

# How to Meet People:

*rehabilitating particularity and reciprocity  
below Levinas, Heidegger, and Augustine*

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## Contents

Introduction	3
Chapter One: Heidegger's Secular <i>Confessions</i> ?	8
I. Self-relation	10
II. Other-relation	18
III. Concluding	20
Chapter Two: The Self, Givenness, and Particular Reciprocity	22
I. Levinas' Critiques of Heidegger	23
II. Levinas' Faceless Face: Against Reciprocity and the Stakes of Asymmetry	30
III. Some Problems with Asymmetry	38
Conclusions: Resuscitating Reciprocity and Positive Particularity	45
Works Cited and Consulted	54

## Abbreviations

Augustine, *Confessions*: *Conf.*  
 Heidegger, *Being and Time*: *BT*  
 Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*: *PRL*  
 Levinas, *Entre Nous*: *EN*  
 Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*: *EI*  
 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*: *OB*  
 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*: *TI*

## Introduction

The question undergirding this project is not a novel one—one of the oldest, perhaps: Who am I? More precisely, who am I in relation to others? This project turns to three thinkers—Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), and Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995)—to think more clearly about this question. Each figure represents an influential take on this subject, and each gives us powerful conceptual tools with which to approach the problem. Augustine’s *Confessions*—often said to be the first autobiography—is also said to be the birthplace of the modern, inward self, and the inwardly reflective nature of the Western dialogue of thought on the nature of the self and its relation(s) to and in the world.<sup>1</sup> Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, which is, as is much of subsequent philosophical writing, indebted to Augustinian anthropology, takes a secularizing turn away from Augustine’s belief that the source of the self is the relationship with God, while retaining crucial similarities to Augustine’s dynamic, as will be argued in my first chapter. Both Heidegger and Augustine think about selfhood in terms of one’s relation to death, though they approach that being-towards-death from vastly different perspectives.

For Augustine, death is the only way that I am able to reach true communion with God, who is—from Augustine’s Christian perspective—the source of the self. In life, it is by “enter[ing] into our own minds and transcend[ing] them” that we can come closest to “reach[ing]

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<sup>1</sup> “It is hardly an exaggeration to say that it was Augustine who introduced the inwardness of radical reflexivity and bequeathed it to the Western tradition of thought. The step was a fateful one, because we have certainly made a big thing of the first-person standpoint.” From Charles Taylor’s near-canonical *Sources of the Self*. (131)

that place of unfailing abundance”<sup>2</sup> alongside God, though we always fall short. It is the fact that all things in life are transient and limited when compared to the infinite (temporally, spatially, etc.) God that prompts Augustine to say that life in the mortal world serves only to give us a false sense of life since those things, being finite, will eventually fall away revealing their nature as an aside to true existence with God. Thus, it is in death that we shed our worldly concerns for good to live as ourselves next to God.

Conversely, for Heidegger, death is not an avenue through which to reach God, but itself the source of my uniqueness. Death to Heidegger is what lends me my uniqueness, my selfhood, because it is the only thing that cannot be taken over for me by another: “With death, Dasein stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being.”<sup>3</sup> What this means in the simplest terms is that, for Heidegger, my death is my ultimate potential—it is that which is always looming ahead of me as the only certain, and yet in the temporal sense uncertain, end. As such, my death is uniquely my own, my “ownmost,” in the sense that while one might give their life to save another, that task cannot ever be satisfied since that other will always, eventually, die their own death. Thus, we generally are not living as ourselves since in day-to-day life we tend not to be overwhelmed with the visceral anxiety that comes from truly confronting and being subsumed by the realization of death. This reaction, the visceral “‘*anticipation*’ of *this possibility*,”<sup>4</sup> is what to Heidegger constitutes “authentic” existence in which we truly inhabit ourselves as unique individuals. This authenticity is characterized by Heidegger throughout *Being and Time* as “non-

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<sup>2</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, IX, 24. Citations of *Confessions* refer to the book number, followed by the section rather than page numbers. This is in effort to make finding quoted phrases easier for readers using the astonishing plurality of translations and abridgments and editions available of this text.

<sup>3</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 294.

<sup>4</sup> *BT*, 306. Emphasis in original.

relational,” meaning that in authenticity, in recognizing that in death we will no longer have relation to the world, that world opens up in front of us as filled with significance and meaning. To Heidegger, it takes the retreat from signification in anxious authenticity to allow the meaning of the world to open up before us. Thus it is ultimately death, and the non-relational nature that it represents, that levy onto me my selfhood.

Levinas takes a different tack to the question of the self and the other. For Levinas, the Heideggerian philosophy—with which he had been so enamored as Heidegger’s student at the University of Freiburg—was bereft of any substantive ethical consideration; the Heideggerian project relied on a self-referential outlook which did little to consider the well-being—the *Being-towards-death*—of others. As my second chapter demonstrates, Levinas’ philosophical project became to reorient the notion of selfhood so that the other is seen at the forefront of who I am, of how I come to receive myself. In Levinas’ philosophy my uniqueness comes to me not by virtue of my own death, but rather that of the other. To him, the knowledge of the other’s *Being-towards-death* as a unique other foists on me in every case a responsibility for that person’s wellbeing, and a guilt for never having been able to arrive in time to save them from suffering, “already late and guilty for being late.”<sup>5</sup> It is in this guilt that I feel, as a unique individual carrying *my* responsibility, that I come to be or have a (responsible) self. It is the fact that I, and only I, am responsible that gives me over to myself.

The thread that runs through all three thinkers, and which steers them away from thinking about the relationships we actually have with others in the world, is not only death, but transcendence. In Augustine the transcendence to which my selfhood relates is quite obviously

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<sup>5</sup> *OB*, 87.

that of the transcendent God and of heavenly life with God. In Heidegger it is found in the non-relationality of the authentic self—in anxious authenticity I am removed from my relations to the world, thus replacing an Augustinian ‘outerworldly’<sup>6</sup> transcendence with the ‘innerworldly’ transcendence of self-relation. And as I will explain in my second chapter, for Levinas the figure of transcendence is neither God nor oneself, but the other who appears in an ‘outerworldly’ sense, one which echoes the explicitly theological language found earlier in Augustine<sup>7</sup>. As I come to argue, this emphasis on transcendence commits each thinker to two errors: a) a methodological critique extended from the Derridean-deconstructionist reading of Heidegger shows that the lingering notion of transcendence sentences these philosophies to conceptual transcendence and, more pertinently, that b) this marriage to transcendence has the side-effect of not permitting these thinkers to sufficiently approach the figure of the concrete, particular other and that this fault represents a vital gap in their phenomenologies. On the first count, this is to say that the claims to the fundamental nature of their theories that are made by all three thinkers rely in part on the notion of transcendence. Without it, the claims that their philosophies represent first philosophy (in Heidegger’s or Levinas’ case) or the proper relationship to God and religion (in Augustine’s) have no grounding. My second point is, I believe, a symptom of the first. As these thinkers employ notions of transcendence, the particular other in the world falls out of view and out of importance. For Augustine, concrete, worldly others are representative of the

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<sup>6</sup> While in lived life, Augustine encounters God from within himself (see footnote 2), it is in terms of a God that exists beyond the bounds of the world, thus ‘outerworldly.’

<sup>7</sup> Levinas references Augustine in several places, a tie which shores up the parallels found in the fact that they both utilize biblical language in making their points. See, for example, in *Entre Nous*, “Diachrony and Representation” pp. 173, and “Hermeneutics and Beyond” pp. 98. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas even makes reference to the fact that Heidegger takes cues from Augustine: “As Heidegger, after St. Augustine, pointed out, we use the term vision indifferently for every experience, even when it involves other senses than sight.” (*TI*, 188)

concupiscences—those tactile and mortal things in the world which serve to distract us from the eternal, beatitudinal joy of true love of God. To Heidegger, others make us *das Man*—the mob of anonymous everyday existence into which we are absorbed in inauthenticity. Finally for Levinas, the other *qua* other is at the forefront, yet as soon as actual others are seen to have features with which to identify them, the ethical dynamic has passed into other considerations. Ultimately I claim that this rejection of particular others bars reciprocal relationships from taking a meaningful place in the process of giving and receiving selfhood.

To be clear, my main goal here is to highlight the transcendence in each thinker's work, and to highlight how, consequently, that transcendence distracts attention from a relationship with the concrete other person and what this loss costs us. However, I close this paper by offering the beginnings of a theory of the self borne out of reciprocal relationships with particular others, the sort of concrete others that these thinkers too often ignore. Any thinking of the other that abstracts them, as these philosophies do, is, as I will come to argue, both not representative of lived experience as a matter of phenomenological validity, and also to do a disservice to the other, to disrespect them as an individual who exists alongside us in the world. In Augustine, Heidegger, and Levinas, we find an other who has been leveled, abstracted to the point of non-distinguishability. It is this thinking, rooted in conceptions of transcendence, that I argue is not representative of the lived experience of the other, and in basing their philosophies on such elevated conceptions these three thinkers disrespect those actual others we live alongside. In offering, as I do, a non-transcendent—that is to say *wholly worldly*—conception of the other, these pitfalls can be avoided. More importantly, by avoiding these pitfalls, we can regain a notion of reciprocal relationships with particular others that more accurately represents lived experience.

## Chapter One: Heidegger's Secular *Confessions*?

As much as Heidegger's work—emblematically the lengthy *polemos* launching *Being and Time*<sup>8</sup>—is a project aimed at the “destruction” of the historical approach to philosophy, religion, and their relation,<sup>9</sup> it is still one that, in confronting these approaches, draws from and takes ground in them. The most fundamental structures of Dasein can find their roots in Heidegger's “attempts to arrive at the ontological foundations of Augustinian anthropology.”<sup>10</sup> Heidegger's reading of Augustine develops several concepts central to his hermeneutic.<sup>11</sup> This chapter will demarcate the parallels and departures that populate the thought of these philosophers in two main categories: the self's (to Heidegger, Dasein's) relationship to itself and its own being, and the self's relation to and encounter with others. This will mainly be a conceptual rather than a historical analysis, though there has been quite a bit of recent scholarship on the latter (see footnote 11). I will here be pursuing these connections as

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<sup>8</sup> *Being and Time*, Introduction, part II, §6, “The task of Destroying the history of ontology.” *BT* 41.

<sup>9</sup> “...what stands in the way of the basic question of Dasein's Being (or leads it off the track) is an orientation thoroughly coloured by the anthropology of Christianity and the ancient world, whose inadequate ontological foundations have been overlooked both by the philosophy of life and by personalism.” And just further on in the same section: “The two sources which are relevant for the traditional anthropology—the Greek definition *and the clue which theology has provided*—indicate that over and above the attempt to determine the essence of ‘man’ as an entity, the question of his Being had remained forgotten...” (*BT* 74, 75. Emphasis my own.) These quotes serve to exemplify the distance Heidegger attempts to establish between himself and the history of metaphysics which he sees as too closely married to theological anthropology, a distance against which this chapter will work.

<sup>10</sup> *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, 302. An admission much later in *Being and Time* betrays the book's debts, despite the early stance: there are aspects of Heidegger's work, namely the fact that may be ontological bedrock on which Dasein's existential rests “...belongs to those residues of Christian theology within philosophical problematics which have not as yet been radically extruded.” (*BT* 272) The quote in the body of the text above is also read by Ryan Coyne in “A Difficult Proximity.” Coyne's article, as well as his recent manuscript *Heidegger's Confessions*, on certain points guides my reading of Heidegger's relationship with Augustine's thought.

<sup>11</sup> For additional writing on this, see Crowe (2006), De Paulo (2006), and Ostman (2014).

emblematic of the likeness between Heidegger's thought and the Augustinian project as one that explicitly works in with a transcendent referent—God. These parallels will hopefully serve to show that concepts in Heidegger which bear resemblance to Augustine are indicative of a remnant of transcendent thought in Heidegger's supposedly secular philosophy.

Obviously it will not be possible for me to fully tease out Heidegger's translation and de-theologization of Augustine. That project extends far beyond the scope of the present work, and has been taken up recently by a number of scholars (Coyne's work is expansive here).

Heidegger's integration of Augustinian anthropology permeates his entire corpus and Augustine is so passively present in Heidegger's thought so as to be nearly inextricable. And yet, the value of the exegetical work of teasing out how Heidegger's understanding of the encounter with the other has roots in Christian theology will become apparent later in the project as the distinctions between Heidegger's and Levinas' hermeneutics come into play.

On the two divisions: the first of the two mentioned above—the self's relation to itself—is best understood as the parallel between Heidegger's and Augustine's notions of "inauthentic" life, and how the 'fallenness' of such a state results in an estrangement from the self that is immutable within secular life.<sup>12</sup> This section will be further divided into considerations of what I consider to be the most vital of Heidegger's appropriations of Augustine on this topic: Dasein's being at issue for itself, and inauthenticity. The second division will adopt a different lens through which to approach inauthenticity, this time focusing on how it characterizes the other to whom we relate.

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<sup>12</sup>Throughout this project, I use 'secular' as a technical term, coming from the Latin *saeculum*, referring to the world as free of religious or metaphysical externality or transcendence. I employ 'secular' merely to limit the scope of reference where it is used.

## I. Self-relation

### §1: Being at issue for oneself

A critical way of understanding of human life for both Augustine and Heidegger is as possibility. The fact that there is always in this life something left open conditions the very fact of our existence: for Augustine, “our hearts are restless until they find rest in [God.]”<sup>13</sup> while for Heidegger “possibility is...the most primordial way...in which Dasein is characterized ontologically.”<sup>14</sup>

The restlessness described early on in *Confessions* shows Augustine’s assertion that the secular world contains no authentic solace (rest) and that it is only in satiating the wandering of mortal life in death that we make take rest, since rest in death is the opening of true life next to God. Generally, our possibilities are to either continue along the dispersed, branching paths of the temporal and secular, or to turn to God and “find rest” in the knowledge of the singular and eternal. Earthly, lived life is a constant flux, weaving in and out of various possibilities, yet never without the character of *having possibility*. Even when individual channels close off, there are still infinite others to which we are open, and it is this infinite openness that Augustine sees as a defining feature of temporal life. Given that the possibilities in life rise up to an individual, that is to say that no one else has the same opportunities in life as me, to Augustine, the recognition of the possibilities for engagement with life being disclosed to oneself and only oneself are what give the very notion of self over to us.

Tempering this, Augustine conditions our mortal life essentially as a nullity—a lack of the completion to be found in this world. The things to be found in the secular world—the concupiscences of daily life—serve only to distract us from the pursuit of our truest possibility,

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<sup>13</sup> *Conf.* I, 1.

<sup>14</sup> *BT*, 183.

distract us, in his eyes, from the effort and continence that proper faith requires. The self, then, in Augustine's formulation, is always one who lacks its fullness of being, insofar as one has not died and taken up in the realm of heaven in the presence of God after a life of effortful faith. "On your exceedingly great mercy alone rests my entire hope,"<sup>15</sup> Augustine pines, as a salve to his anguish that "surely human life on earth is a time of trial?"<sup>16</sup> But a trial of whom? Certainly no one but I can be continent in my own faith. This trial of continence is mine and mine alone, thus for Augustine, I and my own selfhood are always at issue for myself. Augustine continually throughout the *Confessions* reiterates the fact that the nature of being is an open question in relation to God, and one which cannot by nature be resolved in this lifetime—the question of the nature of the self is one which can only be answered through the state of having no more possibility. Throughout our living, our "time of trial," the world in which we live that life appears are the grounds in which possibilities manifest. Therefore, our experience in the world is always as someone who is not themselves: since our selfhood is conditioned by a possibility which is null in this life—that of truest communion with God—as long as we are living in the secular world—that is, not having fulfilled that potentiality—we are living as empty. Augustine formulates this lack of selfhood as a question: "What kind of nature am I?"<sup>17</sup> The "complex and manifold," "utterly incalculable"<sup>18</sup> life that he finds as his answer is the result of his resolution to perpetually question his own nature in relation to God.

Heidegger feels, and amplifies, this notion of possibility: Dasein is, as Heidegger says, "that which, in its potentiality-for-Being, it is *not yet*."<sup>19</sup> It is Dasein's character as always Being-

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<sup>15</sup> *Conf.* X, 29.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* X, 28.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.* X 17.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* X 17.

<sup>19</sup> *BT*, 186.

towards-death which, similar to Augustine, holds open the possibilities of the future which always remain until we fulfill “the possibility of the impossibility of comporting oneself towards anything, of every way of existing.”<sup>20</sup> Rather than Augustine’s effortful faith, the continence of life for Heidegger comes in the form of anticipatory resoluteness of death, my “ownmost potentiality for Being.” For “only when it qualifies itself as Being-toward-death” do we “understand the ‘can’” of life.”<sup>21</sup> Heidegger again picks up this notion of being at issue in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* in the terms of asking “What Does it Mean to Search?”<sup>22</sup> Drawing on Augustine’s story of the lost drachma in book X of *Confessions* as allegorical for the search for self, Heidegger asks

The woman who searched for and found the lost drachma—how could she search for and find it if she did not somehow still have it present to herself? If, while searching for something, different things offer themselves, and I reject each and everything until I ‘have’ found the ‘right’ thing I am searching for, then I must ‘have’ what I am searching for and that according to which I evaluate what I find. *And even if what I search for were there, and I did not recognize it as such, it would not be found.*<sup>23</sup>

In this we see Heidegger’s divergence from Augustine in thinking that the conditions for selfhood are self-related. Augustine characterizes this parable in terms of the search for God, while Heidegger’s reading draws out the idea of ipseity, or ‘being oneself,’ from Augustine’s meditations on *memoria* [memory]. While for Augustine the question of my selfhood is framed in reference to my relationship with God, for Heidegger the self is given over to me through my relation to death. In both cases that which hands over selfhood and uniqueness

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<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, 307.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, 354.

<sup>22</sup> Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, 139.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, 139. Emphasis my own.

is transcendent,<sup>24</sup> and yet Heidegger's resolutely secular reading of Augustine here necessitates the de-theologization of this notion, which nonetheless comes quite clearly from the Church Father as we can see from his prolonged engagement with *Confessions* from the time of *PRL* through *Being and Time*. Importantly, however, selfhood is never passive—for Augustine it is received through resolute and active faith; for Heidegger it comes through resolute anticipation of death. In neither case can I in this life, invested in the trappings of daily commitments, forget that “I have become a puzzle to myself, and this itself is my weakness.”<sup>25</sup> My own being is, as long as I occupy the time of my life, at issue for myself. This sentiment is reflected by Heidegger when he asserts that “Dasein is that entity which, as Being-in-the-world, is an issue for itself.”<sup>26</sup>

To summarize, that there are always doors open to me—until of course there are no longer, in death—means that I will always need to persist in choosing, and these choices determine how I relate to my ultimate potential. For Augustine this potential is God, for Heidegger death.

## §2: Inauthenticity

What is the condition of this search of which I, my selfhood, am the subject? The condition of interminable possibility always rendering me at issue for myself in turn sustains the inauthenticity of secular life. According to Augustine, the world in which he wanders restlessly appears as the “beauty of outward appearance” that tears us away from God:

So what is it that I love when I love you? Not the beauty of outward appearance, nor the splendor of time, not the fairness of light (and look how pleasing that is to our eyes), not the dulcet melodies of all kinds of song, not the sweet scent of

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<sup>24</sup> God for obvious reasons, but death because of the totality of non-relationality that it necessitates.

<sup>25</sup> *Conf. X*, 33.

<sup>26</sup> *BT*, 182.

flowers and salves and perfumes, not manna and honey, not limbs which are fit for bodily embrace.”<sup>27</sup>

Here we find Augustine systematically denouncing our putting stock in that which we find in the reach of any of our bodily senses—sight, time, sounds, smell, taste, or touch.<sup>28</sup>

To him, none of these are what we love when we love God, or put positively, to love the joys of the body—of the secular world—is to love that which God is not, and as such is a faulty, or fallen,<sup>29</sup> mode of loving.

We fall away from the possibility of authentic experience of “world” by falling away from the only authentic origin of the world—God. To love the world for the enjoyment that sensual (in the technical sense of the word) objects bring is to love a fallen world. The love of the world that is temporal and factual, turning away from the eternity of God, makes existence bounded by finitude and mortality: this faulty love is a distraction that binds us up in the infinite plurality of distractions that are the world, estranging us from the timeless God that is the object of proper love. Hence in loving the world through their use towards loving God rather than enjoyment, we are a step closer to renouncing this distraction: “Through continence, in fact, we are joined together and restored to wholeness.”<sup>30</sup>

Since God, as eternal and absolute, is not susceptible to the loss of the temporal, mortal world, it is only through God that humans can hold open the possibilities of life; in all other things there is an end, and only through God can the world of possible futures be extended infinitely. In our love of a mortal world, we limit ourselves, in turn, to the realm of the finite. To

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<sup>27</sup> *Conf. X, 8*

<sup>28</sup> It is curious that sight is given the first consideration. While it could be argued that this ordering was for melodic or poetic effect, the idea of vision’s primacy amongst the senses is an old (clearly) and established one, and is a theme which Levinas purposefully works to subvert, something I will approach in later sections.

<sup>29</sup> Fallen in the sense that it is always already below the transcendent height of God.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid. X, 29*

relate oneself to temporal things is to lock oneself in the immanence of the finitude that is, according to Augustine, inherent to temporality, denying the transcendent nature of the divine. In turn, this relation to the plurality of worldly things is to disperse oneself among them, to be *in multa defluxismus* [trickled away into multiplicity<sup>31</sup>]. Put quite simply, according to Augustine, in being lost amongst the world of distractions, we are lost not only within the world, but also from ourselves. This loss is only strengthened by our tendency not to think ourselves lost—“why does it [this truth] not speak alike to all?”<sup>32</sup> In the times when we are most secure in our being, when we are the most certain of ourselves and our place in the world, that is when we, in truth, are the most adrift. The distractions that seem to be mooring us to the world—the concerns that seem to be of the most deathly importance—are what keep us from the truth of our selfhood, that is, love of God as the transcendent, authentic, source of the world.

This turn—of one’s life away from the sinful pleasures of the secular world towards the authentically open future in God—is and must always be an effortful auto-extrication from the deception of complacency in the temporal world. For Augustine, the turn is precipitated by some event—e.g., the death of a friend recounted in *Conf. IV*—that shakes one from the slumber of security. It is not that only death that can perform this function (though this is a thread taken up by Heidegger), but rather that one is being supplanted from the complacency inherent in embeddedness in the secular world. For Augustine, this is not simply a question of living a life of piety. Rather, we live estranged from God nearly all of our time, and it is only in the visceral moments of disruption that we can begin the turn towards a life continence. In God, one’s soul

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<sup>31</sup> *ibid.* X, 29. This is the translation of this Latin phrase as rendered by Carolyn Hammond. Heidegger instead translates this as “scattered into the many,” which has less of a temporally drawn-out implication than Hammond’s version. Throughout this section I may use either, depending on which connotation I wish to draw out, but know that they come back to the same Latin phrase—*in multa defluxismus*.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.* X, 10

finds its only true, eternal respite,<sup>33</sup> in contrast to the false sense of security gleaned from the things and people and joys and pleasures of the secular world. In these fallen moments where I am at issue for myself, for Augustine, only God can provide a catch, giving me to myself, securely, authentically, and eternally.

The many—as in *in multa defluxismus*—is what explicitly becomes Heidegger’s manifold of life’s possibilities: “For ‘*in multa defluxismus*’ [we are scattered into the many], we are dissolving into the manifold and are absorbed into the dispersion.”<sup>34</sup> There is even a direct equivocation of the two: “*Multum*: the manifold.”<sup>35</sup> What does this mean for us interested in seeing Heidegger’s philosophy through? This appropriation of Augustine’s analytic of the self becomes inauthenticity in *Being and Time*: “The Self, however, is proximally and for the most part inauthentic, the they-self. Being-in-the-world is always fallen.”<sup>36</sup> Heidegger, always attentive to the precise use of language, here in his secular magnum opus uses a term to describe inauthentic life that insinuates a height from which to fall, a place beyond factual life from which we tumble into our daily patterns of living. In much the same way that being ensnared by the joys of the secular world means turning away from oneself for Augustine, for Heidegger “Dasein’s absorption in the ‘they’ and its absorption in the ‘world’ of its concern, make manifest something like a *fleeing* of Dasein in the face of itself.”<sup>37</sup> For Heidegger too, to escape this state is exceedingly difficult as it is the way of being that is “in accordance with [our] ownmost inertia of falling.”<sup>38</sup> This can be traced back to *Phenomenology of Religious Life*, and thus directly back to Augustine when Heidegger says that we are “being-pulled by... the life of the world in its

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<sup>33</sup> “...our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

<sup>34</sup> *PRL*, 151-152. Bracketed translation in original text.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, 153

<sup>36</sup> *BT*, 225.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, 229. Italics in original.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, 229.

manifold significance,” and that this way of being “appeals to us.”<sup>39</sup> So what is Augustinian ‘being-scattered’ for Heidegger if not the fall into “das Man” or the “they-self?” For Heidegger, just as Augustine, it is easy—perhaps the easiest thing of all—the remain happily embedded in the world, and to remain forever a part of the anonymous “they” rather than to be struck by selfhood.

As we see here, the life we live in the secular world is the life of concern—it is the one that matters to us day to day. In bounding from activity to activity—notably for Heidegger, the activities of the they-self include things like idle chatter, curiosity—we are, in essence, scattering ourselves amongst the distractions of daily life. “The appetite of knowing,”<sup>40</sup> that which we often think of as one of the most desirous activities of a dignified life, is still to Heidegger only a satiation that remains embedded in inauthenticity: We “[seek] novelty only in order to leap from it anew to another novelty. In this kind of seeing, that which is an issue for care does not lie in grasping something and being knowingly in the truth; it lies rather in its possibilities of abandoning itself to the world.”<sup>41</sup> The everyday being of Dasein as ‘fallen’—exemplified by Heidegger as ‘idle talk,’ ‘curiosity,’ and ‘ambiguity’—shows how Dasein is “proximally and for the most part *alongside* the ‘world’ of its concern.”<sup>42</sup> That is to say, continually embedded in inauthentic Being.

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<sup>39</sup> *PRL*, 152.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, 166.

<sup>41</sup> *BT*, 216.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, 220.

## II. Other-relation

### §1 Inauthenticity

The discussion of inauthenticity above has served to illuminate the threads of comparison between Heidegger's and Augustine's notions in terms of how inauthenticity affects my relation to *myself*. The remainder of this chapter will turn the focus of inauthenticity to how it conditions my encounter with others who exist in the world alongside me. In examining Augustine's analysis of inauthenticity in relation to others, we turn back to the story of the passing of a friend in Book IV of *Confessions* mentioned above.

The events in this story's effect on Augustine, the catalyst for his turn to Christianity, is best summarized with this passage: "...he whom I had loved as if he would never die had in fact died; and I was even more amazed that I remained alive when he was dead..."<sup>43</sup> Even in questioning the profoundly moving death of his dear friend and confidant, Augustine "become[s] the subject of [his] own questioning,"<sup>44</sup> wondering whether there is any inherent catharsis in grief, or whether "it is sweet only inasmuch as we hope to hear [God] respond."<sup>45</sup> This turn to God only appears, though, after a period of reflection prior to which Augustine is filled with a deep anguish directed towards the world at large:

I was carrying about with me my shattered, bleeding soul; it could not endure being carried by me, but I could find nowhere to set it down. Not in pleasant woodlands could it find any peace, nor in sports and music, not in sweet-scented groves, nor in elaborate banquets, nor even in the pleasure of bed and couch, nor—finally—in books and poetry.<sup>46</sup>

And if I used to say 'Hope in God,' my soul would not obey me, and rightly so, because the human being whom I had lost when he was so very dear to me was

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<sup>43</sup> *Conf.* IV, 6.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.* IV, 4.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.* IV, 5.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.* IV, 6.

truer and better than the imaginary divinity in which I kept being told to put my hope.<sup>47</sup>

The revelation of this event that precipitates Augustine's turn to faith is the emergent futility of loving others as if they are infinite when in fact they make up simply another element of the same secular world that cause us to remain fallen away from God as the only true place for love. His framework of the concupiscences of the secular world derives from this realization that the other—not just any stranger—but one of the most significant presences in his life, is simply another distraction from continent faith. This is not to say that the loves of our life are not of value, but to Augustine it is gravely mistaken to direct the same sort of love towards earthly things, and people, that is only true when directed towards God.

This thread is taken up by Heidegger in *Being and Time* with his characterization of the 'they.' While others are imperative for the co-construction of and meaning in the world, their main function is essentially as constituents of an anonymous mob: "The 'they' ... is nothing definite, and which all are, though not as the sum..."<sup>48</sup> and "Everyone is the other, and no one is himself."<sup>49</sup> This mob, as the other whom we encounter in daily life, steals away every attempt at "genuineness," or the realization of possibility-fulfilling death. Thus, to Heidegger the other that we encounter in the world is rendered both unfocussed and sapping: "...the answer to the question of the 'who' of everyday Dasein, is the 'nobody' to whom every Dasein has already surrendered itself in Being-among-one-another."<sup>50</sup> Heidegger is careful to avoid normative language here, asserting that his characterization of being a part of the 'they' as our normal mode

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid.* IV, 4.

<sup>48</sup> *BT*, 164.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, 165.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, 166.

of Being is not a claim of value, but simply of description. Life in the ‘they,’ though, is unequivocally inauthentic, and in all cases robs me of my selfhood.

However, Heidegger goes farther than Augustine regarding the death of the other. Where for Augustine it was an authentically transformative experience which led to his effortful love of God, for Heidegger the death of the other means only that another person becomes an object to be used: “The *end* of the entity *qua* Dasein is the *beginning* of the same entity *qua* something present-at-hand.”<sup>51</sup> While we experience the death of the other in a more authentic way than we relate to everyday inanimate objects (accepting for the sake of this argument that a corpse is an inanimate object, only not of the garden variety)—we encounter them in a mode of solicitude for the body in the way of funerary rites and respect—this death is still not something experienced in what Heidegger calls “a genuine sense,” for even with this added layer of care, “at most we are always just ‘there alongside.’”<sup>52</sup>

### III. Concluding

Given that the “Augustine and Neo-Platonism” lecture in *PRL* from which we receive many of the direct links between *Confessions* and *Being and Time* only treats in earnest Book X of *Confessions*, it is difficult to assert with a high degree of certainty that Heidegger’s notion of the encounter with the other is linked as directly to Augustine’s account of the same. That being said, I hope that the preceding connections are strong enough evidence for me to assert with some confidence that the same is likely true for this most recent argument.

The account presented in this chapter—that of the ways in which Heidegger’s notions of selfhood and the encounter with the other find their roots and parallels in Christian theology—

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, 281.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, 282.

will serve, moving forward, to help make sense of the trajectory of thought on these issues. Hopefully this section lends credence to the assertion that Heidegger's methodical labor to de-theologize Augustinian anthropology still has parallels to the dependence on transcendence which is so critical for Augustine. For both Heidegger and Augustine, it has become clear that the other falls into the category of concupiscence—that which lives in the secular world and serves to detach us from our selfhood.

Levinas turns this account on its head, arguing that it is in fact the encounter with the other that gifts me my selfhood. This comes out of a worry of solipsism in Heidegger, the worry that the non-relationality of what constitutes authenticity in Heidegger leaves behind a self which has no impetus for concern for others who live amongst and alongside us. In the following section, I will lay out Levinas' critique in greater detail, which will consist in part of a broader explanation of authenticity in Heidegger which was left wanting in this past section.

## Chapter Two: The Self, Givenness, and Particular Reciprocity

As Jean-Luc Marion suggests, “Heidegger would not have held and retained until the end, and despite all his faults, such prestige in Levinas’s eyes if the existential analytic had merely missed the question of the other.”<sup>53</sup> While true that alterity does not hold a central place in *Being and Time*, the work also does not describe Heideggerian Being as without consideration of the alterity of others. An inherent part of the givenness of self that results from thrownness into a shared world maintained by care and meaning is the other with whom it is shared and who helps to constitute it. The goal of the present chapter is to explore the gulf between Heidegger and Levinas on this front, and to show how the differing notions of the place of the other relate to the givenness of Being.

Is the adventure of being, as being there, as Da-sein, an inalienable belonging to self, a being proper—Eigentlichkeit, an authenticity altered by nothing—neither support nor help nor influence—conquering, but disdaining the exchange in which a will awaits the consent of the stranger—the virility of a free ability-to-be, like a will of race and sword?<sup>54</sup>

As we see characterized in Levinas’ critiquing question, Dasein is not an originary being. It is in the fact of my death that I find myself, meaning that to Heidegger, as we have seen, I am usually not myself. Levinas’ heaviest criticisms of Heidegger’s work turn on his denial of this dynamic between one and self while he simultaneously wishes to find “what could be added to

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<sup>53</sup> “Substitution and Solicitude,” 53. In *The Gift of the Other*, Jean-Luc Marion.

<sup>54</sup> “Dying For...” in *Entre Nous*, 207, Levinas. This work will serve as my main source for understanding Levinas’ reading of Heidegger and of his central critiques that appear in his original concepts. *Entre Nous*, in which this text was published, comes very late in Levinas’ oeuvre and as such represents some of his final published thoughts on such matters.

[Heidegger's] insights without compromising them."<sup>55</sup> To see where Levinas and Heidegger differ in their notions of the origin of the self, it is useful to examine Levinas' criticisms of Heidegger's priority of others. In this writing is the foundation of Levinas' development of the ethical responsibility inhered into interaction with the Other. In seeing where the self arises in the work of both philosophers, the role of the other becomes apparent. Both Heidegger and Levinas work from the basis that the self is not originary—either the self is given over to itself (*Geworfenheit*) by a death which it is not yet, or imposed by the Other, but in neither case is it *sui generis*. Thus, as I will come to argue, by resolving tensions that I see in both accounts of how the self is given over in death (of itself or the other), and from a position of non-relation, we are left with a mechanism of self-giveness that is rooted in transcendence and which thus denies us the experience of others as they actually appear to us in the world

## I. Levinas' critiques of Heidegger

Heidegger's Dasein analytic is often seen by unsympathetic readers as an obsession with a deathly and depressing notion of authenticity that leaves us with a narcissistic and nearly solipsistic version of the self that forgets its embeddedness alongside others and forgets again that this embeddedness is a necessary condition of the authentic self.<sup>56</sup> However, Levinas does not fall in line with this reading, asserting that in Heidegger "on the contrary" that "would not to be, that verb, signify—in being-there—non-indifference, obsession by the other, a search and a

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<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, 209.

<sup>56</sup> See, e.g., Peter Sloterdijk's reading in his influential triptych *Bubbles*, when he characterizes Dasein as a "[...] lonely, weak, hysterical-heroic existential subject that thinks it is the first to die, and remains pitifully uncertain of the more hidden aspects of its embeddedness in intimacies and solidarities." (*Microspherology*, 335)

vow of peace?”<sup>57</sup> Levinas signals here that he sees in Heidegger a foundation on which to build, and one in which *to be* (as the verb) is to be responsible for the life and suffering of and to bear witness to the death of those others alongside whom our own being streams. Put another way, for Levinas the authentic self derives from our concern and responsibility for the other, rather than our own death as it does for Heidegger. In constructing this as his original philosophical contribution, Levinas takes a critical section of Heidegger’s work to be the discussion of Being-with as it related to notions of things as ready-to-hand. The other that inhabits Heidegger’s phenomenology is not simply an object ready-to-hand, which in a phrase means to be “understood precisely in terms of work.”<sup>58</sup> That is to say that even in Heidegger’s individualizing philosophy, others play a role greater than that of rote objects populating the world. Being-in-the-world surrounded by these rote objects of significance necessarily implies the fundamentality of being-with, since the meaning of the objects can only be meaning in reference to others. Meaning means nothing if it is only with oneself; nothing can have meaning if it does not also carry that meaning for someone else. There is, for Heidegger, a second sense in which the other is indispensable in the constitution of Dasein, for “Being-in [the world] is *Being-with* Others.”<sup>59</sup> The others who constitute the world with me are not simply ‘those who I am not’ as that background against which *I* stand out, but “They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does *not* distinguish oneself—those among whom one is too.”<sup>60</sup> This “sameness,” as Heidegger calls it, is part of what allows Dasein to locate itself as an individual within the

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<sup>57</sup> Dying For... 207.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, 212.

<sup>59</sup> *BT*, 154.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, 154.

world.<sup>61</sup> To Heidegger, in existing within the world, we understand ourselves in terms of that world, and to do that invariably means to understand ourselves alongside those other inhabitants of the world. Thus in a world of care, of concern of the relation between self and world, that care is determined by the meanings that things have in relation to Dasein. Since meaning is determined by the relationship with the other that allows for meaning in the first place, the entire dynamic of care and concern which is so pivotal for Heidegger's understanding finds its crux in being-with.

And yet, Levinas does not think that enough of an emphasis is placed on this interaction. To him, the Heideggerian means of understanding the relationship with the other as slipping into the anonymous mass of the *they* is a dilution of the imposition that the face of the other places on us in its becoming the genitor of meaning in the world. The other way that Heidegger characterizes the other is also unsatisfactory for Levinas: the fact that the "Dasein of Others"<sup>62</sup> stands in its own right separate from me provides no impetus for my caring for that other. "A concern for the other man, a care for his food, drink, clothing, health, and shelter"<sup>63</sup> is not what we get when we think of our relationship with the other as a state of estrangement from our self, or as a way of locating oneself amongst generators of the world. In the *they*, as we have seen Heidegger say, "Everyone is the other, and no one is himself."<sup>64</sup> In surrendering to the anonymity of the everyday, the mass of the other is what answers for me when I ask "who am I?"

As we have seen, while the other in Heidegger's framework is co-constitutive of the world, they at the same time are an obfuscation of one's individuality in that world. So, the role

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<sup>61</sup> Locate is a particularly apt word, as Heidegger describes this structure of Dasein's Being in terms of spatiality and the way in which Dasein locates itself in the world.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, 154.

<sup>63</sup> "Dying For..." *EN*, 212.

<sup>64</sup> *BT*, 165.

of the other is simultaneously a crucially indispensable one and yet also, despite the lack of evaluative language which Heidegger is so careful to avoid, an obstacle. Overcoming that obstacle means, to use Levinas' words,

...the departure from the "they" ...recovered through an upheaval, within the everyday existence of the "they" brought about by a resolved and free determination made by being-there which is thus being-for-death, anticipating death in the courage of anxiety. In the courage of anxiety, not in the fear and evasions of the everyday! Perfect authenticity!"<sup>65</sup>

When Dasein, in anticipatory resoluteness of death, is its most authentically *self*, it is in a state of non-relation. That is to say that the conditions Heidegger assumes for authenticity are such that "...all [one's] relations to any other Dasein have been undone."<sup>66</sup> Yet this non-relationality or isolation does not make Dasein the origin of its self—the self is “not one which Dasein procures for itself”<sup>67</sup>—but rather it is given by Dasein's thrownness. My having been thrown into the world—my placement in life, in the world, my own volition *in absentia*—and the fact that I will leave it through death, is where I receive my uniqueness, for Heidegger's authenticity comes only from that death which I would not have had I not been thrown into mortal existence. Others are those from whom I retreat in authenticity. Something even as profound as the death of the other—the bodily death rather than the projected ethical imposition that Levinas theorizes—, even of someone as close as a parent or lover, means nothing more than the provocation of those emotions that inhabit the day-to-day. It is anxiously resolute anticipation of one's own death that gives one's self over to them; in realizing my own death which cannot be taken over from me by any other, I see that I truly am an individual in that my ultimate future cannot be carried out by

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<sup>65</sup> EN, 214.

<sup>66</sup> BT, 294.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, 295.

any other. It is in this way that to Heidegger, selfhood is given rather than something which is a feature of my current being. It is predicated on the temporal futurity of the possibility of death.

To Levinas this givenness is manifested not through an internal relation to one's own death but rather through the recognition of the individuality of the other that is shown by the meeting of the face and the gaze into the infinity that that face represents. "We," as Levinas writes, "can see the formal structure of nonfreedom in a subjectivity which does not have time to choose the Good and thus is penetrated with its rays unbeknownst to itself."<sup>68</sup> Here Levinas articulates one of his central assertions, that the face of the other is an undeniable imposition of responsibility. The unknowability of the other, as that which is "overflowing its idea,"<sup>69</sup> is what we come up against when meeting the face. One cannot shy away from the face's levying "the primordial *expression*... 'you shall not commit murder'"<sup>70</sup> once the gaze has "penetrated [us] with its rays." While we are always accused by the interaction with the Other and bear the burden of responsibility for the death of the Other, it is not such that this responsibility is *only* a burden. For Levinas, this responsibility is also that which individualizes me: "In responsibility the same, the ego, is me, summoned, provoked, as irreplaceable, and thus accused as unique in the supreme passivity of one that cannot slip away without fault."<sup>71</sup> What we see here is that the self is given to me by responsibility. Just as for Heidegger the self is given over by my death, for Levinas the self is given over by the other's death. Referencing the term of philosophical tradition, ego, Levinas shows that turning one's head from the imposed responsibility of the face of the other is the only way one can deny the self that is handed over in such responsibility, and even then it is a false denial; we do not truly lose this responsibility, but shirking it does put us at

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<sup>68</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 11.

<sup>69</sup> *Totality and Infinity*, 47.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, 199.

<sup>71</sup> *OB*, 135.

fault, commits a sin. Levinas works against the idea that there is an authentic self to be discovered through anxiety that exists prior to the interaction with the Other. This interaction is even prior to the appearance of the world. To him, it is the encounter with the Face itself that renders selfhood—before this there is nothing that can assure me of my ipseity.

This happens because the call of the other calls *me*. When I am beseeched by the responsibility that the meeting of the face's gaze levies, *I* am beseeched rather than anyone else. Jeffrey Kosky puts it well: "I reach a certainty of myself in exposure to the summons by which the other claims me..."<sup>72</sup> The binary orbit of the subject and the other is a twofold individuation; I see the other as their singularity in their death and at the same time I become myself through my responsibility for that death and the guilt of my not having arrived in time to stop it. Since individuation is based in both cases on that aspect of the self which cannot be taken over by another, it is implied that this same aspect also cannot be known by another. There always remains something of the other than cannot be known, that forever evades knowledge. It is not the responsibility itself that is seen in the face—though as explored above it is certainly an effect—but the infinity. It is the impossibility of knowing what it is I am looking at that looks back when the gaze is met: "The face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me, the idea existing to my own measure and to the measure of its *ideatum*—the adequate idea."<sup>73</sup> No matter the notion of the other that is built up inside us as knowledge there is always something lacking—there is an ineffability in every other, their self as mortal, that is inaccessible. Just as for Heidegger no one else can fill in for me at the hour of my death, so it is for Levinas that I cannot fully know the death of the other, and this is what makes them unique. So it is that the responsibility that we face in the face is the responsibility for a

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<sup>72</sup> "Love Strong as Death," 114. Jeffrey Kosky.

<sup>73</sup> *TI*, 51.

unique other rather than a vague guilt brought on by the death of anonymity, as might be the case were we to think of the other as the *they* of Heidegger's existential analytic.

In not being able to substitute one for another, the other as infinite and as the fundamental block is brought to the forefront of philosophy. For Levinas, if I am truly "I, unique in my genus"<sup>74</sup> it is only because of the exchange that takes place between myself and this equally unique other. This uniqueness is again, determined by that unknowability by which "The face is present in its refusal to be contained. In this sense it cannot be comprehended, that is, encompassed."<sup>75</sup> To Levinas, to do harm to the singular other is a far greater sin than if we think of the other simply as a part of the masses; if the other has no individuality then they cannot be the impetus for ethical behavior and thus does not impose responsibility. Heidegger's mode of existing alongside others is deficient in the eyes of Levinas in that for Levinas my care for alterity—the other—does not fall back into concern for the self. As the other remains without uniqueness, they cannot have individual concerns and cannot be the subject of concern for them as individual. Consequently, in the Heideggerian mode, the authentic form of caring for another is to allow them to settle their own affairs. To do otherwise is to "leap in" to the other's life and deprive them of agency, stealing away the open future that makes them individual and making them "dominated and dependent."<sup>76</sup> By not allowing another to be in an authentic mode of being, as a being-towards-death, I steal away their possibility for self in service of my own everyday conscience.

Levinas, conversely, takes shouldering responsibility for the other's harm—a harm which already precedes my hearing their call—i.e. heeding the call of responsibility, to be the most

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<sup>74</sup> *OB*, 139.

<sup>75</sup> *TI*, 194.

<sup>76</sup> *BT*, 158.

devout act of individuation. Despite the fact that Levinas' understanding of the encounter with the other effectively displaces Heidegger's description of authenticity as the fundamental existential construct of our being, the next section will explain that Levinas' other is still faceless. This residue of anonymity becomes the starting point for my critique of Levinas.

## II. Levinas' Faceless Face: against reciprocity and the stakes of asymmetry

Despite the fact that the relationship between authenticity and inauthenticity as Heidegger develops it does not think of the two as dichotomous but rather as different versions of inauthenticity,<sup>77</sup> it remains tempting to think of Levinas' work as a mediation attempting to occupy a middle space. The radical isolationism of authenticity countered by the radical anonymity of extreme "they-hood" leave a void into which Levinas offers a radical altruism; where he sees and rejects the leveling vacuity of the they, Levinas also turns away from authenticity on the grounds of its self-absorbed appropriation of the other. Authenticity's retreat

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<sup>77</sup> As Heidegger puts it, "*authentic* existence is not something which floats above falling everydayness; existentially, it is only a modified way in which everydayness is seized upon." (*BT*, 224) This suggests that the proper understanding of authenticity is as a way of living and experiencing inauthenticity, rather than as the phenomenon of its transcendence.

Additionally, it is not self-evident that Heidegger's authenticity is as isolating and solipsistic as many critics read, as Heidegger describes Dasein as never not being alongside others in the world:

As structures essential to Dasein's constitution, these [Being-alongside things and Being-with others] have a share in conditioning the possibility of any existence whatsoever. Dasein is authentically itself only to the extent that, *as* concerned Being-alongside and solicitous Being-with, it projects itself upon its ownmost potentiality-for-Being rather than upon the possibility of the they-self.

However, although Being-with is fundamental to the ontological structure of Dasein, and Dasein cannot be without it, authentic Dasein (the subject of criticism here) is only such as it retreats from others except insofar as they relate to its own "potentiality-for-Being." That is to say that Dasein, in authenticity, rejects others except as they relate to resolute anticipation of its own death.

into self-relation is, for Levinas, a dangerous devaluing of the other through prioritizing the self. By making authenticity, or in other words, self-congruence, the focal point and suggestively aspirational state of being,<sup>78</sup> Levinas worries that Heidegger grossly neglects the importance of the care of the other.

However, Levinas' critique of authenticity (as the stronger of the two horns of authenticity and inauthenticity), is clearly more fundamental than the normative claim that Heidegger pays too little attention to the plight of the other—he challenges the ontological validity of Heidegger's stance by insisting on the individuating nature of the encounter with the other. It is the other who gives my *Jemeinigkeit* [mineness], not simply that the face of the other solicits proper moral treatment. While the normative ramifications of this shift are enormous, Levinas' more fundamental claim is, as Howard Pickett puts it, that “there is no description of the self that is not already normative, ethical, and, most importantly, freighted with responsibility.”<sup>79</sup> While not saying that the mode of inauthenticity is preferable—that too, as the two agree, is a state of non-individuation—Levinas suggests that the other has a stronger role to play in the realization of selfhood than Heidegger allows. Since Heidegger insists on the other's instrumental role as a fundamental existential of Dasein without which Dasein cannot be Dasein, Levinas' critique that Heidegger simply doesn't pay enough attention to the other can be frustrating to a Heideggerian. While true that Being-with is fundamental to Dasein (see footnote 19), Levinas sees this constant engagement with the other as an engagement both in and

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<sup>78</sup> The common translations of *Eigentlichkeit* and *Uneigentlichkeit* as authenticity and inauthenticity respectively are perhaps in part responsible for this conception. The more direct translations of “ownness” and “disownedness” respectively, while improving on the former construction in terms of evaluative suggestion, still carry with them connotations of possession and loss, which in turn hold implications of normative valuation. That said, I will retain the use of authenticity and inauthenticity as is the usual translation in Anglosphere discourse.

<sup>79</sup> *Rethinking Sincerity and Authenticity*, 177. Howard Pickett.

constitutive of the world. This goes against his argument of the primacy of the encounter with the face, and his thesis that it is this very encounter which individuates me. The encounter with the face, to Levinas, is both necessary and sufficient for my individuation, where for Heidegger it is merely necessary.

Again, it is the other who gives me over to myself. More precisely, as discussed previously, it is being-towards the death of the other, rather than towards my own, that constitutes subjectivity for Levinas. By formulating his argument as such, he maintains that the mode of inauthentic anonymity—the correlate of which for Levinas is the turning away from the responsibility which I always already have—is undesirable because it bears no responsibility (How can *I* shoulder a burden if I am at once no one and everyone?), just as the mode of authenticity is undesirable because it subordinates the fact of my embeddedness alongside others. In both cases, the ethical duty he wants to highlight is lost. Levinas' project is, to put it shortly, to remedy the fact that all of Heidegger's proposed modes of Dasein's being mischaracterize the relationship with the other. The tonic to this problem is then responsibility that centers the other, a centering that at the same time places Levinas' philosophy at the center between authenticity and inauthenticity.

If Levinas does what he sets out to do—split the difference in the modes of being that Heidegger describes—then what is missing from Levinas' revisions? The weight of particularity and, as I will come to argue, reciprocity through particularity, are left wanting in Levinas' analysis. It may seem perplexing that a philosopher whose work is almost singularly dedicated to the uniqueness and singularity of the other could be open to accusations of not giving due thought to particularity. However, through this section it will become clear that to Levinas, particularity is certainly not the same as uniqueness. His way of speaking about the other takes

their uniqueness as the most primordial existential fact of their being, and as such it comes before any other way of identifying them, such as their name, appearance, history, etc. can be apprehended.<sup>80</sup> This means that to Levinas, the other is left at just that, other, rather than some other that I can identify. To take up the critique offered by Marion,

Certainly, the face appears as no (other) person (appears): but this must now be understood no longer only as the excellence of its phenomenality, but as its anonymity: it appears as “no person”, as no individual, as no so-and-so, it does not appear, to sum up, in person, nor as a person. With the Other, no person appears yet.<sup>81</sup>

As Marion reads it, and I am inclined to follow him, Levinas goes so far as to render the other “it” rather than ‘them’. Put simply, to Levinas, the other that appears to me as the face is other as such, and they may just as well be any other. Because they appear before anything that might identify them, the other that I see in responsibility is unidentifiable—they are no one and everyone. Following from this, the critique that I make of Levinas is of this neutrality of the face of the other. As I will shortly show, this anonymous face and the responsibility with which it holds me hostage overcorrect the Heideggerian analytic by characterizing existence too much in terms of the other at the expense of the self where Heidegger’s sense was, as Levinas correctly read, concerned too much with the self at the expense of the other.

How does Levinas philosophically justify such a fundamental asymmetry? From *Totality and Infinity*:

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<sup>80</sup> This notion of what constitutes particularity will be referenced *sic passim* as “form.” I choose “form” because of its ties to the French *figure*. *Figure* refers not only to the physical presence of a thing or person, but also to its particular features, its facial features and characteristics. The word also connotes a face’s ability to convey mood or emotion. These are all things which the English “form” loses, but which hopefully can be re-injected. This rationale follows from that of the translators of Emmanuel Falque’s *The Loving Struggle*. What I hope to add to my usage of this word however, is to use form not only to refer to the physical features and the ability for the conveyance of mood, but also to that described above, the rest of what makes a person *them* rather than anyone else: their history, persona, intellect, and so on.

<sup>81</sup> “From the Other to the Individual,” 7. Jean-Luc Marion.

*what I permit myself to demand of myself is not comparable with what I have the right to demand of the Other.* This moral experience, so commonplace, indicates a metaphysical asymmetry: the radical impossibility of seeing oneself from the outside and of speaking in the same sense of oneself and of the others, and consequently the impossibility of totalization.<sup>82</sup>

In formulating the experience of and with the other as such, Levinas establishes an insurmountable hierarchy between my consideration of myself and my consideration of the other: my concern for the other is, to him, prior in every sense to my self-concern.

“There is a radical difference between the suffering in the other...and suffering in me,” as my own suffering can only take on meaning “in becoming a suffering for the suffering...of someone else.”<sup>83</sup>

Thus we have the situation in which the radical alterity of the other represents their absolute transcendence, in which they appear from the same “height in which God is revealed.”<sup>84</sup> Since Levinas’ conceptions of God and the other about one another in their transcendence, he is disallowing himself from thinking that the essence of the other can be incarnate in their embodied nature: “...the Other, in his signification prior to my initiative, resembles God.”<sup>85</sup> Here we see how, similarly to Augustine, Levinas’ anthropology is tied to his theology. In ascribing to the other the same quality that he does God—transcendence of the world—Levinas is tying these two together intimately. The drawing of this parallel serves to highlight how starkly the irreducible difference between myself and the other must be seen. Just as there is an absolute difference between myself and God, the distance inherent in the face to face relationship of responsibility serves to reinforce the difference between myself and other. Where we see in Augustine the revelations that lead to his search for God, in Levinas we have “the epiphany of

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<sup>82</sup> *TI*, 53. Emphasis my own.

<sup>83</sup> *EN*, 94. Useless Suffering.

<sup>84</sup> *TI*, 79.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, 293.

the face.”<sup>86</sup> To Levinas this leads to the face that the other cannot be incarnate just as God cannot be, and this ‘non-incarnatability’ leads to the other who cannot take form.

Therefore “the face” cannot ever be “your face” in the same way that God cannot be named. Put another way, the other’s transcendent nature places them prior to and beyond the factual world, and as such they cannot be the subject of my totalizing or thematizing intention. “The Other who dominates me in his transcendence is thus the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, to whom I am obligated.”<sup>87</sup> These are examples to him of those others who have nothing to offer back to me—who are powerless—and yet still overwhelm me in my responsibility for them, despite the fact that they can do nothing for me in return. The transcendence of the other, through which they speak downwards to me as the face, then manifests itself as the infinite ethical imposition that takes hold of me. To Levinas, the asymmetry of this relationship, between myself received from the other and this same other whom I cannot conceive and yet am irreconcilably responsible for, prevents any reciprocity in our relationship from remaining on the level of ethics. In my own uniqueness, my ethical responsibility cannot be taken over by any other, yet any sort of meaningful reciprocity would be based on the fact of the other’s simultaneous responsibility for me, an assertion which, as we have seen, Levinas would wholly denounce.

Being able to ask the other to in turn hold responsibility for my own wellbeing would disintegrate my own responsibility and thus, myself: “It is precisely insofar as the relationship between the Other and me is not reciprocal that I am subjection to the Other; and I am “subject” essentially in this sense. It is I who support all.”<sup>88</sup> This makes Levinas’ ethics one without regard

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<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, 213

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, 215.

<sup>88</sup> *Ethics and Infinity*, 98.

for, and seemingly disdain for, any expectation of communion. To be sure, it is plausible to think that there is an implicit reciprocity in this dynamic—is not the other also held in responsibility to me? At the same time as I am held to infinite responsibility in meeting their face, are they not as well? As intuitive as this may be, for Levinas to make this explicit would be anathema. He in several places references a formulation of Dostoevsky: “We are all guilty of all and for all men before all, and I more than the others.”<sup>89</sup> In his own words, “I am responsible for a total responsibility, which answers for all the others and for all in the others, even for their responsibility. The I always has one responsibility more than all the others.”<sup>90</sup> To accept that the other holds responsibility alongside me would simply reduce the infinity of my own burden, a reduction which in turn reduces me.

To have an expectation that the other will return responsibility would necessitate a dialogue, and to do so would be to reduce their radical alterity to that which can be conceived and engaged through language. Reducing the other in this way, as Levinas sees it, would be to threaten them with a sort of ethical imperialism, even as it may take the form of their role as a lover or friend. Following from this, the reduction of the alterity of the other would threaten my own subjectivity, since my own selfhood is dependent on the other’s—recall that it is in my non-transferable responsibility for the unique death of the other that I am given my own selfhood. If the other were to be a particular other, that would be to knock them down from their transcendent height; a particular other is one with features—physical, personal, historical—that can only be conceived as a part of the world that they help constitute. Thinking the other as a part of the world rather than transcendent alterity diminishes my responsibility to them because they now do not appear to me as “the face” but as a face alongside the rest of what constitutes my daily life.

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<sup>89</sup> Dostoevsky, quoted by Levinas in *Ethics and Infinity*, 98.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*, 99.

The upshot of this is that any act that reduces my responsibility, even farcically, in turn reduces my individuation since it is that responsibility in the first place which makes me unique. In taking stock of and in a particular other, meaning the other in their form, the irruption of the face—my subjectivizing event—breaks down, for Levinas, into a secondary consideration. As we see neatly summarized in Levinas' stance on particularity in *Totality and Infinity*,

These differences between the Other and me do not depend on different “properties” that would be inherent in the “I,” on the one hand, and, on the other hand, in the Other, nor in different psychological dispositions which their minds would take on from the encounter. They are due to the I-Other conjuncture, to the inevitable *orientation* of being “starting from oneself” toward “the Other.” The priority of this orientation [that of the ethical] over the terms that are placed in it (and which cannot rise without this orientation) summarizes the thesis of the present work.<sup>91</sup>

In this we see that the priority of the ethical relationship contains within it that which follows from it, namely any discourse with the other which could be possible only through interaction with their form (form, again, is being used as I have defined it in footnote 80). As Levinas continues, my subjectivity—my uniqueness—“is indeed founded on the infinitude of the other, which can be accomplished only by being produced as the idea of Infinity in a separated being.”<sup>92</sup> In other words, the transcendence (“infinitude”) that I run up against in the encounter with the other is dependent on the fact that there is an insurmountable distance between the two of us. The distance is simply that fact of the other's alterity in reference to me. To overcome this distance would require discourse, and since discourse requires intelligibility, to be able to discourse with the other would mean to make them immanent and knowable, which to Levinas would subvert the Messianic relationship. This, to him, is not possible. The face speaks, yes, but it is a call without a response: “The other does indeed invoke this separated being, but this

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<sup>91</sup> *TI*, 215. Bracketed phrase my own.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*, 216.

invocation is not reducible to calling for a correlative.”<sup>93</sup> Thus, language and discourse are left as considerations of justice, which is only thinkable after the primordial ethical relationship has manifested. Hence we must take Levinas literally when he says that “the epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity.”<sup>94</sup> This is the reasoning that leaves us with Levinas’ non-reciprocal ethical relationship that sublimates the form of the other, leaving them as other, but no one.

### III. Some problems with asymmetry

So where does this notion present a problem? I do not, as Levinas did for Heidegger, presume to offer a rebuttal of Levinas’ position, nor even of Heidegger’s. While my reading is one that rests on identified weaknesses in both positions, I do not think that there are fatal flaws in either. In fact, I believe that they can coexist as multiple modes of individuation, contrary perhaps to received wisdom on these philosophies. Thus, my own position does not aim at replacing or displacing either Heidegger’s, Levinas’, or Augustine’s positions despite their flaws, but rather to be situated alongside them as another (and perhaps preferable in certain senses or situations) mode of receiving (and giving) selfhood. That said, there is no impetus for making an argument unless it addresses some of the flaws or deficiencies that I see in the present accounts. The Levinasian subject is one whose relationship to the other is that of a hostage<sup>95</sup>—his ethics of

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<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*, 216.

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*, 213.

<sup>95</sup> This strong phrase is language that Levinas himself uses in *Otherwise than Being*: “Responsibility goes beyond being. In sincerity, in frankness, in the veracity of this saying, in the uncoveredness of suffering. Being is altered. But this saying remains, in its activity, a passivity, more passive than all passivity, for it is a sacrifice without reserve, without holding back, and in this non-voluntary - the sacrifice of a hostage designated who has not chosen himself to be hostage, but possibly elected by the Good, in an involuntary election not assumed by the elected one.” (*OB*, 15)

alterity is a Messianic<sup>96</sup> one in which my lack of a claim on reciprocal treatment both distills my relationship to you as other and also restricts me in my freedom by keeping me bound to a responsibility I can never fulfill.

It is to thinking of Heidegger's radical self-relation as too dismissive of the individuating power of the other that Levinas turns; it is away from Levinas' radically asymmetric altruism as too dismissive of the role of the particular—beyond the unique—other, that I turn. I see a mischaracterization of the encounter with the other in both accounts, swinging too far afield in their respective directions. Not straying back into the realm of *Das Man*, the role of reciprocal and particular relationships sits between the self-relation of authenticity and the alterity of responsibility. Before constructing my notion of what exactly these relationships look like, however, it is necessary to set off in greater detail why Levinas' assertion of asymmetry is a pyrrhic victory in the name of ethics.

The assertion of the fundamentality, or in Levinas' words, the "primacy of the ethical,"<sup>97</sup> is itself a claim that necessitates skepticism. Just as Levinas questioned and revised Heidegger's notion that the fundamental existential state of human existence is anxiety, so too must we question Levinas' replacing anxiety with the ethical relationship. One need not go so far as to accuse the very idea of ontological claims as being foisted onto us by idealistic metaphysicians to see that there is a conceptual transience at play.<sup>98</sup> Levinas carries forward Heidegger's assumption that there can be a foundational existential fact that is, by definition, common to all human existence and constitutive of the quiddity of such experience. This raises the question of

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<sup>96</sup> "The messiah is Myself; to be Myself is to be the Messiah...the Messiah is the just man who suffers, who has taken on the suffering of others." (Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 89. Cited by Falque.)

<sup>97</sup> *TI*, 79

<sup>98</sup> Though that certainly would not be an unthinkable avenue to pursue, at the risk of ruffling some metaphysician's feathers.

what constitutes, or what even could constitute, the fundamental, and how one could justify the assertion that something is fundamental to being, rather than emergent from their socio-intellectual perch.<sup>99</sup> This is posed as a question: what is meant by fundamental, and what grounds this meaning? Levinas' answer, as we have seen, is the priority of the ethical relationship imposed by the face of the other. However, behind Levinas' assertion there is no phenomenological content. Levinas himself even alludes to this when he admits that "there is always a third party in the world,"<sup>100</sup> meaning that the purely ethical relationship with the radically other never actually happens. The idea of the "third" is discussed in "Philosophy, Justice, and Love" as a way of making sense of the fact that we need to make moral decisions in the world. While the ethical relationship with the other is still always prior to any conceptualization of the world, that conceptualization is what allows us to make judgments between competing calls on my responsibility. Only by allowing me to weigh others according to their worldly characteristics can Levinas allow for any sort of moral *action* at all, otherwise I would be paralyzed in my insurmountable responsibility for all at once. He even goes so far as to say that "Thus justice, here, takes precedence over the taking upon oneself of the fate of the other."<sup>101</sup>

So the question remains: on what grounds does Levinas assert the fundamentality of ethical responsibility if it is a concept essentially with no content? This is to say, if, as Levinas

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<sup>99</sup> This is similar to the Derridean deconstructionist critiques of Heidegger: "Heidegger wants to destroy—that is, to deconstruct, de-structure, shake (solicit), to bring out the thinking of being that is hiding under the ontic sedimentations." (Derrida, *Heidegger: The Question of Being and History*, 18) Yet this is, according to Derrida a doomed project: "As being is not a being, it is nothing outside beings, it is not another being, therefore it is nothing ontically—outside its ontic determinations, therefore outside its totality and the totality of its history. Thus to ask questions about being outside historical reference to the totality of its ontic determinations and their explication in the history of metaphysics is to miss the meaning of being itself." (op. cit. 27)

<sup>100</sup> *EN*, 104, "Philosophy, Justice, Love."

<sup>101</sup> *loc. cit.*

admits, the pure encounter with the Face is never experienced—if there is phenomenologically no such thing as the Face—then how can it be known to be fundamental?<sup>102</sup> In fact, the only experience we actually have with and of others is through the sort of relationship that I will describe below—relationships with particular others and in many cases, as reciprocal.<sup>103</sup> This is not to say that Levinas is unable to think sincerely about fundamentality or that he foists on us some normative view hiding behind claims to priority. His claims are made convincingly. However, my point here is that ideas of fundamentality are and have been mutable, and as such we can make use of the concepts and language Levinas provides without believing it to be existential bedrock. All this to say that while Levinas may very well be correct in his characterization of ethics, it is left unconfirmed by lived experience and thus open to the same sort of ‘conceptual transience’ mentioned above. The same is of course assumed of my own arguments.

Beyond these meta-critiques of ontology and Levinasian ethics, there are more pertinent concerns with Levinas’ ideas of asymmetry. The sort of individuation that Levinas offers for the

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<sup>102</sup> As Derrida does for Heidegger, a similar critique to the one described here is made of Levinas by Emmanuel Falque in his recent manuscript *The Loving Struggle*, though to perhaps dubious ends. Falque ends up insinuating that Levinas is not able to think the fundamentality of the particular other due, in Falque’s view, to the fact that Levinas’ philosophical theories so closely mirror the commitments of his Judaism. (Falque, *The Loving Struggle*, ch. 3.) The crux of these critiques (meaning Derrida’s as well) is that no matter who is proposing an ontological fact that purports to subvert the ontic description of philosophers past, that attempt is farcical because of the simple fact of the philosopher’s socio-cultural embeddedness. The grounds upon which any ontological claim is made are unstable, perhaps even this one. I do not wish to explore at length how these critiques destabilize the practices of ontology, metaphysics, and ethics (in the Levinasian sense) as a whole, but hope that the brief explication of Derrida’s and Falque’s critiques lend credence to the idea that the claims of this present work are not mutually exclusive of those out of which they grew.

<sup>103</sup> The question of the fundamental in general is perhaps a “philosopher’s question.” By this I mean that the concern with finding the fundamental structures of existence is a concern generated by philosophy. It may be the fact of his being wrapped in this dynamic which leads Levinas to put forward his idea of the ethical as a fundamental existential dynamic when, because we are always in relation to a third, the ethical does not, in life, exist.

other, as a pre-conceptual uniqueness, is, as we have seen, a shallow sort that does not take heed of, to borrow a Heideggerian term, the open future of or the form of that other. The responsibility that I have for this unique other is, as discussed above, what gives over to me my own uniqueness. My self comes from responsibility in the form of guilt as being me, the only one responsible for the suffering of the other, and yet “already late and guilty for being late.”<sup>104</sup> I am always too late to prevent the other from suffering at all, and the guilt that I feel in having let down the other—that *I* have let them down as the only one responsible for their wellbeing—is from where I receive myself in Levinas’ ethics. This is something that is somewhat counterintuitive in Levinas—that I can receive my own self only by giving myself over to the other in responsibility: in my boundedness to the needs of the other—if she is without shelter, I am bound to offer my home; if they are hungry, I am bound to offer my food—their face does not at first appear as a face that can be recognized since the responsibility that they generate, “because of its irreducible difference, refuses to give itself to a thematizing knowing.”<sup>105</sup> This is to say that the fact that the other is other, and suffering as other than me is where my responsibility arises, not in the fact of my special duties to someone whom I recognize. I then only see myself in the fact that I am not the one who suffers, and who must take that suffering upon myself. As we have seen in an earlier citation, in “suffering for the suffering...of someone else”<sup>106</sup> I am given over to myself. The *prima facie* circularity of this understanding is apparent: I receive myself by giving myself away. Yet to Levinas, the face’s appearance as radical alterity is precisely what can allow that face to speak to me in the accusative: I am responsible for this other, unique from me, and within this responsibility “is the very fact of finding [my]self while

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<sup>104</sup> OB, 87.

<sup>105</sup> TI, 72.

<sup>106</sup> EN, 94. “Useless Suffering.”

losing [my]self.”<sup>107</sup> To him, it is only by thinking myself responsible to the other before realizing the things that make them particular—their form—that responsibility can be authentically in its blindness to particularity. This sort of individuation—though seen as necessary by Levinas—extracts the ethical from the other, leaving behind only that radically pre-thematized ethicality beyond which anything else of the person must lie.

By taking the uniqueness of the other as separate from their form, the sort of individual to whom I am responsible is only individual insofar as they are unique: as *not me*, rather than as *them*. By centering the responsible subject and leveling that person to whom I am responsible, the death of the other which makes them unique might as well be the death of any other: a person’s death is a part of their history, so to think a person unique outside of their history on the basis of their death is not impossible. As much as the death of my fellows may be tragic, those deaths do not appear to me in responsibility in the philosophically significant way the Levinas would like prior to any relationship with them. This is perhaps an epistemological problem, or one of education, than of first philosophy as Levinas would retort. Without taking into account the other’s history, and my own part in it, there can be empathy but not particularized individuation. Without their history, the other perishes before me like any other thing which passes out of my life.<sup>108</sup> In a sense, to think the other as unique only through their death, rather than also through the life that leads up to it, is to think that they are comprised by their death rather than how, in thinking them united by and in their history—which includes their death—individual aspects are left behind in favor of the whole as singular. By thinking of the other outside of or prior to their history, they become a multiplicity rather than a unity. By this I mean

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<sup>107</sup> *OB*, 11.

<sup>108</sup> There are interesting avenues to pursue regarding the implications of Levinas’ views on the ethical treatment of non-human entities, but those are well outside the remit of this current project.

that they are divided into their constituent parts, one of which—their unique death—is prioritized.

Disallowing a space for the infinite other to manifest<sup>109</sup> in their particularity is, by attempting to forbid violence, to do a violence to that other by forbidding them from inhabiting their whole self, which includes the past and future history of time and world that make them up. The way that the Heideggerian understanding of how the world comes to be—as “that referential totality which constitutes significance”<sup>110</sup>—allows the world to be manifest, opening up the field in which the other can then be seen as a whole. Put simply, the temporal and relational qualities of the world are the context in which people come to be themselves.

The concluding chapter of this work will explore a resolution to the impasse up against which the current section has left us: following from Augustine’s characterization of the nature of others in the world, we have found that the Heideggerian notion of the encounter with the other in inauthenticity, and the non-relational isolation of authenticity, is too concerned with the self with little mind paid to the other. Conversely, the guilty hostage of Levinas’ ethical leaves us with a radical altruism that sacrifices the self too much for the other. Levinas resolves certain aspects of the problems in Heidegger by asserting that the other always calls me in, and that this mandatory interaction is not one to be dismissed when thinking about the fundamental nature of our being. And yet, as I will soon argue, something like a Heideggerian resoluteness of individuality is required to retain oneself amidst Levinas’ dynamics.

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<sup>109</sup> Levinas, as we have seen, through his language places the appearance of the other before the sensibility of the world in which they can appear.

<sup>110</sup> *BT*, 160.

## Conclusions: Resuscitating Reciprocity and Positive Particularity

The preceding sections have shown how, in all three thinkers, the transcendence that makes up the base of their notion of individuation gets in the way of thinking that the particularity of others plays a role in that individuation. Even for Levinas, whose inversion of the Heideggerian formula centers the other in my individuation, that other remains only other as such. Having just seen how Levinas takes the other out of their particularity, it is useful to rehearse the parallels seen in Augustine and Heidegger. For Augustine, every other mortal human is my neighbor, that person who is deserving of agapeistic regard and thus, any person. And yet these others are not, in terms of the striving towards God that constitutes Augustine's truest living life, strictly necessary. Particularly, to think of them as themselves, in their form, is a snare which may cast me falling back into the distractions of everyday life. For the post-turn Augustine, the death of his mother Monica recounted in book IX of *Confessions* is emblematic of this attitude. The profound grief he feels over her death, though he acknowledges it as a normal human reaction,<sup>111</sup> frustrates him: "...I was disappointed that human concerns had such influence over me...I grieved with a different sort of grief at the fact of my own grief."<sup>112</sup> As he overcomes his grief, Augustine realizes that he ought "set aside [his mother's] good deeds" and turn instead to asking God to "pardon [his] mother's sins,"<sup>113</sup> that which he would and did do for anyone who has died, regardless of their deeds or of their relation to him. In his conscious attempt to think of his own mother's death as he would the death of any other, Augustine signals his commitment to

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<sup>111</sup> "If they do find fault," he says of those who may think his grief precipitant of sin, "let them not be scornful because I wept so briefly for my mother, a mother who was... dead to my sight." (*Conf.* IX, 33.)

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.* IX, 31.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.* IX, 35.

the fundamental levelling of mortal humans who are held to the same standards and stock in the eyes of God.

We have seen similarities in Heidegger's representation of others as making up the mob of *das Man*. The way that we exist in "everyday Being-with-one-another"<sup>114</sup> "level[s] down...all possibilities of Being."<sup>115</sup> This means that to Heidegger, the way that our ordinary lives cross over with the lives of others causes us to neglect the possibility of our own lives, particularly that ultimate possibility of death, the anticipation of which constitutes his notion of authentic being-oneself. In the concerns of daily life, we forget the fact of our always looming death, to Heidegger the locus of individuality. In forgetting this, everyday life is not lived as myself. Others as we encounter them in everyday life represent the way in which we, as individuals, are never held to task, even for our own existence. This is to say that, for Heidegger, in being able to vanish into the *they*, we are "disburdened" of the troubles that come with authentic existence—the anxiety that comes with thinking of death. As a part of the collective, we are no longer responsible for anything since we are no one and everyone at once. This vanishing extends to those others as well. As we exist anonymously among others, "the Others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more."<sup>116</sup> Heidegger puts it quite plainly in saying that in the mode of inauthentic existence alongside others, "Everyone is the other, and no one is himself."<sup>117</sup> It is through the "clearing-away of concealments and obscurities"<sup>118</sup> of daily life among the mob that allows authenticity to manifest. It is the overwhelming "averageness" of the *they* that covers over

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<sup>114</sup> *BT*, 164.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*, 165.

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*, 164.

<sup>117</sup> *ibid.*, 165.

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*, 167.

the uniqueness of each other, limiting them to the concerns and involvements with which they relate to the concerns in my own life that they are attached to.

To reiterate, this everydayness that Heidegger characterizes in places as “fallenness” is our normal way of existing, hence describing it as “everydayness.” However, even insofar as others play a role in authentic existence, as they must since “Being-in is *Being-with* Others,”<sup>119</sup> they “are encountered from out of the *world*.”<sup>120</sup> What this phrase suggests is that others, even as they make up the world in which we exist, are not encountered as themselves. These others are always, even in authentic being, seen as the *they*. It is in authenticity—that retreat from relation with the world—that we realize the “sameness of Being”<sup>121</sup> we share with others—the authenticity of realizing death is in part because of the realization of the mortality of all things, in which I am of a kind with others.

The non-particularity of the other to which each thinker is committed in turn leads them to disregard reciprocal relationships with the other as having a significant place in the fundamental description of existence. For Augustine, the other does nothing essential in my search for God. Certainly they may be my interlocutor in discussing faith, scripture, etc., but ultimately one’s faith must be their own. The way that the other interacts with me is always in the realm of finitude, and thus always stops before the infinite certitude of God. For Heidegger, we have seen a similar role for the other. The other co-constitutes the world in which I am always embedded, but in authenticity all my relations to that world fall away. The fact that this authenticity might be a way of rendering greater meaning in the world whilst living

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<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*, 155.

<sup>120</sup> *loc. cit.*

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*, 154.

inauthentically does not mean that relationships with others are retained in anxious authenticity itself.

To Levinas, if I am concerned with the reciprocity of my relationship with others, that would corrupt the ethical dynamic. To him, if I think that I have some claim on the reciprocation of my ethical responsibility—if I believe that the other is bound to behave ethically towards me as well—then I am not truly undertaking responsibility at all, but rather in a sense purchasing my own care. We arrive at a recursive narcissism where my ethical behavior is predicated on receiving something in return and thus not truly a response to the suffering of the other. That said, Levinas is not wholly dismissive of reciprocal *behavior*. His concern is more so with my *expecting* or *claiming* reciprocity. Reciprocity conceived simply as a return does not necessarily cover over the authentically radical altruism of responsibility: “[t]he interhuman... is prior to any contract that would specify precisely the moment of reciprocity—a point at which altruism and disinterestedness may, to be sure, continue, but at which they may also diminish or die out”<sup>122</sup> The “interhuman”—his word here for the ethical relationship—is quite clearly here not excluding reciprocity in the relationship since it (ethics) can continue on beyond the moment of reciprocity; my radical altruism in the encounter with the other can continue to be that same radical altruism even after they reciprocate that altruism.

What is vital here for Levinas is the fact that reciprocity is not a part of the original relationship, but only a condition which comes after it and does not in every case end it. Furthermore, reciprocity does not get in the way of the ethical only so long as it avoids *claims* on the other’s ethical commitment to me in return. This goes back to the fact that I am responsible where others are not, recalling Levinas’ borrowed phrase from Dostoevsky. Put less poetically,

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<sup>122</sup> EN, “Useless Suffering.” 100.

when asked whether the other might also be held to responsibility towards me, Levinas replies “Perhaps, but that is his affair. One of [my] fundamental themes ... is that the intersubjective relation is a non-symmetrical relation. In this sense, I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity, were I to die for it.”<sup>123</sup> The fact that the other may reciprocate is, per Levinas here, simply none of my concern. I do not wait for a promise of reciprocity before I am responsible, though it at some point may come. It makes, and ought to make, no difference to me and my own burden whether the other shoulders their own burden—it “is his affair.”<sup>124</sup> While this shows that for Levinas, reciprocity does not get in the way of the ethical relationship, neither does it play any role in that most fundamental relationship. The idea that the other is also a subject receiving the same responsibility from me as I am from it is a symmetry to be acknowledged for our purposes, in spite of Levinas’ assertion of the “asymmetry of subjectivity.”<sup>125</sup>

So how does a thinking of the particular other enable us to think about reciprocity as a more valid form of mutual individuation than it is given credit for by Levinas, Heidegger, or Augustine? We have seen already the deficiencies in the other forms of individuation: they are not faithful to the worldly experience of the other, meaning that there is a lack of phenomenological content to fill in these accounts, and that the empty, anonymous other that we get from all three prior accounts does a disservice to the other as a singularity, and is disrespectful to that which constitutes them as a whole person. In discharging the commitment to transcendence-dependent paradigms, we can conceive of the interaction with the other as a

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<sup>123</sup> *EI*, 98.

<sup>124</sup> Throughout the present work I’ve chosen to retain the gendered language found in Levinas’ original texts so as not to disrupt his voice. That said, it is ironic that we don’t find gender-neutral phrases employed by a philosopher who insists so ardently on the neutrality of the other.

<sup>125</sup> See *Entre Nous*., “Philosophy, Justice, and Love.”

relationship that is, as I soon show, mutually individuating in a way that takes seriously the form of the person, thus resolving the difficulties found in other accounts.

This is not to say that reciprocity and its recognition is at the forefront of every interaction I have with others. While there is a certain irreducible reciprocity in every interaction—in traffic I expect the other driver to respond to my movements and vice versa, when I interact with a cashier I expect them to reciprocate my offer of cash with a cup of coffee—it is exactly the *expectation* of the reciprocation that separates the everyday transactional reciprocity from the individuating sort that I have used here. It is the very fact of not expecting or claiming the reciprocation that may or may not come which, perhaps counterintuitively, makes it so powerful. To see the other in their form as I describe ‘form’ means essentially to see them as they manifest themselves to me, a manifestation that encompassed all that leads up to that point. The history of the worldly self of the other with whom I discourse is brought fully to bear on me in my recognition of them, and in order to respect this person as the whole entity that they are requires that I not solicit anything from them. To do so would reduce my recognition of this other to the realm of economy—as soon as I predicate my care or attention for this other on my compensatory receipt of anything, then my recognition ceases to be a gift.

An enticing way of responding to the problems of asymmetry and non-reciprocity may seem to be developing a notion of symmetrical reciprocity. However, such a notion would also be flawed. In my wariness of symmetrical reciprocity I follow Iris Marion Young in her assertion that “it is neither possible nor morally desirable”<sup>126</sup> for relationships to be perfectly reciprocal. While Young applies this injunction to concerns of standpoint in normative moral arguments, her critiques of the idea of symmetrical reciprocity can be extended into the question of

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<sup>126</sup> Young, “Asymmetrical Reciprocity.” 340.

individuation that is being interrogated here. The first critique that Young articulates is that, in a reflectiveness resembling that of a mirror, a symmetrical reciprocity attempts to reduce the difference between those in the relationship in an impossible way. The sameness that this implies would annul the uniqueness and the particularity of both myself and the other in the implication that our difference is reducible. This resolute difference between myself and others is a thought retained throughout the trajectory through Augustine, Heidegger, and Levinas. Thus any reciprocity—insofar as reciprocity requires at least two actors—must be built on the grounds of this difference between myself and the other. For its force, this point does not rely on the transcendent version of the other found to be so problematic, as the impossibility of perfect reciprocity remains even when we think of the other wholly in terms of their form. In fact it is strengthened when, on top of the fundamental claims we have argued against, additional stratifications of difference are layered on top. Take for an abstract example the relationship between the letters A and B. Despite the fact that they are two distinct and individual things, they cannot be thought of as A or as B without their relation to the other. To say that they are two individual things is not to say much at all; in order to distinguish them in any meaningful way, the co-constitutive nature of their relationship must be considered. Thus, the form that constitutes the other shows us even more clearly that “while individuals may have many things they take to comparable between them, they could rarely be said to share everything.”<sup>127</sup> In extending Young’s claims from the normative to the thinking of individuation, this “rarely” becomes an unassailable “never.” The recognition of the other person is to see precisely that that we cannot step into each other by perfectly reciprocating each other’s contribution to the relationship, but

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<sup>127</sup> Young, 347.

that the other is “an ‘I’ to herself just as I am an ‘I’ to myself.” Even further though, recognition consists in seeing not only that she is an ‘I,’ but that she is ‘her,’ specifically.

This discussion leads to the conclusion that we must conceive of reciprocity as a relationship in which, to borrow Paul Ricœur’s phrase, I am the recipient of “a kind of second first gift,”<sup>128</sup> though as we have just seen, never an equal gift. The language of giftgiving is quite useful in illustrating the point of asymmetrical yet reciprocal relationships between particular people. The notion of the gift—here given as that which is given without an expectation of a response—is the foundation of reciprocal relationships as they are differentiated from economic ones. I have been speaking about the gift of recognition, the recognition of the other in their form, individuating them to me. The gift I receive from them is the same—they recognize me as their unique and particular interlocutor. Yet, in this dynamic there are still only two individuals recognizing the other in front of them. There is still no mutuality in this form of individuation. For there to be mutuality, I am required to recognize the other’s recognition of me. This precludes the relationship with a stranger from being one that is mutually individuating—with the stranger, they or I might be recognized by the other, but here it remains unidirectional. If the recognition is never recognized, the initial gifts pass like ships in the night.

The necessity of avoiding the commonplace economic reciprocity and the relationships such as those I might have with strangers seems to mean that only certain relationships can carry the dynamic of mutual individuation. What this means is that only relationships of a certain intimacy—what we might colloquially call ‘loving’ relationships—are the precipitation of the mutual individuation that I describe. It is not my goal here to investigate where exactly the watermark for love in relationships is that might tip them over the edge one way or another, but

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<sup>128</sup> Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*. 242.

simply to describe the framework itself. What must be remembered is that—and Levinas remains correct in this—the other’s death is the bedrock of their selfhood, but a foundation does not make a building. Just the same as we cannot identify a structure simply by looking at an abstract rendering of its foundation, a person cannot be truly individual without considering all that makes them who they are. Without this truly individual account of the other, any notion of a meaningful reciprocity falls away. When this reciprocity is recovered as the recognition of one another in form as well as the recognition of that recognition, we recover a mutual individuation that has been left behind by the thinkers treated herein.

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