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Becoming Other: Heidegger and the trace of a post-metaphysical ethics

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The (im)possibility of a Heideggerian ethics

Heidegger’s relation to the ethical is a difficult and controversial matter. It is known that the philosopher has never dedicated any special work to that topic, and this very absence is many times understood as the symptom of a deep ethical failure at the heart of his ontological thinking. Many critics even suggest that the absence of a systematic concern with ethics might have something to do with his active involvement with National Socialism between 1933 and 1934, when he became Rector of the Freiburg University under Hitler’s leadership. Others argue that Heidegger’s ethical failure is to be blamed on his refusal of the main concepts through which modern philosophy theorized the ethical domain, that is, the grounding of the moral subject in the concept of rational autonomy, redefined in contemporary philosophy in order to incorporate its necessary intersubjective and dialogical character.

Richard Wolin synthesized many of the above mentioned criticisms by affirming that the excessively solipsistic character of the existential analytic developed in Being and Time blocked Heidegger’s path to understand the primarily intersubjective character of everyday human interactions in the common world. From solipsism to blind political decisionism there would be only a short passage, one that Heidegger would have definitely crossed by regarding any moral imperative as the expression of an old-fashioned value philosophy. According to Wolin, the ethical impoverishment of Heidegger’s philosophy is linked with the absence of a serious consideration of the Other, without which reflection on human worldly interrelations falls prey to moral nihilism and political decisionism. It would be thus highlighted the supposedly necessary linkage between the philosophical arguments advanced by Heidegger in Being and Time, of 1927, and the terrible political choices made by the philosopher in 1933 (Wolin 1990, pp. 53, 65, 149-150). Most of Wolin’s criticisms are a more openly aggressive version of those critical arguments previously espoused by Habermas in his Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. In this work, he affirmed that although Heidegger revised his own Husserlian heritage, he was not able to totally disentangle his philosophy from the apories of modern philosophy of subjectivity or of conscience. This problematic entanglement appeared, according to this
argument, in Heidegger’s rigid and insoluble opposition between the solipsistic isolation of the authentic self and the everyday dispersion of the inauthentic self among others. By degrading the intersubjective linguistic structures of the “life-world” (*Lebenswelt*) to the despised realm of everyday inauthenticity, or, in other words, by emphasizing the “character of being mine” (*Jemeinigkeit*) of *Dasein*, against the linguistic structures of the intersubjective life-world, Heidegger deprived himself of the way to think a post-metaphysical ethics (Habermas 1995, p. 149).¹ In spite of Heidegger’s intent to clarify the existential determinations of our “being-with” others in the common world, his observations would still be tainted by Husserlian solipsism and this is why he would never reach the point of fully developing an adequate consideration of intersubjectivity and otherness in socially institutional contexts.

I think that these critical assessments suffer from two interconnected deficiencies: first of all, these interpretations of *Being and Time* can be contested, as I will try to demonstrate. But not only that, it is also problematic to think that since Heidegger did not develop a theory of intersubjectivity as the fundamental ground for a thematically developed ethical treatise, he could not contribute to radically rethinking the ethical in a post-metaphysical key, or, even worse, that his own thinking is inherently un-ethical. The present article intends to build a case for a non-solipsistic interpretation of the existential analytic, one that stresses Heidegger’s concern with the other and with question of otherness as such. I will argue that *Dasein*’s resolute “being-toward-death” (*Sein zum Tode*) does not imply irresponsibility toward others in the common world, but has as its positive consequence the liberation of authentic friendship, understood as the proper mode of *Dasein*’s ethical relation to the other ‘as’ other.

Heidegger’s post-metaphysical ethics is to be understood as the trace of an ethics without grounds or any other metaphysical or transcendental criteria aiming at securing the ethical character of one’s actions in the world, be they monological or dialogical. If *Dasein*’s existence can be described as ethical, this *possibility* depends on properly acknowledging and assuming one’s own constitutive finitude, its lack of grounding. The assumption that *Dasein*’s existence lacks any ultimate moral or rational ground or

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¹ I follow the suggestion of Robinson and Macquarrie in their translation of *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*, New York, Harper and Row, 1962) and leave untranslated Heidegger’s existential denomination of the human being, which literally means “being-there”, and is exclusively used to refer to the being that we ourselves are. The existential determination of *Dasein* does not include any mention to sexual or gender differentiation, a relevant matter much discussed in contemporary phenomenological and feminist investigations, but not addressed in this text. In this text, I will utilize the generic pronoun ‘it’ to refer to *Dasein*, but this should not be mistaken for a reason to objectify the human existence, as will become clear all along the discussion. All translations of *Sein und Zeit* are my own, although I follow some suggestions of the Robinson and Macquarrie translation.
foundation does not imply its un-ethical character, nor does it render impossible or ineffective an ungrounded ethics. Of course, such a post-metaphysical ethics should not be framed as a systematic undertaking. Much to the contrary, it should remain non-objectified, that is, as nothing more than the trace of its own possibility. Once we refrain from thinking that the absence of an explicit thematization and grounding of the ethical in *Being and Time* implies the ethical indifference of Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology, there appears the opportunity to discover not only the important ethical implications of that particular work, but of Heidegger’s thinking as such.

**Heidegger and the relation between ethics and ontology**

*a) why Heidegger did not write an ethical treatise?*

Before closely analyzing the ethical dimension of *Being and Time*, it is necessary to understand Heidegger’s explicit refusal to conceive his existential analytic, as well as his whole ontological undertaking, as an ethics. In *Being and Time*, after arguing that the work deals with the elucidation of the Seinsfrage, the question of being, Heidegger limits himself to affirming that the analytic of Dasein is to be distinguished from the type of knowledge found in sciences such as psychology, anthropology, biology or ethics. The argument is not that those disciplines are unscientific or unfruitful, but that they exclusively aim at discussing ontic characters, leaving aside the ontological questioning of Dasein’s being. Almost twenty years later, in the *Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger would consider again the relation between ethics and ontology, now urged by the question that Jean Beaufret posed to him, regarding “the relation of ontology with a possible ethics”. This very question reminded Heidegger of another one an old friend had posed to him right after the publication of *Being and Time*: “‘when are you going to write an ethics?’”(Heidegger 1998, p. 268). In the *Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger argues that more important than the distinction and the relation between ethics and ontology is to revive the originary thought of being, practiced by early Greek thinkers much before the Platonic Academy transformed it into philosophy, with its different disciplines such as logic, ethics, etc. The arguments have changed, especially because the analytic of Dasein has now given space to pondering the thought of being in its destinal or epochal truth. However, there

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2 I agree with Dastur’s affirmation that “the philosopher also should be capable of remaining silent on the subject of ethics, for such a silence is perhaps exactly what makes possible an opening to a practical ethics”. See Dastur, 2002, p. 96. [Think about the political implications of this!]
remains the same refusal to construe his philosophical undertaking as an ethical one, under
the recurring argument that reconsidering the question of being is the main task of
philosophy. Should this ontological task be understood in terms of the refusal of the ethical
as such? For many critics the answer would be yes, but I think that the right answer is no.

To start addressing the matter, Heidegger’s refusal to write an ethics has to do with
his critical questioning of the growing anxiety for it in our present. He understood it as a
symptom of the disorientation that overrules the technological world, in which we feel lost
unless we have amassed well planned rules of conduct to follow. In the technological
world, says Heidegger, “technological human beings, delivered over to mass society, can
attain reliable constancy only by gathering and ordering all their plans and activities in a
way that corresponds to technology” (Heidegger 1998, p. 268). In other words, we do not
know anymore how to act and evaluate our actions in the absence of well-defined legal,
technical and moral codes. Even worse, we do not realize that most of our worse
contemporary political tragedies have come out directly from our blindly obeying the
established rules of the technological world. According to the sociological investigations of
Z. Bauman, horrifying events such as the Holocaust are not the result of the dissipation of
order and the failure of the civilization process, they are not the consequence of irrational
and barbaric acts and forces, but can only happen as the result of coordinated actions
committed by very normal and highly professional human beings, able to impeccably and
meticulously execute orders and commands regardless of any moral consideration. Briefly,
they are the results of a rationally and bureaucratically conducted plan of action (Bauman
1997, p. 197 ff.). Hannah Arendt also discovered something quite similar when she
reported the Eichmann trial and forged the controversial notion of the “banality of evil”,
that is, of evil committed out of blindly obeying to the established rules, without
considering the moral and political consequences of that very behavior (Arendt 1965). Or,
to put it in Heideggerian terms, mass extermination under totalitarian regimes could not be
achieved in the absence of a technological understanding of being, in which all beings
become “reserve-fund” (Bestell) at the disposal of whatsoever technological demands, be
them humanitarian or fully destructive. According to that line of reasoning, Heidegger’s
refusal to conceive a metaphysical ethical treatise was the condition to rethink the ethical
beyond our traditional expectancy for grounding foundations, first principles and moral
imperatives, not to mention any prescriptive code of behavior: “more essential than
instituting rules is that human beings find the way to their abode in the truth of being”
b) the Levinasian objection: ethics as first philosophy against Heidegger’s ontological violence

There is yet a second and more important criticism, the one concerning Heidegger’s refusal to conceive ethics as “first philosophy”, as proposed by Levinas. I would like to consider the Levinasian argument a bit more closely, since it will enable us to overcome what seems to be the ethical indifference of Heidegger’s ontological thinking. Surely, it is plainly undeniable that Levinas’ concern with ethics is far more extended than Heidegger’s, and I do not intend to confront or compare both thinkers at length on that basis. The only purpose of briefly expounding some of Levinas’ ethical ideas is to pave the way for demonstrating that, in spite of his critical stances against Heidegger, an ethical interpretation of Heidegger’s ontological questioning is possible.

Of course, Levinas does not understand ethics in a traditional way. He does not want to propose an ethics, but only to analyze the meaning of the ethical and, thus, he has no interest in returning to a pre-Heideggerian philosophy. According to him, in order to fully think the ethical one should live outside the atmosphere of Heidegger’s philosophy, since it still remained captive to the ontological imperialism that impregnates the tradition of Western philosophy. Heidegger’s thinking still shares the metaphysical violence that subordinates the ethical relation with the other to the ontological primacy of an “understanding of being”. For him, the core of the matter is that any act of understanding being simultaneously aims at dominating it, undermining its particularity by projecting it onto a shared horizon of already established meanings. To understand the other is, thus, to hermeneutically project him/her against the familiar background of the already known, that is, against a common horizon of being, in which the other has always already been interpreted as such and such. This hermeneutical model culminates in the vain temptation of homicide, in which I intent to fully dominate and subjugate the other, which, however, always escapes me in its death.

In opposition to this hermeneutical model that violates otherness by projecting it to the realm of the already signified and understood, Levinas affirms that the other is already accessible to me as pure and naked “face” (visage) that signifies by itself, without reference to a commonly shared web of meanings. In Levinas’ ethical thinking, the face is not the object of any theoretical perception, it is not exposed to inspection or description, briefly, it is not a part of the human body with such and such particular characteristics, but
constitutes the pure incarnation of otherness, which demands respect and poses the interdict of killing: “the face is that which we cannot kill, or at least, that whose meaning consists in saying: ‘Thou shall not kill’” (Levinas 1982, p. 91). In the ethical relation the other is not firstly interpreted and conceptually understood, and only then addressed, since the other does not affect me as a concept, but as face, as a being that signifies and matters to me as such. The other is encountered as face that obliges me to serve, and my invocation or discourse is a response to its standing right in front of me. The face orders and demands unconditional respect, this is its meaning. Thus, to meet the other as pure face is to positively assume absolute and unconditional responsibility for him/her, without adducing any particular reason for so doing, as it happens when my action is a reaction to my interpretation of the other as interesting, beautiful, unattractive, dangerous, suspect, with blue eyes, etc. According to Levinas, it is not from a neutral Being in general that I encounter the other, since the face always escapes and exceeds any understanding that refers it to a common history, to a social milieu or common habits. To summarize in his own words: “the face is signification, and signification without context. I want to say that the other, in the righteousness of his face, is not a personage in a context. Ordinarily one is a ‘personage’: one is a professor at Sorbonne, vice-president of the State-Council, the son of someone, everything that is in the passport, the way one dresses and presents himself. And all signification, in the usual meaning of the term, is relative to a context: the meaning of anything consists in its relation to another thing. Here, much to the contrary, the face is meaning in itself. You are you. In this sense, one can say that the face is not ‘seen’. It is what cannot become a content that thinking would embrace (Levinas 1982, pp. 90-91).

The main aspect for our discussion is that, for Levinas, the ethical relation with the other does not fall prey to the primacy of ontology, it is not dominated by interpretation and conceptual representation, but happens in an invocation of the other in which there is no transcendence to Being. According to Levinas’ criticisms, Heidegger’s analytic of existence would be incapable of adequately theorizing the ethical encounter of the other, whose face would have been definitively covered up with the ontological veil of the theoretical understanding of being. The presupposition of these criticisms is that Heidegger’s conception of the understanding of being is identical with the way the tradition of Western philosophy conceived of ontology, knowledge and representation. According to Levinas’ mature interpretation of Heidegger, to understand a particular being is already to go beyond the particular, since to understand means to relate to the particular through knowledge, which is always knowledge of the universal. Although I do not intent
to extensively address Levinas’ criticisms against Heidegger, it is necessary to question the pertinence of some of them, in order to prepare the way for an ethical understanding of *Being and Time*.

In fact, for Heidegger, our constitutive understanding of being always implies a circular movement between the particular being understood, and the hermeneutical broad context of signification in which the particular is understood as such and such. In other words, the hermeneutical character of understanding, be it practical or theoretical, determines the impossibility of understanding being by departing from a ground zero in which there would be no previously understood meanings. However, what I would like to show in this paper is that the hermeneutical circle does not deprive *Dasein* from the possibility of understanding itself as other, nor does it block the possibility of understanding the other *Dasein qua* other, that is, without subsuming it to the familiar horizon of the already known and dominated. In order to demonstrate this double existential possibility, it will be essential not to conceive Heidegger’s thesis concerning *Dasein*’s constitutive understanding of being in terms of a theoretical attitude. It is decisive to discard the idea that he envisaged the encounter of the other under the model of knowledge and conceptual representation, whose consequence, as posited by Levinas, would be the dismiss of otherness, inasmuch as the other would be referred to a universal and neuter concept of Being, a thesis which is also plainly arguable.

Although, for Heidegger, “being” (*Sein*) is always the being of a whatsoever “being” (*Seiende*), that does not mean he conceives of being (*Sein*) as the “seigneur de l’étant”, according to the happy expression of Derrida, since being is nothing outside beings and cannot “precede” any particular being, be it in “time or in dignity”. As rightly stressed by Derrida, “being is not a principle, it is not a first entity, it is not an arche that would permit Levinas to slip under its name the face of a faceless tyrant” (Derrida 1967, p. 200). Accordingly, it is not at all correct to affirm a supposedly Heideggerian theoretical subordination of the other under a universal and neutral concept of being, or to accuse him of subordinating ethics to ontology, understood in terms of a theoretical understanding of being. There is no reason to think that to understand another *Dasein* is to submit him or her to a being that would exist outside that particular being and menace it as a “foreign potency, as an impersonal, hostile or neuter element”, as stated by Derrida (Derrida 1967, 200).

Therefore, the absence of any primacy of the ethical in relation to the ontological in Heidegger’s thinking does not mean that he had conceived ontology as first philosophy,
i.e., as hierarchically precedent to ethics, which would then be merely derivative; rather, he criticizes this very metaphysical subordination. Heidegger does not think ontology as first philosophy, as the determination of the true and first metaphysical being, and therefore his questioning of being is strange to the metaphysical distinction between ethics and ontology, as he stated in *Letter on Humanism*: “the thinking that inquires into the truth of being and so defines the human being’s essential abode from being and toward being is neither ethics nor ontology. Thus, the question about the relation of each to the other no longer has any basis in this sphere.” (Heidegger 1998, p. 271). However, once one rejects thinking ontology and ethics as different and hierarchically related philosophical disciplines, with their already established terminology, there appears the opportunity to understand the post-metaphysical equivalence between them, without the exigency of any grounding relation between them. This is why, again in the *Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger affirmed that the project of the fundamental ontology of *Being and Time*, thought of in terms of a first intent to think “the truth of being as the primordial element of the human being, as one who exists, is in itself an originary ethics” (*ursprüngliche Ethik*) (Heidegger 1998, p. 271). If one cannot find in the existential analytic any ethical doctrine, any explicit ethical message, any ethical grounding, that does not imply the impossibility of acknowledging the trace of a post-metaphysical and ungrounded ethics in the very core of *Being and Time*, as I shall now proceed to explain. As Derrida clearly put it, “Not only the thought of being is not an ethical violence, it seems not possible to open up any ethics – in the sense of Levinas – without it” (Derrida 1967, p. 202).

*The encounter of the other in the common everyday world*

a) *Deconstructing the epistemological subject and the other as its double*

In *Being and Time*, the deconstruction of modern philosophical dilemmas concerning the acknowledgment of the other as other, as well as the problems concerning the definition of the essence of the self, are advanced in § 25 to 27. The theme of § 25 is the rejection of the traditional understanding of the self in terms of a substantial ego that would remain identical and unchanging in time, as the hidden timeless support (*hipokeimenon, subjectum*) of different mental attitudes throughout the human life. To understand the self in terms of a substance is to attribute to it the ontological status of “presence-at-hand” or “subsistence” (*Vorhandenheit*), thus misunderstanding its basic relation with temporality and with being as such. Heidegger claims that this is a totally
inadequate way to define human existence, even when one theoretically rejects “the substance of the soul or the thing character of conscience or the objectivity of the person” (Heidegger 1986, 114). The fundamental philosophical question is not anymore ‘what’ one is, but ‘who’ one is, and the answer to this question cannot anymore be the self as a timeless thing self-enclosed in itself. In short, the self is not anymore thought in terms of a thing subsisting in the world, always already there. In order to start the deconstruction of the substantive understanding of subjectivity, Heidegger advances some very provocative and unusual interrogations: “what if who I am in everydayness is not always and exactly I myself?” Or: “what if the constitutive character of being mine of my own Dasein was a reason for me not to be myself firstly and foremost?” And finally: what if, sometimes, the self could be shown to be “its own contrary”? In other words: what if the “loss of the self” (Selbstverlorenheit) was a possible mode of my own being? (Heidegger 1986, pp. 116-117).

To escape the risks of the ontological reification of the self, Heidegger introduced his concept of Existenz, existence, which no longer designates the essentia of my being, but constituted only the “formal indication” that, while I am, I will always be concerned with my own being and with being as such. To put it differently, the being that ‘I’ am always has the “character of being mine” (Jemeinigkeit): it is my being, and not any neutral being to which I could be indifferent. But ‘to be’ my own being does not necessarily mean that I will always exist in the mode of properly being my own self, since I may be like everyone else. By rejecting the substantial character of the self Heidegger was able to think the self existentially, as constantly related to itself in its two fundamental possibilities of being, those of being and of not being its own self, designated as the possibilities of “authenticity” (Eigentlichkeit) and “inauthenticity” (Uneigentlichkeit). Existence does not comports any given subsistent attribute or “property” (Eigenschaft), but ‘is’ the mode of being of Dasein. Existence, as Heidegger conceived it, does not designate the quid content of a definite being, but defines the mode of being of that particular being which has the possibilities of both being or not being its own self. In other words, while being, Dasein always has the possibilities of both “gaining” or “loosing” itself, of both “escaping” or “conquering” itself, of both “forgetting” or “appropriating” its own self, as posited in § 9. Authenticity and inauthenticity, “self-constancy” (Selbst-Ständigkeit) and “self-inconstancy” (Unselbständigkeit), the two axes of Heidegger’s analysis of existence, are

3 Although following again the Robinson and Macquarrie translation, I would like to emphasize that authenticity and inauthenticity have no moral connotations nor are mere characteristics or qualitative properties of a subsistent being. They refer only to what is most proper (eigen) to one’s own self, as well as to those modes of being in which there is no difference between me and all others with whom I share the world of common affairs.
not moral categories nor an anthropological description of human conduct, but ontological
determinations of human existence. As accurately observed by Jean Greish, to consider the
existential possibility that Dasein may not authentically be itself in everydayness does not
mean to negate its own ipseity, since it is not the same to ‘be’ in the mode of being of
inauthenticity, and to be in the mode of being of pure subsistence (Greish 1994, p. 158). By
distinguishing between Existenz and Vorhandenheit, Heidegger was also able to detect the
“abyss” that separates the “selfishness” (Selbigkeit) of the authentically existent Dasein
from the “identity” (Identität) of the ego that remains the same throughout the multiplicity
of mental acts (Heidegger 1986, p. 130). Or, to quote from the observation marks that
Heidegger added to his own exemplar of Being and Time, the matter consists in
distinguishing “genuine ipseity” (echte Selbheit) from the “indigent egoity” (elende
Ichlichkeit) of something that escapes time in its own constancy.

The next step in the deconstruction of the metaphysical certainties of modern
philosophy is advanced in the discussion of the existential determination of the “co-
existence” (Mitdasein) of others and everyday “being-with” (Mitsein). Heidegger argues
that the encounter of the other has to be considered in the ambit of the analysis of “being-
in-the-world” and its everyday affairs. Being-with is not a matter of adding others to
myself; it is not something to be achieved by juxtaposing one to another, in the same way
that being-in-the-world does not mean that something merely subsistent is inserted into a
given subsistent content. Existence is synonymous to being-in-the-world with others, it is a
particular mode of being not shared by those beings that merely are inside the world, but
do not exist, since they are not open to being. The others are not something added to a
given isolated subject-thing by means of its representations, nor are all those like me –
alter ego –, but from which I find myself isolated. Therefore, being alone does not
contradict being-with, but is possible only on the basis of that existential determination:
only a being that is co-being may find itself momentarily deprived of others. Being-in-the-
world means to co-exist with others, with whom one shares a “common world” (Mitwelt)
whose originary totality of meaningful nexus of references (Verweisungszusammenhang)
are always already opened and thus understood by all. The encounter of the other as
another Dasein has always already happened through a common “familiarity with the
world” (Weltvertrautheit), which is constitutive of the understanding of being of being-in-
the-world. This is the existential condition that allows the being that exists to become
“occupied” (Besorgen) with subsistent beings, and to become “solicitous” (Fürsorge) with
other Dasein. More precisely, the encounter of the other has to be thematized in the context
of the analysis of *Dasein’s* everyday occupations in the world, and not as a matter of an epistemological or theoretical investigation. It is not a question of reversing the traditional hierarchy between the active and the contemplative, the practical and the theoretical, but a strategic move in order to highlight the grounded character of any act of theoretical knowledge, as well as of all practical dealing with other beings, in the basic existential determination of the understanding of being of being-in-the-world. The core of the argument is that before I could represent the other as if it was a thing of perception, and, in fact, as a condition to that kind of theoretical representation, I have already understood that being as being another *Dasein* who shares the understanding of being with me. As argued by Frederic Olafson, when we intend to interrogate if there are other minds beyond our own, we are in fact trying to put in question that very condition that allowed us to start positing the interrogation (Olafson 1999, p. 25). Thus, Heidegger affirms that even when we see another *Dasein* around us, it is never merely “apprehended as a subsistent thing-man”, but always as another *Dasein* who shares the world with me by means of a common language, and even pre-linguistically (Heidegger 1986, p. 120).

*b) who am I and who is the other?*

The others are not even those ones from which I distinguish myself: much to the contrary, Heidegger argues that in the everyday life of common affairs no one is distinguished from any other. In § 27, Heidegger mentions many times the other under quotation marks, since he wants to emphasize that these are others which could be easily replaced by any other ones, since all are the same. In the everyday co-existence, says Heidegger, “*Dasein* is entirely dissolved into the mode of being of ‘others’, in such a way that the others in their difference and expressiveness disappear even more” (Heidegger 1986, p. 126). He goes on up to affirming that “the ‘others’ are thus designated in order to cover up that each one essentially belongs to them, that they are all those who in everyday co-existence ‘are there’ first and foremost” (Heidegger 1986, p. 126). Heidegger defines everyday solicitude with others in terms of “deficiency” and “indifference”, since in this mode of being with one another no one fully acknowledges the other as other, that is, as naked and singular face. To put it differently, in our everyday relations with others, we are generically “for the other, against the other, without the others, side by side with the other, not touched by the other” (Heidegger 1986, 121). Michel Haar is right when he says that, since everydayness is grounded in the deficient modes of co-existing, in the everyday
encounter of the other its otherness is always already implicated, invoked, utilized and, at the same time, neglected, repressed and finally negated (Haar 1994, p. 67). Firstly and most of the time, I do not encounter others in their irreducible otherness, since they have already been understood and acknowledged as those to whom I am indifferent, hostile, flattering, friendly, menacing etc.

Amidst the generic and neutral modes of everyday co-existing, in which the other and I become indistinct – is it not symptomatic that we all try to interpose small differences and distances between us? – there emerges the Heideggerian answer to the question of the ‘who’ of everyday Dasein. In “everydayness” (Alltäglichkeit), says Heidegger, “each one is the other and no one is himself” (Heidegger 1986, p.128). Note that everydayness is not a circumstantial condition of Dasein, but is considered by Heidegger as an existential determination of each Dasein. Against the distinction proposed by Haar, according to which private and familiar relationships would not be reached by the uniformizing forces of the everyday public inauthenticity (Haar 1994, p. 68), it is important to stress that everydayness and “public interpretation” (Öffentliche Auslegung) of being penetrate all domains of human co-existence. Public interpretation or “publicity” (Öffentlichkeit) is what constitutes the homogenization of our common historical interpretation of being, without which there would be no direct communication and understanding among human beings.

This is why in everydayness Dasein is first and foremost not its own self, but exists as everyone else does, in the neutral mode of being that Heidegger aptly defines as the anonymous and impersonal “they-self” (Selbst-man).

Deeply absorbed in its everyday worldly affairs with others, amidst the predominant “public interpretation” of everything that is, the they-self silently steals Dasein’s own proper or authentic self by facilitating and lightening up the “weight” of the responsibility to be. Everydayness hides from us that we are not masters of our past and future, keeping us well entangled and absorbed in the present. It is not that Heidegger considers everydayness and its forms of co-existence as ontologically degraded than the supposedly more real mode of being of authenticity. Much to the contrary, the problem with everydayness and its forms of occupied and solicitous co-existence is that it overshadows the possibility of being one’s own authentic or proper self,

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4 The translation by Robinson and Macquarrie is not adequate, since it may lead us to think that there would be an opposition between ‘they’ and ‘me’. Much to the contrary, what Heidegger has in mind is the neutralization of any distinction between all existents, since in everyday existence everybody is like everyone else. Perhaps, the Heideggerian Selbst-man could be understood in terms of a one-self, in allusion to phrases in which the subject remains indeterminate. Bearing in mind this objection, I will follow their translation suggestion since it has already been well fixed in English.
as well as the possibility of authentically being-with others, by imposing to everyday Dasein its already known forms of co-existing with others as the only reality. This is why Heidegger defines the everyday Dasein as an “ens realissimum”, as the “most real subject”, full of the sense of reality and thus oblivious to the fact that to be a human being is to be open its own possibilities of being. In § 38 he will suggestively say that “the supposition of the they (Man) that one is leading and sustaining a full and genuine ‘life’, brings Dasein a tranquillity, for which everything is ‘in the best of order’ and all doors are open” (Heidegger 1986, p. 177). Heidegger is also not merely affirming that everyday Dasein voluntarily concedes to others its own power to decide and choose whatever it happens to want – obviously, this is also an everyday possibility of each Dasein. What is really important is that my own everyday decisions are already pre-determined by the impersonal they-self that I am in everydayness. In other words, in a choice made by the inauthentic Dasein, “it remains indeterminate who ‘authentically’ chooses” (Heidegger 1986, p. 268).

Without realizing it, each Dasein fully absorbed in its everyday solicitous occupations is always already under the “tutelage”, “dominion”, “power” and the “dictatorship” of others, according to the well known terminology of §27. It is interesting to think that this terminology, whose political and social overtones are obvious, might give us the opportunity to think that, at least to a certain point, it would be possible to modify that determination of our co-existing. If that is true, then it would be possible to conceive the possibility of being with others without necessarily or absolutely submitting myself to the imperious dominance of the anonymous others, a possibility that is decisive for considering the ethical relation. Of course, it would be wrong to mistake the possible modification of the inauthentic mode of co-existing with others for the idea of an absolute suspension of the human submission to socially shared meanings and imposed rules of conduct. To imagine a form of co-existence not previously ruled by shared meanings would be as absurd as to abolish all forms of structured language and still desire to communicate with others. Leaving temporarily aside the decisive discussion regarding the possibility of modifying everyday co-existence, to which I shall return, the central theme of § 27 is that co-existence is always already delivered to the anonymous power of “public interpretation” of being, which pre-determines and constitutes the historic openness to being that we are. In other words, as stated already in §5, Dasein has the constitutive “tendency” to interpret itself from the “world” in which it exists with others, so that its being-in-the-world is always already pre-determined by social standards and historical
prejudices which prefigure, regulate and pre-determine its own self-interpretations about everything else (Heidegger 1986, p. 43; see also Heidegger 1988, p. 342). Dasein is thus enclosed in a pre-shaded historical identity that filters and controls in advance whatever is destined to be understood as possible, feasible, repulsive, inglorious and so forth. In short, what Heidegger defines as “publicity” is an anonymous historical discursive force that renders uniformed and homogenized all Dasein’s “median” (durschnittlich) and everyday interpretations of being, from which each Dasein understands its own possibilities of being, thus becoming tied down to the inauthenticity of the they-self. According to Taylor Carman, everyday public interpretation of being establishes a bridge between anonymous social norms of the they-self and concrete interpretative practices of individual agents. (Carman 2000, p. 20).

The phenomenological description of Dasein’s inauthentic possibility of being-in-the-world amidst the public interpretation of being is finally concluded in §38, in which Heidegger advances the existentially positive determination of the fall or “decadency” (Verfallen). This paragraph demands an accurate analysis, since it is frequently misunderstood by critics as displaying the signals of Heidegger’s supposedly religious and moralizing rejection of modernity. More importantly, it requires special attention since it contains many subtle tramps that might make it impossible to recognize the ethical trace of the existential analytic. For Heidegger, decadency is not a transient quality that describes a determinate group of human beings, but the existential condition of being-in-the-world. More precisely, decadence or fall is the existential determination of everyday Dasein when “fully absorbed” (völlig benomen) in the common world of shared occupation and solicitude, “inasmuch” (sofern) as it is pervaded by the public interpretation of being in its everyday leveling down determinations, designated by Heidegger as “idle talk” (Gerede), “curiosity” and “ambiguity”. Decadence is thus not a moral or theological characterization of the human being, but the positive existential description of Dasein’s inauthenticity, or, of its condition of “being lost” (Verlorensein) as regards its own proper or authentic self. First and foremost, since Dasein has the tendency to interpret itself from the world, it has always already decayed from its own self into the shared world of daily affairs, dominated

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5 Note that “idle talk” cannot be understood as designating exclusively what could be termed as everyday media gossiping. Much beyond that, Heidegger’s Gerede designates any form of discursive communication that does not fully and rigorously grasp the ontological referent content of its own discourse: in this broad sense, even scientific and academic discourses could be thus defined as “idle talk”. The German passage at pages 175-176 reads as follows: “Die Verfallenheit an die ‘Welt’ meint das Aufgehen im Miteinandersein, sofern dieses durch Gerede, Neugier und Zweideutlichkeit geführt wird. (...) Uneigentlichkeit meint so wenig dergleichen wie Nicht-mehr-in-der-Welt-sein, als sie gerade ein ausgezeichnetes In-der-Welt-sein ausmacht, das von der ‘Welt’ und dem Mitdasein Anderer im Man völlig benomen ist.”
by idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity. This means the conversion of Dasein’s rich and genuine openness to being into an impoverished one, which Heidegger designates as openness in the privative mode of “enclosure” (Verschlossenheit). Decadent Dasein, fully absorbed in its shared daily affairs, easily surrenders to a shallow understanding of itself and of everything else under a rigid conception of reality, thus becoming oblivious to the fact that Dasein ‘is’ nothing more than its own possibilities to be. Everyday decadent Dasein becomes accommodated with traditional answers to decisive questions such as those concerning from where does it come to the world and whereto will it go after its death. This implies that everyday decadency covers up the ontological precariousness or finitude of a being whose adequate existential description is defined by Heidegger as “being thrown” (Geworfenheit) and “being towards death” (Sein zum Tode). This is why he affirms that everyday decadent Dasein prepares to itself the surrendering to a “tempting tranquillity” whose effect is to “aggravate” (steigert) decadency up to the point in which Dasein fully submerges under the “alienation” (Entfremdung) of its own existential character of being.  

What Heidegger defines as the “whirl” (Wirbel) of everydayness is nothing more than the frenetic agitation of Dasein while imprisoned in the cage of mundane identity and leveled down public interpretations of being.

Once one arrives at this characterization of decadency, there appear some decisive questions concerning the coherence of the existential analytic and, of course, its ethical dimension. As regards the coherence in the development of the analytic, one could ask: if decadency is not an ontic circumstance that could be easily eradicated, but a positive and thus unsurpassable existential determination of Dasein’s inauthenticity, how could it be possible for it to appropriate its own authentic self? Concerning the ethical trace of that work, one could also interrogate: how could Dasein establish an ethical relation to the other, acknowledging him/her as face or irreducible otherness, if it has always already decayed into the inauthenticity of everydayness and its leveled down public interpretation of being, in which the other has always already been interpreted as such and such? In other words, there could be no ethical encounter of the other, once Heidegger has explicitly affirmed that “foremost the other is ‘there’ out of what one (man) has heard about him, out of what one knows and talks about him. Amidst originary being-with-others (ursprüngliche Miteinandersein), idle talk soon imposes itself. Everyone first and foremost pays attention to the other, to how does the other behave, to what does the other say. Inauthentic being

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6 The German text, at page 178, reads as follows: “Die versucherische Beruhigung steigert das Verfallen. (...) In diesem beruhigten, alles ‘verstehenden’ Sich-vergleichen mit allem treibt das Dasein einer Entfremdung zu, in der sich ihm das eigenste Seinkönnen verbirgt. Das verfallende In-der-Welt-sein ist als versuchend-beruhigendes zugleich entfremdend”.
with others is not in any way a finished and indifferent juxtaposition, but rather a tense and ambiguous paying attention to the other, a secret hearing one another. Under the mask of for-one-another, an against-one-another is in play” (Heidegger 1986, pp. 174-175). At this crucial point, Habermas’ and Levinas’ criticisms assume their full relevance. Remember that, according to Habermas’ interpretation of the existential analytic, being-with could only be possible under the “dictatorship of others”, while the fundamental possibility of becoming one’s own authentic self should require a Kierkegaardian existence, “radically isolated” in the face of death and nihilistically affirmed in the recognition of its own impotence and finitude (Habermas 1989, p. 150). In a different, although similar interpretation, Levinas argued that, for Heidegger, “the fundamental relation of being is not the relation with the other, but with death, in which all that is non-authentic in the relation with the other becomes evident, since one only dies alone” (Levinas 1982, p. 59).

**Becoming other: the possibility of the ethical encounter of otherness and genuine friendship**

*a) Solipsist anguish of the authentic self against the decayed inauthentic co-existence?*

However difficult and complicated those questions and objections might be, it should be noted that, until now, Heidegger has only described the existential possibility of inauthentically being oneself with others. Briefly, this is the possibility that **Dasein** may enclose its own self in the strict limits of what is already publicly interpreted, established and accepted as the common and unsurpassable horizon of all present occupation and solicitude in the world. Up until now, the Levinasian objection would be plainly correct and Heidegger would be incapable of conceiving the ethical encounter of the other in its own otherness, since in everydayness the other is always already encountered under the spell of the public interpretation of being. In fact, in everyday decadent being-with others in the world of shared affairs, the ‘face’ of the other almost never appears to me, since it has been codified by social, historical and cultural patterns. However, I would like to insist that, so far, this is only half of the existential analytic. What Heidegger has mentioned as **Dasein**’s “primary and genuinely originary being relations to the world, co-existence and to being-in as such” (Heidegger 1986, p. 170) still remains open. In order to respond to the above mentioned questions, I would like to propose three interrelated arguments. First, that
the existential determination of decadency is not contradictory to the possibility of Dasein’s “existenziell modification” (existenzielle Modifikation) that discloses the possibility of authentically being one’s own self. Second, that authentically resolute Dasein does not cut off its worldly relations with others, since there is a fundamental difference between a “singularized” (Vereinzelt) and a solipsistic self, isolated from others. Third, that resolute Dasein opens up the possibility of being the “conscience of others”, thus insuring the possibility of an ethical encounter of itself and of the other in a particular mode of being-with that I shall call authentic or genuine friendship.

In the first place, it should be noted that Heidegger suggests that decadency, although unsurpassable, can be modulated, that it can be modified and attenuated, since, as it was seen, it comports the possibility of being “aggravated” up to the point in which Dasein finds itself “fully absorbed” by being-with others, “inasmuch” as it is pervaded by the everyday public leveling down interpretation of being. I would like to emphasize Heidegger’s terms völlig benomen (fully absorbed), sofern (inasmuch) and steigert (агgravate), since they are decisive to my argument, by suggesting what could be modified in Dasein’s everyday co-existing with others, without requiring the abolition of the existential determination of decadency. If that is so, then the existenziell modification operated by Dasein’s resoluteness should render possible to “jump”, as Taylor Carman suggested, from inauthenticity to authenticity, thus modifying or attenuating decadency, while never fully overcoming it (Carman 2000, p. 25). In other words, the possibilities of appropriating one’s own authentic self, and of ethically being with others, have to be granted without the requirement that Dasein should step aside from the common worldly horizon of shared meanings by becoming a solus ipse. In fact, Heidegger affirms in the very §38 that “authentic existence does not floats above decadent everydayness, but, existentially understood, is only a modified apprehension of it” (Heidegger 1986, p. 179). If inauthenticity is the mode of being in which Dasein first and foremost finds itself, that does not imply that this possibility should constitute its more original and proper mode of being. In the same sense, if publicity and idle talk act by leveling down all Dasein’s authentic possibilities of being, that should not imply the impossibility of authentically appropriating discourse, which Heidegger understands as Dasein’s capacity to genuinely express itself in both speaking and silencing, in both talking and hearing. Thus, the existenziell modification of the existential condition in which Dasein finds itself lost to its own authentic self has to be conceived as the modification of its everyday “flight” (Flucht)
from its ownmost possibility of being, a phenomenon that is firstly elucidated by Heidegger’s phenomenological analysis of the fundamental mood of “anguish” (Angst).

As it is known, Heidegger distinguishes the “attunement” (Befindlichkeit) of “fear” (Furcht), which frequently engenders Dasein’s escape or running away from the being considered as dangerous, from the attunement of “anguish”, which has no ontic reference in the world from which Dasein could escape. Therefore, there is a fundamental difference between the escape or runaway motivated by fear of a determinate worldly being, and the phenomenon alluded to above of everyday “flight,” which, not having been caused by any dangerous and definite worldly being, has to be interpreted in terms of a flight in the face of itself. But why should Dasein flee when confronted with itself? What is the threat that should provoke such a deviation from itself? How does one know that there is such an everyday flight from oneself? And whereto does Dasein flee from itself? These questions are answered in §40, where Heidegger famously argues that anguish, since it cannot be explained as being caused by any worldly being that might effectively frighten Dasein, has to be thought of as anguish in the face of Dasein’s unexplainable “facticity” (Faktizität). That with which Dasein is anguished is with being-in-the-world as such, whose origins and destination remain absolutely veiled to it when properly conceived in its ontological determinations. Dasein thus becomes anguished with the subtle manifestation of the void and nothingness of its own existence, which is thrown in the world and delivered to its own death. This is a being fully concerned with its own ontological mystery, which cannot be avoided and much less solved by theological, psychological or scientific discourses regarding it. Such discourses might render right and adequate ontic answers concerning Dasein’s anthropological characteristics, but have nothing to say about its own facticity, about the fact that it ‘is’ and soon will not be anymore.

The attunement of anguish momentarily suspends the totalizing web of shared meanings and meaningful references, and Dasein finds itself in the existential condition of “fundamental helplessness” (Hilflosigkeit), as Heidegger puts it in Prolegomena zur Geschichte der Zeitbegriffes (Heidegger 1988, p. 401). To become anguished is, thus, to become “strange” (unheimlich), to feel not at home in the world, to loose one’s own proper home in the world of everyday affairs, structured upon the web of shared meanings and public interpretation of being: this is what Heidegger defines as Dasein’s “strangeness” (Unheimlichkeit). In anguish, Dasein succumbs to its own strangeness and all “intraworldly” (innerweltlich) beings, along with all others and the whole everyday world of common affairs (occupation and solicitude), become “irrelevant” (nicht ‘relevant’),
assuming the “character of total insignificance” (völliger Unbedeutsamkeit) (Heidegger 1986, p. 186). The totalizing web of shared meanings and meaningful references “sinks down in itself” and, thus, appears to Dasein as being ungrounded by any fundamental criteria. At the same time, the urges of everyday solicitude and occupation reveal itself as a fragile identity barrier that crumbles down. In anguish, the world of common affairs, as well the co-existence of others, “have nothing more to offer. Anguish takes from Dasein the possibility of understanding itself out of the ‘world’ and the public interpretation in decadency” (Heidegger 1986, p. 187).

It is this very momentarily suspension of the public interpretation of oneself and of everything else that opens up the possibility of perturbing the supposedly unshakable theyself, for it is exactly from this other of the everyday public identity that Dasein constantly flees. What anguish thus reveals is the other from which Dasein continuously flees, the strange singularity of being-in-the-world, of being without why. Everyday inauthentic Dasein flees from the other that it already is, thus evading its ownmost possibility of being by fully decaying into the constant agitation of the everyday world of common affairs. Metaphorically speaking, the whirl of everyday existence is like a dog chasing its own tail: it runs towards something it will never catch, or, to resolve the metaphor, it intends to flee from its own self. Anguish is defined by Heidegger as a fundamental attunement since it shows Dasein in its fundamental existential possibilities of being, those of authenticity and inauthenticity, at the same time that it elucidates the grounded and derived character of inauthenticity. Dasein’s familiarity with the common world of daily affairs is, therefore, not the original determination of being-in-the-world, but only an existential consequence that results from Dasein’s flight from its own strangeness, from its own “not-being-at-home” (Nicht-zuhause-sein) in that very world. To become forgetful of one’s own strange possibility of being by decaying in the everyday world of affairs is thus a derived existential possibility, one that covers up the more originary “abyss” (Abgrund) of one’s own otherness, revealed in the “positive existential nothingness of anguish” (Heidegger 1988, p. 402). Anguish is, thus, the fundamental attunement that manifests Dasein’s “freedom” to appropriate its ownmost possibility of being, against the inauthenticity of the they-self it already is. To summarize it in Heidegger’s own words, “anguish withdraws (zurückholt) Dasein from its decadent immersion (Aufgehen) in the ‘world’. Everyday familiarity disrupts itself simultaneously. Dasein is thus singularized (Vereinzelt), but only as being-in-the-world. Being-in comes in the existential ‘mode’ of not-being-at-home. This is the meaning of the discourse on strangeness” (Heidegger 1986, p. 189).
In spite of all this talk about *Dasein’s* anguish, strangeness and singularization in the process of disclosing one’s own authentic self, Heidegger does not establish a fix and stiff opposition between the positive fundamental possibilities of authentically and inauthentically being itself. Much to the contrary, he plainly affirms that “only a thin wall separates the they-self from the strangeness of its own being” (Heidegger 1986, p. 278), so that the modes of everyday shared occupation and solicitude with others cannot be discarded from authentically being oneself. This is why Heidegger only talks about the possibility of an existentiell modification or modulation of inauthenticity, without pretending to abolish everydayness, being-with and the prevailing they-self. This is also why Heidegger insisted that the “existential solipsism” implied in the singularization procured by the attunement of anguish does not give any place to the appearance of a “thing-subject isolated in the inoffensive void of a worldless occurrence”, since *Dasein* is singularized, but only as being-in-the-world with others (Heidegger 1986, p. 188). If it is certain that, for Heidegger, the others are not co-participants in the process of *Dasein’s* singularization, a matter that is subject to much discussion, there is no sense in talking about a Heideggerian refuse of the existentially originary character of *Dasein’s* being as being-with others, nor is it correct to ascribe any form of egotism to Heidegger’s *principium individuationis*. As will be seen in a moment, the possibility of becoming a singularized “individual” (*einzeln*) in the anticipation of death has unavoidable ethical implications, since “death individualizes - but only in such a manner that ... it makes *Dasein*, as being-with, have some understanding of the potentiality-for-being of others (*Seinkönnen der Anderen*)” (Heidegger 1986, p. 264). There is no contradiction between the fundamental possibilities of authenticity and inauthenticity, since they are not exclusively opposed to each other. Rather, Heidegger advocates for the understanding of *Dasein’s* ontological scission, inasmuch as both possibilities pertain to the same being while it exists. And how could it be different, if the “authentic self does not rest upon an exceptional state of the subject separated from the they-self, but is only an existentiell modification of inauthenticity as an essential existential”? (Heidegger 1986, p. 130; see also p. 263). If that would not be so, then Heidegger would have congealed *Dasein’s* fundamental possibilities of being, and his existential analytic would have become tainted either by indifference to otherness, or by a philosophical solipsism absolutely contradictory to the project of a concrete hermeneutic of facticity. Neither ethically indifferent to otherness, nor a saint or a *schöne Seele* isolated from others and concrete historical worldly circumstances, *Dasein’s* openness to being is rich enough to comport both the courage to
look at the abyss of human existence’s finitude, and everyday confidence to keep on living with it. Finally, what has now to be demonstrated is the fully ethical implications of “resoluteness” (Entschlossenheit), conceived as Dasein’s proper answer to the “call of conscience” (Ruf des Gewissens).

b) Resoluteness as the response to the call of otherness

Of course, anguish as the fundamental attunement is not yet sufficient for Dasein to appropriate its own otherness. Anguish, as an attunement, only reveals a possibility that still has to be fully attested and appropriated by Dasein, and this is the theme considered in the phenomenological investigation of the call of conscience. It is in paragraphs 54 to 60 that Heidegger discusses the attestation and assumption of the existentiell modification that modulates the inauthentic they-self, fully decayed in the whirl of everydayness and its public leveled down interpretation of being, into an authentic self capable of facing and assuming its own strange otherness, as well as that of others. In §54, this modification is rendered as the “recuperation of a choice”, that is, as the recuperation of the possibility of choosing out of one’s own authentic self. In spite of all appearances, Heidegger is not proposing a return to traditional theories concerning the voluntary acts of thought or of will of the sovereign subject, nor is he advocating for the renewal of the old theological doctrine of free will of choice among given possibilities. In Being and Time, Heidegger does not offer us any set of definite mundane choices, he only argues that resolute Dasein has recuperated its own possibility of choosing. In fact, it is never a matter of what to choose, but of how to choose. As we shall see in a moment, in his analysis of the call of conscience and Dasein’s resolute answer to it, Heidegger never falls prey to the modern philosophical fiction of sovereign subjectivity and its rationally grounded capacity to choose by calculating the best possible results for itself. In the place of this modern and arrogant figure, there appears a human figure whose ethical quality is its uncompromising humbleness and openness to otherness.

In order to adequately approach Heidegger’s analysis of the call of conscience, I would like to briefly consider a set of questions. If resolute Dasein answers and responds to a call that does not come from others, nor from any other worldly instance; and if, while hearing and responding to that call, Dasein is not conceived as a modern subject endowed with mental faculties, nor as a believer in the face of God’s commandments, then who is the one who calls, how does it call, what does the call say, and how does the resolute
Dasein properly answers to it? Heidegger’s answer is direct and simple: inasmuch as the call of conscience attests and confirms the singularization of Dasein, it thus becomes evident that Dasein itself is both the caller and the one who is called. Heidegger argues that the call of conscience addresses the they-self of decayed everydayness and brings it to its own authentic self by abruptly interrupting its curious and ambiguous listening to idle talk. By interrupting Dasein’s unperceived fascination with idle talk, as well as its full submersion into its everyday solicitous occupations, the call of the conscience inaugurates the possibility of a different kind of hearing, that of silently listening to one’s own self. According to Heidegger, the call of conscience uncompromisingly reaches out to the they-self in its everydayness and renders it fully “insignificant” (Unbedeutsamkeit). By addressing Dasein in its existential possibility of being lost to itself, the call disrupts Dasein’s everyday certainties concerning its own worldly identity and, thus, delivers it to its own strange singularity. In other words, by calling Dasein out of itself and to itself, the call of conscience interrupts the inconspicuous and alienating noise of idle talk, instantly silencing it. Since the call is a call to one’s own otherness, that is, to the other that I already am, in contrast to my public identity, it is understandable that the call should not utter any public messages, being pronounced without the need of any verbalization. The call of conscience operates “always and only in the mode of silence” (§ 56), it is a “strange voice” (fremde Stimme), absolutely unfamiliar to the they-self. In fact, it defies the they-self that I am almost always, as well as the everyday public interpretation of being, by confronting them with the strange sound of silence. As rightly stressed by Françoise Dastur, “voice here does not signify immediate self-presence: on the contrary, it reveals that the self is not intimate with itself, or at best, only exists in the noncoincidence between two voices, everydayness and conscience ...” (Dastur 2002, p. 94). Heidegger also stresses that the call is uttered both “from me and yet from beyond me and over me” (§57), since it abruptly and unexpectedly imposes itself to Dasein, who cannot amass the means to that end and thus provoke it. The strange and reticent call to one’s own otherness is nothing mysterious to Dasein, since whoever is “wanting-to-have-conscience” (Gewissen-haben-wollen) clearly understands what it enunciates and responds to it in existential resoluteness.7

Resoluteness, as conceived by Heidegger, is not the act of a subject that makes any definite decision in the world, it has no predetermined content and is, thus, formally empty like Kant’s moral imperative. Resoluteness is nothing more than the existential

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7 Note that neither resoluteness nor wanting-to-have-conscience can be interpreted in terms of the modern philosophy of subjectivity. As Heidegger affirmed in The Origin of the Artwork, “resoluteness as conceived in Being and Time is not a decided action of the subject, but the opening (Eröffnung) of Dasein from its being imprisoned in beings (Seitenden) to the openness (Offenheit) of being (Sein)” Cf. Heidegger 1994, p. 55.
determination of a *Dasein* ready to modify its own shallow everyday understanding of time, of its own self, of others and everything else there is. In fact, resoluteness is only a privileged and more original mode of *Dasein’s* openness to being, one that opens up the possibility of appropriating its own authentic self, against the neutral everyday they-self of mundane identity: “resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) is this privileged and authentic openness (*Erschlossenheit*) testified by conscience in *Dasein*, that is, its readiness to become anguished in silently self-projecting upon its ownmost indebtedness (*das verschweigene, angstbereite Sichentwerfen auf das eigenste Schuldigsein*)” (Heidegger 1986, p. 296-297). In spite of all appearances, resolution understood as readiness to become anguished with existence’s “indebtedness” (*Schuldigsein*) is not a matter of painful desperation, or of succumbing to pessimism or nihilism, since the call calms down the agitated everyday *Dasein* by delivering it to its ownmost “quietness” (§60). If something, it only proclames that this is (the other) who I already am. This is why Heidegger affirms that the call of conscience surpasses all “*Dasein’s* mundane power and prestige”, singularizing it down to its ownmost possibility of authentically being the debt it already is (Heidegger 1986, p. 307). The call has nothing worldly to proclaim and merely declares *Dasein’s* ungrounded finitude, that is, existence’s debt of ground, extensively discussed in §58. Existence is fully surrounded by “nothingness” (*Nichtigkeit*) in what concerns its past, its future and its present, and this existential nothingness is not a privative fault of that being, since it is positively constitutive of it. In fact, the call of conscience silently testifies to the fact that *Dasein* was not endowed with a fundamental why, nor decided when to come into being. *Dasein* is a being that, while it exists, is the thrown ground of itself, but it will never become the master of its own ground. As regards the ‘fact’ that it has always already been thrown into existence, *Dasein* can only assume that it ‘is’. At the same time, while existing, *Dasein’s* existence is constantly tainted by the mark of nothingness in all its choices: to have chosen to become a philosopher is simultaneously not to have chosen to become a physician or a soccer player, etc. Each choice displays the nothingness of everything else not chosen. And finally, *Dasein* cannot master its own future, since it is existentially destined to death as its ownmost possibility.

To properly understand one’s own self as being-towards-death, that is, as its ownmost and extreme possibility of being, is to assume oneself as the mortal that one already is. Against the false impression that “being-towards-death” is merely an outdated reverberation of German expressionism, it is necessary to understand its relevance to our actual and concrete existence. Right at the moment when genetic research promises us
everlasting life, Heidegger reminds us that more important than the length of one’s life is how it is actually lived, that is, how does one choose his/her mundane possibilities. He does not intend to remind us of what everybody is already sure (although inauthentically), that is, that so far we still are destined to die. In other words, he is not at all interested in the bare fact that human beings, as well as all other living beings, die. Death, existentially understood, is not an external event that one day will occur to Dasein; thus, it should not also be thought in medical or biological terms as an event caused by the collapse of one’s vital functions. Existentially conceived, death is not to be mistaken with the bare fact of dying, and this is why Heidegger affirms that, “as thrown being-in-the-world, Dasein is already delivered to the responsibility of its death. Being to death, Dasein in fact continuously dies during the time it has not yet ceased to live” (Heidegger 1986, p. 259). Or, to put it in Dastur’s words, commenting on a well known passage from the Prolegomena zur Geschichte der Zeitbegriffes, “the ‘self’ in oneself only arises through death, which explains why Heidegger was able to write sum moribundus, the I is always in the process of dying, is dying” (Dastur 2002, p. 90). The famous, but frequently misunderstood existential determination of the “anticipation” (Vorlaufen) of death, has to be conceived as the anticipation of one’s ownmost and extreme possibility; it has nothing whatsoever to do with risking one’s own life. Anticipation is, thus, synonymous with resoluteness, it is nothing other than the opening of Dasein’s worldly possibilities, as chosen by a finite and ungrounded authentic self. When everyday Dasein flees from its ownmost possibility of being, it does not flee from the horrifying event of its decease, but from its possibility of being-other as regards its everyday mundane identity. To embrace one’s own being-towards-death means to recognize finitude as the ontological instance that opens Dasein to its worldly possibilities, allowing them to be chosen out of one’s own authentic self. By rendering finite its own mundane choices in the world, resolute Dasein recognizes that they have no other reason to be than to have been chosen by a being that has no ultimate grounds. In resoluteness, Dasein ‘is’ its own death, its own nothingness at each mundane choice, understood as a “finite” (endliche) possibility. By properly or authentically being-towards-death in resoluteness, Dasein “disrupts the rigidness of the already achieved existence”, that is, it liberates Dasein to reject the “imposition of occasional possibilities”, and to concentrate on those ones that really matter to it (Heidegger 1986, p. 264).

It could also be demonstrated that in the “instant” (Augenblick) of resolution, Dasein becomes liberated from the traditional understanding of time as the infinite
succession of empty ‘now’ points, closely surrounded by what is “no more” and what is “not yet”. It is in resolution that Dasein opens its access to the originary and finite temporality, recognizing its own existential futural temporality and, thus, breaking up the cage of the present and its everyday inauthentic “presentification” (Gegenwärtigen), which grants the possibility of our daily affairs constantly measured by our watches. However, that demonstration would take me too far away from the purposes of this text. What really matters now is to realize that resoluteness brings with itself intrinsically ethical implications, since the assumption of one’s own otherness opens Dasein to the discovery of others as face, in the mode of being-with of genuine or authentic friendship.

c) The resolute self and the face of the other: genuine friendship and the responsibility of acting without pre-established rules

To consider what Heidegger had to say about the ethical possibility of being responsive to the face of the other, one has to pay attention to the subtle connections that bind together paragraphs 60, 34 and 26 of Being and Time. There is an important passage in §60, in which Heidegger briefly considers the modification that occur when resolute Dasein properly hears and responds to the strange call of conscience. According to Heidegger, in resoluteness Dasein finally appropriates its ownmost “original truth”, since, by now, the openness to being that it already was has been modified in order to become its own proper or authentic openness. What really matters to my argument is that resoluteness also “modifies, in an equally originary way, the discovery of the ‘world’, as well as the openness of the co-existence of others” (Heidegger 1986, p. 297). Of course, this is not to say that the world has been magically changed or transformed, or that the “circle of others” has been substituted by another one, as if resolute Dasein should have to change its friends, as well as its occupations in the everyday world of affairs. Again and again, Heidegger emphasizes that “resoluteness does not detach Dasein, as authentically being itself (eigentliches Selbstsein), from its world, it does not isolate it in a free-floating I. And how should that be, if Dasein as an authentic openness, is nothing else than a being-in-the-world that authentically is?” (Heidegger 1986, p. 298 [conf. translation?]). Resoluteness also does not mean that Dasein no longer falls into the everyday leveling-down public interpretation of being. Rather, it means that, from now on, Dasein is not fully oblivious of otherness in a double sense: resolute Dasein is now solicitous to the other with whom it coexists in the world, as well as to the other that it already brings along with itself. What has actually been modified is that, from now on, Dasein has disclosed the possibility of
determining its own occupations, as well as its caring-for others, out of the possibility of its own authentic being. And this is where the ethical traces of the analytic become more openly evident, that is, in Heidegger’s thesis that, in resoluteness, Dasein is “impelled into a solicitous being-with with others (stösst es in das fürsorgende Mitsein mit den Anderen). (...) It is only in resoluteness to one’s own self that Dasein is brought into the possibility of letting the co-existing others ‘be’ in their ownmost possibility of being, by including them in the openness of the solicitude that liberates in anticipation (die mitseitenden Anderen ‘sein’ zu lassen in ihrem eingensten Seinkönnen und dieses in der vorspringend-befreienden Fürsorge miztuerschliessen). Resolute Dasein can become the ‘conscience’ of others. It is only by authentically being itself in resoluteness that an authentic being-with-others (eigentliche Miteinander) springs, and not out of envious and ambiguous compacts and talkative alliances in the they (Man), and whatever they might undertake” (Heidegger 1986, p. 298).

It is only at the end of the journey that some quite enigmatic sentences from §26 and §34 become fully understandable. Much before discussing the possibility of properly hearing the call of conscience, Heidegger had already advanced the thesis that “hearing is Dasein’s existential openness as being-with to the others (existenziale Offensein des Daseins als Mitsein für den Anderen). Indeed, hearing (Hören) constitutes Dasein’s most primary and authentic openness to its ownmost possibility of being, as in hearing the voice of the friend whom every Dasein carries by itself (als Hören der Stimme des Freundes, den jedes Dasein bei sich trägt). Dasein hears, because it understands. As an understanding being-in-the-world with others, Dasein is ‘obedient’ (‘hörig’) to co-existence and to itself, and in this obedience it becomes solidary (in dieser Hörigkeit zugehörig) (Heidegger 1986, p. 163). Now it becomes fully understandable that hearing and obeying the voice of the friend that each Dasein carries in itself is the ontological condition of hearing and becoming friends with the other encountered in the world. By hearing the strange voice of otherness, deeply rooted in its own self, Dasein becomes open to being with others in the mode of that particularly “positive” solicitude that, according to Heidegger’s terms in § 26, “encounters the existence of others” and “helps them to become free for their own care”, by establishing the “authentic bond that makes possible the right state of affairs in which the other is liberated to its own freedom” (Heidegger 1986, p. 122). The possibility of the ethical encounter of the other as face, or irreducible otherness, is exactly what Heidegger suggests by describing the positive mode of being solicitous to the other defined as a

8 As regards the analysis of this passage, see also Derrida (1994), Finsk, (1993) and Vogel (1994).
solicitude that “anticipates” (vorauspringt). He distinguished it both from the already discussed “indifferent” or “deficient” modes of co-existing - being for, against, or indifferently side by side the other, etc. -, as well as from another “positive” mode of being solicitous with others, denominated as “substituting” (einspringen) solicitude. In this mode of positive solicitude, Dasein assumes or takes the place of the other in his/her worldly affairs and, thus, ends up by finally stealing from the other his/her own “care” (Sorge). This is a very common form of solicitude, in which Dasein does not let the other be free and responsible for him/herself, up to the point in which, although insidiously and almost secretly, the other becomes dependent, manipulated and dominated. In the substitutive mode of being solicitous to the other, Dasein does not encounter his/her face, since everything the other does or says is always already interpreted (and many times overinterpreted) by the leveling down standards of the public interpretation of being.

In the anticipating solicitude, however, Dasein jumps or leaps ahead right to the face of the other, posits itself in front of him/her, and by authentically hearing and talking to the other, Dasein let the other be who he/she is. In authentically hearing the strange voice of the friend that each Dasein carries by itself, as much as in authentically hearing the voice of the friend encountered in the common world of daily affairs, Dasein does not merely listens the neutral or impersonal voice of the public interpretation of being, since it has become authentically opened to the recognition of otherness as such. This is what it means to affirm that the resolutely attuned Dasein becomes the “conscience of others”, in the mode of that solicitude that liberates the other to his/her ownmost freedom. Ontically speaking, it means that Dasein has become genuinely friends with the other, that Dasein has appropriated the possibility of facing in the face of the other, both in hearing and talking to him/her, without reducing otherness to the domain of the already known and dominated. Resolute Dasein has, thus, acquired the enriched openness that permits it to be in front of the face of the other without imposing itself to it, plainly assuming respect and responsibility for the other’s otherness. Friendship, understood in a non-conventional sense, is exactly this possibility of caring for the other without passing him/her moral exhortations. Rather, in genuine friendship Dasein talks to the other in such a way that the other can also speak, that is, in such a way that what is said does not oppose ‘yes’ and ‘no’, ‘meaning’ being protected by ‘shadows’, as in Celan’s wonderful poem, “Sprich du auch”. In such kind of authentic friendship, many times, more important than advising is being together with the other in both hearing and silencing, for no one possesses the universal measure to evaluate what is objectively better to the other. To put it in Heidegger’s own
words: “Keeping silent authentically is possible only in genuine discoursing. To be able to keep silent, Dasein must have something to say - that is, it must have at its disposal an authentic and rich openness of itself. In that case reticence makes something manifest, and does away with ‘idle talk’. As a mode of discoursing, reticence articulates the intelligibility of Dasein in so primordial a manner that it gives rise to a potentiality-for-hearing which is genuine, and to a being-with-others which is transparent” (Heidegger 1986, p. 165). In his poem “Distances”, Celan also express this kind of proximity in the distance, by interposing between one and the other, whose eyes meet in the cold, the thin “veil” that “hides” one from the other, thus preserving the delicate precariousness upon which genuine friendship is based.

If the possibility of hearing the voice of the friend that each Dasein carries by itself is constitutive of the openness of its ownmost possibility of being, then, Derrida is right when he affirms that “there is no authenticity, no Dasein’s proximity to itself, without the bei sich tragen of the different other” (Derrida 1994, p. 356). Authentically hearing the strange voice of the friend is, thus, becoming friends with otherness, both my own, as regards my social everyday identity, as well as regarding the pure face of the other. In light of these considerations, the strange voice that “comes from afar and calls to afar” (aus der Ferne in die Ferne), as Heidegger described it in §55, could be interpreted as the friendly voice of otherness. Perhaps, one could go as far as to consider this strange voice as the “anonymous voice - the neuter or white voice” of “being's otherness”, or as the voice of “nothingness” as regards the totality of everything that is, according to the suggestion of J.F.-Courtine. However, one should care in order not to follow the author in his interpretation of Heidegger’s analysis of the individuation process as fundamentally tainted by solipsism, that is, as oblivious to the otherness of the factual other in his/her mundane existence (Courtine 1990, pp. 350, 343 and passim). Here, it seems that Paul Ricoeur offers a much better interpretation of the ethical implications of Heidegger’s analysis of the call of conscience, affirming that “otherness is not added to ipseity from outwards, as if to prevent solipsism, but already pertains to the meaning content and to the ontological constitution of ipseity” (Ricoeur 1990, p. 367). If it is right, as observed by Ricouer, that in Heidegger “ontology veils at the doors of ethics”, since he never followed the path that should lead him “from ontology to ethics” (Ricoeur 1990, pp. 402 and 403), then, again that should not be interpreted as if Heidegger had blocked, once and for all, the path that connects the ontological to the ethical.
Now, it only remains to briefly question if Heidegger’s analysis of \textit{Dasein’s} openness to otherness, that is, of its own constitutive finitude and debt of grounds, might not be mistaken for an invitation to “evilness” (\textit{Bosheit}). As regards morality, conscience, when ontologically conceived, does not advert, censor or proclaim what is right or wrong in common public language, it only evidences that \textit{Dasein’s} constitutive debt of grounds is the ontological condition for the “existential possibility of what is morally good and evil, that is, of morality as such in its possible factual configurations” (Heidegger 1986, p. 286). Of course, \textit{Dasein’s} acknowledgment of its own groundless nothingness does not definitely prevent \textit{Dasein} from evil doing against others. However, that does not imply either a necessary indifference to the other, as I have argued, nor does it necessarily constitute an invitation to evil. Much to the contrary, it could be argued that resoluteness, since it shatters the impersonal they-self that \textit{Dasein} first and foremost ‘is’, might inspire a healthy ethical and political mistrust regarding public norms and rules of conduct which, many times, suggest or promote indifference or even distrust against others. Resolute \textit{Dasein} suspends any calculation or negotiation with its conscience when it comes down to responding and being responsive to the other. Heidegger is not arguing that resolute \textit{Dasein} should break all moral and legal rules in order to authentically act in the world. In other words, he does not espouse the arrogant and aristocratic heroism of the solipsistic self, against the leveling down massification of common and public rule, socially disseminated in shared meanings. Rather, what I think Heidegger emphasizes is that \textit{Dasein} assume an authentic appropriation of acting and of its criteria, so that \textit{Dasein’s} actions in the world might not be mere repetitive and a blind reproduction of social patterns of conduct. As already noticed, this is a social practice that might promote and result in the most terrible acts committed in mass society, such as mass murder or mass indifference towards the other’s misery. Therefore, such an appropriation of the criteria of one’s actions in the world requires a special attentive mistrust regarding moral prescriptions that would like to offer \textit{Dasein} an universal code of behavior, one that could grant and secure the ethical character of its actions. Against the traditional obsession for moral pre-established criteria that should definitely grant the moral quality of one’s actions, as well as against the complains about the void of a conscience that does utter commandments, Heidegger stressed that if we “miss a ‘positive’ content in that which is called”, that only happens inasmuch as “we expect to be told something currently useful about assured possibilities of ‘action’ which are available and calculable. This expectation is grounded in the interpretative horizon of the understanding \textit{occupation}, one that compels \textit{Dasein’s}
existence under the idea of a ruled whole of affairs” (Heidegger 1986, p. 294). Resoluteness as the authentic understanding of Dasein’s constitutive debt of grounds does not relieve Dasein from the responsibility to act, but is the existential condition for Dasein to become responsible and to “act in itself”, momentarily dismantling the all pervading privileges of the inauthentic they-self. Only resolute Dasein is able to appropriate or to render its own the chosen criteria of its actions in the world, be they in conformity with social, historical and cultural patterns of conduct or not. According to Heidegger, only resolute Dasein, since it has fully acknowledged its own constitutive debt of grounds, can recognize itself as already being in debt to the other, and this is why only in the assumption of one’s own debt of grounds “there subsists the existentiell possibility of being ‘good’” (Heidegger 1986, p. 288). At last, Dasein can only fully responsibly act in an autonomous way when it does not have a previous set of values, norms and rules of conduct that should be merely applied to the case in order to obtain moral results. If conscience does not offer any practical indication, the reason is that under the light of such well calculated maxims, “conscience would deny the possibility of acting” (Heidegger 1986, p. 294). In other words, from an ontic and practical standpoint, acting without previously disposing of moral standards which might secure the moral meaning of one’s actions does not imply abdicating from respect and responsibility towards others. Occasionally, however, it might require opposing resistance to theoretical systems or social institutions that would like to seduce and/or dominate us with the desire of fully administrating and objectifying the groundless finitude that we are.

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