically possible by the fact that none of these three steps is reflectively available to Dasein at the time. There are several possible types of explanation for such lack of availability. Subsystem theories such as Davidson (1985) and Pears (1985) suggest that in cases when the coming to awareness of a particular belief would cause significant anxiety to an individual, a sub-system is set up within the mind which, unbeknownst to the main system, manipulates the latter so as to insulate it from that belief. As pointed out by Poellner, another — in my view, preferable — account can be found in Sartre's distinction betweenthetic and non-thetic forms of awareness. While the former is fully reflective and thus cannot fail to be noticed by the subject, the second is pre-reflective and easily overlooked. The reason for such ease is that for Sartre self-deception (as a psychological form of ontological bad faith) also involves a pre-reflective commitment from the part of the subject not to submit certain aspects of herself or her life to reflective scrutiny (what Sartre calls the 'original project' of bad faith, see Sartre 1969: 67–8).

<sup>12</sup> This is a significant difference with Sartre, for whom the (single order) choice of the self is unavoidable: 'the choice is absurd, not because it is without reason but because there never has been any possibility of not choosing oneself' (BN: 479).



into failing to see that it has a choice to make. But it not aware of this failure to see and does not intend it. By contrast,  $C1(\sim C2)$  involves both the pre-reflective awareness of the double choice and an intentional attempt to repress both this awareness and Dasein's choice not to choose itself. Significantly, the watershed line between weaker and stronger forms of inauthenticity is the face to face with the double choice brought about by anxiety.

So the doubling of the choice is crucial in two respects: firstly, it allows Heidegger to distinguish between more passive cases of existentiell indifferenciation and more active cases of self-deception — in other words, between absorption as the ontic consequence of falling on the one hand, and Dasein's 'fleeing in the face of itself' (BT: 184) on the other. This helps explain Heidegger's well known pronouncement according to which 'this potentiality for being [existence], as one which is in each case mine, is [ontologically] free either for authenticity [ $C1(C2)$ ] or for inauthenticity [ $C1(\sim C2)$ ] or for a mode in which neither of these has been differentiated [ $\sim(C1(C2 \oplus \sim C2))$ ]' (BT: 232). Secondly, and importantly, the doubling shows that the ability to choose is a necessary but *non sufficient* condition for existentiell freedom. If Dasein performs  $C1$  but not  $C2$  it still chooses. Yet it is not existentiell free: it is enthralled more deeply than it was before, this time not by blind conformity to the They but by its own self-deception. Thus existentiell freedom requires one to make the *right* choice. To understand what this entails, I shall turn to Kierkegaard.

### *What is involved in the choice? Heidegger and Kierkegaard.*

MFL mentions 'Kierkegaard's talk of choosing oneself and of the individual' and state that although 'Kierkegaard's purpose is not ours' this 'doesn't prevent us from learning from him but obliges us to learn what he has to offer' (MFL: 190-1). So what did Heidegger learn from Kierkegaard and his various pseudonyms about the choice of the self and its relation to freedom? I shall suggest that he re-interpreted four important ideas: (a) freedom consists in a specific choice which (b) is paradoxically transformative of the self and (c) works through the self-ascription of responsibility (d) in a 'transparent' manner. I'll discuss each of these in turn, bearing in mind that my purpose is not to analyse Kierkegaard's views for their own sake but in relation to Heidegger's.

Throughout the second letter in *Either/Or*, Judge William repeatedly states that to choose oneself is to become free: 'this choice is freedom' (E/O: 251) and whoever makes it 'possesses

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<sup>13</sup> See for example Mele 1997: 91 sq). A standard example is that of the anxious husband whose anxiety and desire to be reassured about his marriage motivate him to disregard potential evidence of deceitful behaviour from his wife and to over-interpret elements in her conduct that may assuage his worries.

himself as posited by himself — i.e., as chosen, as free' (E/O: 222). Freedom resides in a specific kind of self-relation which is brought into existence by the choice. Yet this process is hard to understand because it said to both transform the individual and leave him unchanged: 'the self that he chooses in this way is absolutely concrete, for it is he himself, and yet it is absolutely different from his former self, because he has chosen it absolutely. This self had not existed before, because it came into existence through the choice, and yet it has existed, for it was indeed 'himself' (E/O: 215). One way to untangle the paradox is to borrow Paul Ricoeur's distinction between two kinds of identity, 'identity-idem' and 'identity-ipse'.<sup>14</sup> The first is numerical, quantitative, and consists in the possession of a certain number of fixed features (such as being a certain size, a certain shape, etc.). It allows for the identification/recognition of a particular individual from the third person point of view. By contrast, the second is qualitative and consists in this individual's reflexive self-relation. This self-relation is interpretative, fluid, largely unreflective, and first-personal. So from the quantitative perspective of identity-idem, the choice indeed leaves everything as it is: the individual 'remains himself, exactly the same as before, down to the most insignificant feature' (E/O: 222). Yet from the qualitative standpoint of identity-ipse, the self-relation is radically modified: 'and yet he becomes another, for the choice penetrates everything and changes it' (ibid). The reason for this is that by choosing himself, the individual acquires a 'transparent' self-understanding and makes the leap of taking responsibility for what and who he is. Thus 'the ethical individual is transparent to himself' (E/O: 258). Yet the 'sober reflecting about oneself' through which self-knowledge is acquired is performed with the quasi-biblical aim of 'rendering an account of every careless word that is spoken' (E/O: 222). As a result, 'the individual, then, becomes conscious as this specific individual with these capacities, these inclinations, these drives, these passions, influenced by this specific social milieu, as this specific product of a specific environment. But *as he becomes aware of all this, he takes upon himself responsibility for it all. (...) And this choice is freedom*' (E/O: 251, my italics).<sup>15</sup>

Thus the main function of the choice of the self is the self-ascription of responsibility: 'not until a person in his choice has taken himself upon himself, has put on himself, has totally interpenetrated himself so that *every movement he makes is accompanied by a consciousness of responsibility for himself*— not until then has a person chosen himself ethically' (E/O: 248, my italics). There are of course many significant differences with BT, several of which are linked to

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<sup>14</sup> See Paul Ricoeur's *Soi-même comme un autre*, Paris : Seuil, 1990.

the predominance of religious and salvific concerns in Kierkegaard's thought — in particular, the Judge's version of the choice of the self is linked to repentance and to the search for the absolute, two aspects I have left out. Yet Heidegger takes up the crucial idea that existentiell freedom resides in a transformation of the self-relation through the self-ascription of responsibility. Before I explore the form taken by this in BT, however, let me point out two important and problematic differences between Heidegger's double choice and even my largely secularised account of the single choice in *Either/Or*. The first one has to do with the proposed resolution of the paradox of the self being both presupposed and produced by the choice. As we have seen, Ricoeur's distinction between identity-*idem* and identity-*ipse* is helpful to understand William's view that the choosing individual can both be the same and another. Yet it is of little help to understand Heidegger's choice to choose oneself, quite simply because the ontic features picked out by identity-*idem* were never part of Dasein's ontological make up in the first place. Like Ulrich in Musil's novel, Dasein has no 'qualities', no present-at-hand properties it could legitimately identify with. So the paradox, and the associated issue of who makes the choice, will need re-examining — and what we have to take responsibility *for* is bound to be significantly different. Secondly, the Judge's notion of the 'transparency' required for the choice is highly reflective: it is a 'sober *reflecting* upon oneself', a 'consciousness' or 'awareness' of one's own features. Or yet most explicitly: 'the person who lives ethically has seen himself, knows himself, penetrates his whole concretion with his consciousness' (E/O: 258). Judge William qualifies this by explaining that such self-knowledge 'is not simply contemplation' but a 'collecting of oneself which itself is an action' (*ibid*). In other words, the reflecting is not performed from a detached perspective but is performative in that it transforms the individual's sense of identity *ipse*. Still, the predominance of the vocabulary of epistemic clarity seems too strong to ignore and whatever Heidegger means by 'transparency' in relation to the choice to choose oneself, it is very unlikely to share this high threshold of reflective awareness.

*The choice to choose as the transparent self ascription of responsibility.*

After having been introduced in the anxiety section, the theme of the double choice is developed in the sections on conscience and guilt. It is presented as the answer to the search for an existentiell 'attestation' to the possibility of authenticity, itself analysed formally in the sections

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<sup>15</sup> Judge William draws a contrast with the mystic who 'chooses himself abstractedly and therefore lacks transparency' (E/O: 248). Rather than acquiring concrete self-knowledge, the mystic identifies with humanity as a type and is thus unable to choose and take responsibility for himself as an individual.

about death. Whereas anxiety presents Dasein with the choice of freedom, the later sections explain how Dasein may actually come to make that choice, and what is involved in it. Importantly, they do not do so by explaining what the second choice C2 might be independently from whether C1 is made in the first place; it is not a matter of first clarifying a particular option for further deliberation. For Heidegger, hearing the call of conscience, which specifies the meaning of C2, means performing C1: ‘to the call of conscience there corresponds a possible hearing. Our understanding of the appeal unveils itself as our wanting to have a conscience. But *in this phenomenon* lies that existentiell choosing which we seek — the choosing to choose a kind of being one’s self’ (BT: 270, my italics). So anxious Dasein may perform C1 and reject C2 without understanding exactly the implications of the latter, but it cannot perform C2 without performing C1. This is another reason why the doubling is important: it points towards this peculiar aspect of C1, namely the fact that genuinely understanding its object means choosing it. This may be seen as the practical consequence of ontological freedom as *propensio*: just as for Descartes, seeing the good is choosing it because our nature inclines us towards it, so for Heidegger understanding the call to C2 is making the choice C1 because we have an ontological inclination towards authenticity: ‘in understanding the call, Dasein is *in thrall* to its ownmost possibility of existence. *It has chosen itself*’ (BT: 287, my italics). We knew from above that existentiell freedom lies in making the *right* choice. We now discover that such a choice is not a matter of deliberation, of weighing pros and cons, but of understanding oneself in the right way and being ‘in thrall’ to such understanding, two aspects I’ll come back to when discussing objections.

So what is the right choice? As suggested above, Heidegger takes from Kierkegaard the idea that freedom resides in the transparent self-ascription of responsibility: ‘understanding the call is choosing (...). What is chosen is *having a conscience as being free for one’s ownmost being guilty*’ (BT: 288, Heidegger’s italics). A few pages before, Heidegger had referred the ‘ordinary significations’ of ‘being guilty’ (*schuldig*), namely ‘having debts to someone’ and ‘having responsibility for something’ to ‘a kind of behaviour which we call “*making oneself responsible*”’ (BT: 282, Heidegger’s italics). Note the transition from the passive (‘having responsibility’) to the active (‘making oneself responsible’): responsibility is not simply something which befalls Dasein but something it must take hold of. To understand this, it is helpful to distinguish between third person accountability and first person responsibility, and this in the light of the difference between ontological and ontic forms of freedom. Because it is ontologically free and thus has a specific, norm-responsive, kind of agency, Dasein is accountable for what it does and can legitimately be praised or blamed for it. Thus ‘in the projection of the for the sake of as such,

Dasein gives itself the primordial commitment [*Bindung*]. Freedom makes Dasein the ground of its essence, responsible [*verbindlich*] to itself, or more exactly, gives itself the possibility of commitment' (MFL: 192). Ontological freedom is the ground of responsibility. But the end of the quote introduces an interesting amendment by stating that ontological freedom gives Dasein 'the possibility of commitment' only. This needs to be actualised by the choice to choose itself so that Dasein becomes responsible *in its own eyes*: then 'Dasein commits itself to a capability of being itself as able to be with others in the ability to be amongst extant things. *Selfhood is free responsibility for and toward itself*' (ibid, my italics). Note that the existentiell commitment lies primarily in the choice of a potentiality for being ('being itself') rather than the adoption of a particular course of action: it is the 'choosing to choose a *kind of being one's self*' (BT: 270, my italics).<sup>16</sup> In other words, the choice to choose makes Dasein responsible not only for what it does, but also for what it is in the pressing ahead into a particular possibility, and this is what we need to explore now.

As we saw, for Kierkegaard too the choice of the self involved the self-ascription of responsibility for what we are, not just what we do. But what we are was played out as a collection of features (for example psychological, physical or social) which the individual had to take reflective stock of and own up to by acknowledging them as his. Yet for Heidegger Dasein *is* none of these features on the mode of presence at hand: it is the projection of its existentiell possibilities, or abilities-to-be, constrained by thrownness and falling. So when a particular possibility faces Dasein with the double choice, what it needs to take responsibility for is not a set of present-at-hand properties but the very way in which it deploys this possibility in relation to its understanding of itself and of its situation. Yet from the undifferentiated point of view of the pre-choice Dasein, the natural assumption is precisely to view itself as indeed endowed with objective features for which it is not responsible: in Blattner's terms, it tends to understand its ability-characteristics as state-characteristics (Blattner 1999: 34 sq). Thus the choice of choosing oneself simultaneously involves two aspects: on the one hand, breaking away from undifferentiatedness by understanding pre-reflectively that I don't have any essence in the traditional sense of inalienable properties which, in conjunction with various empirical laws, would determine my comportment causally. 'Dasein is, *in its existing*, the basis of its potentiality for being' (BT: 284, Heidegger's italics). What I 'am' is what I understand myself to be in relation to the constraints of falling and thrownness (such as a constitutive tendency to avoid anxiety for the former and bodily

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<sup>16</sup> See also: 'in understanding the call, Dasein lets its ownmost self take action in-itself *in terms of that*

characteristics, social environment, cultural milieu, etc. for the latter) focused by a particular possibility, and this not through conscious reflection, but through existentiell projection. On the other hand, choosing to choose oneself entails making the leap of realising that since I don't have any essence, I must take responsibility for my understanding of myself and of the possibility I'm deploying and this, without ever being caused to do so: 'the self, which as such has to lay the basis for itself, can never get that basis into its [causal] power; and yet, as existing, it *must* take over being a basis' (ibid, my italics). Note that there is no relation of logical entailment between the two aspects: Dasein could very well understand pre-reflectively that it is not causally determined by anything and decide that its life is going to be a free for all, with no responsibility involved from anyone and especially not from itself. This is why Dasein needs to be 'called', and why answering involves a leap.

Thus the self-ascription of responsibility is not a logical conclusion but a response to an ethical demand, a response which is *necessitated* by nothing but by which Dasein freely owns up to itself. But then where does the call derive its normative force from (Heidegger's 'must')? As we saw Heidegger himself links it to the idea that ontological freedom is a *propensio* towards authenticity, although this is not without its difficulties. Another answer, more relativistic but perhaps less metaphysically laden, could be that the demand for responsibility is predominant in our culture, and that in taking responsibility for itself Dasein is responding to an important aspect of its normative environment. This, however, may call for a further question: if Dasein is simply responding to the envioning normative pressure, how then is this a free choice? How different is that from just doing what One does? Yet there is a difference between responding to normative pressure without knowing that one is pressurised into doing so, and responding while being pre-reflectively aware that one's comportment is a *response* to one's normative environment. This difference is, again, what the doubled structure of the choice brings to the fore: the first attitude is that of  $\sim(C1(C2 \oplus \sim C2))$  or  $C1\sim(C2)$  Dasein (i.e. undifferentiated or inauthentic), the second, that of the  $C1(C2)$  Dasein. In the latter case, while the self-ascription of responsibility happens in  $C2$ , the performing of  $C1$  indicates Dasein's pre-reflective awareness that in taking responsibility for itself in the pressing ahead into a particular possibility, it is responding to its normative environment *as such*, rather than just going with the flow.

The choice of choosing oneself thus involves a degree of what Heidegger, following Kierkegaard, calls 'transparency'. Significantly, the theme is first introduced in relation to

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*potentiality for being which it has chosen*. Only so can it *be answerable*' (BT: 288, my italics).

freedom: 'there is also the possibility of a kind of solicitude which (...) helps the Other to become transparent to himself *in* his care and to become *free for* it. (BT: 123-4, Heidegger's italics). The idea of a link between freedom and transparency is taken up by the next occurrence of the notion: 'Dasein is the possibility of being free *for* its ownmost potentiality for being. Its being-possible is transparent to itself in different possible ways and degrees' (BT: 144). The combined quotes suggest that existentiell freedom requires a significant degree of transparency. So what does Heidegger mean by it? As we saw, for the Judge transparency is the full epistemic clarity afforded to the individual by the reflective scrutiny of his character and deeds. But not so for Heidegger. In the section on understanding, he characterises Dasein's projective openness to the world as a form of existential 'sight': 'Dasein *is* this sight equiprimordially in each of those basic ways of its being' (BT: 146, Heidegger's italics — he mentions as examples circumspection and solicitude). Sight is not thematic knowing; it is Dasein's practical grasp of a particular situation on the background of its pre-reflective comprehension of itself and its world. Transparency is a particular kind of sight: 'the sight which is related primarily and on the whole to existence we call '*transparency*' [*Durchsichtigkeit*]' (ibid). Thus the proper object of transparency is not ontic but ontological: it is the structure of existence itself: transparency is Dasein's pre-reflective grasp of its own ontological make up. In Heidegger's words, 'it is not a matter of perceptually tracking down and inspecting a point called 'the self' but rather one of seizing upon the full disclosedness of being-in-the-world *throughout all* the constitutive items which are essential to it, and doing so with understanding' (BT: 146, Heidegger's italics). No wonder then that the development of such transparency should intrinsically be linked to existentiell freedom: without it, Dasein would keep understanding itself in terms of natural or social features, which in turn would make the self-ascription of responsibility impossible.

Note, however, that the transparency required for existentiell freedom is not the highest possible degree. This would require an anticipatory understanding of my existence as a finite temporal whole, which can only be provided by being-towards-death: 'the existential structure of such being [towards death] proves to be the ontologically constitutive state of Dasein's potentiality for being a whole' (BT: 234). There is much debate on what such 'wholeness' might mean for Dasein, from Guignon's psychological account as a narrative which would allow authentic Dasein to 'live each moment as an integral component of the overall story it is shaping in its actions' (Guignon 2004: 85) to Carman's re-interpretation as the 'wholeheartedness' of Dasein's commitment to itself. In my view, Heidegger's emphasis on transparency as an *ontological* kind of

sight significantly complicates psychological accounts (either of freedom or authenticity).<sup>17</sup> But either way, existentiell freedom *per se* is not enough to satisfy the requirement of total transparency: only ‘when one has an understanding of being-towards-death — towards death as one’s *ownmost possibility* — one’s potentiality for being becomes authentic and *wholly* transparent’ (BT: 307, second italics mine). The choice to choose oneself allows Dasein to take responsibility for itself as it presses ahead into a particular possibility. But it does not disclose to Dasein that death impends at every moment of its life and that each and every of its possibilities, including the current one, may very well not come to be. By contrast, full ontological transparency reveals that, in S. Mulhall’s words, it must ‘make its every projection upon an existentiell possibility in the light of an awareness of itself as mortal’ (Mulhall 1996: 120). This is why existentiell freedom is a necessary but non sufficient condition for authenticity: ‘making up for not choosing signifies *choosing to make this choice* — deciding for a potentiality for being and making this decision from one’s own self. In choosing to make this choice, Dasein *makes possible*, first and foremost, its authentic potentiality for being’ (BT: 267, Heidegger’s italics). In existentiell freedom, the choice of choosing oneself is made wholeheartedly in the sense that Dasein takes without reservation as much responsibility for itself as is allowed by its finitude and the relative degree of ontological transparency achieved. Authenticity requires the further step of making the same self-commitment, but with a pre-reflective awareness of the radical fragility of each and every commitment.<sup>18</sup> Should this happen, then freedom is fully expressed and becomes an ‘*impassioned* freedom towards death — *a freedom which has been released from the illusions of the ‘they’, and which is factual, certain of itself and anxious*’ (BT: 266, Heidegger’s italics). Such ‘passion’ is needed because this intensification of ontological transparency (the ‘release from the illusions of the They’) makes the choice to choose oneself even harder: it forces Dasein both to

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<sup>17</sup> Such accounts usually rely on an identification condition: Dasein must be able to recognise itself in its deeds, which conversely are viewed as expressive of who and what it is. Yet note that this condition can be satisfied by even the alienated Dasein of Division One: the They-self can perfectly well identify with what it does — such naïve identification is in fact one of the main ways in which the They-self can secure its grip on Dasein, by fostering conformism and the lack of critical awareness of Dasein’s self-interpretative essence. By contrast, the sort of self-awareness characteristic of ontological transparency, while it would not make such identification impossible, would complicate it significantly because it would now involve the pre-reflective understanding that I am not naturally endowed any of the qualities which I recognise in my deeds, and that they themselves are a matter of interpretation and need to be freely owned up.

<sup>18</sup> See also BT: 305: ‘the existentiell way of taking over this guilt in resoluteness is therefore authentically accomplished only when that resoluteness, in its disclosure of Dasein, has become *so transparent that being-guilty is understood as something constant*. But this understanding is made possible only insofar as Dasein discloses to itself its potentiality for being, and discloses it right to its end. (...) *As being towards the end which understands* — that is to say, as anticipation of death — resoluteness becomes authentically what it can be’ (first italics mine).



understand that it is temporally finite *and* not to succumb to the nihilistic temptation of holding this finitude against the very possibility of commitment. ‘Only being-free *for* death (...) pushes existence into its finitude’ (BT: 384), and with the awareness of finitude come the twin shadows of despair and resignation. Being free for death, the highest form of freedom, is an implicit response to this risk which involves both the acknowledgement of the relative powerlessness entailed by finitude and the — equally relative but intensely passionate — overcoming of such powerlessness through the choice to choose a self that can still own up to itself *even though* it has a pre-reflective awareness of its own limitations. Thus ‘if Dasein, by anticipation, lets death become powerful in itself, as free for death, Dasein understands itself in its own *superior power*, the power of its finite freedom, and that in this freedom, which ‘is’ only in its having chosen to make such a choice, it can take over the *powerlessness* of abandonment to its having done so’ (BT: 384, Heidegger’s italics).

### *Replies to objections.*

There are, however, three objections pending: a) the idea of a world defining choice is contradictory, b) the choosing self is both presupposed and produced by the choice and c) the temporality of the choice is unclear. I shall consider these in turn.

As far as the first is concerned, the objection seems simply misplaced, both for Kierkegaard and for Heidegger. A contrast with Sartre’s radical choice may help bring this out: for Sartre, choosing one’s fundamental project involves the creation of all of one’s values. Such creation is a voluntaristic act by which ‘freedom makes [value] exist as value by the sole fact of recognising it as such’ (BN: 38). This generates a vicious circle because the choosing individual is required to bring into existence *by* his choice the very values which are required *for* such a choice: ‘it is this original choice which originally creates all values and all motives which can guide us to partial actions; it is this which arranges the world with its meaning, its instrumental complexes, and its coefficient of adversity (BN: 465).<sup>19</sup> Yet if there is nothing in the pre-choice world to derive some normative orientation from, then the very idea of a choice becomes contradictory: no choice can be made without some commitment to pre-existing (even conflicting) values which will exert a draw on us and give us reasons for choosing. So the Sartrian choice, instead of providing the radically new and

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<sup>19</sup> See also: we choose the world (...) in its meaning by choosing ourselves. (...) The value of things (...) does nothing more than outline my image — that is, my choice’ (BN: 463).

free values Sartre claims for it, becomes groundless.<sup>20</sup> Thus Dreyfus and Rubin's criticism, if it was addressed to *Sartre*, would be well taken. Yet there is nothing, either in the Judge's letter or in BT, which points towards this criterion-less choice or to the creation of entirely new values by a sheer act of will. For the Judge, the choice of the self requires the individual to reflect on his idiosyncrasies and his relation to his social environment in order to take responsibility for it all. But this self-ascription of responsibility, while it radically transforms the individual's self-relation, leaves the normative framework intact: 'he has his place in the world; in freedom he himself chooses his place — that is, he chooses *this* place' (E/O: 251, my italics). In a similar way, for Heidegger the choice to choose oneself does not involve a radical reconfiguration of the normative framework opened up by ontological freedom: it bears on the here and now, and requires Dasein to take responsibility for itself *as it is*: 'in the express self-choice there is essentially the complete self-commitment, *not to where it might not yet be, but to where and how it already is, qua Dasein*' (MFL: 190, my italics). Such 'complete self-commitment' is only possible on the background of Dasein's current understanding of its world and its major normative orientations. Thus the demand that one should take responsibility for oneself has been central to our culture at least since the Enlightenment, arguably for much longer.<sup>21</sup> The choice to choose oneself may *modify* it to some extent, for example by requiring that Dasein should take responsibility not just for what it does, but for what it 'is' in the pressing ahead of a particular possibility, but this does not involve the *ex nihilo* creation of the new normative framework involved in radical choice. The point of existentiell freedom is not to bootstrap Dasein into a brave new world of private values but, as we saw, to foster its pre-reflective awareness, amongst other things, *that* it lives in a shared normative framework so that it can take responsibility for its understanding of it.

The second objection needs reformulating as it was originally made in relation to the choice of the self. It faces us with a two pronged dilemma: call S1 the self who makes the choice to choose itself, and S2 the self who is chosen. In some sense, S1 and S2 must be the same for otherwise Dasein could not be said to choose to choose *itself*. Yet if the choice is to set Dasein free existentiellly then it must be genuinely transformative, and therefore S1 and S2 cannot be the same. So either I genuinely choose myself but then the choice is not transformative and thus pointless, or the choice is transformative but then I cannot choose myself. Can Heidegger get out

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<sup>20</sup> A similar criticism can be found in the final chapter of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. A more analytic version features in Galen Strawson's 'The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility', *Philosophical Studies*, 75/1-2 (1994), p. 5-24.

<sup>21</sup> See for example Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III, 5. If one is to believe Nietzsche's account in the *Genealogy of Morals*, it is coextensive to the humanisation process of proto-human forms of consciousness.

of this impasse? He can, provided that one doesn't collapse the double structure into a single choice. Recall that we are talking about the conjunction of *two* choices, C1 and C2. S1 is the self which makes the first choice C1. Yet the proper object of that choice is *not* S2 but the second choice C2: thus in Heidegger's version S1 was never *meant* to choose S2 directly, which prevents the dilemma from arising. But there is more to the story. As we have seen, the choice C1 is *per se* transformative of S1, whether C2 is performed or not: if Dasein chooses *not* to make the choice C2, then it becomes self-deceived (call that S1'). If it chooses C2, then it is transformed into S2 but by virtue of having made that first choice C1, not because it has chosen itself. So S2 takes responsibility for itself by making the choice C2, which thus can be spelled out as 'S2 chooses S2'. This may look tautological from a third person point of view, but from the first personal perspective of the choosing Dasein, the doubled structure makes manifest the reflexive (but not necessarily reflective) character of the self-ascription of responsibility. Thus the form of Heidegger's choice of the self is not the problematic 'S1 chooses S2' but 'S1 performs C1 and by performing C1 transforms itself into S2 who takes responsibility for itself in C2'. There is indeed a transformation of S1 into S2, which is the whole point of existentiell freedom, but crucially this is mediated by the choice C1.<sup>22</sup>

The third objection concerns the temporality of the double choice: when is it made? Is it made in time at all? Here again it may help to compare it briefly with Sartre's choice of the fundamental project and Kant's choice of our *Gesinnung* [disposition] in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. In Thomas Baldwin's pithy words, for Sartre 'there is no time within a man's life when he makes this choice: rather, his whole life is the choice' (Baldwin: 33). Although it is never fully visible in any of his actions, the choice is presupposed by everything a man does. Just like a three dimensional object is only visible through two dimensional surfaces, our fundamental project is disclosed through our deeds but not reducible to any of them. So although it is not made at any particular time, it is involved in everything we do and allows for a holistic account of the totality of a person's life. Similarly Kant's choice of our moral disposition was developed in relation to subjective freedom<sup>23</sup> to provide an ultimate account for *Willkür's* ability to consistently opt for some maxims rather others. Thus all our maxims ultimately point towards

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<sup>22</sup> Note that the mediation is logical, not chronological: in other words, it is not the case that Dasein first chooses C1 and only then, C2. As we saw, Dasein may opt out of the choice C1(C2) disclosed to it by anxiety: it then becomes S1' and is not in a position to choose S2 (and thus remains ensnared). But if it makes C1(C2) it does so simultaneously, by hearing the call of conscience. One can still distinguish between the two choices logically, but not chronologically.

the adoption of an original maxim whereby we choose our *Gesinnung*. Such choice is ‘the subjective ground of the exercise of man’s freedom in general’ (Kant: 16). Although it is an ‘intelligible action, cognisable by means of pure reason alone, apart from every temporal condition’ (Kant: 26-7), all our empirical choices are grounded in it. As noted by Schopenhauer in his reinterpretation of Kant’s choice of our intelligible character, a thief may steal all kinds of objects in his life but each theft will point towards the same choice of his moral disposition (dishonesty). So both for Sartre and for Kant the choice is meant to allow for moral responsibility for actions which otherwise could be viewed as causally determined by natural laws, a feature shared by Heidegger’s understanding of existentiell freedom. But Heidegger’s double choice is different from either of its two counterparts because it is not meant to account for the intelligibility of our lives as unified totalities. As we saw, Heidegger’s own sense of the ‘wholeness’ of our existence is not provided by freedom, but by being-towards-death. In other words, the choice to choose oneself is not meant to build up to an incremental picture of the self over time through which one would acquire a sense of a person’s psychological characteristics but which would preserve freedom, as in Sartre and Kant. Thus it makes more sense to suggest that we choose to choose ourselves in a discrete way when we answer the call and act responsibly in the pressing ahead of a particular possibility: the choice is made each time my comportment exhibits a pre-reflective awareness of my ontological make up and of my owning up to it, and this without guarantee that I shall *always* behave responsibly.

*The choice to choose as medio-passive.*

If these replies are convincing, then there is nothing flawed in principle to Heidegger’s idea that existentiell freedom resides in a choice to choose oneself. Yet such choice remains paradoxical. It forces us to depart from the rationalist model of decision-making and to consider a much less voluntaristic version which, although it involves some awareness of one’s own ontological make up (transparency), does not require reflective deliberation — as we saw, C2 is not really an option open for prudential calculus since truly understanding it is to make the first choice C1. What are we to make of this?

Heidegger is very clear that his version of the choice is not a primordial act of willing, as for Kant or Sartre. For one thing, willing itself is not primary but dependent on the structure of care (BT: 194). More importantly, performing C1(C2) is tantamount to hearing the call of conscience,

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<sup>23</sup> (i.e. *Willkür* as free arbiter, by opposition to positive freedom as the self-determination of *Wille* through

and *whether* we hear the call is not a matter of willing ourselves to do so. Heidegger states that it cannot be ‘cultivated voluntarily’: one must be ‘ready to be appealed to’ (BT: 288). Or again: for Dasein, ‘becoming free for the call’ means ‘*understandingly letting itself be called forth*’ (BT: 287, my italics). Thus rather than the deliberative making of a decision, the choice involves a special kind of readiness, halfway between self-possession and abandonment (‘letting oneself’). Just as the call ambiguously comes both from outside and within me, the choice seems made *in me* almost as much as *by me*. Thus the choice is neither fully active nor fully passive: it involves a particular kind of agency which, following Greek grammarians, I shall call ‘medio-passive’.<sup>24</sup> So how are we

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the moral law).

<sup>24</sup> Although most indo-European languages only allow for passive and active modes, ancient Greek had a third mode to refer to such cases where agency is ambiguous. The middle voice was meant to capture the modality of situations in which the agent participates in the action but without being fully in control of it. There is a large amount of secondary literature on the middle voice, and the one thing scholars seem to agree on is that it is a very elusive notion (cf. for example Andersen 2004: 10: ‘there are as many definitions of voice or diathesis as there are theoretical frameworks in the relevant literature’, S Kemmer 1993: 1: ‘there is no generally accepted definition of the middle voice’). One of the reasons for this is that the Greek themselves did not elaborate on the matter. Andersen notes that the first grammar to use the three categories is a work attributed to Dionysios of Thrax. He focused on the opposition between active performance (*energeia*) and passive experience (*pathos*) and introduced *mesothēs* as an intermediate category that applies to verbs that have a grammatical form which doesn’t fit in either of the two previous ones (e.g.: active verbs with a passive ending, such as deponents). Roman grammarians, in particular the Stoa (Zeno of Citium, the founder of the Stoic school) re-appropriated this active/passive distinction by referring it to agency. Current grammar manuals of ancient Greek emphasise that the middle voice refers to actions that the subject performs on or for himself. See for example Smyth’s *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1956, §1713): ‘the middle voice shows that the action is performed with special reference to the subject: *loumai* (I wash myself). Such actions often involve an ambiguous form of agency, neither fully active nor fully passive, as one is both the agent and the recipient of the action. Benvéniste (1966: 172 sq) and Gonda (1960: 30-67) picked up on this particular feature of the middle voice. According to the first, the middle voice does not so much indicate that the subject has an interest in the action as point towards the fact that s/he is the medium in which something takes place. It indicates that the subject is part of a process (expressed by the verb) to which s/he participates but which is not reducible to such participation. To emphasise this dimension, he introduced the notion of internal diathesis (as opposed to the external diathesis of the active mode, in which the subject accomplishes an action which is under his control and carried out outside of him. Gonda (Gonda: 1960: 53 sq) underlines this peculiar active/passive mode of the middle voice in relation to a particular example in ancient Greek, that of marrying someone. The active form (*gameō*) was standardly used by men and denotes an action in which the agent is fully in control, namely the taking of a wife. This is grammatically reflected by the fact that the complement is in the accusative. The middle voice form (*gameomai*) was normally used by women: it denotes activity (the woman takes a husband) but also passivity (she gives herself over to him, a fact which is grammatically expressed by the complement being indirect and in the dative). Furthermore, the middle voice has an eventive dimension: it indicates that ‘the process of marriage befalls the subject’ (59), in such a way that she participates in it without controlling it. Llewelyn (1991) follows his lead in his studies of Heidegger and Derrida and indicates that ‘we need a notion of power which does not merely pass through the subject, and a notion of subject which is neither merely a conduit or passage (the ‘through’ of pure passivity) nor the conductor entirely in charge of a performance (the ‘by’ of pure agency) but is performed as much as it performs the process’ (p. IX). For a useful account of the various conceptions of the middle voice, see

to make sense of such a choice, since it is so far removed from the ordinary conception? It may help to note that medio-passivity is characteristic of *understanding* in general. Whether I understand something or not is not up to me (alas). Yet I have a measure of control over this in that I can lay the ground appropriately, for example by working very hard at familiarising myself with the relevant material or bringing about the right kind of circumstances. Not doing so would significantly decrease the chances of the dawning of comprehension. So up to a point I am responsible for what I understand, precisely because if I don't prepare myself for it, it is quite possible and even likely that understanding will not blossom. Even though it is not fully dependent on me, this understanding is an achievement which I can be praised for. And as with understanding, so with the choice to choose oneself — since the latter is largely a matter of self-understanding, it is hardly surprising that it should share this medio-passive feature. Ultimately, hearing the call is not up to me: yet I can take some responsibility for doing so in the sense that unless I try to attune myself in the right way it may never be heard at all.

Yet there is more: the choice of existentiell freedom is not just a choice I'm accountable for from a third person standpoint. It is that by which, in Heidegger's terms, I 'take hold' of myself in the first place. Yet given the medio-passive modality of the choice, such 'holding' cannot be the active and explicit self-positing of freedom intended both by Sartre and Kant. Nor can the responsibility involved be absolute, since the choice itself is not fully within Dasein's control. Dasein is responsible *up to a point*, and this is as good as it gets. To demand more would be to exceed the limits of Dasein's finitude. Still, how do we understand such responsibility, limited as it is? It may help to do so *via* a reconsideration of mineness. In Division One, Heidegger states that Dasein is always mine: 'that being which is an *issue* for this entity in its very being, is in each case mine. (...) Because Dasein has *in each case mineness* [*Jemeinigkeit*], one must always use a *personal* pronoun when one addresses it' (BT: 42-43). At the level of ontological freedom, this formal, quasi grammatical sense of mineness does not require any awareness from Dasein's part that its possibilities are its own: it can and does press ahead into them unreflectively, responding selflessly to the various affordances of the world in the context of its activities. Yet each time Dasein is faced with the choice of existentiell freedom, this thin sense of mineness acquires a more substantive meaning: having achieved a degree of ontological transparency, Dasein becomes pre-reflectively aware that it is nothing but the particular possibility it is pressing ahead into, and that the way it 'is' this possibility is not a matter of possessing present-at-hand qualities but of

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Eberhard (2004), in particular: 'The middle voice from a Linguistic Perspective' and 'Philosophical

projective understanding, both of the world and of itself: it is its thrown basis 'only in that it projects itself upon possibilities into which it has been thrown' (BT: 284). Dasein is called to realise that although such projection is not fully under its control, it is not either something which simply happens to it. Thus answering the call means owning up to a particular possibility in a sense which is neither merely grammatical, as previously, nor even psychological: the possibility is not Dasein's own because it can recognise itself in it, for example by intuitively seeing it as expressive of a particular character trait or by connecting it with its past — such naïve, everyday identification is precisely what is prevented by ontological transparency.<sup>25</sup> By contrast, the more substantive sense of mineness gained in existentiell freedom is that of pre-reflective moral appropriation: even though it is aware that it does not have full control over its projection, Dasein is still prepared to *own up* to it. This means, inter alia, that it is prepared to take the negative consequences of its pressing ahead into the possibility (if any) as consequences rather than as accidents which befall it and about which it could complain. It also means that Dasein stands ready to answer for its choice and to make reparations to other parties should they be affected adversely by these consequences. Such pre-reflective moral appropriation, in turn, transforms the meaning of Dasein's comportment: its very pressing ahead into the relevant possibility becomes the implicit endorsement of its responsibility for doing so.

How can we tell the difference, then, between cases in which the choice of choosing oneself has or not been made? The pre-reflective awareness of responsibility is not directly available *as such* to Dasein in the first person because the very process whereby it would become available would transform it from pre-reflective into reflective. So I would suggest that whether Dasein is pre-reflectively aware of its responsibility for itself or not is expressed through its comportment, and can thus be observed from the third person standpoint. This, in turn, requires a non psychological version of expressivism. According to C. Taylor<sup>26</sup>, our actions are neither the result of causal or psychological determinism, nor narrowly intentional. They are the expression of our self-understanding rather than the result of our executive powers, and such self-understanding is not reducible to a narrow intentional content because its meaning cannot be isolated from our wider understanding of the world. To say that an action is expressive means that the expressed content can be seen directly from the action itself, without the need for any inference: I may infer

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Perspectives on the Middle Voice' (p. 7-31).

<sup>25</sup> Note, however, that a more critical kind of psychological identification remains possible on the condition that Dasein does not view itself as naturally endowed with the psychological traits it assigns to itself, nor determined by them.

<sup>26</sup> See in particular Taylor (1979) and 'Hegel's Philosophy of Mind' in Taylor (1985).

from a flashing light on a car that it's about to turn left, but I can see from the smile on someone's face that they are in a good mood. Expression itself, and not the relation between signifier and signified, is the primitive. Naturally all of Dasein's comportment may be seen as expressive of its understanding both of itself and the world, and makes the latter publicly available. But there are some forms of comportment which seem expressive of precisely the sort of pre-reflective appropriation of responsibility which is characteristic of existentiell freedom. Perhaps a particularly clear example could be found in T. E. Lawrence's narrative in *The Mint* of how, after having returned from the Middle East and resigned from his duties at the Foreign Office, he sought to enrol himself in the R.A.F. as J. H. Ross. Yet at 36 he was barely under the age limit for enrolment, at 5'5" almost too short, and he had to start totally from scratch. Combined with his age, the wounds received during the Arab wars made it hard for him to satisfy the harsh requirements of the RAF training programme. Given his accomplishments and his fame, he could certainly have obtained a much more comfortable and lucrative position. And yet he did enrol. And not just once. After having been recognised and kicked out of the R.A.F, he *re-enrolled*, this time as T. E. Shaw and in the Royal Tanks Corps. It does not seem unreasonable to see such resolute comportment as expressive of a degree of ontological transparency and the self-ascription of responsibility involved in Heidegger's choice. Lawrence did not do any of the things that his physical abilities, socio-cultural background (he was highly educated and spoke eight languages) or previous career could have been seen to predispose him to do. Had he understood himself as causally determined by his past, it seems highly unlikely that he could have chosen such a course. Yet he appropriated this unlikely possibility and took responsibility in pressing ahead into it. This may be, to use Heidegger's expression, an 'extreme model' (BT: 188); yet for most of us there is no need (or capability for) such heroism. Think back on your life: there are hard to pin down but crucial moments in our existence when we are pre-reflectively aware that even though nothing prepared us for it and there is nothing necessary about it, a possibility has opened up which calls to us in such a way that we have to make the leap of appropriating it inasmuch as we can. Such a leap is the choice of existentiell freedom.

### *Conclusion.*

So the choice to choose oneself is a strange beast: while it involves a pre-reflective form of self awareness which Heidegger (following Kierkegaard) dubs 'transparency', it is not an exercise in deliberation. Although it admits of an alternative possibility (to choose not to choose oneself), existentiell speaking if we hear the call the alternative is not there, and the double choice is



made. As Kierkegaard beautifully put it, ‘the content of freedom is decisive for freedom to such an extent that the very truth of freedom of choice is: there must be no choice, even though there is a choice’ (Kierkegaard 1970: 67). Furthermore, while the double choice is in each case made *by* Dasein, it is not entirely *up to* Dasein. It is the self ascription of responsibility and yet it is not, as in Sartre’s wilful reinterpretation, an absolute self-positing of freedom whereby man would ‘carry the weight of the whole world on his shoulders’ and be ‘responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being’ (BN: 553). Such could only culminate — as it does indeed for Sartre — in the desire for man to be God.<sup>27</sup> Even when it chooses to choose itself, Dasein’s responsibility remains limited to the possibility it now transparently presses ahead into. Its understanding remains constrained by its thrownness, and the possibility it was called to needs to be one that it finds available in its world, or at least one which would make sense within it. It is not invented out of nothing – thus for Lawrence joining the R.A.F was a publicly available possibility, albeit not one which would have seemed relevant in his case from the third person standpoint. Yet if I am right in seeing his comportment as expressive of existentiell freedom, then he appropriated this possibility and made it right *for himself* by taking as much responsibility for it as is humanly possible.

But then why, one may ask, should the choice of choosing oneself count as a form of *freedom* at all? It does not free Dasein from its thrownness, nor from the normative pressure of its environment, nor from its facticity. It does not enable Dasein to give itself its own laws nor to have full control over itself and its life – it does not make it autonomous. On the contrary, it reveals the vacuity of the rationalist ideal of absolute mastery and the pernicious way it denies the constraints of finitude by blinding us to the medio-passive character of some of the most important aspects of our lives. It shows that Dasein needs to give up on freedom as total control to realise that, in Freud’s words, it is not the master in its own house and needs the call of conscience which brings the choice home to it. Yet by developing its receptivity to the pull of possibilities which cannot be disclosed without a greater degree of ontological transparency, the double choice gives Dasein more *Spielraum*, more room for manoeuvre. It frees it from the alleged constraints of its ‘nature’ and expands its range of existentiell possibilities, opening up the perspective of a richer and more ‘experimental’ life, as Nietzsche would say. At the same time, by calling Dasein to take as much responsibility for itself as these constraints allow, it prevents the risk of such a life becoming meaningless. Thus Heidegger emphasises the limits of spontaneity by drawing attention

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<sup>27</sup> Thus ‘human reality is the pure effort to become God (...). Desire expresses this endeavour’ (BN: 576).

to the importance of receptivity and departs radically from the Kantian tradition: at the end of the day, existentiell freedom is mostly a matter of understanding in its medio-passivity, not will. By transforming its self-understanding it frees Dasein both from the indifferentiation which enthrals it to the They, and from the self-deception by which it further ensnares itself if it refuses to make the double choice. Of course, none of this is permanent: Dasein is only existentiell free in the pressing ahead of a particular possibility, and the reason why it is free does not lie in a specific ontic content for that possibility (Heidegger does not propose any ‘ideal of existence with any “special content”’ (BT: 265),<sup>28</sup> but in the *form* taken by Dasein’s self-relation in this particular case. The change in the self-relation brought about by the choice to choose can fade and Dasein, lapse into self-deception. Such fragility is the hallmark of finitude; yet perhaps it is also a blessing, and the possibility of making the choice again and again can *per se* be seen as a reason for hope.

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<sup>28</sup> The full quote goes thus : ‘in our existential projection of anticipation, we have of course clung to those structures of Dasein which we have arrived at earlier, and we have, as it were, let Dasein itself project itself upon this possibility, without holding up to Dasein an ideal of existence with any special ‘content’ or forcing any such ideal upon it ‘from the outside’.

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