

“... but what to do with the guilt?”

*Kantian Autonomy, Heideggerian Authenticity, and Human Lacking*

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“You are the issue, far and wide; there is no scholar.”

--Franz Kafka

“‘Be yourself’ is the worst advice you can give anybody.”

--Oscar Wilde

“. . . but what to do with the guilt?”

*Kantian Autonomy, Heideggerian Authenticity, and Human Lacking*

Kantian autonomy and Heideggerian authenticity each have a place in a human life. To show this I must show how the two complement each other and how they differ. To show that authenticity does not conflict with autonomy, and autonomy does not impede authenticity, I will focus on the differences between two fundamental kinds of human lacking and how autonomy and authenticity deal with each. By the end of my project, I will show how they have complementary roles in fulfilling a life which for the most part affects other people.

For Kant, the moral law is the form of practical reason itself. The effectuality of reason as a necessary constraint on inclination depends on inclination itself. Inclination is “the dependence of the faculty of desire on sensations. . . which accordingly always expresses a need” (GMM p. 413, p. 24).<sup>1</sup> The basis of all inclination is some kind of lacking, the wanting of something and all inclinations can yield to an imperative. People will always lack in many different ways; for example, one needs food but by getting

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<sup>1</sup> In Kant’s moral philosophy inclination represents “the subjective, materially founded and partial aspects of human moral experience which are countered by the objective, formal, and universal categorical imperative” (Kant Dictionary, page 253 by Howard Caygill). Inclination as a need expresses the kind of lacking which gives itself over to inclination and perhaps even to satisfaction. Howard Caygill says, “Inclination is the source of heteronomy of the will, namely its determination of things outside of the will” (i.e. not determined by the will itself– the will is practical reason in its employment.) (Kant Dictionary, 253) In heteronomy, the will “does not give itself the law, but the object [toward which the will is inclined] does so because of its relation to the will” (Groundwork, K. 441). An “ought,” which is the common expression of all imperatives, applies to human nature in virtue of “the relation of an objective law of reason to a will that is not necessarily determined by this law because of its subjective constitution.” (Groundwork, 413, p. 24) A law constrains human actions by virtue of our “subjective constitution.” And I will later show the same law is recognizable by virtue of what Heidegger calls primordial guilt.

food, one no longer lacks it. But despite the satisfaction of this kind of lacking, quite a different kind of human lacking still prevails. While Kant's idea of the imperfect will implies a kind of lacking which gives itself over to inclination and even satisfaction, Heidegger says that people lack in a fundamental way which does not give itself over to inclination. Heidegger calls these ways in which one lacks human "nullities." They make up what he calls "primordial guilt" <sup>2</sup> and he thinks that a human is called to take responsibility for them.<sup>3</sup> An example of what Heidegger calls a human nullity is death. In death, a human being is *not* any longer. Temporally speaking, death is fulfilled by nothing; it has no satisfaction.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Heidegger uses the word 'guilt' in a way which is different from the way we usually use the word. 'Guilt' in English means many things, and in German the meanings of 'Schuld' and 'schuldig' must be just as manifold but unfortunately the appropriateness of so many German meanings is lost when translated to English. In their translation of *Being and Time*, MacQuarrie and Robinson say, "Heidegger will point out, the words 'schuldig', 'schuld', and their derivatives have many different meanings, corresponding not only to 'indebtedness,' as we have seen on H. 242 above, but also to 'guilt' and 'responsibility.' In the present chapter we shall translate them by 'guilt' and 'guilty' whenever possible, even though these expressions will not always be entirely appropriate." (*Being and Time*, page 325, MacQuarrie and Robinson translation) Moreover, Heidegger himself says, ". . .we define the formal existential idea of guilty as being the ground for a being which is determined by a not—that is, being the ground of a nullity" (H. 283).

<sup>3</sup> I will explain the meaning of "called" in this context in a later section when I explain what Heidegger calls the "call of conscience." And 'responsibility' here means "owning up to" the nullities which are fundamental parts of one's existence. "Responsibility" with respect to authenticity means coming to terms with those nullities which belong exclusively to the individual. It also means coming to terms with the fundamental questions of existence: Why am I here? Why am I not myself? What will I become? What about death? These questions are expressive of the existential guilt for which we are called to take responsibility in authenticity. This kind of guilt is the subject of this inquiry. Facing up to these questions makes people uncomfortable for the most part. To avoid facing up to these questions, people do many things, including distraction. Responsibility, with respect to authenticity, means taking what already belongs to one as one's own: the null aspects of one's existence. It means taking as one's own what is already all one's own.

<sup>4</sup> Despite the hope, belief, or faith in "Eternal Life," death never ceases to be a human concern. Neither the "hope" nor "belief" in eternal life alleviates anxiety about death without first facing up to it; moreover, a certain kind of faith demands this anxiety. Death can be understood as *the* issue in a human life and some people believe in an afterlife. But the afterlife is not an object of any philosophical (or temporal) certainty but rather it is an object of an individual's faith. And here we must be cautious because we risk mixing the categories of the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal; philosophically speaking, we must attend to the differences. Speaking with respect to the category of the religious, one's life may be fulfilled in death because perhaps the "Redeemer Lives." But in strictly human terms, death is still a nullity no matter what and the individual, alone, must reckon with it; in temporal terms, death is one of the fundamental nullities of being human. The ardently and faithfully religious believe in the afterlife, by

While a certain kind of lacking (like the need for food) will always lead to inclination, the satisfaction of inclination which is impermissible by reason often begins with an individual's effort to flee from the anxiety about death inherent in taking responsibility for oneself as called by conscience (Heidegger's "call of conscience"). Most people resist the call of conscience to authenticity because it demands that one own up to one's guilt and understand death explicitly as one's own most possibility and thereby experience *anxiety*.<sup>5</sup> In The Courage To Be, Paul Tillich says, "The normal, existential anxiety of guilt drives the person toward attempts to avoid this anxiety (usually called the uneasy conscience) by avoiding guilt" (75). For the most part, human beings flee from anxiety into inauthenticity to avoid taking responsibility for their primordial guilt. In inauthenticity, people seek heteronomous satisfaction which would purport to fill the primordial kind of lacking for which the call of conscience demands that one take responsibility. By contrast, in authenticity one takes responsibility for the primordial kind of lacking which, temporally speaking, can never be fulfilled.

Because people seek in futility to fulfill their primordial lacking, this kind of lacking gives itself *indirectly* over to inclination the satisfaction of which may require the use of non-universalizable maxims which necessarily contradict reason. The moral law as the form of Kantian practical reason forbids the satisfaction of such inclination. In short, in inauthenticity, one falls prey to the kind of inclination the satisfaction of

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which the nullity of death can be fulfilled. Belief in a Divinity is not at all incompatible with authenticity. Recall Hamlet. In the same scene in which Hamlet is explicitly "being unto death" (reference: "The readiness is all. . . Let be." V.ii. lines 172-175) he also says to Horatio, "There is a Divinity who shapes our ends, rough-hew them how He will" (V.ii. lines 11-12) as well as ". . . there's a special Providence in the fall of a sparrow" (V.ii. lines 170-171). Also note that this is after his momentous voyage to England and also his metaphorical confrontation with death in the graveyard while gazing at the skull.

<sup>5</sup> In Heidegger: An Introduction, Richard Polt says, "Owning up to guilt, like facing up to mortality, is connected to anxiety" (90).

which reason may not permit. Inauthentic behavior may be characterized by heteronomy (allowing ends other than respect for the moral law to determine one's actions) and the moral law necessarily constrains such heteronomous inclination. But in authenticity, a person takes responsibility for one's essential lacking by which one then eliminates the seeking for heteronomous fulfillment (while heteronomous seeking is eliminated by authenticity, this does not put one above or beyond the moral law). Heidegger thinks that all human beings want to be authentic; moreover, I argue that because being authentic requires that one experience anxiety people mostly flee from it. Fleeing from anxiety may express itself in the seeking of heteronomous satisfaction by which one may use non-universalizable maxims. Actions done according to non-universalizable maxims are constrained by the moral law.

By virtue of human rationality, the moral law as the form of practical reason always applies in a human life; as long as one is rational, one is not exempt from the moral law. But the moral law as a constraint on human action *qua* constraint depends on inclination. *Moreover, the satisfaction of any one inclination is not necessary for one to be authentic—by itself, being authentic does not entail the satisfaction of any particular inclination at all. Since authenticity does not entail the satisfaction of inclination, it is not something that by itself necessarily leads to impermissible action.* “Being true to oneself” in authenticity does not mean satisfying one's desires. Being authentic does not necessarily imply that one would become an egoist who would pursue heteronomous satisfaction, but in fact heteronomous seeking can distract one from being authentic. Heteronomy is not only contrary to moral autonomy but it distracts one from one's authentic self.

Being authentic means being brought to one's own most potentiality. In authenticity one takes responsibility for one's primordial guilt which means taking responsibility for one's being here. Being authentic by itself does not necessarily involve affecting others, but by being authentic one is then clear on what limited possibilities one may choose to realize and this may affect others. When making such choices one is commanded by one's own reason to choose only those possibilities the maxims of which are universalizable. Moreover, part of being authentic entails the authentic treatment of others ("authentic care") which Heidegger calls "leaping-ahead."

Being authentic does not place one beyond the moral law. But I do think that even if one seeks moral perfection while pursuing the satisfaction of one's inclinations (happiness), there is still a kind of lacking which persists. Despite moral perfectionism and satisfied inclination, the individual still experiences what Paul Tillich calls an "estrangement" from oneself. Heidegger's account of authenticity addresses this human concern. The Heideggerian account of authenticity deals with this self-estrangement.

Although Kant's and Heidegger's conceptions of a human being differ, their conceptions share an essential and crucial aspect of what it means to be human: to be human is to lack. A certain kind of human lacking is implied in Kant's conception of the human being as an imperfect will disposed to inclination, but Heidegger gives an account of a different kind of lacking by describing the three ways in which human being is a nullity. Moreover, in his description of human nullity, Heidegger accounts for one necessary condition (an ontological condition) for human obligation; he accounts for how it is possible that a human being can recognize a moral injunction at all, including Kant's formulation of the categorical imperative. What Heidegger calls human

primordial guilt makes possible for a human any ethics at all: a human is that being who is ready to hear an ethical injunction.

### **Kant's Imperfect Will: Human Lacking, Inclination, and the Moral Law**

How is the human will constituted such that it can be constrained by what Kant calls an objective principle of morality? How does the constitution of the human will differ from that of a holy will? By understanding these questions, we must understand the essence of Kant's conception of a human being: to have both rationality and an imperfect will as fundamental aspects of our own human nature and then to have that nature necessarily constrained by the moral law.

Kant conceives of the human will as essentially practical reason and as characteristically imperfect. He focuses on the former feature of the will in The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, but I focus on the latter feature for my present discussion in this section. The imperfection of the human will is an important but underdeveloped notion in the Foundations which I will connect with Heidegger's account of human lacking: each is a condition for the possibility of morality. But in this section, I want to show that the imperfect will exists in relation to a fundamental incompleteness which is characteristic of all human beings and which is implied in Heidegger's description of a person as having to care for one's being by taking care of things in the world. This characterization of the imperfection of the will is a condition for duty and imperatives to apply to human beings-- as Kant would say, the imperfection of the will gives "place" to both duty and imperatives in a human life (Groundwork, K. 414).



Kant says that all humans want happiness which results from the sum satisfaction of all inclinations.<sup>6</sup> But because a human being is rational, the pursuit of such satisfaction would inevitably lead to non-universalizable maxims which contradict reason and are thus impermissible by reason.<sup>7</sup> Rationality and the imperfection of the will are equally essential to make possible for human beings any imperative at all but especially the categorical one. *While reason issues imperatives for action, because of the will's imperfection such imperatives necessarily apply to human beings.* For Kant, the human will is imperfect because it is often inclined to will other than according to the moral law.

For Kant, the will is reason in its practical employment. Kant's conception of the will as practical reason means that one can determine one's actions from principles or conceptions of law as given by reason.<sup>8</sup> But what is the condition for one's capacity to determine one's actions according to principle? What must condition must hold for imperatives to apply to a human being? Of course, one must be a free agent not subject to the determinism of the phenomenal world, but one must also have an imperfect will. To understand what is meant by the concept of the "imperfect will," let us consider by contrast a holy will.

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<sup>6</sup> This is true by what Kant calls an analytic judgment.

<sup>7</sup> Kant conceives of human beings as having an essentially rational nature. In The Theory of Morality, Kantian ethical formalist Alan Donagan says that human rationality consists in being dissatisfied with contradictions and understanding the structure of using means to accomplish certain ends. For Donagan, rationality sets human beings apart from other creatures. In the Kantian ethical view, it is the essence of humanity and the cornerstone of moral relations.

<sup>8</sup> Freedom (a negative concept of freedom—the absence of external determination) is a condition for our ability to determine our actions according to the conception of law. If we are not free, which would mean that all of our behavior is deterministically governed by laws of nature, then we are not autonomous; in other words, if we are not free, then we are not free to order ourselves by the principle of moral law as it is given to us by reason. Freedom is a condition for our moral obligation, for we cannot be obligated to do what we are not able to do. But while freedom is a condition for morality, it is not a condition which is directly relevant to my discussion here.

An angel is an example of a holy will. In contrast to the imperfect will which is in some way incomplete, the holy will is a complete and thus “perfect” will. Because of its perfection, the holy will automatically wills the moral law-- there is no “gap” or discrepancy between what it wills and what is the objective principle of morality.<sup>9</sup> As Kant says, “thus no imperatives hold for the divine will or, more generally, for a holy will. The ‘ought’ here is out of place, for the volition of itself is necessarily in unison with the law” (page 263, Foundations). Its volition is necessarily in unison with the moral law, but why? *Because of its perfection the holy will is complete, and because of its completeness the holy will does not want and so it is beyond inclination; since it is beyond inclination, the moral law does not constrain its will.* The moral law, in accordance with which the holy will determines its action, is always what the holy will does anyway. The maxim for the holy will could never be determined by other ends or what Kant calls heteronomously. Unlike human beings, a holy will does not have what Caygill calls a “subjective constitution” by which it becomes dependent on other entities for its existence. Because of its completeness, the holy will does not want “other things” and so it has no inclination or desire to achieve other ends; because a holy will does not “want” to achieve other ends, the holy will would not use a heteronomous maxim. The holy will is necessarily a good will since its actions always accord with the objective principle of morality: the moral law. Because it always wills the moral law, there is no such thing as a constraint for the holy will. For the holy will, duty does not apply, or as Kant says, it has no “place” (Ibid.). Of course, in our humanity we are neither divine nor perfect. In fact, we differ fundamentally from anything purely holy.

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<sup>9</sup> For the present discussion, let us ignore the possibility of sheer defiance by the holy will despite its

Kant conceives of our will as flawed in the sense that we do not necessarily will according to the moral law; because we do not always will perfectly according to the moral law, Kant calls our will imperfect. Kant says, we do not always will “perfectly;” for the most part, we do not act out of duty. He says that imperatives that “say it would be good to do or to refrain from doing something” apply only to “a will which does not always do something simply because the thing is presented to it as good to do” (p. 262). In this way, the moral law constrains the imperfect will because we are often *inclined* to act otherwise than according to the moral law. Only because we are inclined to do otherwise does a constraint on our will become *possible* and, according to Kant, it becomes a *necessary* constraint as dictated by our own reason. As opposed to the holy will whose will is *always good*, our will is *not* always good, but sometimes it *can be* good if it overcomes certain hindrances.

Because we are inclined toward other ends (heteronomy), the moral law as the form of practical reason commands us to respect it. It becomes our *duty* to determine our actions out of respect for the moral law as it is expressed in the form of the categorical imperative. Two expressions of the categorical imperative which are essential for this discussion are:

- ◆ Act as though the maxim of your action were by your will to become a universal law of nature. (Groundwork, K. 402)

- ◆ Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only. (Groundwork, K. 429)

The first formulation commands one to act only on those maxims which are universalizable; one is commanded by reason to act only on those maxims which one can also will as a law which would govern all rational beings and all of nature as well. If a maxim is not universalizable, then it contradicts reason and what contradicts reason is impermissible by reason (reason is always the appeal in figuring moral action.) Reason commands a person to act according to reason itself; to reject what the dictates of reason means rejecting one's rational nature. The second formulation commands a person to treat all persons with respect and never merely as instruments or as a means to some other end. By this formulation, reason commands a person to respect all human beings by virtue of our shared rationality. Both of these imperatives of reason apply only to those beings who are inclined to act other than out of respect for the moral law. We are such beings.

Because of the imperfect will's inclination to act other than out of respect for the moral law, it is constrained by what it *ought* to do as commanded by one's own reason; this is the Kantian idea of autonomy: determining one's actions as commanded by one's own reason; and herein also lies what Kant conceives of as freedom: determining one's actions autonomously according to one's own reason and not being ruled by heteronomous ends which are determined by something other than one's own reason.<sup>10</sup> While a certain kind of freedom consists in autonomy, the imperative for individual autonomy follows from the command to treat others as ends-in-themselves because it is "a limiting condition on the action of each man" (Beck, Acad. 431). In autonomy, one

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<sup>10</sup> In a limited sense, there is noteworthy kinship here between heteronomy and inauthenticity. In the Kantian view, one is not free if one determines one's actions by something other than reason alone; that is, one is not free if "other ends" determine one's actions. Similarly, one pursues heteronomy in the mode of

accepts a rule for action as commanded by one's reason instead of being ruled by other ends (heteronomous ends). According to Kant, when we are inclined to do otherwise, we are duty-bound to determine our actions as commanded by our own reason.

Kant says “. . . duty is the practical unconditional necessity of action; it must therefore hold for all rational beings (to which alone an imperative can apply) and only for that reason can it be a law for all human wills.” (Groundwork, K. 425) From this quote, I am primarily concerned with the way duty relates to an imperative and how both relate uniquely to the imperfect will. We have inclinations which reason can command us to ignore-- in fact, it is our duty to ignore them if the maxim we would use to achieve that end is not a maxim that we can will as a universal law of nature. Holy wills do not have inclinations, and this is one reason why an imperative could not apply to them, but the imperfect nature of our will makes imperatives at least *possible*, and indeed *necessary*. *Moral constraint necessarily applies to the imperfect will because without moral constraint, the imperfect will can will maxims which may contradict reason and violate other rational beings.*

As I conceive it according to Kantian thought, the holy will is perfect most fundamentally because it is purely rational and because it is *complete*. In contrast to the holy will, we are imperfect because we are in some way *incomplete*. Because of our incompleteness we necessarily lack and because we lack, we are left to want.<sup>11</sup> In other words, because we are without something, we are disposed to desire; just as in Plato's Symposium, we love or desire only that which we lack or that which we are already

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inauthenticity. And in inauthenticity, by pursuing other ends one is distracted (and not free) to be one's authentic self.

<sup>11</sup> Thus so much of Kantian ethics is predicated on the category of human inclination.

without—lacking necessarily means wanting. By definition, we can only desire when we already lack; it just does not make sense to desire what one already has.<sup>12</sup> And because we desire (and for some reason we are constituted such that sometimes we do not even want what is absolutely *good*; often we want what is actually considered bad for us, even though it *seems* good), we are inclined to pursue certain ends other than that which is motivated by respect for the moral law.

The contrary of moral autonomy is heteronomy which uses reason to determine the *means* to achieve some other end the willing of which may violate reason itself; heteronomy, while not motivated by respect for the moral law, is thus necessarily constrained by the moral law. Because the moral law constrains in virtue of both one's rationality and one's disposition to inclination, it is then possible for one to *violate* one's own rationality. One violates one's own rationality by violating the rationality of another or by treating another exclusively as a means to achieve other ends or, more generally, by willing according to non-universalizable maxims. According to Donagan violating the rationality of another is a violation of one's own rationality because insofar as one respects one's own rationality, it necessarily follows that one should respect it in others since rationality is not a property exclusive to oneself: to value one's own reason but not to respect it in other people contradicts reason itself. Moreover, without constraint by the moral law, wanton pursuit of the satisfaction of one's inclinations would not be checked by the moral law and so therefore *no law would exist to forbid one from treating another as a means only or from violating another's rationality*. Moreover, the use of a rational being as a means to achieve another end is a violation of

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<sup>12</sup> Of course, as Socrates says, one can want to keep (to maintain) something that one already has but then

one's *own* rational nature. One violates one's own rational nature by violating the rationality of another; by violating another's rationality, one falls short of willing the moral law as commanded by one's own reason in two respects: one fails to respect that human being as an end in himself or herself<sup>13</sup>, and one has taken as one's maxim (the subjective principle of the will) what is not universalizable and so not according to the moral law. The categorical imperative commands that one act only on those maxims which are universalizable. The moral law is necessarily universalizable. Those maxims which are not universalizable do not accord with the moral law.

In the Kantian moral picture, a human is inclined to achieve some end which requires the use of a maxim. To test the permissibility of satisfying this inclination, one takes one's maxim and tests to see if by willing it as a law for oneself one can also will it as a universal law of nature. If not, then it results in a contradiction, and contradictions defy reason and what defies reason is a violation of one's own rational nature. If everyone acted according to reason, then everyone would all respect each other as ends in themselves and never as means only; Kant says that we are commanded by reason to will such that what we will could be a universal law of nature; and from that we also will the creation of a realm of ends which is a kind of paradise wherein all rational beings act in perfect accordance with the universal laws of nature which they will for themselves and each other.

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this implies one's insufficient means to keep something permanently.

<sup>13</sup> This is a form of the categorical imperative as mentioned by Kant in the Groundwork: "Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as end and never as a means only" (Groundwork, K. 429).

For Kant, our imperfection is a rational and volitional imperfection.<sup>14</sup> It is a rational imperfection because we often do not know all of the factors and circumstances which are involved in making a moral decision. Generally, Kant conceives of our imperfection as consisting in our ability (or frequent disposition) to employ reason as merely a means to satisfy inclination through the achievement of heteronomously determined ends instead of allowing reason to determine our action (autonomously) according to the moral law. We fall short of our nature which is to will according to the moral law as the form of our own reason. We fall short of our own rational nature because our subjective constitution inclines us toward ends beyond our own rational nature. Our imperfection exists in part with respect to our subjective constitution; because of it, we can use reason to achieve other ends instead of willing the moral law itself. Furthermore, according to Kant, we are imperfect because sometimes we fall short of achieving for ourselves the highest and unqualified good which we know as the *good will*.

While it is clear that for Kant our volitional imperfection exists in our inability to will perfectly according to the moral law by choosing non-universalizable maxims, I have argued that our imperfection also exists in the fact that we are fundamentally incomplete (not self-sufficient) and consequently subject to inclination. Let us next move to respond to the question about another kind of lacking which is so essential to human nature but does not exist with respect to our subjective constitution in the way

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<sup>14</sup> If the human will and reason are not perfect but in fact fallible then naturally one may remark that presumably Kant's reason is imperfect as well. Given this, one may remark further that the morality of the categorical imperative must be held with provision since it is formulated by Kant who is also an imperfectly rational being. Some philosophers may accuse Kant of a kind of hubris for purporting to have formulated a law which commands certain actions in all circumstances. Kant would respond that he is



our imperfection does in Kant's view. At this point, I will begin to invoke Heidegger to address and clarify more questions.

Why is it that we are disposed to will imperfectly? Why are we what Kant calls "a will which does not always do something simply because the thing is presented to it as good to do"? (Groundwork, K. 413) As pure rationality, we would will according to the moral law but because of our subjective constitution and our incompleteness we are dependent on other entities for our existence and thus disposed to inclination. For Kant, it is one's rational nature to will according to the moral law but because of the subjective aspect of the human constitution, the will is inclined toward ends other than reason itself and it is thus imperfect. The Kantian will is imperfect since it falls short of its own nature which is willing according to its own laws which are given by reason itself. For Kant, this is just a fact, part of the "givenness" of human nature. But Kant and Heidegger differ markedly on an important point. The imperfect will is imperfect because it falls short of its rational nature which is to will the moral law. The imperfect will falls short of its essential nature because of its subjective constitution and incompleteness by which it is inclined to use reason to pursue other ends. But whereas Kant's imperfect will falls short of perfect willing according to its rational nature, Heidegger's "*Dasein*" lacks;<sup>15</sup> part of that lacking is falling short of being itself--for the most part, a person is not one's authentic self, but this is not a "fault" or something by which one could judge a person as "imperfect." A person does not fundamentally fall short of something else, like the moral law, but *for the most part a person just falls short*

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only clarifying and providing the metaphysical foundations for what is already considered common everyday moral thinking.

<sup>15</sup> From now on I will use 'human being,' 'person,' 'one,' or 'individual' instead of 'Dasein.'

*of being its authentic self and this is just a fact.* That a person would fall short of willing the moral law is not fundamental to its being but neither is inclination, in Heidegger's view.

### **Critical Remarks on Kantian Ethics**

The category of inclination figures prominently in Kant's Groundwork: inclination is a condition for the effectuality of reason as a moral constraint; reason's imperatives depend on the kind of human lacking which leads to inclination. When one's maxims are not universalizable and the more that one's inclinations demand satisfaction, then the more tyrannical the categorical imperative can be. While happiness would result from the sum satisfaction of all inclinations, such happiness is impossible and this is not to mention that it would require that one will according to non-universalizable maxims. So since people cannot achieve such happiness, Kant thinks that for human beings another incentive becomes possible: by willing out of respect for the moral law (acting out of one's duty), one can achieve the unqualified goodness of good will. Moreover, even though one cannot achieve happiness through the satisfaction of all inclinations, by willing as commanded by reason, one thereby becomes morally worthy of happiness; one's actions have moral worth. If one's actions have moral worth, then one is deserving of the happiness which one receives. But despite goodwill and being morally worthy of happiness, there is still another fundamental human concern which needs to be addressed.

As Paul Tillich says, "Moral self-discipline and habits will produce moral perfection although one remains aware that they cannot remove the imperfection which is implied in man's existential situation, his estrangement from his true being" (Tillich,

75). Despite what Kant presents in the Groundwork, there is also another way in which one lacks which does not give itself over to inclination which can then by some means be satisfied. What does one do about the kind of lacking which persists regardless of inclination, whether satisfied or ignored? In Being and Time, Heidegger describes how human beings fundamentally lack and he shows what we can do with these unique ways in which we lack. We lack in three fundamental ways: we are not our own cause; for the most part, we are not ourselves; and we will inevitably die.<sup>16</sup> Despite any inclination, satisfied or not, what Heidegger calls our “primordial guilt” still persists and until the individual addresses this guilt what Tillich calls a person’s “estrangement from his true being” still prevails. So, naturally, the question arises: what to do with the guilt?

For Kant, reason commands a person to act dutifully, that is, to will according to the moral law despite all inclination. But according to Heidegger, an individual’s conscience calls one to take responsibility for a kind of lacking which, even though it is not the immediate ground of inclination, people still avoid it often by seeking to satisfy inclination. Because of the human reluctance to “own up to” this lacking, people are disposed to seek a kind of fulfillment which would purport to fill one’s primordial lacking but such seeking is a distraction from taking responsibility for one’s existence in authenticity. In authenticity the individual takes responsibility for one’s own being by taking up on one’s own, the unfulfillable lacking that is all one’s own.<sup>17</sup> Heidegger’s conscience calls for the individual to take responsibility for the lacking and thereby to

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<sup>16</sup> We also lack in that we cannot be all possibilities. By choosing one possibility, we negate others.

<sup>17</sup> Primordial guilt is not to be confused with Christian concept of original sin. Primordial guilt is not the kind of lacking which gives itself over to inclination. Primordial guilt is not “secularized” original sin. Original sin is different and primordial guilt says nothing “for or against the possibility of sin” (see Being and Time, notes for German pp. 306-320). Primordial guilt does not necessarily call for Redemption. The individual is called to “attest” to it in authenticity.

realize authentically one's own most "potentiality-for-being." While the Heideggerian kind of conscience does not call out of reason, what it calls a human to become does not by itself conflict with reason or its imperatives. Let us now turn to understand the ways in which an individual is primordially guilty so that later we may consider the call of conscience and how it calls a human back from inauthenticity to one's authentic self and how authenticity entails "attesting" to one's primordial lacking.

### **The Three Nullities of Human Being:**

#### **Primordial Guilt as a Condition for Morality**

In Being and Time, Heidegger describes the null ground of human being which "constitutes" primordial guilt. It does not make sense to say, "you shouldn't die," "you should be authentic," "you should have been the cause of your own existence;" these are just the nullities which permeate the basis of our being. One is not guilty *because* one *falls short* of being immortal, authentic, or being one's own cause; one is guilty insofar as these nullities permeate the basis of one's being—one is guilty because of what one is *not*.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, I will show how primordial guilt is also a condition for morality. But let me begin by pointing out a critical but overlooked significance of Heidegger's account of human lacking.

Some who misunderstand Heidegger think that he continues to think in some kind of amoral philosophical narrative begun by Nietzsche.<sup>19</sup> In the shadow of the Nietzschean Overman ideal, some, perhaps even Alan Donagan, may conceive of

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<sup>18</sup> Heidegger says, "Thus we define the formal existential idea of 'guilt' as being-the-ground for a being which is determined by a not—that is, being the ground of a nullity" (H. 283).

<sup>19</sup> In The Theory of Morality, Donagan writes, "authenticity consists neither more nor less than in seeing through the pretense that anything is required of man as such, other than that he act in full awareness of the fact that he is mortal and that nothing is required of him. On the contrary, moral nihilism is but one

Heideggerian authenticity as a more formal grounding of a man's freedom in the face of nihilism to act according to nothing else but his own principles as far as they can be exercised by the power of his own will; by being mindful of one's mortality one is free from everything, even morality, and so one is free to recreate oneself and live according to one's *own* rules. But it is not right to say these things about Heideggerian authenticity; it is especially wrong to say that authenticity is just a different description of the Overman ideal. I do not deny that Heidegger gained momentous insights from studying Nietzsche's account of Zarathustra's "moment of vision," but most remarkably and perhaps most overlooked, Heidegger shows how *despite Nietzsche's philosophical and cultural report of the death of God, human beings still lack; Heidegger believes that a kind of guilt persists regardless of theology.*<sup>20</sup>

A subtle but inexorable philosophical consequence of Nietzschean thought follows from his report on the death of God: by denying all things transcendent, the basis of comparison (for example a holy will) by which one could see humans as faulty, sinful, and even imperfect no longer exists. Such comparative judgments about human nature lose their sense. Does this demonstrate that a man is free from obligation? Heidegger shows how because of primordial human lacking, the grounds of moral obligation are inherent in existence. To make my claim about such comparative judgments clear, consider by analogy the Wittgensteinian claim: "To say 'language, as a whole, is imperfect' makes no sense. What else do you have to which you can compare language? Do you claim to have some other 'perfect' or ideal and yet, presumably,

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more innumerable devices by which a corrupt consciousness may disguise from a man what he is and how he is called to live" (p. 142).

inarticulable language? All that we have is language as a spatio-temporal phenomenon. Saying ‘language, as a whole, is imperfect’ has no sense.” Similarly, since Heidegger writes in the wake of Nietzsche’s denial of all things transcendent, Heidegger knows that he can no longer speak of humans as “imperfect” (if one grants the denial of all things transcendent i.e. perfect beings, then how are we by contrast “imperfect?”), but he is still concerned with the problem of human lacking and so he accounts for it. Heidegger accounts for human lacking by showing the ways in which human being is fraught with nullity. Despite Nietzsche’s shadow, Heidegger shows how human beings lack and that the grounds of obligation still persist in human nature and thus he shows that a condition for obligation still inheres in human being. Let us turn now to make clear the three nullities that permeate human being and how they condition one’s ability to recognize a moral injunction.<sup>21</sup>

Human existence is a nullity in three ways: in the past, one was thrown into the world without having chosen to be here; in the present, one falls from being his

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20 An interesting parallel may be drawn between Kant and Heidegger. In the Groundwork, Kant grounds a moral theory which while presumably compatible with theology is not theologically dependent.

21 Reading Being and Time as a critique of Nietzschean philosophy would be an enticingly rich project, but it is well beyond the scope of this paper. Still there is also another subtle but important contrast between the philosophies of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Nietzsche thinks that becoming oneself means to recreate oneself. For him, this requires sloughing off one’s past and rebuilding oneself in the present to look forward to a new future; by willing what was, one somehow transcends it. For Nietzsche, it seems possible that one can stand on one’s own shoulders—in a sense, one can recreate oneself, *ex nihilo* with no debt to anyone or anything that came before. Such thoughts are probably empty hopes. In Heidegger’s account of the way in which a human being is guilty because of one’s thrownness and past, as Richard Polt says, one is what one is in the present because of one’s past; in this sense, one is always indebted to one’s past. One’s future depends on what one is in the present which exists as it is because of whence one came. Against Nietzsche who thought that by willing the past, one could redeem it, and get beyond it, Heidegger shows that the guilt always persists. Nietzsche seems to think that by the death of God as the “impossible creditor,” humans are free from an “impossible debt” which is guilt to God (Genealogy). But some Heidegger commentaries say that to purport to slough off the debt one has to one’s past is inauthentic, for the guilt about one’s “thrownness” and “pastness” is not negotiable. In Heidegger: An Introduction, Richard Polt says, “I am indebted because I have a past which must serve as a foundation of my existence, but which I cannot control.” Moreover, Polt writes, “It would be inauthentic to pretend that [one] can

authentic self into being with the inauthentic they-self; and one's futurity is a nullity because one must die. These three negativities make up one's primordial guilt. Because of these negativities, human being is by nature a nullity. Heidegger says

“...existential nullity by no means has the character of a privation, of a lack as compared with an ideal which is set up but is not attained in Dasein; rather, the being of this being is *already* null as project before everything that it can project and usually attains. Thus this nullity does not occur occasionally in Dasein, attached to it as a dark quality that it could get rid of if it made sufficient progress” (H. 285).

This means that human nullity is fundamental and ineradicable; to couch “primordial guilt” in a classically Kantian term, human nullity is *a priori*; in Heidegger's language, it is “always already” there. Even in authenticity, which is not an “ideal” or something to be “achieved” in the usual sense, one still lacks. But becoming authentic means taking responsibility for the lack. Even in authenticity, because one still lacks then the grounds of obligation persist and the moral law still applies. *Dasein does not escape the moral law by being authentic*, but I will show that having become authentic, the individual would not have the same inclinations which the moral law would have to constrain. Moreover, human nullity is a condition for the possibility of our recognition of any kind of moral injunction at all, including the categorical imperative. Next, I will make clear how Heidegger accounts for primordial guilt such that obligation becomes possible; on the basis of primordial guilt, a human being can recognize a moral injunction such as the categorical imperative.

Alan Donagan in The Theory of Morality writes that “authenticity consists neither more nor less than in seeing through the pretense that anything is required of

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create [oneself] anew, and have complete control over [one's] entire existence” (89) Despite Nietzsche the question still remains: what to do with the guilt?

man as such, other than that he act in full awareness of the fact that he is mortal and that nothing is required of him” (142). Donagan seems to think that Heidegger’s description of authenticity expresses moral nihilism for he refers to authenticity by saying, “moral nihilism is but one more of the innumerable devices by which a corrupt consciousness may disguise from a man what he is and how he is called to live.”<sup>22</sup> But Heidegger does in fact write about a necessary but not sufficient condition for morality which is inherent in all human beings. He describes an ontological condition (though he does not claim to account for all conditions) by which we can recognize a moral requirement. The positive ethical implications of Heideggerian authenticity is a topic to which I will return at the end of my paper but for now I seek to show that Heidegger’s description of primordial guilt complements Kant’s conception of the imperfect will.

Although I can understand the criticisms that Heidegger is a moral nihilist, Heidegger does not say in Being and Time that an individual is free from moral requirement. In fact, he shows that the basis for a morality is already a part of human beings insofar as human beings are primordially guilty. Heidegger means that a human being is that being who is ready to hear a moral injunction. The word ‘guilt’ has many uses and in one way we commonly use the term, it means falling short of living up to certain principles or moral ideals. But as Heidegger uses the term, one is guilty in the

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<sup>22</sup> “Moral nihilism” could have several meanings as Donagan uses the term. It could mean: “nothing matters”; “the denial of morality or ethical values”; “a kind of freedom in the face of nihilism by which everything is permitted.” Heideggerian authenticity means none of these things. I think Donagan mistakenly conflates the Sartrean brand of authenticity with the Heideggerian. By doing this, I understand better why Donagan polemicizes against authenticity for Sartre, himself, says, “authenticity consists in having a true and lucid consciousness of the situation, in assuming the responsibilities and risks that it involves, in accepting pride or humiliation, sometimes in horror and hate.” From certain points of view, these words do seem to imply that being authentic involves being one’s own moral authority; one is responsible only to oneself for the consequences of an action and not responsible to reason before one even chooses to act. Heidegger is not nihilistic in two senses: in explicit anticipation of one’s own death,



grounds of one's being before one ever even holds such principles. Moreover, our primordial guilt is the condition by which we can recognize any such principles. Heidegger writes, "being-guilty does not result from an indebtedness, but the other way around: indebtedness is possible only 'on the basis' of a primordial being guilty" (H. 284).

Heidegger does not call it primordial guilt because it is a falling short of *something*; but rather *because of primordial guilt moral principles can then apply*. Because of primordial guilt we can then hold moral principles which we can then fall short of. With explicit regard to morality, Heidegger says that primordial guilt "is the ontological condition for the fact that [a human being] can become [explicitly or particularly] guilty while. . . existing. This essential being guilty is. . . the existential condition of the possibility of the 'morally' good and evil, that is, for morality in general and its possible factual forms. Primordially being guilty cannot be defined by morality because morality already presupposed it for itself" (H. 286).<sup>23</sup> Because of human primordial guilt, a human being is then that being who is ready for an ethical injunction. One can see that while Heidegger shows how morality finds a "hook" in human being he goes no further to show what morality to "hang" on that hook. Just as Kant says that because of the imperfect nature of the human will, duty then has a "place," so too Heidegger shows how morality has a "place" by virtue of primordial guilt. Whereas Nietzsche may argue that one must recognize one's freedom from morality to begin to

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what one sees all the more clearly is that what matters is one's life; and Heidegger shows a condition by which morality can find a kind of foothold in a human life—morality always already has a "place."

<sup>23</sup> In *Eclipse of the Self*, Michael E. Zimmerman says, "Moral indebtedness is possible only because we are in debt ontologically; that is, because our very Being is characterized by finitude, negation, and limitation. Our being is guilty (lacking) not only because we are not self-grounding, but because our choices are limited" (75).

re-create one's own life, Heidegger shows that moral obligation always already has a basis in human being because of the null grounds of our being.

By showing how a person is ready to recognize an ethical injunction, an "ought," Heidegger shows how a necessary condition for a human ethical understanding inheres in human being. If by "moral nihilism" Donagan means the denial of any basis for moral obligation in human life then Heidegger is not a moral nihilist. Moreover, it may seem that since Being and Time does not include a theory of morality, this seems to speak about how Heidegger thought that it had no place in existence. This is a topic to which I will return after I discuss authenticity. But before I move on to authenticity, let me conclude this section by showing that authenticity is not a normative judgment although it certainly does seem that Heidegger is saying that "it is best to be authentic"—in some sense, I am sure that he thinks that it is and indeed I do, too. But to see how authenticity and inauthenticity are not value judgments, let us see how Heidegger uses the terms.

Heidegger uses authenticity and inauthenticity as ontological descriptions for the modified ways of human being. For the most part, one lives inauthentically. Heidegger's account of authenticity and inauthenticity is what Michael Cipiora calls "an ontological depiction" of the two extreme ways humans exist. According to Cipiora, "each is a phenomenological description of a relatedness to oneself and to others."<sup>24</sup> While authenticity is something that a human being is called to be, it is not an ideal; it is not something for which someone is at *fault* for falling short; it is not something for

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<sup>24</sup> Quotes taken from telephone conversations with Professor Cipiora who teaches Heidegger courses in the Existential Phenomenological Psychology Program at Duquesne University.

which someone strives.<sup>25</sup> But in being inauthentic one is “guilty” not because one fails to achieve any “ideal” but because one’s fallenness from one’s authentic self is one of the nullities which permeates the grounds of one’s being; for most of one’s life one is just *not* authentic. Of course, Heidegger never says whether one should be authentic or inauthentic, but in reading Being and Time one cannot help but prefer the authentic mode of living. And this does not necessarily have to do with any persuasive powers on the part of Heidegger. The “preference” for authenticity can be explained as a kind of testimony to the fact that one *recognizes* that one “should” be authentic but for the most part is not.<sup>26</sup> I will explain more about this recognition about wanting to be authentic when I discuss the “call of conscience” in the next section.

**Being Responsible for Being Here: From Inauthenticity  
to the Call of Conscience to Anticipatory Resoluteness**

Kant says that happiness consists in the sum satisfaction of all desires (or inclination) and to this extent I agree with him for it is an analytic judgment. But I also agree with Heidegger that there are ways in which one lacks (primordial guilt) which do not give themselves over to inclination and cannot be satisfied in any way. So even if all

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<sup>25</sup> One becomes authentic by answering to the call of conscience which comes at any moment. To be authentic, one must be open and ready to hearken to it.

<sup>26</sup> In Heidegger: An Introduction, Polt says that some people think that Heidegger’s descriptions of inauthenticity are “simply [Heidegger’s] way of wrapping his personal moral opinions in the mantle of sober ontological facts.” In response he calls for us to “reconsider our usual dichotomy between judgments of fact and value judgments. It may be a *fact* that everyday existence is superficial, ambiguous, and evasive. These words may do more than just express disapproval; they may describe reality. If we react to this reality with disapproval, that may be because of the pull of a different style of existence, authentic existence.” (76) I agree with Polt but with some qualification. Like Polt, I think that some of the approbation directed toward Heideggerian authenticity may express one’s proximity to the call of conscience. But I do not think that everyday life is all “superficial, ambiguous, and evasive,” and I do not think that Heidegger thinks so either. Of course some parts of it are and I do not think that many people would deny this. But inauthenticity does not mean just “superficiality.” “Inauthenticity” subsumes much of this behavior which one is reluctant to admit to, but it also includes a lot more as a general descriptive category of the wide range of human behavior.

of an individual's inclinations are satisfied there is still something left over with which one must deal even if one is "happy." This brings me to the guiding question of the inquiry: what to do about the nullities which make up one's primordial guilt? Being authentic in anticipatory resoluteness entails taking responsibility for the nullities of human being. I will show how conscience calls one from inauthenticity to resolute attestation and then to authentic anticipation of one's own death.

No one chooses to be born, but even so it is up to the individual to make one's life one's own.<sup>27</sup> In authenticity, one owns up to the ways in which one lacks by taking responsibility for one's own life as called by conscience. But before conscience calls one to be authentic, a person is already that being who can hearken to it. One can be called to authenticity because one is usually already falling into something else: inauthenticity.<sup>28</sup> And Heidegger conceives of a human being as essentially concerned with being here, and to preserve one's being here one must *take care* of it (H. 84).<sup>29</sup> Because people are so concerned with being here, they spend most of their time taking care of it and they do this in the mode of inauthenticity.

Everything that one does to take care of oneself displays one's concern for being in the world because one understands death as a future possibility. While death is always a concern, most of the time one does not like to think about it explicitly for

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<sup>27</sup> Heidegger says that we are "thrownness into death" and "delivered over to ourselves" by something other than ourselves, but even so, as Charles B. Guignon says, "we are responsible for making something of our lives" ("Authenticity, Moral Values, and Psychotherapy," The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger, page 229). As Polt says in Heidegger: An Introduction, "I did not bring myself into the world, and I cannot change what I have been, but I have to work with what I have been in order to be someone" (89).

<sup>28</sup> For the most part, in most cases, one is inauthentic just because that is the way human beings are.

<sup>29</sup> What Kant might call human incompleteness with respect to the imperfect will is implied also in our having to take care of our being here by using things in the world. That human beings are not self-sufficient is always already implied in our being as "Care."

explicit thinking about death without any usual euphemistic disguises demands that one experience anxiety which people generally avoid.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, this last fact reveals two ways in which one lacks: one's futurity ultimately lacks because one is finite. And because one tries to forget about one's finitude, one also lacks in the present: by trying to forget about death, one flees from one's own authentic self into inauthenticity. In the present we lack because we are not our authentic selves; and in the future we lack because we must die. For the most part in life, we try to "disburden" ourselves of thinking about these nullities by being with the "they-self" or by letting ourselves be absorbed by everyday "worldly" affairs. But there is also a part of our lives that makes up the "null grounds" of our being which has to do with our past.

One lacks because one is thrown into the world without having chosen to have been born—Heidegger calls this "thrownness." One's thrownness may be expressed in yet another way: one is not one's own cause. One understands one's thrownness whenever one asks the fundamental question "why am I here?" If one knew initially whence one came, then one would not ask such a question. Even though one may not have chosen to have been born, one is still called by conscience to attest to the nullities of one's being including one's thrownness. While one's past is essentially a lack because of "thrownness" there are also other aspects of one's past which limit the possibilities which one can realize in the future. In Eclipse of the Self, Michael Zimmerman says that one's "possibilities are determined by one's limited historical circumstances. I act toward the future in terms of what I have been and still am" (105). As Polt says in Heidegger: An

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<sup>30</sup> We can avoid thinking about death in so many ways especially by engaging in inauthentic "idle chatter" which can take many forms especially euphemizing about death (e.g. "Sally is in a better place," or "James is no longer with us," or "Juan passed on").

Introduction, “I have a past which must serve as a foundation for my existence, but which I cannot control” (89). Those possibilities which one can realize in the future are limited by one’s past.

For the most part, one tries to forget that one lacks by fleeing into inauthenticity, but there are occasions when one becomes authentic. We can be ourselves by answering the call to accept the ways in which we lack. Despite our inauthenticity, there is something in our nature which always calls us back to our authentic selves; he says the “call of conscience” always calls to us, but since we flee into inauthenticity, we are not always ready to hear it.<sup>31</sup> The call of conscience calls from oneself and summons oneself. Heidegger says, “and to what is one summoned? To one’s own self” (H. 273). The call of conscience calls us out of inauthentic existence back to attest to the null grounds of our being (“our own most being-guilty”) and to realize our own most potentiality.<sup>32</sup> What happens in answering to the call of conscience?

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31 The “call of conscience” is definitely different from what we usually understand as a “moral conscience.” The call of conscience calls when one is not oneself but the moral conscience calls when one is doing something morally questionable or wrong. The moral conscience plays a role in the way a person understands the permissibility or impermissibility of one’s actions and one’s culpability or inculpability as a rational actor; it is that little voice which says, “According to my moral principles, as I understand them, I think this is right.” Alan Donagan has a Thomistic conception of conscience which is “the verdicts of conscience derive from a disposition of ordinary human reason” (134, Donagan) where conscience is a kind of “court of justice,” in the Kantian sense (H. 293), wherein one subjects one’s maxims for action to a kind of moral review. By acting according to the moral conscience, one takes a kind of responsibility for one’s actions; the moral conscience calls out for one to test the maxim of one’s action for universalizability before acting. Here are some remarks on the differences between each conception of conscience: the call of conscience does not purport to be an appeal for discerning how to act at all; it is not a criterion. The way Heidegger describes the call of conscience, it is not something which would call for someone to act contrary to the imperatives of reason; it is not a voice which would “override” the moral conscience. There is no conflict between them. The moral conscience tests the permissibility of actions which would satisfy inclination but the call of conscience calls one to be one’s own authentic self which does not require the satisfaction of any inclination at all. The moral conscience is the voice which intervenes when one’s action may not accord with one’s moral principles, but the call of conscience calls out for one who has lost oneself to come back to oneself. The call of conscience does not call one to do anything but be one’s authentic self.

32 Heidegger says, “The meaning of the call becomes clear if our understanding of it keeps to the existential meaning of being-guilty, instead of making basic the derivative concept of guilt in the sense of an indebtedness ‘arising’ from some deed done or undone” (H. 287).

Usually, one resists the call of conscience because it demands that one be ready for “anxiety.”<sup>33</sup> For Heidegger, anxiety has a special meaning: it is the mood one experiences when one confronts the totality of one’s nullity which culminates in death. One hears the call of conscience in leaving the “they-self” so that away from “their” idle chatter and its comfort and security, one becomes individualized. Being free from idle chatter, one is ready to hear in silence the call to become authentic. One is ready to hearken to the call of conscience and finally own up to (to take responsibility for) one’s fundamental nullities: having been born without one’s choosing; one’s present fallenness into inauthenticity; and one’s finitude. Heidegger says the individual attestation of conscience is “the reticent projecting oneself upon one’s own most being guilty which is ready for [anxiety]” and this is resoluteness (H. 297).<sup>34</sup> Conscience calls one out of being inauthentic back to realizing that one’s being here now is the issue. Harkening to the call of conscience means that one wants to have a conscience.<sup>35</sup> “Wanting to have a conscience becomes a readiness for [anxiety]” (H. 296). In resoluteness one demands “[anxiety] of oneself” (H. 282). Anxiety is that mood which one experiences when one confronts one’s own most possibility of not being here—one confronts one’s own non-being or nothingness. Thus Heidegger says, “the nothingness before which [anxiety]

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33 Thomas Sheehan says that Heidegger describes anxiety “as a ‘call of conscience,’ where conscience means not a moral faculty but a heretofore dormant, and now awakening, awareness of one’s finite self. What this conscience reveals is that one is ‘guilty,’ not of some moral fault but of an ontological defect: the fact of being intrinsically incomplete and on the way to absence [death]” (Routledge Encyclopedia, Vol. 4, page 311; word in brackets mine).

34 “Resoluteness” as Heidegger uses the term does not mean “determined” or “willful” in the active sense in which we often use the word. It means being “unlocked” (the German word is “entschlossenheit” which means “unlockedness”) from inauthenticity and open to the future and to the limited possibilities that one can become. In The Origin of a Work of Art Heidegger says, “The resoluteness intended in Being and Time is not the deliberate action of the subject, but the opening up of the human being, out of the captivity in that which is, to the openness of being” (67). Furthermore, Polt says, “When one owns up to the guilt, one becomes resolute” (90).

35 “Authentically understanding the call [is] wanting to have a conscience” (H. 272).

brings us reveals the nullity that determines Da-sein in its ground, which is as thrownness into death” (H. 285). Through anxiety, the individual understands himself or herself as thrown into the world as a nullity and existing as a nullity all the way to death. So from resoluteness, the individual is brought to understand death in explicit anticipation of it.

No matter what, one always “cares” about one’s own being. Moreover, in explicit “being-unto-death” one cares for it authentically--this explicit being-unto-death is “anticipation.” In anticipation of one’s own death, one realizes that while “they” will go on forever, the individual does not; only the individual can die that individual’s death.<sup>36</sup> In anticipation, the individual understands death as what comes as one’s ownmost possibility at any moment.<sup>37</sup> Thus Heidegger defines “anticipatory resoluteness as authentic being toward the possibility that we characterized as the absolute impossibility of Dasein” (H. 329). How does anticipatory resoluteness mean taking responsibility for the nullities of one’s existence? Heidegger writes, “Anticipatory resoluteness understands Dasein in its essential being-guilty. This understanding means to take over being-guilty while existing, to *be* the thrown ground of a nullity. But to take over thrownness means to authentically be Da-sein in the way

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36 Polt says, “. . .my death is a possibility that necessarily faces me alone; no one can face it for me” (87).  
37 Death is not an event or the object of any experience but rather the cessation of it; one does not understand death “in” death but rather in the explicit anticipation of one’s own death. And we find the best examples of authentic anticipation of death not in theory but in art, especially literature. Think of Ernest Hemingway’s Francis Macomber, but most of all think of Hamlet when he says of death:

“If it be now, ‘tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. Since no man of aught when he leaves knows, what is it to leave betimes? Let be.”  
(*Hamlet*, V. ii. 221-246)

Shakespeare understood anticipation and created Hamlet who experiences it. What Hamlet calls “readiness,” Heidegger calls “anticipation.” One can argue that Hamlet is also resolute by resolving to “Let be.” Moreover, I need also mention that while Shakespeare shows anticipation in literature, Heidegger is not the first thinker to understand “anticipation” in philosophy. In Temporality and Practical Reason, Frank Schalow notes that “it was Kierkegaard who first recognized that the fact that man is finite may become an individual concern” but that Kant, “through his examination of time paved the way for a



that it always already was” (H. 325). To be the thrown ground of a nullity is to take responsibility for what is always already one’s own; in a sense, becoming authentic and “taking over” the nullities mean “becoming what one already is.” “Taking over” one’s own “being-guilty” while existing means becoming responsible for one what one is: thrown fallen finite nullity.<sup>38</sup> Authenticity means taking responsibility for one’s own existence. Let us now turn to authenticity and its ethical implications relating to heteronomy.

### **Heteronomy and Anxiety: Avoiding the Call to Authenticity**

In this section, I deal with the negative function of heteronomy.<sup>39</sup> It is not only contrary to autonomy but it can also distract one from taking responsibility for one’s primordial lacking and so it can impede one from becoming one’s own most potentiality in anticipatory resoluteness. In anticipatory resoluteness, a person owns up to one’s throwness, fallenness, and finitude. But owning up to these nullities demands so much of the individual that people try to avoid it because it demands anxiety. To avoid the anxiety involved in owning up to one’s nullities, one may seek to distract oneself. I interpret heteronomy as seeking to fulfill oneself by pursuing and satisfying one’s

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philosophical treatment of finitude” (Page 150). Kierkegaard’s Climacus inquired into “whether death can be apprehended and experienced in an anticipatory conception” (Concluding Unscientific Postscript, 150)

38 Authentically understood, an individual’s life belongs to that individual and to nobody else: another individual cannot effectively “take care” of another person’s life for that person. More specifically, one cannot take over one’s existential responsibility which is owning up to the nullities of one’s being. But for the most part we do not understand it this way. Sometimes a person wants to blame others or other events for the things that happen even when it is nobody’s fault not even one’s own (think of the tragic lament which more dramatically reveals our throwness, “Why me!”) Sometimes a person wants others to make one’s decisions for that person, solve their problems, and tell them what to do and even what to be (likewise, sometimes we are even inclined to leap into the lives of others and try to take care of all of these things for them.) Part of being authentic is authentic care of another which finds its most positive expression in “leaping ahead.” This is a kind of authentic concern for the being of another. I will return to this toward the end of this paper.

39 Heteronomy: one determines one’s action according to a maxim the employment of which can achieve a certain non-universal end—the satisfaction of an inclination.

inclinations. Thus heteronomy can be interpreted as a distraction from authenticity and not an implication which follows from it.

In The Courage To Be, Paul Tillich says, “The normal, existential anxiety of guilt drives the person toward attempts to avoid this anxiety (usually called the uneasy conscience) by avoiding guilt” (75).<sup>40</sup> I agree with Tillich: one can have anxiety over the totality of one’s nullity which makes up what he calls “existential guilt.” I also agree with Tillich that people often seek out certain kinds of distracting activities to avoid the anxiety inherent in coming to terms with one’s existential guilt. Certain quests for satisfaction or fulfillment express an effort to distract oneself from becoming one’s own most potentiality. Such quests for “other things” (heteronomy) are not only contrary to autonomy but also distract one from authenticity. Recall that Heidegger thinks that no matter what, people fundamentally lack and this lacking cannot be satisfied or fulfilled. Heteronomous seeking distracts one from authenticity. I interpret heteronomy as an attempt to fulfill oneself by purporting to fill in one’s essential lacking despite the futility of such a task. Furthermore, I interpret the authentic acceptance of one’s existential nullities as freeing one from the illusory fulfillment which satisfied inclination would purport to give. In this way, the authentic individual is not disposed to the kind of heteronomy which may so often lead to action which is impermissible by

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40 The “uneasy conscience” is the conscience which calls one to be authentic. It is “uneasy” when one flees both being one’s authentic self and taking over one’s existential responsibility. Moreover, Tillich uses “guilt” in the Heideggerian sense: one is “guilty” in one’s very nature because of its null grounds. We are “guilty” because we lack, because of our nullity. And confronting the totality of this lacking calls for anxiety. Avoiding the guilt means being inauthentic. Tillich means that we avoid the guilt to avoid anxiety which accompanies coming to terms with the guilt (like the existential nullities themselves, Tillich says that “Existential anxiety has an ontological character and cannot be removed but must be taken into the courage to be” (77)). Michael Zimmerman characterizes anxiety as “the mood which causes us to flee into the intensified egoism of inauthentic everydayness” (Eclipse of the Self, 64). This section is about how inauthentic fleeing from one’s existential guilt is expressed in heteronomy. Those heteronomous pursuits which are impermissible by reason also distract one from being authentic.

reason (immorality). The authentic individual sees through the allure of heteronomous satisfaction. To express it in a Kierkegaardian fashion, the authentic individual is not an aesthete.

Of course, authentic individuals will have inclinations which must be satisfied for survival because all people are thrown into the world having to take care of themselves. But I do not think that Kantian morality would judge the satisfaction of these kinds of inclinations as impermissible since the satisfaction of such inclinations usually do not require the use of non-universalizable maxims.<sup>41</sup> But in the case that heteronomous satisfaction would result in an impermissible action, then the authentic individual must subject the maxim of his or her action to moral review to test its universalizability. According to Kantian ethics, all rational beings are bound by the moral law which is the form of one's own practical reason. So even in authenticity one is also still rational and so one is also bound by the moral law; but also in authenticity the moral law ceases to be the tyrannical constraint which it is for heteronomous egoist.

While successful heteronomy may satisfy, it does not fulfill one's essential nature. One essentially wants to be oneself and becoming one's authentic self does not require the satisfaction of any inclination. Moreover, being authentic is not itself the satisfaction of an inclination either. While heteronomous pursuits may lead to happiness, often those heteronomous ends which people pursue are distractions—pursuing happiness itself can be a distraction. A person essentially wants to be authentic, not “happy” in the sense of satisfied inclination. Many kinds of

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<sup>41</sup> I am talking about the inclinations toward things which humans are dependent on for survival: food, shelter, and sleep, for instance. In most ordinary cases, satisfying these inclinations is not impermissible by reason since the maxims one usually uses to satisfy these inclinations are universalizable.

heteronomous pursuits distract one from the call of conscience which calls one back to one's own authentic self-- that is, to take responsibility for oneself, to become one's own most potentiality for being. It is not a human being's essential nature to be "fulfilled" by satisfied inclination for satisfaction is temporary and the happiness which one thereby achieves is fleeting. While Kant says that happiness consists in satisfied inclination, I do not think that human flourishing consists only in satisfied inclination; being "happy" (having inclinations satisfied) does not equal human flourishing. Human flourishing consists in becoming one's own authentic self. Moreover, authenticity has even more extended significance in a human life.

### **Autonomy as a Moral Limit on Realizing Possibilities**

In owning up to one's existential nullities in anticipatory resoluteness one is brought to one's own most potentiality for being. Then the individual is ready to seize upon the existentially limited possibilities to which one is open in anticipatory resoluteness. Being brought to one's own most potentiality for being, one has a more firm grasp of the limited possibilities one may choose to realize. Thus in Temporality and Practical Reason, Frank Schalow defines anticipatory resoluteness as the "finite ability to stand committed to the options which are revealed through one's limitations" (151).<sup>42</sup> These limitations include: one is thrown into the world and cannot become anything which is not already based on one's past; one is not for the whole of one's life one's authentic self; one cannot become all possibilities but by becoming one, then one

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<sup>42</sup> Schalow also argues that "it is possible to define ethical commitment in terms of the basic structures of constituting human existence" and that "anticipatory resoluteness is the basic structure of human finitude." (150) Moreover, I appreciate Schalow's project but it must also be noted that in his study he construes "resoluteness" in an active sense so "resoluteness" may connote "willfulness," "determination," or "commitment." Perhaps the way he uses the word 'commitment' in terms of "resoluteness" is appropriate, but for Heidegger "resoluteness" essentially means "openness" or "unlockedness."

negates all others<sup>43</sup>; sometime, one is *not to be at all*. But while the possibilities which one would realize are one's own, one does not realize those possibilities in a vacuum. In authenticity, when one is clear on the existential limitations on the possibilities one can realize, choosing to become these possibilities may still affect others. So when one does become authentic, what happens next with respect to the fact that, as Heidegger says, a human being is "always already being with others"?

Not only are there existential limitations to the possibilities which one can become (throwness, fallenness, the impossibility of being all possibilities, finitude) there are moral constraints as well: one cannot become anything which one cannot also will that all others be permitted to become as well. Kant says that autonomy is "a limiting condition on the action of each man" (Beck, Acad. 431). Autonomy is a moral limit on what possibilities an individual can choose to become; moral autonomy constrains what possibilities one may choose by virtue of one's own reason. Recall the formulation of the categorical imperative which states: "Act only according to that maxim which you can will as a universal law of nature." One is commanded by one's reason to will the realization of those possibilities which all others be permitted to realize as well.

Determining one's actions according to the moral law (autonomy) is not the end-purpose of a human life but it conditions by way of constraint what possibilities one can choose to realize in a life; the moral law constrains the things we may do to realize more fully our human potential (including but not limited to things like our gifts, talents, and abilities.) The moral law does not circumscribe what one may become but it does proscribe certain possibilities and then it prescribes how we ought to choose if one is

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<sup>43</sup> Schalow says, "In Being and Time, Heidegger defines freedom as the condition in which the self opts

inclined to choose to realize those possibilities which are impermissible by the moral law. While the possibilities one may choose are limited by the existential nullities of one's individual being, choosing those possibilities is also conditioned by the unconditional imperatives of reason: as long as one is rational, one's rational nature is violated by contradiction; and when one chooses a possibility the realization of which is not universally permissible then one is contradicting one's own reason.

Since some choices are made in the context of others, some choices are moral choices. The maxims of such choices are subject to moral review. Sometimes before choosing a possibility one must pause to think about the moral permissibility of this choice—in moral perplexity, one thinks explicitly on a moral problem. In such moral choices, the moral conscience alerts one about a potential violation of the categorical imperative. In these moments of moral perplexity, one then thinks through the permissibility of an action by subjecting the maxim of one's choice to moral review as alerted by the moral conscience to see if it passes the test of universalizability. If one cannot will that the maxim hold as a universal law, then it is impermissible. The choices which are determined autonomously condition the limited possibilities (which one understands authentically). Moral autonomy conditions those limited possibilities which one would choose to realize insofar as one is not permitted by one's own reason to realize those possibilities which one could not also will that another be permitted to realize as well.

The objective principle of autonomy as a limit on human freedom is a moral limit, but not an existential one like the existential nullities. Because it is not an

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for one possibility while explicitly recognizing that it must forgo the others" (Temporality, 384).

existential-ontological limit, it is not one which Heidegger would have explicated in Being and Time since his purpose is ontological.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, in Heidegger and the Ground of Ethics, Frederick Olafson argues that “an ontology of human nature is of fundamental importance to any effort to get at the ground of ethics” (6). With respect to the moral limits (autonomy) of what possibilities one may choose, Olafson also understands that, “We are bound because we cannot claim a right to treat others in a way we could not accept for ourselves” (12). Heidegger does not write about the moral limits of choice, but he does describe the way in which an individual could care for another authentically. Now let us turn to look at what Heidegger describes as the kind of treatment of another person which authenticity may entail.

### **Leaping-Ahead as Authentic Care of Another Person**

Recall that for the most part, one takes care of one’s daily business in the mode of inauthenticity. In this mode of taking care, one regards things for use and one also can have various kinds of concern for other people; in its phenomenal display, we see one regard a person as one does a thing—as something for use. Heidegger says there are countless different modes of regarding others in the mode of inauthenticity, including but not limited to: “Being-for, against-, and without-one-another, passing-one-another-

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44 In Heidegger and Ethics, Herman Philipse asks, “Why does [Heidegger’s] ontological analysis of human existence lack a substantial moral dimension?” It is true that in Being and Time there is nothing like reason from Kantian ethics on which one could predicate an objective morality of mutual respect, but this is not a basis for criticizing Being and Time for Heidegger’s purpose is ontological. But that there is nothing like reason in Being and Time on which to predicate a traditional ethics does not necessarily mean that an ethics is groundless or that there is no place for moral obligation in human being. As Frederick Olafson argues an ethics finds its basis in the phenomenal fact that, as Heidegger says, “we are always already being with others” (*mitsein*) and that we can be “for the sake of others” (*fursorge*). Moreover, I have already shown that the basis of obligation is already in human being by virtue of primordial guilt. But what ethics to predicate on this basis of obligation is not a part of Heidegger’s ontological purpose.

by, not mattering-to-one-another, are possible ways of concern.”<sup>45</sup> But by becoming authentic, one has an altogether different way of being concerned for others which Heidegger says “pertains to authentic care” and he calls it *leaping ahead* of the other person.

In contrast to “leaping in” to the life of another and doing “someone’s job for him or dominating him,” leaping ahead of the other one is “in advance of him and frees him” (H. 122).<sup>46</sup> Heidegger describes authentic care in the most sparing of terms, but one can still gather that it involves potentiating authenticity in another. Heidegger says, “the existence of the other. . . helps the other to become transparent to himself *in* his care and *free* for it.” By “leaping ahead” of the other one cares for the other not by “taking ‘care’ away from him, but first to give it back to him as such.” Recall that in authenticity, the individual takes responsibility for the null grounds of one’s being which belong to that individual and to nobody else; no one else can be authentic for another individual. Part of being authentic is realizing that others are potentially authentic, too, so one may leap ahead to the authenticity of the other and “care” for the other’s authenticity by helping the other to become authentic himself or herself. Part of being authentic is recognizing that while one cannot take care of another by taking over his or her nullities (or living a life for another), one can leap ahead of the other to free that person to take responsibility for the existential nullities himself or herself. This is what Heidegger refers to as becoming “the conscience of others.”

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<sup>45</sup> Heidegger also says, “the last two modes of deficiency and indifference characterize the everyday and average being-with-one-another” (H. 123).

<sup>46</sup> Some appropriate similarities may be drawn between leaping ahead and the formulation of the categorical imperative which commands treatment of all others as ends in themselves and never as means only. In leaping ahead, one cares for the “end” of the other which is his or her authentic self, his or her



In a later section, Heidegger refers to authentic care of the other again: “The resoluteness toward itself first brings Dasein to the possibility of letting the others who are with it “be” in their ownmost potentiality-of-being, and also discloses that potentiality in concern which leaps ahead and frees. Resolute Dasein can be the conscience of others.” (H. 298) An authentic individual is ready to “let the other be” his or her authentic self. Michael Zimmerman notes, “To care for something authentically would be to let it manifest itself in its own way,” and in Heidegger’s language this means letting the other person be. By contrast, Zimmerman says that, “To care for something inauthentically would be to manipulate it for selfish purposes” (Eclipse of the Self, 44).

Heidegger describes the authentic care of the other as leaping ahead of the other when the other falls short of his or her authentic self. Heidegger does not explicitly say so, but the implication seems to be that given the nature of our authentic selves, then this is how we would treat others. Part of the nature of our authentic selves is to leap ahead to try to potentiate authenticity in others. To fall short of authentic care of others is to treat others inauthentically. It is not a part of authenticity to be inclined to manipulate, dominate, use, or mistreat others; Heidegger calls this “leaping in” to the life of the other where one can even become dependent on the care of the other who leaps in.<sup>47</sup>

### **Concluding Remarks on Authenticity and Autonomy**

My next step in this inquiry would involve several different approaches to relating authenticity, autonomy, and ethics. I would like to take up the task that Frank

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own most potentiality of being. In leaping ahead, one has an explicit regard for the authenticity of the other.

Schalow proposes in Temporality and Practical Reason: “Kant’s ethics requires an existential foundation that can be provided by the basic principles of Heidegger’s thought.” He thinks that “anticipatory resoluteness is the basic structure of human finitude” and that “it is possible to define ethical commitment in terms of the basic structures constituting human existence” (150).<sup>48</sup> Thus he argues that anticipatory resoluteness (authenticity) is a kind of condition for grasping the magnitude of the ethical task involved in committing to the unconditional commands of reason. Also in a further inquiry I would seek to investigate how Kant uses the word “autonomy” and how Heidegger uses “authenticity” to alleviate some of the confusion which accompanies the discussion about authenticity and ethics; I would compare methodologies of each thinker to clarify conceptually some of the confusion and the problems which often surround this issue.<sup>49</sup> I would also seek to understand more about later Heideggerian philosophy and his idea of an “original ethics.”<sup>50</sup> Lastly, I would like to delve into Kant’s literature to the end of exploring the commonality which presumably exists between Kant’s conception of the imperfect will and Heidegger’s description of the inauthentic self and how they both relate to the Christian concept of original sin.

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47 I do not claim that authentic care of the other is an “authentic morality,” even though such treatment may look like moral treatment.

48 Schalow takes up the issue which Climacus raised in The Concluding Unscientific Postscript: “The question must be raised of the possibility of finding an ethical expression for the significance of death” (151). Schalow seeks to understand ethics in terms of human finitude.

49 I myself am bound to have been caught up in some conceptual confusion in this inquiry, too. Although I have tried to attend the differences between such different methodologies, it is still very difficult to relate authenticity and autonomy without eliding some of the fundamental differences between moral theory and phenomenological description. But I hope I will be indulged in my mistakes when the reader understands that while Kantian autonomy comes from moral theory and Heidegger describes authenticity in its phenomenal display, each pertains to the same human subject.

50 I was introduced to Heidegger’s idea of an “original ethics” through a later work of Frank Schalow’s called The Temporality of an Original Ethics in which he argues that Heidegger’s “original ethics” is the basis on which objective normative principles can rest. Furthermore, in Heidegger’s Original Ethics, John D. Caputo describes such an ethics as, “The thinking committed to being (*Seinsdenken*), to the Origin

There is still so much room for investigating a subject the surface of which I have barely scratched; the philosophical avenues of inquiry by which one may gain a rich and edifying understanding of this subject extend well beyond what I present here. But in the meantime, I have remarked on some of the differences between autonomy and authenticity to the end of showing how they do not conflict; each is necessary for a kind of fulfillment of one's being since an individual wants to flourish. Through authenticity one comes to terms with the nullities which cannot be satisfied and is brought to one's ownmost potentiality for being. In authenticity, having been brought to one's ownmost potentiality, one is ready to choose from among one's limited possibilities what to become in life. In authenticity, one's being is fulfilled (as much as it can be, temporally speaking) exclusive of satisfied inclination. In authenticity, one comes to one's essential nature.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore by an individual's moral autonomy, there are moral limits which condition those possibilities which one may choose since our choices affect those with whom we live. Autonomy and authenticity complement each other. Let me conclude by addressing Donagan's criticisms of authenticity.

Donagan says that authenticity is a "corruption of consciousness," that it is "one more of the innumerable devices by which a man may hide from himself what he is and how he is called to live" (143). But I have shown that one is fundamentally called by conscience to be authentic. Moreover, to ignore the call is to flee taking responsibility for some essential parts of one's human nature. But I do think that Donagan would agree with me that choosing from among one's limited possibilities without a moral

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(*Ursprung*) of man's world and of the way that man dwells in the world (*ethos*)." The ethical relationship is between a person and Being itself.

regard for other people is a “corruption of consciousness” as well. Being authentic opens one up to the limited possibilities which one faces, but then seizing some possibilities is further conditioned by moral autonomy. When one would choose by a non-universalizable maxim, one defies one’s rational nature.

How to realize the most of one’s human potential while getting along with others in the midst of this temporal spot is an essential concern in a human life but sometimes we forget just how much it means. Understanding one’s finitude tends to give all the more significance to this “spot” and what we have to do with it within our limited circumstances. Kant says that it is a duty to cultivate one’s talents, one’s “natural powers,” to realize one’s human potential (Metaphysics of Morals, K. 6:444-445). Furthermore, Donagan notes that “A life the sole object of which was to obey the moral law would be empty and aimless.” (11) And I have shown that authenticity is a condition for understanding how one’s possibilities are limited and by becoming authentic one can then choose ways of living within which to commit to developing one’s talents and realizing one’s human potential; authenticity not only fulfills a human nature (by owning up to one’s essential nullities and by becoming oneself) but it also is a condition for choosing from among limited possibilities what to pursue in life, possibilities within which one can most clearly commit to cultivating oneself, one’s talents, and realizing one’s potential.

Sometimes we are inclined, however, to waste our time, to let things just go by as if we have plenty of time later to make things up; sometimes we are just satisfied

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51 “We receive many gifts, of many kinds. But the highest and really most lasting gift given to us is always our essential nature, with which we are gifted in such a way that we are what we are only through it. That is why we owe thanks for this endowment, first and unceasingly.” -- Martin Heidegger

about the way we are now; sometimes we are just satisfied by being satisfied. But our authentic selves fight against these tendencies. If Donagan understood authenticity the way I do, then he would agree with me that autonomy without authenticity is empty. And he would also agree with me that a life led with out a regard for how one's choices affect others is blind.

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\*These are articles I received via interlibrary loan. I have yet to find out their original sources.