

## Possibility *Tout Court*:

# Heidegger on Death as a Phenomenon of Life

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“Our life has no end in just the way in which our visual field has no limits”  
– Wittgenstein

**ABSTRACT:** A leitmotif of *Being and Time* is the attempt to reverse the classical priority of actuality over possibility: instead of understanding the possible in terms of the actual – as “arising out of the actual and returning to it” – Heidegger insists on grasping possibility as the primordial notion. Nowhere is it more evident than in his complex treatment of death and dying. Death is exactly that possibility which offers nothing actual in terms of which to grasp it; death only *is* in our ever being-toward it. I focus on Heidegger’s characterization of being-toward-death as rooted in, and a *concretion* of, Dasein’s being-toward-itself. This approach yields an interpretation of the notorious “possibility of impossibility” formulation that is diametrically opposed to the so-called “world-collapse” interpretations. I then explore why, and in what sense, Dasein’s being-toward-itself needs a concretion and draw conclusions about the organization of *Being and Time* as whole.

**KEYWORDS:** Heidegger, Death, Temporality, Ontological Difference, Authenticity

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**INTRODUCTION: APORIAI SURROUNDING HEIDEGGER'S  
TREATMENT OF DEATH**

The chapter on death in *Being and Time* has always been a source of excitement and irritation among Heidegger scholars. What exactly Heidegger means by “death,” why he approaches the subject as he does, and the significance of the discussion to the Existential Analytic as a whole are all questions held in contention. It is typical to open an article on the subject with some form of exasperation: “The concept of death is one of the least understood but most significant concepts in *Being and Time*”;<sup>1</sup> the discussion’s “intentional false starts and dead ends easily mislead the reader”;<sup>2</sup> creating an “enormous amount of confusion”;<sup>3</sup> and posing even to Heidegger’s most sympathetic readers “some of their greatest challenges.”<sup>4</sup>

At the heart of the difficulty is Heidegger’s insistence that death must not be construed as the endpoint at which life terminates.<sup>5</sup> Already in his introduction to a lecture course on Aristotle from 1921–22, he writes: “Just as factic life in its character of being is not a process, so too death is not a cessation in the sense of a termination of this process someday” (GA 62: 358/158). Thinking of death as an endpoint means “inadvertently positing” Dasein as “something present-at-hand, ahead of which something that is not yet present-at-hand is constantly shoving itself” (GA 2: 315/SZ 237). What underlies the “false positing” here is our tendency to see life as a process in time, or more precisely, a process in time *looked at from sideways-on*: a burning candle, or the ubiquitous lit fuse of a dynamite stick in the cartoons: so much is already burned; so much remains; finally it stops. Instead, Heidegger offers an “existential” treatment of the phenomenon, i.e. a treatment proper to the sort of being whose mode of being is *existence*. An existing being such as Dasein is *in time* in a radically different way than our cartoon fuse. Hence, the primary gesture of the chapter on death in *Being and Time* is to reorient the discussion *away* from death construed as endpoint and toward death construed as “possibility-of-being” (sections 48–50). As possibility, death is meant to define Dasein’s existence throughout. Far from being an end, it is

rather a “phenomenon of life” (GA 2: 328/SZ 246). In this connection, it is useful to invoke a notion like “being-mortal,” or being subject to death, which defines not just our ends, but primarily our lives (and defines them in contradistinction to the lives of, e.g., the Greek gods). We will expand on these themes below.

Heidegger’s articulation of this unique “possibility of being” is notoriously enigmatic. Death is “the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there [*Nicht-mehr-dasein-können*],” “the possibility of the utter impossibility of being-there [*Daseinsunmöglichkeit*]” (GA 2: 333/SZ 250), and “*the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all*” (GA 2: 348/SZ 262). But what can “the possibility of impossibility” mean here, and why reach for these almost incomprehensible formulations? Can we really think of death as possibility, as possibility *tout court*, without grounding it in the actuality that one day we will in fact die? To clarify these questions, it is useful to consider a novel and influential interpretation known as the “world-collapse approach.” In a recent survey paper, Iain Thomson summarizes:

a number of cutting-edge Heidegger scholars think that what *Being and Time* means by “death” has almost nothing to do with the ordinary sense of the word (the two share a merely “metaphorical” connection, as Haugeland said). Instead, Heidegger means something like *global world collapse of significance* typified by a depressive episode (Blattner), *the collapse of an understanding of being* exemplified by a scientific paradigm shift (Haugeland), or *the end of an historical world*, which allows a new historical epoch to take shape (White).<sup>6</sup>

To get the gist of this interpretative approach, consider the following from Blattner:

Death is the condition in which Dasein is unable to be there, because it is unable to exercise its ability to determine who it is...This situation occurs when Dasein

is beset by anxiety, in which none of its possibilities matters to it differentially. . . . The term “death” in *Being and Time*. . . is the name for a certain condition in which Dasein can find itself.<sup>7</sup>

The goal of this approach is to make sense both of the stipulation that death is not the end of one’s life, and of Heidegger’s apparently paradoxical “possibility of impossibility” formulation, by seizing on a “situation” (an episode of anxiety) in which it is, in some sense, impossible for Dasein to be. In this “strange experience of being,” Thomson claims, “we do indeed experience the paradoxical ‘possibility of an impossibility of existence.’”<sup>8</sup>

What is remarkable about these interpretive strategies – apart from claiming that “what *Being and Time* means by ‘death’ has almost nothing to do with the ordinary sense of the word” – is the categories they employ. Death is a “condition,” a “situation” that “occurs” (Blattner); it is an “experience,” “something we live through.”<sup>9</sup> But Heidegger, conversely, always characterizes death as *possibility*. He is seldom consistent in the chapter on death, but there is absolutely no wavering on this point: death is the “ownmost possibility of Dasein,” the “non-relational possibility,” the possibility “not to be bypassed”; being-toward-death is being toward a possibility *as possibility*. So why invoke such categories as “condition,” “situation” and “experience”? What is really going on here? “Not being – or, more precisely, being our not being – can actually happen to us,” Thomson concludes,<sup>10</sup> and his use of the word “actually” here encapsulates the main thrust of these interpretations. It’s as if in thinking of death as a possibility, one is irresistibly led to ask: a possibility for what? What is possible in this possibility? What actual “something” (“situation,” “condition,” “experience”) “occurs” when this possibility is realized? And if we reject, as Heidegger does, that death is the event that ends one’s life, then we must produce something that “occurs” *during* one’s life (like Blattner’s episode of anxiety) in terms of which to understand this possibility, in terms of which to ground it – the actual wherein the possible finds relief.

As we will see below, however, Heidegger is interested in death exactly because it is a possibility that “gives Dasein nothing to ‘be actualized’” (GA 2: 348/SZ 262), and that being-toward-death in Heidegger’s sense is being toward a possibility that can “never”<sup>11</sup> be realized. To treat these claims as puzzles, paradoxes that need to be solved, and to solve them by seizing on some “condition” or “situation,” is precisely to oppose the driving force of the entire discussion. Instead, we must situate Heidegger’s existential treatment of death vis-à-vis the broader aims of the Dasein-analytic. Following is a synoptic view of the argument presented in this paper.

Heidegger’s treatment of the phenomenon of “death” is continuous with his articulation of the being of Dasein as “care” (*Sorge*; “being-ahead-of-itself-already-in...as being-alongside...”) and in particular with the preeminent structural item of care, the “ahead-of-itself.” He writes:

[Death’s] existential possibility is based on the fact that Dasein is essentially disclosed to itself, and disclosed, indeed, as ahead-of-itself. This item in the structure of care has its most primordial concretion [*ursprünglichste Konkretion*] in being-toward-death. (GA 2: 333/SZ 251)

Note the use of “concretion” here: “being-toward-death” is somehow a *concretion* of the “ahead-of-itself.” Earlier, the “ahead-of-itself” is defined as follows:

Dasein is always ‘beyond itself,’ not as a way of behaving towards other entities which it is not, but as being towards [*zum*] the potentiality-of-being [*Seinkönnen*] which it itself is. This structure of being, which belongs to the essential ‘is an issue’ [*geht um*], we shall denote as Dasein’s ‘being-ahead-of-itself.’ (GA 2: 254-55/SZ 192)

The “ahead-of-itself,” then, is Dasein’s being somehow toward (*zum*) itself as potentiality-of-being (*Seinkönnen*). Combining the two we get:

*being-toward-death is the most primordial concretion of Dasein's being toward itself as potentiality-of-being* (Seinkönnen).

There's a lot to unpack here. To properly access Heidegger's complex analysis of death and being-toward-death we must first consider: in what sense is Dasein a *potentiality-of-being* that is *toward* (zum) itself as *potentiality-of-being*? What is meant here by "concretion" and why is being-toward-death such a concretion?

In what follows, I will first discuss the characterization of Dasein as *potentiality-of-being* and as *being-toward-itself* (section I). Next, I will consider the characterization of being-toward-death as a *concretion* of that former structure and give a full interpretation of Heidegger's existential treatment of death (section II). Finally, I will show how this interpretation reveals the intimate relation between Heidegger's analysis of death and his commitment to the ontological difference. This will shed light on the organizational structure of *Being and Time* (section III).

#### **I. DASEIN AS POTENTIALITY-OF-BEING THAT IS TOWARD ITSELF; THE MEANING OF THE "TOWARD"**

The being of Dasein (*das Sein des Daseins*), which is initially called "existence" (*Existenz*) and later "care" (*Sorge*) (*Existenz* being the futural, primary item in the structure of care), is given various articulations throughout *Being and Time*. Dasein is the factually-existing, thrown-projecting, attuned-understanding entity. It is constituted as being-in-the-world. But at the heart of these various articulations we again and again confront the notion of possibility: Dasein is "in each case what it can be and how it is its possibility" (GA 2: 191/SZ 143); it is "nothing but *being-possible*" (GA 20: 412/298); "possibility as an *existentiale* is the most primordial and ultimate positive way in which the Dasein is characterized ontologically" (GA 2: 191/SZ 143-4).

The key term is *Seinkönnen*, which Macquarrie and Robinson render as *potentiality-for-Being*, Stambaugh as *potentiality-of-being*, and Kisiel as *can-be* (*ability-to-be* is often also suitable). We read repeatedly that Dasein doesn't *have* its possibilities, but rather *is* its possibilities.

Being a teacher, for example, a *potentiality-of-being*, a *can-be* of an existing Dasein, is very different from the possibility I *have* of going on vacation next week. In the latter, the possible is understood as a modality of the actual – what is possible in this sense is not yet actual, but perhaps later will be. We can refer to such possibility as *categorical possibility*.<sup>12</sup> Being a teacher, however, has to be understood as an *existential possibility*, a notion of possibility appropriate to an existing entity, i.e. Dasein. This latter sense of possibility cannot be understood as a modality of some attained or attainable actuality. It is rather a *way to be* rooted in “projection,” in Dasein’s understanding and interpretation of itself and its world, in a “being able to”: my ability-to-be a teacher, my *Lehrerseinkönnen*.

Dasein’s being is care, and the structure of care (“being-ahead-of-itself-already-in ... as being-alongside...”) is nothing other than a working out of the being of Dasein as existential possibility. As we have seen above, the “ahead-of-itself” is Dasein’s “being towards the *potentiality-of-being* which it itself is” (GA 2: 254–55/SZ 192). Analogously, the “already” captures the *thrownness* of Dasein, the fact that it is always already situated in an antecedently interpreted world from which it draws its possibilities. So, for example, *the potentiality-of-being a teacher*; the *ability-to-be* a teacher, as a projecting *ahead*, has *already* appropriated possibilities from the world into which Dasein has been thrown, and this *already-ahead* opens up a present (the teacher’s world) in which things like chalk, chairs, students, and faculty meetings may be differentially encountered (as useful, as a hindrance, as a necessary evil, indifferently). This is one sense in which the actual (e.g. the chalk *as* useful) is rooted in, and thus subordinate to, the possible (*the potentiality-of-being* a teacher) rather than vice versa.

“Existence means potentiality-of-being (*Seinkönnen*)” (GA 2: 309/SZ 233), or more precisely “thrown potentiality-of-being” (GA 2: 250, 448/SZ: 188, 339). Following Heidegger’s tendency to adumbrate we will refer to the being of Dasein – *das Sein des Daseins* – as “potentiality-of-being,” “thrown potentiality-of-being,” as an “understanding [*verstehendes*] potentiality-of-being” (GA 2: 307/SZ 231), as “can-be,” or simply as “possibility.”<sup>15</sup>

But there is another crucial facet to the characterization of Dasein as potentiality-of-being. Heidegger claims that Dasein is always “beyond itself” (*über sich hinaus*) in the sense that it is toward (*zum*) itself as potentiality-of-being (GA 2: 254-55/SZ 192). Put more plainly, Dasein is a possibility that is toward (*zum*) itself as *possibility*, with this *zum* already contemplated in the first pages of *Being and Time*. What is the significance of this fundamental stipulation? As we have seen above, Heidegger even sees the *zum* in *Sein-zum-Tode* (being-toward-death) as a “concretion” of this more fundamental *zum*. What is the relationship between the *Seinkönnen* and the *zum*, between Dasein being a possibility and Dasein being somehow toward itself?

When we characterized Dasein as *thrown potentiality-of-being*, we were characterizing Dasein’s being, its *ontological* constitution. *Ontically*, i.e. insofar as it is individually determined as an entity (what Heidegger calls “*existentielly*”), Dasein is what (or rather who) it understands and interprets itself to be (a teacher for example). A major theme in *Being and Time* is that everyday Dasein understands and interprets itself in terms of what it takes care of – in terms of the world in which it is entangled and “by its reflected light” (GA 2: 29/SZ 21) – in short, in terms of that which it is *not*. This is also true of philosophical Dasein and its historical self-*mis*interpretations.<sup>14</sup>

This overriding tendency of Dasein to misinterpret itself is characterized as a “falling,” a “lapsing,” or a “fleeing” exactly because in them Dasein misses its own (ontological) constitution. If we keep in mind that such understandings and self-interpretations ontically determine Dasein fully, a gap opens: a gap between what Dasein is ontologically (a thrown *potentiality-of-being*) and how it understands itself ontically/existentielly (whether in its everydayness or historically-philosophically).

It is in order to bridge this gap between ontological and ontic that Heidegger immediately introduces the “toward” (*zum*) and the closely related notion of *Eigentlichkeit* (ownedness, authenticity). From the very first pages of *Being and Time*, Heidegger stipulates that despite its tendency to lapse, Dasein must somehow have a way of understanding itself *properly*, *genuinely*, as it *really* is. (Each of these last three

italicized terms captures aspects of *eigentlich* better than the usual rendering, “authentic.”) But what then is Dasein really? As we have already emphasized, it is a possibility, a can-be, a thrown *Seinkönnen*. Hence *Eigentlichkeit* is the structurally simple (yet ontically-existentially perplexing) stipulation that among Dasein’s many possibilities of grasping or understanding itself, there must also be the unique possibility of Dasein grasping or understanding itself *as the thrown possibility that it is*. This unique possibility, this *potentiality-of-being-itself* (*Selbstseinkönnen*, GA 2: 390/SZ 294), is quite literally Dasein’s ownmost possibility. It is common for readers of *Being and Time* immediately to think of death when Heidegger speaks of Dasein’s “ownmost potentiality-of-being.” But death is only introduced later in the text, as a *concretion* of that defining possibility.<sup>15</sup> The “ownmost potentiality-of-being,” a modality invoked as soon as the idea of *Existenz* is introduced, expresses the crucial point that the possibility (which is Dasein) is primarily the possibility to be or to fail to be the possibility that it is – i.e., to understand/interpret itself as the possibility that it is, or to fail to do so. Dasein has already “projected itself upon” – i.e. understood itself in and out of – “its potentiality-of-being (*Seinkönnen*) before going on to any mere consideration of itself” (GA 2: 537/SZ 406). It is in this sense, and in these two modalities of facing and fleeing, that the *understanding potentiality-of-being* (which is Dasein) is toward (*zum*) itself as *potentiality-of-being*. And since for Dasein to interpret and understand itself as X means to ontically/existentially be X, Heidegger can dramatically say:

Dasein is out for its own being; it is out for its very being in order ‘to be’ its being [*um sein Sein* ‘zu sein’] (GA 20: 407/294).

Or:

The being [*Seiende*] which is concerned in its being about its being is related to its being [*Sein*] as its ownmost possibility (GA 2: 57/SZ 42).

Dasein's being (*das Sein des Daseins*) is somehow a possibility of Dasein, indeed its ownmost possibility. Dasein *is* the possibility to be (or to fail to be) the possibility that it genuinely (*eigentlich*) is. Or, to put it another way, *Dasein can ontically be "what" it is ontologically* and it is in this sense that "Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence [*Existenz*], a possibility of itself, to be itself or not itself" (GA 2: 17/SZ 12). Indeed, Heidegger's focus on the modalities of this ontic-ontological correspondence underpins the "jargon of authenticity" that dominates so much of *Being and Time*. Authenticity or ownedness, as articulated in the modalities of the "zum," is a purely structural notion in the conceptual machinery of *Being and Time*, invoked the moment "existence," the being of Dasein, is introduced. In section III, we will discuss why this notion of *Eigentlichkeit* is a *necessary* aspect of the idea of existence, why there must necessarily be a way for Dasein to understand itself properly.

What does it mean for the *understanding possibility* (which Dasein is) to understand itself *as possibility*? What is it for the ontic to correspond to the ontological? What is it for Dasein to "be its being," to be authentic? This is still unclear. Heidegger certainly does not mean that one reads *Being and Time* and understands that one is ontologically a *verstehendes, geworfenes Seinkönnen* (an understanding, thrown, potentiality-of-being). Understanding (*Verstehen*) is not meant in the narrow sense of an explicit, theoretical achievement. It designates, rather, nothing less than Dasein's "fundamental mode of happening" (GA 24: 393/277). What is needed here is an orientation of Dasein toward its own existence in which Dasein's understanding of itself as possibility is somehow already *enacted* (*vollgezogen*). As we will see below, Heidegger contends that it is exactly Dasein's complex relation to its own death that embodies, expresses, and enacts this self-understanding. We are told that death is where "the character of possibility of Dasein can be revealed most clearly of all" (GA 2: 331/SZ 248-249) and this holds not just for the reader of *Being and Time*, but also for the existing Dasein in general.

We started the discussion from the following: *being-toward-death is the most primordial concretion of Dasein being toward (zum) itself as Seinkönnen* (a combination of GA 2: 333/SZ 251 and GA 2: 254-55/SZ 192). We discussed Dasein being a *Seinkönnen* and “being toward itself.” We must now examine what “being a concretion” amounts to.

## II. THE PHENOMENON OF DEATH AS A CONCRETION OF DASEIN BEING-TOWARD-ITSELF

Epicurus famously said that death is nothing to us “since when we exist, death is not yet present, and when death is present, then we do not exist.”<sup>16</sup> Here is Wittgenstein: “Our life has no end in just the way in which our visual field has no limits.”<sup>17</sup> And here is Freud: “it is impossible to imagine our own death; and whenever we attempt to do so we can perceive that we are in fact still present as spectators.”<sup>18</sup> Despite the very different contexts of these utterances, they all insist that my first-personal relation to my own death is radically different from my second- or third-personal relations to the deaths of others, which I can experience, mourn, and, in general, “apprehend sideways-on.”<sup>19</sup>

Heidegger similarly rejects any such sideways-on approach and any articulation of this phenomenon, which invokes our experience of the deaths of others. More generally, he insists that we must resist the ubiquitous tendency of seeing life sideways-on as a finite “stretch” on the infinite line of world-time with death as the endpoint. Instead he conceives of death as *possibility*, the possibility that defines human existence (in a sense similar to being-mortal or being-subject-to-death) and insists on approaching this possibility from *Dasein’s own temporal horizon*. The rejection of the sideways-on approach is crucial, and it is continuous with the broader aim of Division II of *Being and Time* to ground infinite world-time in the more primordial, finite temporality of Dasein.<sup>20</sup> Hence the phenomenon of death, belonging essentially to the latter, cannot be properly understood in terms of the former. In other words, we cannot ground an *existential* notion of death (a notion appropriate to an existing entity such as Dasein) in the fact that one day we will die.

Heidegger shifts here from death to “being-toward-death” (*sein-zum-Tode*) as a way of resisting the tendency to root our attitudes toward death, our understanding of ourselves as mortal, in our *actually* being mortal (conceived as an endpoint in world-time.) Rather, the attitudes themselves, the understandings, and in short our various ways of “being-toward” are recognized as primary. “For something of the character of Dasein death is only in an existentiell being-toward-death” (GA 2: 311/SZ 234). This is a dramatic inversion typical of Heidegger. The phenomenon of death is not grounded in some impending event – the transition from being present to not being present in world-time. Rather, death is grounded in being-toward-death, a self-understanding, a self-grasping, more akin to something like being-a-teacher – a projection where my ability to understand and interpret myself as a teacher just *is* my being a teacher.

But can this really be the case? Can we really think that death “is only in” my ontic/existentiell ways of being toward it, i.e. only in my somehow understanding or failing to understand myself in and through it? How can we make sense of these existentiell comportments if we take away the eventuality to which they seem always to refer? If we take seriously Wittgenstein’s claim, that “our life has no end,” then aren’t our various ways of “being-toward-death” comportments toward *the end of a life that has no end*? But what is that? A “no-thing”? An event? An inexpressible ...? If, as Heidegger puts it, death is a possibility that “gives Dasein nothing to “be actualized” and nothing which it itself could *be* as something real” (GA 2: 348/SZ 262), then *to what do I ultimately relate* when I relate to it as possibility? Death as possibility? Fine – but a possibility *for what*?

We might get the feeling that there’s something uncanny going on here, *that violence is being done to the notion of possibility itself*. Can we think of death as a possibility wherein “nothing” is possible, as an imminent, yet essentially unrealizable possibility? I submit that this is precisely Heidegger’s intention. Nothing could be more contrary to his project than to try to “fix things” by producing clever structures intended to fill that gap. “In running ahead to this possibility, it becomes

“greater and greater,” that is, it reveals itself as something which knows no measure at all, no more, no less, but means the possibility of the measureless impossibility of existence” (GA 2: 348/SZ 262). The “nearest nearness” to this possibility as possibility is “as far removed as possible from anything real” (GA 2: 348/SZ 262). Being-toward-death “offers no support for becoming intent on something, for “spelling out” the real thing that is possible and so forgetting its possibility” (GA 2: 348/SZ 262). A relation to this possibility is a relation to “no thing” – indeed to nothing – a “nothing” which we mostly misapprehend as a “something,” and even in this misapprehension still relate to somehow.

Hence the *possibility of impossibility* formulation. When it comes to an entity like Dasein – an entity whose mode of being is being-possible, an entity thrown into, and ever projecting onto, possibilities – *impossibility* is the analog of the “nothing.” Impossibility is thus precisely *not* another possibility, as the world-collapse interpreters would have it when they construct an “experience,” an “event” that “occurs” in which it is literally “impossible” for Dasein to be. Impossibility is not another possibility in just the same way that the “nothing” is not another thing. Impossibility, the “measureless impossibility of existence” (GA 2: 348/SZ 262), is rather the absolute limit of an entity constituted as nothing but possibilities. It is the incomprehensible lacuna facing an entity whose “fundamental mode of happening” is comprehension. Heidegger’s formulation of a *possibility of impossibility* is, then, exactly how he resists the “vulgar” understanding of death as an endpoint in world-time, and the correlative representation of Dasein as a “succession of experiences ‘in time’” (GA 2: 493/SZ 373). It is perfectly suited for the task of unsettling our familiar notion of possibility, a notion traditionally rooted in, and subordinate to, the actual. It forces us to move from “categorical” to “existential” possibility, from possibility rooted in the actual to possibility rooted in projection, in “existentiell being toward” (GA 2: 311/SZ 234).

“Description, for Heidegger,” Thomas Sheehan writes, “is always the description of . . . first-person “lived” engagements with what is given in experience (*das Was*) and, more importantly, with the *givenness* of

what is given (*das Wie*).<sup>21</sup> We can say that the phenomenon of death is interpreted in *Being and Time* as that unique, first-person engagement in which there is no *Was* but only *Wie*.<sup>22</sup>

Heidegger introduces the concept *Vorlaufen* (usually translated as “anticipation”; literally: “running-ahead”) to designate being toward a possibility *as possibility* – as distinct from mere “expecting” in which “one leaps away from the possible and gets a footing in the real” (GA 2: 348/SZ 262). But since there is nothing real *per se* in the phenomenon of death, no “*Was*” to give us footing, we must concentrate on the “*Wie*,” on the *being-toward*, and find our footing there. Dasein, as understanding-potentiality-of-being (*verstehendes Seinkönnen*), is *toward* its possibilities by projecting itself upon them. Hence, being-toward-death, i.e. being toward this ever imminent, essentially unrealizable possibility *as possibility*, bifurcates into the two familiar modes of authenticity or inauthenticity, i.e. of understanding myself in and out of this possibility, or of failing to do so. *Inauthentic being-toward-death* is that sideways-on grasp of my own death as an event that I try to put somehow at my disposal. This also includes “putting it away” and ignoring it as something that will happen not soon, not to me. There are innumerable, prosaic instances of inauthentic being-toward-death in our daily compartments, where some form of the recognition that “one dies” figures somehow in the background. A nicely dramatic example of this is provided by the premise of the popular TV show *Breaking Bad*. The main character of the show, high-school chemistry teacher Walter White, learns he is about to die of lung cancer. His doctor tells him he has a short time left to live, and he interprets this time as a window in which he can take drastic action to ensure that his family will be provided for after the event of his death. In other words, his death as an impending event, an approaching actuality in world-time, tells him something: it *gives* him something – a year, two years – and it allows him to make calculations. In a sense, then, he has a “hold” on his death. It’s “something” he can work with. It is precisely this getting-a-hold-of, this bringing-to-heel, that the abyssal phenomenon of death as pure possibility – a possibility that “knows no measure” – utterly contravenes.

In order to consider precisely what authentic being-toward-death could mean, that is, in what sense we can (and always already do) understand ourselves out of the *possibility of impossibility*, let us retrieve our point of departure. We started from: *being-toward-death is the most primordial concretion of Dasein's being toward itself as potentiality-of-being* (Seinkönnen). This “being toward itself” was shown to be rooted in Heidegger’s insistence that Dasein must have a way somehow to understand itself as the possibility that it is – to understand itself properly, authentically, i.e. to be ontically “what” it is ontologically. But another fundamental claim of the Dasein-analytic is that the ontological characterization of Dasein as a thrown potentiality-of-being (*geworfenes Seinkönnen*) is *the only* characterization of Dasein. Whatever its ontical/existentiell determinations, however factual Dasein understands or grasps itself (as father or writer or teacher), these ontical determinations do not characterize Dasein *as such*. Heidegger makes this point forcefully early in the text: “All the being-as-it-is [*So-sein*] which [*Dasein*] possesses is primarily being [*Sein*].” (GA 2: 57/SZ 42). Indeed, the term Dasein itself was chosen as a “reiner Seinsausdruck,” a pure expression of being (GA 2: 17/SZ 12). This is a crucial aspect of the Dasein-analytic. It is the reason for Dasein’s primordial unsettledness, namely, that there’s nothing in Dasein itself that can give Dasein a hint as to “who” it can and should be. *Dasein qua Dasein is determined purely ontologically*. It’s as if there were a tool that could be any tool, so that we would be forced to call it just *tool*, or *ready-to-hand* – *Zuhanden* – for its being (*Sein*), and leave it ontically completely indeterminate. So with Dasein.

Now in authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*, ownedness), Dasein somehow understands or grasps itself as the (thrown) possibility that it is. This also means that Dasein grasps itself as an entity determined purely ontologically. But the fundamental principle of ontological difference tells us that *being is not a being*. In other words, for Dasein properly (genuinely, authentically) to grasp itself, it must grasp itself *not* in and out of any of its possible worldly ontic/existentiell determinations – *not* as a father, *not* as a writer, *not* as a teacher, indeed, *not* out of any possibility of being-in-the-world.<sup>25</sup> This requirement exactly matches Heidegger’s

characterization of being-toward-death as being toward “the possibility of impossibility of every mode of behavior toward...of every way of existing...” (GA 2: 348/SZ 262). Put differently, Dasein’s grasp of itself as an entity determined purely ontologically must manifest as a sweeping *inability* to understand itself from its world.

It is in this sense that being-toward-death is a *concretion* of Dasein’s being-toward-itself. A concretion in Heidegger’s sense is an ontic manifestation of what is already understood ontologically in a certain way, the existentiell in which the existential is exemplified.<sup>24</sup> Dasein’s possible ways of being toward its own death *exemplify and enact* its various ways of being toward itself as possibility. We can thus say that the “not” of death (i.e. that as possibility death “offers no support for becoming intent on something,” that it is a possibility of *impossibility*) is tightly linked to the “not” of the ontological difference, the radical insistence that being is *not* a being. Put differently, a being determined only in its being (*Sein*), a being that can and must be able to grasp itself as it genuinely is, must relate itself somehow to a “not.” And Heidegger’s careful articulation of Dasein’s complex relation to its ownmost “not” (i.e. its death) is meant to fulfill just this demand. In death, i.e. in Dasein’s ever being toward its own death as possibility in which “no-thing” (impossibility) can be realized, Dasein already has a *concrete* relation to a *not* (nullity, not-ness, nothingness) in its existence.

Heidegger writes: “familiar being-in-the-world is a mode of the uncanniness of Da-sein, not the other way around. Not-being-at-home [*Un-zuhause*] must be conceived existentially and ontologically as the more primordial phenomenon” (GA 2: 251/SZ 189). Dasein’s understanding of itself in terms of its world is conditioned by Dasein’s primordial *inability* to understand itself from its world. Dasein’s primordial inability to understand itself in terms of its world is not something that happens at this or that time, as would be the case, for instance, with an episode of anxiety (mis)conceived as a psychological event happening in world-time (occurring at one time as opposed to another). On the contrary, Dasein has always already projected itself upon, i.e. understood itself in and out of, its *inability* to understand itself from the world,

even and especially in its clinging to the world and ever struggling to understand itself from it. Dasein is not *either* authentic *or* inauthentic; rather it is constitutively *both* authentic *and* inauthentic, both facing *and* fleeing – “it stays equiprimordially in truth and untruth” (GA 2: 396/sz 298–99).<sup>25</sup>

Heidegger makes just this point, insisting that Dasein does not “switch” between these primordial modes “in time,” in *What is Metaphysics?*, the famous lecture from 1929. There, he writes:

If Dasein can adopt a stance toward beings only by holding itself out into the nothing and can exist only thus, and if the nothing is originally manifest only in anxiety, then must we not hover in this anxiety constantly in order to be able to exist at all? And have we not ourselves confessed that this original anxiety is rare? (GA 9: 115/91).

The solution which Heidegger offers in that lecture is that the nothing nihilates incessantly, and that “in its nihilation the nothing directs us precisely toward beings” (GA 9: 116/92). In other words, it’s exactly not the case that Dasein is in a relation with the nothing only at certain moments in world-time, in certain “situations” or “episodes.” Facing and fleeing are not competing existentiell alternatives, but are rather complementary and co-constitutive. As such, these ur-existentiell possibilities characterize Dasein’s primordial temporality, and it is this primordial temporality which makes something like world-time possible in the first place. The *inability* to understand oneself from one’s world is not another kind of understanding (or another *ability*); nor is it “something” that “occurs” at some time as opposed to another. That *inability* is, strictly speaking, not any ability of an entity determined as nothing but abilities. It is the absolute limit of such an entity.

Similar formulations appear in closely related texts from the period 1929–30. In *On the Essence of Truth*, Heidegger writes: “The insistent turning toward what is readily available and the ek-sistent turning away from the mystery belong together. They are one and the same

(*eines und dasselbe*)” (GA 9: 196/150). The text emphasizes “the simultaneity of disclosure and concealing” (GA 9: 198/151). In the lecture course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, we find:

We have somehow always already departed toward this whole. . . . But we are somehow simultaneously torn back by something, resting in a gravity that draws us downward. We are underway to this “as a whole.” We ourselves are this underway, this transition, this “neither the one nor the other.” What is this oscillating to and fro between this neither/nor? . . . What is the unrest of this ‘not’” (GA 29/30: 8/5–6)?

This “to and fro,” the “toward” and “away” – these fundamental existentiell modalities together belong to Dasein’s primordial temporality, to its ontic/ontological simultaneous “neither/nor,” to the fundamental “unrest of this ‘not.’” When Heidegger speaks in *Being and Time* of Dasein fleeing in the *face* of itself (e.g. GA 2: 245/SZ 184), or when he insists that Dasein has “projected itself upon its potentiality-of-being *before* going on to any mere consideration of itself” (GA 2: 537/SZ 406), we cannot and must not construe the “in the face of itself” or the “already having projected itself on itself” as anything occurring at some times as opposed to others, as any kind of cognitive or psychological attitude, or as any kind of experience. Now of course in our conscious, worldly existence there are *times* when we consider ourselves more alienated from the world or more attuned to our death. Sometimes the world “stops speaking to us.” But these attitudes and experiences are possible because of a more primordial sweeping *inability* to understand ourselves from the world that is ever operative in Dasein – ever defining its “simultaneous disclosure and concealment.”

“Being-toward-death is the anticipation of a *Seinkönnen* of that being whose kind of being is anticipation itself” (GA 2: 348/SZ 262). An amazing formulation. Anticipation (*Vorlaufen*) is being toward a possibility *as possibility*, and this is Dasein’s being precisely because Dasein is a possibility that is toward (*zum*) itself as possibility. And

being-toward-death is the anticipation of a *Seinkönnen* (a being toward a possibility *as possibility*) precisely because death is a possibility where nothing actual or real is possible. Our relation to our own death, wherein we enact our being toward our own being in the sense of anticipation, is a relation to nothing (impossibility), to *the* nothing. It thus anticipates Heidegger's dramatic articulation in *What is Metaphysics?*: "Dasein means: being held out into the nothing" (GA 9: 115/91).

We are now in a position to sum up the results of this section. Conceiving of death as categorial possibility reveals a possibility where nothing is possible, i.e. it brings us before the incomprehensible lacuna that is death from the first person perspective. We therefore must ground this *possibility of impossibility* in projection, in our being *toward* it. Being toward this *possibility of impossibility* is enacted in the dual, complementary relation of understanding ourselves in and out of it, or failing to do so. Failing to do so is manifest in the innumerable ways in which we understand death as an event in world-time, an event that we typically ignore or try to put under our control in one way or another. Understanding ourselves in and out of the *possibility of impossibility* is tantamount to understanding ourselves out of our primordial *inability* to understand ourselves from our world. In other words, Heidegger finds the phenomenon of death not in anything *actual*, not in our not being present at some future point in world-time, but in *impossibility*, i.e. in a more primordial *not*: the *inability* to understand ourselves from the world. This *inability* "nihilates incessantly" and our being toward it is *enacted* exactly in our ever clinging to the world and "holding fast" to it. This projective relation to impossibility, to the primordial *inability* to understand, cannot be reduced to the "occurrence" of some "situation" or "episode" in world-time (occurring at one time as opposed to another). Rather, the modalities of facing and fleeing are complementary and together they belong to Dasein's primordial temporality, which makes something like world-time possible.<sup>26</sup> If the traditional notion of death invokes an *expected* transition in world-time from presence to *non-presence*, Heidegger appropriates the notion, grounding it in the more primordial phenomenon of *being-toward-death* understood

as *projection* onto *not being able to be*. In other words, he arrives at an existential notion of death by replacing “expectation” with projection and being toward, and replacing “non-presence” with not being able to be.<sup>27</sup> It would be a far cry to claim that “what *Being and Time* means by ‘death’ has almost nothing to do with the ordinary sense of the word.”<sup>28</sup>

### III. DEATH, THE ONTOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE, AND THE STRUCTURE OF BEING AND TIME

We have seen in what way Heidegger’s treatment of death is guided by the ontological characterization of Dasein as a *potentiality-of-being* (Seinkönnen) that is toward (*zum*) itself as *potentiality-of-being*, where this *toward* means a facing or fleeing. But we have left a fundamental question untouched: why does Heidegger assume, or rather stipulate and demand, that among the possibilities of the *potentiality-of-being* (which Dasein is), there must be a possibility for Dasein to grasp itself *as* the *possibility* that it is? Why not just say that Dasein is indeed a possibility, even an existential possibility – i.e. that it existentially/ontically is how it understands itself to be – and be content that Dasein’s possibilities are nothing other than the various roles it can play in its factic, everyday, worldly existence? Why does Heidegger add, and emphasize above all else, this further “fantastical” demand? Why introduce the almost incomprehensible *zum*? We saw that authenticity is a structural aspect of the idea of existence, but is it a *necessary* aspect of it? Another way of asking the question is this: could *Being and Time* have stopped at the end of Division I? Putting aside the ambitious plan to root Dasein’s understanding of being in its primordial temporality, could the analysis of being-in, being-with, and the worldhood of the world, culminating in the articulation of the being of Dasein as care (*Sorge*), stand on its own? This question has been raised before, e.g. by Hubert Dreyfus.<sup>29</sup>

To understand the deep reasons for Heidegger’s demand that Dasein must have a way to understand itself as the (thrown) *Seinkönnen* that it is, i.e. his insistence on the *zum*, an insistence already present at the very outset of *Being and Time*, consider the following passage where

Heidegger indicates the sense in which being-guilty (*Schuldigsein*) belongs constitutively to the being of Dasein:

*Being-guilty* belongs to the being of Dasein itself, which we defined primarily as a potentiality-of-being [*Seinkönnen*]. The statement that Dasein “is” constantly guilty can only mean that it always maintains itself in this being either as authentic or inauthentic existence. *Being-guilty* is not just a lasting quality of something constantly objectively present, but the *existentiell possibility of being* authentically or inauthentically guilty. “Guilty” is always only in the actual factual *Seinkönnen*. Thus, being-guilty must be conceived as a potentiality-of-being-guilty [*Schuldigseinkönnen*], because it belongs to the *being* of Da-sein. (GA 2: 405/SZ 305-6)

Clearly, this also applies to any ontological or existential determination of Dasein as such. But what exactly is the significance of saying that whatever is ontologically constitutive of Dasein does not constitute it as a “lasting quality of something objectively present,” but rather in the “*existentiell possibility of being* authentically or inauthentically” toward it?

It is here that we see the most dramatic enactment of the ontological difference in the Dasein-analytic. The characterizations that are ontologically definitive of Dasein are not themselves properties, i.e. beings (*Seiende*) in the widest sense of the term (cf. note 23). They must therefore become manifest (expressed, exemplified, or attested to) in the ontic, in *existentiell understandings*, and this ultimately means *in being authentically or inauthentically toward them*. Being-guilty is not a *property* of Dasein because *being is not a being*. The same holds even when it comes to the ontological characterization of Dasein as *Seinkönnen* (potentiality-of-being). Ontological determinations are not a deeper, independent layer to which the ontic/existentiell may correspond or fail to correspond (in facing or in fleeing). Strictly speaking, ontological determinations “are” not – *there “are”* only ontic states of affairs. That Dasein is ontologically a *Seinkönnen* must be expressed

– must be *made concrete* – in and through an ontic/existential possibility of Dasein. Even if this possibility is proximately and for the most part misunderstood and covered over, it is nevertheless always outstanding. Even in “fleeing,” Dasein *is* the possibility of “facing.”

For the same reasons that Dasein’s being-guilty (*Schuldigsein*) must be conceived as a potentiality-of-being-guilty (*Schuldigseinkönnen*), so also Dasein’s being a *Seinkönnen* (potentiality-of-being) must be conceived precisely as a *Seinkönnenseinkönnen* (a potentiality-of-being-a-potentiality-of-being). In other words, the “fact” that Dasein is ontologically a *Seinkönnen is* (i.e. is made concrete) only in Dasein’s possibility of grasping itself as (i.e. as ontically/existentially being) a *Seinkönnen*. Dasein *is* the possibility to grasp itself as possibility (*Seinkönnen*). Dasein is constitutively *toward* (*zum*) itself as possibility. Dasein is concerned about – it goes around/about, *geht um* – its own being, and its being is precisely the possibility of being the possibility that it is (or failing to be that). This is the true meaning of the oft-quoted mantra about Dasein’s concern with its own being. Dasein’s primordial concern with its own being should not be confused with a concern with itself *as a being*, i.e. with its ontic/existential worldly roles. This point is often misunderstood. A concern with its own *being* per se, and not with itself as an entity (as *a being*), means that Dasein *is* ever the possibility of facing or fleeing the possibility that it is.

Dasein’s ontological structure, its being a potentiality-of-being, *is* in its ontic/existential facing or fleeing itself as possibility. This expressive dependence of the ontological on the ontic explains why Heidegger must immediately stipulate the special ontic/existential possibility of authenticity with the introduction of Dasein’s ontological structure, i.e. with the idea of existence itself. Similarly, we can say that death (the *Nicht-mehr-dasein-können*) *is* only in Dasein’s *Nicht-mehr-dasein-könnens-seinkönnen*, i.e. precisely and exclusively in Dasein’s facing or fleeing it, in its ever being-toward (*zum*) it.

We can end this section with one final word on the organization of *Being and Time* as a whole. Heidegger defines Dasein’s primordial guilt existentially as “being-the-ground for a being which is determined by

a not” (GA 2: 376/SZ 283). It is worth noting that just as Dasein’s complex relation to its own death concretizes Dasein’s relation to itself as *Seinkönnen*, so Dasein’s complex relation to its primordial guilt (whether facing or fleeing it) is intended to concretize Dasein’s relation to itself as *thrown* (i.e. its relation to itself insofar as it is not its own ground). We can accordingly articulate the ontological skeleton of *Being and Time* as follows: the being of Dasein is characterized as *thrown Seinkönnen*; the ontological difference implies that the ontological must be manifested in the ontic/existentiell; when it comes to Dasein, the ontic/existentiell is in Dasein’s self-understandings and self-interpretations; Heidegger’s task is therefore to find an “attestation” [*Bezeugung*] that “‘gives Dasein to understand’ itself” (GA 2: 355/SZ: 267) as the *thrown Seinkönnen* that it is; hence, chapter 1 and 2 of Division II are there to give just such an attestation, i.e. to show that Dasein already understands itself as *Seinkönnen* via its relation to its own death, and as *thrown* via its relation to its primordial guilt. We can accordingly see why Division I of *Being and Time* could not have stood alone as a text articulating the being of Dasein without violating the ontological difference.

## CONCLUSION

We can clarify the implications of the preceding interpretation by returning briefly to the world-collapse approach. As we have seen, this approach is characterized by its attempt to solve the “possibility of impossibility” puzzle by arguing that there actually is a “condition” or “situation” that “occurs” in which it is in some sense impossible for Dasein to be. Possibility here is understood categorially, i.e. as rooted in the actual, even when it comes to the *possibility of impossibility*. This yields the rather strange consequence that impossibility is yet another possibility of Dasein. Put differently, the advocates of this approach attempt to understand death as the *actualization* of an *inability-to-be*, whereas for Heidegger, death is precisely the *unrealizable* (unactualizable) *possibility* of it.

Still, one might argue, isn’t there something right about identifying death with *Angst*, or with an episode of anxiety? After all, *Angst* “takes

away from Dasein the possibility of understanding itself in terms of the ‘world’” (GA 2: 249/SZ 187), and we did just describe the different modalities of being-toward-death as rooted in our primordial *inability* to understand ourselves in terms of the world. At the end of the day, is the interpretation offered here really all that different from the world-collapse approaches?

Well, there surely is something right about the world collapse approach, about its reaching to Dasein’s inability-to-be/understand as the root of the phenomenon of death in *Being and Time*. The problem is that it does not go far enough, that it still operates within the horizon of world-time which forces one to see death as *actualized* – and actualized at this or that time. This shortcoming leads to many difficulties. In the first place, as Thomson himself admits, world-collapse interpretations “leave it largely baffling why Heidegger should call the phenomenon he is interested in ‘death,’”<sup>50</sup> whereas according to the interpretation above, Heidegger’s appropriation of the traditional, “vulgar” notion of death always stays within its purview (see end of section II above). More fundamentally, this approach forces on us such categories as “experience,” “state,” or “condition” – i.e. it keeps us within the traditional framework of categorial possibility. The fundamental connection between being-toward-death and Dasein’s being-toward-itself is lost, and so is the fundamental point that *ways of being* (e.g. being guilty, being-toward-death, or Dasein’s being-toward-itself as possibility) *are* only in the existentiell possibility of being authentically or inauthentically toward them. Indeed, this approach makes it difficult properly to grasp the place of the death-analysis in the overarching structure of *Being and Time* – and the dramatic role of the ontological difference in the organization of this work.

Death for Heidegger is not an episode, not something Dasein “lives through,” but rather Dasein’s fundamental relation to the nothing, to impossibility, a relation that is itself understood as *possibility* – or rather, as *ever being toward a possibility* (as opposed to a relation to an “event” that is not yet present or actual in world-time). This *being toward* is sustained in the two fundamental existentiell modalities of

facing and fleeing – modalities that are ever co-constitutive of Dasein’s ontic/ontological simultaneous “to and fro.” We have seen that this is Heidegger’s way of working out the consequences of adopting that radical first-person perspective from which Wittgenstein could say that “our life has no end.” But in working out these consequences, Heidegger reaches the opposite conclusion from Epicurus. Epicurus claimed that “death is nothing to us since when we exist, death is not yet present, and when death is present, we do not exist.”<sup>31</sup> But by rooting death in the comportment of being-toward-death, Heidegger emphasizes that death is rather *everything* to us. In Jim Thompson’s “The Killer Inside Me,” one of the characters says: “Did you ever stop to figure that there’s all kinds of dying, but only one way of being dead?” We might paraphrase this line, itself a twisted paraphrase of the famous first line of Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*, in a Heideggerian vein: “Did you ever stop to figure that there’s all kinds of dying, but *no* way of being dead?”

In a thoughtful paper from 2005, Jean Grondin asks a question that should always be kept in mind when reading Heidegger’s *Being and Time*: what is the relation between the question of being as a philosophical question “in the Aristotelian tradition” and the fact that Dasein is concerned with its own being: that it goes around it, about it, that it faces or flees it; that Dasein’s being is somehow a burden to it? In other words, what is the relation between the ontological priority of the question of being (SZ, section 3) and its ontic priority (SZ, section 4)? “Can we identify that question of the meaning of being with the burden that Dasein is for itself?”<sup>32</sup> Grondin answers that since the understanding of being is rooted in Dasein, it becomes clear how Dasein’s flight from its own mortality accounts for its tendency to understand true being as “permanent presence.”<sup>33</sup> In the foregoing, we have tried to illuminate another important link by claiming an intimate relation between the “not” of the ontological difference and the “not” of death, i.e. between that fundamental principle of philosophy and the finitude of Dasein.

NOTES

- 1 William Blattner, "The Concept of Death in *Being and Time*," *Man and World* 27 (1994): 49.
- 2 Carol White, *Time and Death: Heidegger's Analysis of Finitude* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), preface.
- 3 Taylor Carman, *Heidegger's Analytic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 276.
- 4 Denis McManus, "Being-Towards-Death and Owning One's Judgment," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 91.2 (2015): 245.
- 5 For this he uses "perishing" or "demise," depending on whether something like biological or biographical ending is meant. See Carman, *Heidegger's Analytic*, 279.
- 6 Iain Thomson, "Death and Demise in *Being and Time*," *The Cambridge Companion to Being and Time*, ed. Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 263.
- 7 Blattner, "The Concept of Death," 67–68.
- 8 Thomson, "Death and Demise," 281.
- 9 Thomson, "Death and Demise," 267.
- 10 Thomson, "Death and Demise," 281.
- 11 I put "never" in quotation marks because the whole point here is to speak from Dasein's own temporal horizon and not from the perspective of world-time to which "never" usually refers. More on this below.
- 12 Cf. e.g. Carman, *Heidegger's Analytic*, 281.
- 13 Heidegger uses *Seinkönnen* together with *Möglichkeit*, *Möglichsein*, *Seinmöglichkeit*, to form a cluster of overlapping formal indications in his attempt to distinguish existential possibility from possibility as a category of the present-at-hand. To accommodate the world-collapse approach, Thomson, following Blattner, attempts to make a sharp distinction between *Möglichsein* (being-possible) and *Seinkönnen*, taking the former to name "our long-term identities, goals and life-projects" and the latter to name "our pressing ahead into, or projecting ourselves

upon, these projects”: “Heidegger’s Perfectionist Philosophy of Education in *Being and Time*,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 37 (2004): 450–1. He makes the case for the “functional independence” of the two notions in order to make a claim that in “death” – understood as an “experience” (Ibid, n33) – what become untenable are these life-projects, but not the activity of “pressing” or “projecting”, i.e. the *Möglichsein* but not the *Seinkönnen*. This distinction is simply not supported by the text. For example, understanding *Seinkönnen* as “the projecting” makes no sense here: “Deciding for a *Seinkönnen* and making this decision from one’s own self” (GA 2: 356/SZ 268), and it makes a statement such as “A *Seinkönnen*, a possibility as possibility, is there only in the projection” (GA 24: 392/277) tautological. Conversely, Heidegger’s statement that “Dasein is nothing but being-possible [*Möglichsein*]” (GA 20: 412/298) goes against not just the proposed distinction, but also against the broader aims of the world-collapse thesis. Consider also: “Dasein is *Möglichsein* which has been delivered over to itself as thrown possibility [*Möglichkeit*] through and through. Its *Möglichsein* is transparent to itself in different possible ways and degrees. Understanding the being of such *Seinkönnen*...” (GA 2: 191/SZ 144) – far from making sharp distinctions, Heidegger’s adumbrated use of the various notions for existential possibility is persistent.

- 14 As “ego cogito, subject, the ‘I,’ reason, spirit, person” (GA 2: 30/SZ 22). These historical self-interpretations are said to still be within “the determination of the meaning of being as *parousia* or *ousia*, which ontologically and temporally means “presence” [*Anwesenheit*]” (GA 2: 34/SZ 25) – exactly what Heidegger is trying to challenge in the Dasein-analytic.
- 15 To be more precise, being-toward-death is introduced as a concretion of Dasein’s being toward itself as *Seinkönnen*. Heidegger himself doesn’t always follow his own distinctions here, often switching quite casually between death and being-toward-death. What should be kept in mind is that death is a certain possibility

(the possibility of impossibility) and being-toward-death is being *toward* that possibility – i.e. facing or fleeing it, understanding ourselves in and out of it, or failing to do so. The ‘ownmost possibility’ is the authentic modality (facing) of that being-toward. More on this below.

- 16 Epicurus, *The Essential Epicurus*. Translated with an introduction by Eugene O’Connor (New York: Prometheus Books, 1993), 63.
- 17 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. David F. Pears and Brian F. McGuinness (London and New York: Routledge, 1974), 6.4311.
- 18 Sigmund Freud, “Thoughts for the times on war and death,” *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works (1914–1916)* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), 289.
- 19 The ‘sideways-on’ vocabulary is effectively used by Taylor Carman, “Things Fall Apart,” *Heidegger, Authenticity and the Self: Themes From Division Two of Being and Time*, ed. by Denis McManus (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 136. John McDowell speaks of the “sideways-on” perspective as a deceptive approach to perception, but the underlying intuition is the same.
- 20 “Only because primordial time is finite can ‘derivative’ time temporalize itself as in-finite” (GA 2: 437/SZ 331). See also *Being and Time* §72 for a discussion and critique of the “vulgar” sideways-on approach, the understanding of Dasein as a “connection of life” between birth and death, a succession of experiences “in time” (GA 2: 493/SZ 373).
- 21 Thomas Sheehan, “Hiding in Plain Sight: Κίνησις at the Core of Heidegger’s Work. Prolegomenon,” *Bollettino Filosofico* 35 (2020): 282.
- 22 Or, more precisely, where the *Was* is no-thing, i.e. nothing, or rather, the nothing.
- 23 Our ontic/existentiell ways of being in the world are also “beings”: “Seiend is alles, wovon wir reden, was wir meinen, wozu

- wir uns so und so verhalten, seiend ist auch, was und wie wir selbst sind” (GA 2: 9/SZ 6–7) (“Everything we talk about, mean, and are related to is in being [*Seiend*] in one way or another. What and how we ourselves are is also in being [*seiend*]”).
- 24 For example, the indicating of a traffic sign is an “ontic concretion” of the referring, the “what-for” that ontologically determines any useful thing (GA 2: 105/SZ 78). Everydayness is the “concretion nearest to Dasein” (GA 2: 335/SZ 252). The ‘they’ as an existential...has “various possibilities of concretion in accordance with Dasein” (GA 2: 172/SZ 129).
- 25 In a recent article, David Abergel reaches a similar conclusion, arguing that Dasein “is simultaneously *both* an ‘authentic-self’ and lost in the ‘they’ as a ‘they-self.’” See David Abergel, “The Confluence of Authenticity and Inauthenticity in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*,” *Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle Annual* 10 (2020): 78. Abergel does this by analyzing the notion of ‘ruinance’ in the 1921–22 Aristotle lecture course (GA 61), a precursor to the notion of “fallenness” (*Verfallenheit*) in *Being and Time*.
- 26 It remains a question how these modes manifest in world-time, and more generally how sequential world-time arises out of primordial temporality. These questions were not fully worked out by Heidegger, as are many other aspects of temporality in *Being and Time*. Dealing with these questions is beyond the scope of this paper. However, I do insist that an understanding of Heidegger’s treatment of death is first and foremost an attempt to think outside the framework of world-time.
- 27 A similarly aggressive, and in many ways analogous, appropriation occurs with regard to the notion of guilt (*Schuld*): from the “vulgar” signification of being guilty as “having debts with...” and “being responsible for...” (GA 2: 374/SZ 282) to “*being the ground of a nullity*” (GA 2: 376/SZ 283) — where the “being responsible” is appropriated to “being the ground” and the “debt,” the lack, to “nullity.”
- 28 Thomson, “Death and Demise,” 263.

- 29 Hubert Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-world: A Commentary on Hei-*  
*degger's Being and Time*, Division I (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).
- 30 Thomson, "Death and Demise," 263.
- 31 Epicurus, *The Essential Epicurus*, 63.
- 32 Jean Grondin, "Why Reawaken the Question of Being?" *Hei-*  
*degger's Being and Time: Critical Essays*, ed. Richard Polt (New  
York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 24.
- 33 Grondin, "Why Reawaken the Question of Being?," 25.