

Heidegger, Dasein, and Authenticity  
From his 'Being and Time' and 'Nietzsche'

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In the book *Being and Time* (1927, 1962 English translation, 2019 edition), Martin Heidegger, a German philosopher, sets out to find the meaning of being and the meaning of living as a being. The English translation carries over the word “Dasein”, which in German means “being-there”, to explain the ontological and existential meaning of the word. “This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term ‘Dasein’.”<sup>1</sup> This use of “Dasein” makes Heidegger more easily understandable when confronting the most overriding theme of the book: Dasein as the “entity which in its Being has this very Being as an issue, comports itself towards its Being as its ownmost possibility.”<sup>2</sup> And choosing a life towards this “ownmost possibility”, to Heidegger, is authenticity.

What authenticity is, is not explicitly defined in Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (*BT*), however, in his book *Nietzsche*, we may find a more detailed uncovering of what authenticity means to one’s being.<sup>3</sup> The similarities between Heidegger (1889–1976) and Friedrich Nietzsche, another German philosopher (1844–1900), can be seen throughout his *BT*, and with his own

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<sup>1</sup> Heidegger, M. (1927/1962). *Being and Time* (2019 ed.), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Heidegger, M. (1927/1962). *Being and Time* (2019 ed.), p. 68.

<sup>3</sup> Heidegger, M. (1961/1991). *Nietzsche* (First HarperCollins Paperback ed.).

personal insights into Nietzsche's philosophies, this can be arguably confirmed.<sup>4</sup> However, very similarly to Nietzsche with Schopenhauer, some philosophies are pushed away and others are added onto. Heidegger's work *Nietzsche* is a collection of lectures from 1936 to 1940, "reworked by Heidegger during the 1950s and 1960 and prepared for publication in 1961."<sup>5</sup> This major work is broken down into four volumes, for the purpose of this paper, Heidegger's *Nietzsche* in addition to his *BT*, answers the question of what authenticity is to Dasein.

To be truly authentic is the aim of Dasein's "Being as an issue," even so, Heidegger does not use language to insist that an authentic life is better than living inauthentically (applying an ethic to the terms), to a significant extent this can be read in *BT* as it is what it is. Although, this could potentially have to do with Heidegger's difficulties when defining what Dasein is: "We must [find how Dasein] can show itself in itself and from itself. And this means that it is to be shown as it is *proximally and for the most part*—in [Dasein's] average *everydayness*."<sup>6</sup> In this quote, it can be seen that Heidegger plans to determine what authenticity is, while still having to stay within the realm of "everyday" Dasein, which would be something applicable to all beings and thus within the realm of something that is not authentic to one's being. When attempting to write on one's "ownmost authenticity", this would be exclusive to one individual. This too can be seen in *BT*, as the metaphysical complexity of this concept forced Heidegger to not finish writing the book.

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<sup>4</sup> Heidegger, M. (1961/1991). *Nietzsche* (First HarperCollins Paperback ed.).

<sup>5</sup> Harcourt, B. E. (2016). 1/13: Martin Heidegger.

<sup>6</sup> Heidegger, M. (1927/1962). *Being and Time* (2019 ed.), p. 37.

In Dasein's everydayness, Heidegger also identifies that time is one of the largest factors for one's being. Hence the title *Being and Time*, "the way in which Being and its modes and characteristics have their meaning determined primordially in terms of time, is what we shall call its '*Temporal*' determinateness."<sup>7</sup> The factor of time is something that cannot be overlooked when considering one's authenticity. The time in which we are born into is not a choice and relies on only a single instant, there are no possibilities to changing this as time is "determined primordially"; this too determines what "everydayness" belongs to this being and what possibilities would be authentic to this being.

Authentic choices within authentic possibilities – this is what Dasein's "Being as an issue" genuinely is. But what makes a choice authentic? Heidegger writes that "whenever Dasein tacitly understands and interprets something like Being, it does so with *time* as its standpoint."<sup>8</sup> Tactic knowledge is something that comes naturally to us, the sort of things that we *know* but generally do not communicate, and as such, the use of which could be seen as being unconscious behavior. Be that as it may, we do think to ourselves "I do not have the time for this" but how we use time as the foundation of our decision making, this is what is unconscious to the self. This can also be said to be nearer to the subconscious or the conscious mind (being that "time" is in the thought itself). However, the way in which Heidegger places "*time* as [being's] standpoint" allows for time to be the fundamental groundwork for all levels of decision-making.

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<sup>7</sup> Heidegger, M. (1927/1962). *Being and Time* (2019 ed.), p. 40.

<sup>8</sup> Heidegger, M. (1927/1962). *Being and Time* (2019 ed.), p. 39.

One major concept within Nietzsche's work is life affirmation: affirming that life is finite as well as valueless. Nietzsche's thoughts on Christian values (sometimes referred to more simply as "slaves" or "the herd"), points to how a belief in the afterlife is life-denying as this can create a false sense infinity within a finite existence. Another major concept for Nietzsche is his "ideal man", the Overman, who affirms life by attempting to reach his own perfection through determining his own values over the authority of the Christian church. Between these two concepts is Nietzsche's famous statement, from his 1885 book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "God is dead!"<sup>9</sup> which brings attention to what values the Christian church employs, and this is their own. With this, Nietzsche shows that social influence on one's moral and ethical values produces inauthentic behaviors and modes of being (to use Heidegger's terms), as these valuations are established by other men, not an all-knowing god, and substantially promote an approach to life that lays its foundation on an infinite afterlife. The aim of the Christian approach is to motivate its followers to be "good" and to go to Heaven through a strict set of rules. For Nietzsche's Overman, rules with a moral standpoint ought to be self-elected by the means of a finite existence. Making use of Heidegger's terms again, a being must realize the temporality of its possibilities in order to be authentic in its choices, and with the intention of authenticity, social influences in values must be foregone.

From section §53 "Existential Projection of an Authentic Being-towards-death" of *BT*, Heidegger discloses that Dasein's "ownmost possibility" is death, as death itself outlines our temporal possibilities. Excepting this fact "*reveals to Dasein its lostness in the they-self, and*

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<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche, F. (1954/1982). *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In W. Kaufmann (Trans.), *The Portable Nietzsche* (pp. 103-439), p. 124.

*brings it face to face with the possibility of Being itself, primarily unsupported by concerned solicitude, but being itself, rather, in an impassioned **freedom towards death**—a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the ‘they’, and which is tactical, certain of itself, and anxious.”*<sup>10</sup> (italics and bold font left as it is). The “they-self” is Heidegger’s concept of social influence on our being and decision-making. Dr. James Fieser, a philosophy professor from the University of Tennessee at Martin, describes the “they-self” as Heidegger’s term for an inauthentic mode of being, “lost in the world of others.”<sup>11</sup> Whereas the authentic self is “the mine-self; the life that is owned by me; its existence is not justified in comparison with others,” with this, Dr. Fieser adds that both authenticity and inauthenticity are in total opposition to the other.<sup>12</sup> The contrapositions of these terms define a dependency to other, meaning that we are a being within the world of authenticity and the made-world of inauthenticity and we must choose between the two, there is no path in between. In addition to this, beings only live within the world of the “they”, social influence is “the Illusions of the ‘they’” and is not something one can necessarily live without, as Heidegger points out, we live in a world of other people. This section points the life-denying values of an infinite self as being inauthentic, parallel to what Nietzsche suggests lies in Christianity. Section §53 is the last of a larger chapter concerning death, the first of which in Division Two of *BT*; here Heidegger asks himself whether or not affirming death as one’s final possibility has a necessary association with Dasein’s authentic being. Following, the majority Division Two falls into the same sense of uncertainty.

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<sup>10</sup> Heidegger, M. (1927/1962). *Being and Time* (2019 ed.), p. 311.

<sup>11</sup> Fieser, J., Dr. (2015). Martin Heidegger.

<sup>12</sup> Fieser, J., Dr. (2015). Martin Heidegger.

The peak of inauthentic social influence is language itself, which unveils Heidegger's metaphysical problem of defining Dasein and finishing *BT*: words created by individuals (agreed upon by the masses) are primordially arbitrary. "Dasein tacitly understands and interprets," to its greatest existent, means that "Being" and "Authenticity" are beyond words. And Dasein's "Being as an issue" can then also then be seen as the existential void: a part of the human condition found in Existentialism that elicits the feelings of meaningfulness and meaninglessness in one's existence (one's own value or one's life's purpose). Often falling moreso toward the latter than the former as the void itself relies on gratification on a scale beyond man-made words. A valueless life, for both Nietzsche and Heidegger, is Nihilism, and to many existential philosophers, this dread cannot be avoided but must be overcome. To Heidegger, "that which we have anxiety about is our potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world," the significance of this to the definition of Dasein is that our existential dread to life proves that we are within the world.<sup>13</sup> And looking to the future, together with death, "lies the existential-ontological condition for the possibility of Being-free for authentic existentiell possibilities"<sup>14</sup> The authentic self, again, remains certain to each and every one individual and the life purpose that they choose as their innermost self-satisfying possibility. And this authentic mode of being would then be a case against one's existential void and points directly to Nietzsche's Overman.

When continuing these lines of thinking with the works of *Nietzsche*, Heidegger compiled four volumes that total nearly 600 pages in length, and so with the aid of a scholar, the overarching findings of Heidegger can be made more readily available. Dr. Micheal Gillespie is a

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<sup>13</sup> Heidegger, M. (1927/1962). *Being and Time* (2019 ed.), p. 235.

<sup>14</sup> Heidegger, M. (1927/1962). *Being and Time* (2019 ed.), p. 237.

“Professor of Political Science and Philosophy” at Duke University and long-standing author on Nietzsche, Heidegger, and a myriad of applied philosophical topics.<sup>15</sup> Dr. Gillespie also published multiple articles in the peer-reviewed philosophy journal “Political Theory” (published semi-monthly from 1973 to 2016).<sup>16</sup> <sup>17</sup> Dr. Gillespie’s article “Review: Heidegger's Nietzsche” (1987) offers great insight into Heidegger’s *Nietzsche* as he sheds light on the work as well the differences between the German and English versions.<sup>18</sup> One of the greatest differences, Dr. Gillespie shares, is the intentions of the work: these writings are not simply lectures on Nietzsche, but Heidegger’s attempt to finish the work of both Nietzsche’s *Will to Power* as well as his own *BT*: “His consideration of Nietzsche is thus not an interpretation in the strict sense of the term but an *Auseinandersetzung*, ‘setting-apart-from-one-another,’ a dialogue or debate with his fellow ‘hermit of the spirit’ across the gulf that separates their two [mountain] peaks.”<sup>19</sup> The importance of this substantial as this means that Heidegger’s *Nietzsche* conveys his own thoughts and philosophies rather than what he plainly taught—as professors can talk on subjects that they do not believe in, this is notably not the case.

From Heidegger’s *Nietzsche*: “By the term ‘overman’ Nietzsche does not mean some miraculous, fabulous being, but the man who surpasses former man. But man as he has been hitherto is the one whose Dasein and relation to Being have been determined by Platonism in one

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<sup>15</sup> Duke University. (2020). Michael A. Gillespie.

<sup>16</sup> Gillespie, M. A., Dr. (2020). Advanced Search.

<sup>17</sup> JSTOR. (2020). Sage Publications, Inc.

<sup>18</sup> Gillespie, M. A., Dr. (1987). Heidegger's Nietzsche. *Political Theory*, 15(3), (pp. 424-435).

<sup>19</sup> Gillespie, M. A., Dr. (1987). Heidegger's Nietzsche. *Political Theory*, 15(3), (pp. 424-435), p. 424.

of its forms or by a mixture of several of these.”<sup>20</sup> It is important to note that Heidegger writes that “Being” to Nietzsche, is his famous “Will to Power” in one word, which can be described as a force of Being motivation.<sup>21</sup> Platonism, in this case, refers to the work of the Ancient Greek philosopher Plato. More specifically, Platonism here is the concept of a true world outside of our own much like the Christian Heaven, greatly separating our life past its finite possibilities. This false sense of godliness can also be found in Nietzsche’s 1889 *Twilight of Idols*, in one-page chapter called “How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable,” which ends with “The true world—we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! *With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one.* [...] Incipit Zarathustra.”<sup>22</sup> Still poetically, but more clearly, Nietzsche writes on Nihilism being the first effect of God’s death, with the realization of man-made values, life becomes relatively meaningless. Heidegger’s and Nietzsche’s Overman then, is the next step: the ability to transform himself past life-denying and other *concrete* concepts, past a life of meaninglessness, to realize something anew, to create one’s own authentic values entirely.

One concern that Dr. Gillespie shares is that if “Heidegger claims that he has directed us to the new beginning that is necessary for authentic thought” then he would have had to thoroughly comprehend and recognize all of Nietzsche’s work (realistically meaning, 100% of the text and context of 100% of Nietzsche’s work); otherwise, Heidegger’s *Auseinandersetzung* would fail from setting itself apart from Nietzsche. In can be said though, if Heidegger is set out

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<sup>20</sup> Heidegger, M. (1961/1991). *Nietzsche* (First HarperCollins Paperback ed.), Vol. I, p. 208.

<sup>21</sup> Heidegger, M. (1961/1991). *Nietzsche* (First HarperCollins Paperback ed.), Vol. I, p. 200.

<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche, F. (1954/1982). *Twilight of Idols*. In W. Kaufmann (Trans.), *The Portable Nietzsche* (pp. 463-564), p. 486.

to determine Dasein's authenticity and "Being as an issue" through Nietzsche, then an *Auseinandersetzung* would not be the largest goal of Heidegger's *Nietzsche*. In addition, finding the same conclusion as Nietzsche while continuing to add onto the philosophical concepts would still stand as an *Auseinandersetzung*, as the mountain that is Nietzsche in Dr. Gillespie's analogy would only grow larger and more defined with Heidegger's remarkable expansions.

Along with Dr. Gillespie, the translator and editor of Heidegger's *Nietzsche*, Dr. David Ferrell Krell also offers grave insight into the minds of both thinkers in his book introduction and footnotes. Dr. Ferrell Krell is, likewise, a published author on both philosophers and other concepts and a "Professor Emeritus at DePaul University", uniquely though, Dr. Ferrell Krell "had the opportunity to work with Heidegger himself."<sup>23</sup> In Dr. Ferrell Krell's introduction, he sheds light on Heidegger's thoughts toward Nietzsche's "Will to Power" as being "equated with self-assertion."<sup>24</sup> "Self-assertion, which wants to be ahead of things, to stay on top of things, is always going back to its original essence, to the origin. *Self-assertion is original assertion of essence.*"<sup>25</sup> Heidegger's "Will to Power" immediately draws attention to his concepts of anxiety for the "potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world", Dasein's "being-there" and "Being as an issue", as well as similar terms from *BT* that have not been mentioned here. As Heidegger writes that "Will to power is never the willing of a particular actual entity. It involves the Being and essence of beings; it is this itself," and so the study of which has the same purpose of "everyday" Dasein but is in truth not authentic to one single being.

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<sup>23</sup> The Department of Comparative Literature. (2012). David Farrell Krell.

<sup>24</sup> Heidegger, M. (1961/1991). *Nietzsche* (First HarperCollins Paperback ed.), p. xv.

<sup>25</sup> Heidegger, M. (1961/1991). *Nietzsche* (First HarperCollins Paperback ed.), Vol. I, p. 61.

Turning back to the existential purpose of finding Dasein's authenticity for its "Being as an issue", this is, for both Heidegger and Nietzsche, how one is able to overcome of Nihilism and the existential void (seeing life as valueless and dreadful), and, at the same time, overcome Platonic- or Christian-set (life-denying) values. In the review, Dr. Gillespie points out the key differences these philosophers encounter: "Art, for Nietzsche, is thus the great countercurrent to nihilism that as the 'grand style' of the overman will bring about a revaluation of all values, bring new gods, a new ethics, a new politics, and a new way of human life."<sup>26</sup> These ideas can be found toward the end of Nietzsche's *Twilight of Idols*, where he argues that art is our projection of transformation into something more realized and perfect, and that "art is the great stimulus to life"<sup>27</sup> As gratification of the will, to Nietzsche, art fulfills this and thus art makes itself clear as the countermovement to Nihilism. To Heidegger, if the Overman is an artist, this would require him to live within society, as art is agreeably political as a positive action (often toward "the truth"); although art does not provide an adequate solution to Heidegger for confronting Dasein's authenticity as art can only belong within the realm of metaphysics.<sup>28</sup> <sup>29</sup> As for counteracting existential dread, Heidegger finds Nietzsche's view on art to be a tangification of the Overman, when considering the heart of the artist.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Gillespie, M. A., Dr. (1987). Heidegger's Nietzsche. *Political Theory*, 15(3), (pp. 424-435), p. 430.

<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche, F. (1954/1982). *Twilight of Idols*. In W. Kaufmann (Trans.), *The Portable Nietzsche* (pp. 463-564), p. 529.

<sup>28</sup> Gillespie, M. A., Dr. (1987). Heidegger's Nietzsche. *Political Theory*, 15(3), (pp. 424-435).

<sup>29</sup> Heidegger, M. (1961/1991). *Nietzsche* (First HarperCollins Paperback ed.), Vol. I, p. 75.

<sup>30</sup> Heidegger, M. (1961/1991). *Nietzsche* (First HarperCollins Paperback ed.), Vol. I, p. 73.

Concerning authenticity itself, together with the extension of *BT* in Heidegger's *Nietzsche*, "authenticity" cannot be found explicitly in Volume I: "The Will to Power as Art" (as might be suggested in its title), but is found in Volume II: "The Eternal Recurrence of the Same."<sup>31</sup> Dr. Ferrell Krell notes that the authenticity from *BT* is in Heidegger's reworking of Nietzsche's "Eternal Recurrence".<sup>32</sup> Heidegger explains that if one were to live over and over, an infinite amount of times within the same life, this still affirms life as finite and the decisive actions within this affirmative life would be authentic—"The self, authenticity, is not the 'ego'; it is that Dasein in which the relation of I to Thou [...] is grounded."<sup>33</sup> The "Eternal Recurrence" of living the same life again and again, to be authentic then is to make choices that one would be able to live with for infinity. Balancing between the anterior social influence and the interior all-present being is thus a life pointing toward authenticity. With Dasein's "Being as an issue" and its "potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world", when encountered with a feeling of a meaningless existence, the employment of art can be a counterposition to this, not unlike the balance between authenticity and inauthenticity, and creates its own meaning within itself.

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<sup>31</sup> Heidegger, M. (1961/1991). *Nietzsche* (First HarperCollins Paperback ed.).

<sup>32</sup> Heidegger, M. (1961/1991). *Nietzsche* (First HarperCollins Paperback ed.), Vol. II, p. 24. [Footnote: \* ]

<sup>33</sup> Heidegger, M. (1961/1991). *Nietzsche* (First HarperCollins Paperback ed.), Vol. II, p. 24.

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