

# Anxiety, Choice and Responsibility in Heidegger's Account of Authenticity

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This paper offers an interpretation of the role that anxiety plays in Heidegger's discussion of authenticity. I take as my starting point a widely-held view of these Heideggerian reflections, Sec. 1-4 exploring some ways in which one might solve the serious problems that that view raises. Though I conclude that these solutions do not work, I draw on them—as well as on an exploration in Sec. 5-8 of some parallels with ideas in the Wittgensteinian rule-following literature—in developing my own reading in Sec. 9-12. What emerges is—I believe—an interesting and plausible understanding of taking responsibility for oneself and one's actions, and of a meaningfully-lived life.

## 1. Anxiety, Authenticity and Death

According to Heidegger, '[a]nxiety reveals an insignificance of the world' (SZ 343).<sup>1</sup> When we have this experience, we find ourselves 'face to face with the "nothing" of the world' (SZ 276). This 'does not signify that the world is absent' (SZ 187), 'annihilated by anxiety, so that nothing is left' (WM 90). But 'what is environmentally ready-to-hand', which Heidegger typically identifies with entities with which we can actively engage, 'sinks away' and an 'utter insignificance ... makes itself known' (SZ 187).<sup>2</sup> Most commentators understandably take such remarks to depict anxiety as 'an experience of utter meaninglessness' (Dahlstrom 2013: 208), of 'universal meaninglessness' (Philipse 1998: 395): '[a]nxiety is the condition in which nothing matters' (Blattner 1999: 80), in which 'all meaning and mattering slip away' (Dreyfus and Rubin 1991: 332).

That *Dasein* can have such an experience is *prima facie* puzzling. *Dasein* is the entity that "understands Being", where Being is 'that on the basis of which [*woraufhin*] entities are already understood [*verstanden*]' (SZ 12, 6). Heidegger identifies 'the "upon-which" [*Woraufhin*] in terms of which something becomes intelligible [*verständlich*]'

precisely with ‘meaning [*Sinn*]’ (SZ 151), in which case—if ‘all meaning’ were to ‘slip away’—*Dasein* would seem to be deprived of the ‘object’ that it—as an understanding of Being—must grasp if it is to exist. Similarly, when Heidegger insists that *Dasein* is Being-in-the-world, this ‘does not signify anything spatial at all but means primarily *being familiar with* [*vertraut sein mit*]’ (HCT 158). A meaningful, surrounding world—‘the world, as that which is familiar to me in such and such a way [*als dem so und so Vertrauten*]’ (SZ 54)—seems necessary then for *Dasein* to so much as exist. ‘In anxiety’, Heidegger tells us, ‘one feels “*uncanny*”’, where ‘uncanniness’ means ‘not-being-at-home’ (SZ 188). But *Dasein*, one might presume, has to ‘be-at-home’ in a meaningful world.<sup>3</sup>

There are further complications. Anxiety also plays a role in revealing, in some way, the possibility of authenticity:

In anxiety there lies the possibility of a disclosure which is quite distinctive; for anxiety individualises. This individualisation brings *Dasein* back from its falling, and makes manifest to it that authenticity and inauthenticity are possibilities of its Being. These basic possibilities of *Dasein* ... show themselves in anxiety as they are in themselves—undisguised by entities within-the-world, to which, proximally and for the most part, *Dasein* clings [*klammert*]. (SZ 190-91)

So here Heidegger weaves his reflections on anxiety into a notably more upbeat discussion. Anxiety reveals to us the possibility of a kind of self-determination; it plays a role in our assuming responsibility for ourselves, our genuinely being ourselves—rather than succumbing to the conformist charms of *das Man* (‘the They’ as Macquarrie and Robinson translate it)—and in what Heidegger calls our ‘choosing ourselves’. ‘Anxiety makes manifest in *Dasein* ... its *Being-free for* the freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself’ (SZ 188); and ‘[w]hen *Dasein* has chosen itself, it has thereby chosen both itself and choice’ (WDR 168). Anxiety poses for us then a challenge, one for which some of us—the authentic—are ‘ready’ (SZ 296, 297).

What complicates matters further still is that Heidegger links anxiety very closely to what he calls ‘death’. Indeed he says that ‘Being-towards-death is essentially anxiety’ (SZ 266). So-called ‘world collapse’ readings of the Being-towards-death discussion, which Dreyfus (2005) endorses as the best available and Thomson has deemed to represent the ‘cutting edge’ of Heidegger scholarship (2013: 263), give us a very straight-forward account of the connection between anxiety and death by—roughly speaking—identifying them,<sup>4</sup> death now understood as ‘something we can live through’ (Thomson 2013: 268).<sup>5</sup> Though I have a rather different view of my own of Heidegger’s discussion of ‘death’,<sup>6</sup> I will accept this identification for the purposes of the present paper.

## 2. Liberation, Paralysis and Motivation

A widely-held interpretation of Heidegger’s discussion of anxiety/death takes the following form:

[I]n ‘being-towards-death’ *Dasein* recognizes, for the first time, that its normal or everyday practical context is simply one possibility among others, *one which is thereby subject to its own free choice*. This context need not be taken up unquestioningly from tradition or society, or even from the past choices that *Dasein* itself has already made. ‘Being-towards-death’ thus opens up the possibility of a very particular kind of liberation—the possibility of a truly ‘authentic’ existence in which *Dasein*’s own choices and decisions rest on no taken for granted background framework at all. (Friedman 2000: 51)

According to such a view, anxiety/death liberates us by making it possible for us to choose how to live without any ‘taken for granted background framework at all’, this being ‘a “resolute” and thoroughgoing decision, a decision that goes all the way down, as it were’ (Friedman 2000: 51-52). Instead of acting on a set of merely inherited possibilities, principles or reasons, the authentic person chooses her own; in doing so, she faces up—owns up—to the need for such choice and takes responsibility for herself and the course her life

then takes. She thereby exhibits a form of autonomy and her life a form of ‘ownedness’, as Heidegger’s *Eigentlichkeit* might be more literally translated.

Iain Thomson offers a recent example of such a view. He identifies Heidegger’s ‘anxiety’ and ‘death’ with ‘an anguished experience of the utter desolation of the self’ (2013: 262), in which ‘all of our projects ... break down simultaneously’ (p. 270). This is a condition out of which we can emerge, however: we can perform a ‘passage through death’ in the form of a ‘reflexive reconnection to the world of projects lost in death’ (2013: 272-73 and 2004: 453). Indeed our experience of anxiety/death makes this reconnection one in which we have ‘the *freedom* to choose’ which projects to reconnect to. This experience ‘break[s] the previously unnoticed grip arbitrarily exerted upon us by *das Man*’s ubiquitous norms of social propriety, its pre- and proscriptions on *what one does*’ (2013: 273, 274 and 2004: 455); instead we now ‘become capable of “choosing to choose”’, and—having made such a choice—acquire ‘the subsequent responsibility for having so chosen’ (2013: 273).

Despite the popularity of this kind of reading, the view it ascribes to Heidegger has also long been thought to be deeply problematic.<sup>7</sup> The principal objection is that—as Dreyfus puts it—if ‘nothing matters’, ‘*Dasein* is paralyzed’ (2005: xx). To see how, let us consider, for example, our ‘reconnecting’ choices. If we take these to rest upon considerations that favour particular projects over others, then we would not seem to have made ‘a decision that goes all the way down’; we are not—as the rhetoric goes—genuinely ‘liberated’ after all, in that the choice will be being made on the basis of a ‘taken for granted background framework’, one which declares certain projects praiseworthy and others not. So if we imagine making such a choice in the face of anxiety, it cannot be the case that it is ‘universal meaninglessness we experience in *Angst*’ (Philipse 1998: 395). But if such choices are not made on the basis of any such considerations, they would instead seem arbitrary, little better than the tossing of a coin. It is hard to see the making of such a ‘choice’ as constituting our taking responsibility for our lives; rather it would seem to be a perfect example of not doing so. As Tugendhat puts it

A choice ... that is not made in the light of reasons ... is a choice in which I leave how I choose to accident; and in this respect we have to say that it was not I who chose.  
(Tugendhat 1986: 216)

I will refer to this problem as ‘the Motivation Problem’ (MP). In a sense, it reaffirms a worry that Sec. 1 raised—that *Dasein*’s existence, as a performer of meaningful actions, is incompatible with ‘the meaninglessness of existence’ (Dahlstrom 2013: 15)—and we can see MP at work in Thomson’s discussion. He talks of our being ‘stranded (as it were)’ in ‘th[e] paralysis of our projects experienced in death’ (2013: 271, 273 and 2004: 453, 454). But a solution to MP is implied in remarks Thomson makes when insisting that the freedom that anxiety/death reveals to us ‘is always constrained’ (2013: 273 and 2004: 454): the constraints include *Dasein*’s ‘ontic talents, cares, and predispositions’ and ‘the pre-existing concerns of our time and “generation”’ (2013: 273). The ‘solution’ to MP emerges as Thomson slides away from treating these constraints as mere constraints. He tells us that, against the background they provide, ‘it ... *matters* that this particular role has been chosen by this particular *Dasein*’, because some choices will ‘develop its particular ontic and factual aptitudes as these intersect with the pressing needs of its time and generation’ (2013: 274, italics added).<sup>8</sup> So the choices we make in reconnecting to the world are motivated by, or grounded in, our ‘ontic cares’ and the ‘pressing needs’ and ‘concerns’ of our ‘time and generation’.

But this will not do. Assuming that we want to avoid MP, *something* must indeed move us if we are to ‘pass through’ anxiety/death; and perhaps this something includes ‘ontic cares’ and the needs of our time and generation. But if we have these cares and find these needs pressing in anxiety/death, then the latter cannot be the ‘catastrophic collapse’ Thomson describes it as being. Being moved by such cares and needs, our choices made in the face of anxiety may not be arbitrary. But if we are so moved, this undermines the vision of liberation through anxiety/death that views of this sort espouse and the accounts of ‘choosing choice’, taking responsibility, etc. that this vision underpins.

### 3. Questioning the Meaninglessness Assumption – I

One way to respond to these difficulties is to question whether anxiety really does reveal that ‘nothing matters’. This section and the following consider two ways of doing that.

One is to claim that, though there are genuine sources of motivation, anxiety/death blinds us to them: it is, in some sense, a deceptive or delusional state. One of the first advocates of a ‘world collapse’ reading, Bill Blattner, has offered a not-dissimilar view in his recent work. Blattner depicts anxiety as ‘a complete collapse of the structure of meaning in which one lives’ (2006: 139-40) but also insists that

Heidegger is *not* claiming that in anxiety we realize the ‘deep truth’ about our lives, that everything is worthless or meaningless. ... Anxiety is a kind of breakdown experience, breakdown in the living of a human life, rather than a window onto the truth. (2006: 142, 144).

But such a view will not solve the difficulty set out at the end of the previous section, because motivation to which we are blind cannot motivate ‘passage through’ anxiety/death. I do not wish to imply that Blattner assumes his view *does* solve that kind of difficulty; but we do pass close by here a criticism that Dreyfus has made of his account, namely, that it is not clear on Blattner’s view ‘what a life of readiness for an anxiety attack would be like’ (Dreyfus 2005: xx). If such readiness is meant to help one deal (in some sense) with anxiety when it strikes—to *do* something in the face of anxiety—then it is hard to see what that something might be when one faces (what one at least experiences as) a ‘complete collapse of the structure of meaning in which one lives’. One could propose that anxiety/death simply passes, coming to an end all by itself, so to speak. But if so, it is unclear why the authentic would count as any more ‘ready’ for the experience in question than the inauthentic are.

Interestingly, there is, I think, a way of reconstructing Thomson’s view such that it follows Blattner’s in taking anxiety/death to be delusional but has the advantage over Blattner’s of understanding that delusion as one for which one *can* be ready. Yet more interestingly, this

reconstruction would spare Thomson MP. But it comes at other—and, for Thomson, excessive—costs.

To begin, let us consider what happens in anxiety/death as a result of which our ‘life-projects’ collapse. In it, Thomson tells us, our projects ‘founder[] on the reef of their own contingency’ (2013: 271). To believe that the contingency of projects renders them meaningless would seem to require that one operate with a rather particular standard of meaningfulness;<sup>9</sup> and Thomson identifies one, the rejection of which he also declares to be key to ‘passage through death’: we realise that ‘there is ultimately nothing about the ontological structure of the self which could tell us what specifically we should do with our lives’ (p. 270).<sup>10</sup> *If* one’s notion of a meaningful project is one dictated by ‘the ontological structure of the self’, *then* our life-projects ‘founder on the reef of their own contingency’.

Thomson tells us that our ‘reconnection to the world’ ‘turns on our giving up the unreflexive, paralysing belief that there is a single correct choice to make’ (2013: 273 and 2004: 453, 454).<sup>11</sup> One way this ‘giving up’ could be key is that we would then see through a confused denigration of our ‘factual’ sources of motivation: we could ‘reconnect to’ our ‘ontic cares’ and the ‘concerns’ of ‘our age and generation’ because we would no longer dismiss them on the grounds that they are not reflective of ‘the ontological structure of the self’. This would also suggest an understanding of how one might be ready for anxiety. *If* one accepts the ‘paralyzing belief’s’ distorted standard of meaningfulness, then recognition of the contingency of one’s life projects will seem to entail their meaninglessness. But if one doesn’t, it won’t: one will be ready for anxiety in that one does not hold a belief—the ‘paralysing belief’—that one must hold if the above recognition is to precipitate a ‘global’ and ‘catastrophic collapse’ of ‘all of our life-projects’ (Thomson 2013: 271, 269).

But this reconstruction will not do either. For Thomson, giving up the ‘paralysing belief’ is key to our ‘reconnection to the world’ because ‘recognizing that there is no such correct choice (because there is no substantive self to determine such a choice) is what gives us the *freedom to choose*’ (2013: 273 and 2004: 454). But this would be a *non sequitur* on the above reconstruction. According to that reconstruction, ‘giving up’ the ‘paralysing belief’ removes a

slander that has been hanging over our existing, ‘factual’, contingent sources of motivation; but that gives us no reason to think that our *choosing* our forms of motivation makes sense. One’s being freed from a confusion that obscures real reasons one has for acting restores one, as it were, to one’s real motivational world; it does not give one a (more or less) free hand to reshape it.

Blattner does not face this problem, because his picture of authenticity differs. When authentic, rather than being ‘lost in the Anyone’ (Blattner’s preferred rendering of *das Man*), one responds to ‘the demands of one’s situation and one’s disposition’: ‘to find oneself and win oneself is to see what is factually possible and important and to carry through with it’ (2006: 166). To hold such a view—and this will be an important thought later—is to acknowledge what one might think of as the ‘given’—‘found’ rather than ‘chosen’—character of our motivation at its most fundamental level: ‘[t]o be *Dasein*, to be a person’, Blattner proposes, ‘is to find oneself differentially disposed towards the possibilities the world has to offer, differentially disposed by way of confronting those possibilities in terms of which they matter to one’ (p. 155). What allows Blattner to adopt these views while seeing anxiety/death as an experience in which ‘none of [*Dasein*’s] possibilities matter to it differentially’ (1994: 67) is his denial that this experience is ‘a window onto the truth’. But, as mentioned above, what remains unclear about his view is how the authentic person might be ‘ready’ for that experience.

#### **4. Questioning the Meaninglessness Assumption - II**

Perhaps then we must question in a more radical way the assumption that what anxiety reveals is that ‘nothing matters’. Reason to doubt whether Heidegger really does endorse a picture of anxiety as an experience of ‘utter’ or ‘universal meaninglessness’—delusional or otherwise—is given by passages such as the following:

He who is resolute ... understands the possibility of anxiety as the possibility of the very mood which neither inhibits nor bewilders him. Anxiety liberates him [‘He who



is resolute’] *from* possibilities which ‘count for nothing’ [‘*nichtigen*’], and lets him become free *for* those which are authentic. (SZ 344)<sup>12</sup>

Readings that place such passages at the heart of Heidegger’s understanding of anxiety certainly promise to escape MP. But the most obvious problem that such readings face is that of squaring such passages with the other remarks that Heidegger makes about anxiety. Heidegger may well say that anxiety leaves one with ‘authentic possibilities’; but how can he say that while also saying that anxiety reveals ‘the “nothing” of the world’, an ‘utter insignificance ... mak[ing] itself known’?

We see a version of this difficulty in Burch’s recent attempt to solve MP. Burch proposes that ‘anxiety nullifies the factual claims of my *current* context ... [b]ut this does not rule out remembering past experiences of satisfaction’ (2010: 223). It is these ‘traces’—these ‘aspects of the self that remain intact in death’—that ‘motivate *Dasein*’s return to the world’ (p. 221). Burch identifies these ‘traces’ as ‘the desire for hedonic repetition’, ‘a desire for an idiosyncratic repetition’ (underpinned by ‘an ever-ready constellation of dispositions and habits available for repeating a familiar self-world arrangement’) and a ‘desire to recover’ ‘eudaimonistic satisfaction’ (pp. 222-23).

As he himself says, Burch’s account ‘goes beyond interpretation to construction’ (p. 233, cf. p. 227) and some of the constructive notions invoked strike me as rather unHeideggerian in spirit (the first and third form of ‘trace’, for example). But it also raises a version of the worry raised above: it is not clear why our commitments are ‘suspended’ in anxiety—even if only ‘momentarily’ (p. 220)—if ‘[t]hese traces are always there in the background of experience’, ‘ever-ready’ (p. 223).

Burch’s is a complex account and I cannot do it justice here. Instead in the remainder of this paper, I will offer an interpretation of my own of what anxiety involves, one which has some similarities to Blattner’s more recent view and yet more to my reconstruction of Thomson’s. But as a final prelude, let us remind ourselves of four requirements that have emerged in our

discussion so far and which—it seems—an account of anxiety should strive to meet. It needs to identify

- 1) an experience of the meaninglessness of things
- 2) which does not necessarily paralyse us (*pace* MP)
- 3) for which we can—in some sense—be ready, and
- 4) which can play a role in a story about choosing oneself, choosing choice, assuming responsibility, etc.

Burch's view seems to fail to meet requirement (1), Thomson's view (2), Blattner's recent view (3), and my reconstruction of Thomson's view (4). My own interpretation, I will argue, meets all four.

## **5. Heidegger's Depiction of Inauthenticity I - Intimations of an Alternative Picture of Anxiety/Death**

To begin, I want to draw attention to some interesting twists in the formulations using which Heidegger characterises anxiety, formulations which paint a very particular picture of the inauthentic.

In anxiety, the possibility of authenticity is revealed 'undisguised by entities within-the-world, to which, proximally and for the most part, *Dasein* clings' (SZ 191, quoted above). Now 'the "world" can offer nothing more': '[a]nxiety ... takes away from *Dasein* the possibility of understanding itself, as it falls, in terms of the "world" and the way things have been publicly interpreted' (SZ 187). Similar notions can be found in remarks on death:

The possibility of death means that ... at some time ... the world will have nothing more to say to me, that everything to which I cling, with which I busy myself, and about which I am concerned will have no more to say to me and will no longer be of help to me. (WDR 168)

The person whom anxiety/death rocks back on her heels is then the person who ‘clings’ to entities; she wants to ‘understand [her]self ... in terms of the “world” and the way things have been publicly interpreted’, and has turned to the world in search of ‘something on the basis of which [she is] able to live’ (WDR 168). But in anxiety/death, I see that this world ‘to which I cling, [and] with which I busy myself’, has ‘no more to say to me’ and is ‘no longer ... of help to me’.

But what kind of ‘help’ did I expect? What did I hope this ‘world’—that to which I ‘cling’—*would* ‘say’ to me? It would seem that I hoped it would (somehow) determine for me how to live. As the 1925-26 *Logic* lectures put it, ‘[i]n inauthentic concern’, *Dasein* ‘places itself into its concern about things in such a way that its conduct [*Verhalten*] is determined in terms of the object of that concern’: ‘the things with which I am involved ultimately determine me and my being’ (*L* 193). But in anxiety/death, we see that such things provide no such ‘determination’, no such ‘help’.

Such passages present a picture of a craving for legitimation or justification being thwarted. The following three sections will elucidate this picture by exploring some parallels with thoughts found in Wittgenstein’s rule-following considerations. These parallels will help us see what this craving might be, how it might seem to be satisfied, why it must—in fact—be thwarted, and how that realisation might lead to the shocking conclusion that the world is meaningless—provoking both fears of paralysis and a vision of ‘liberated’ free choice. But these parallels also suggest, I will argue, a different way in which Heidegger might be read.

## **6. A Wittgensteinian Analogy**

Central to Wittgenstein’s discussion of rule-following is his well-known discussion of ostensive definition and its apparent limitations. I may point at a London bus and say ‘That is what we mean by “red”’. But the notion that such an explanation serves to justify or ground that word being used in some particular way collapses once one recognizes that, though this

object is indeed red, it is also in England, heading to Kings Cross Station, at 30 mph, in the rain, on a Tuesday, etc. etc. The object is indeed a sample of something red; but it also instantiates these other (and indefinitely numerous) concepts. The bus's being red is a reason for describing it as red; but it is a reason to describe it as red rather than blue, and not a reason to describe it as red rather than in England, heading to Kings Cross Station, etc. etc.

The same difficulty will arise—I suggest—if I hope to read a 'basis on which I am able to live' off the objects with which I deal. Every object presents an indefinite number of differently meaningful faces to us, corresponding to an indefinite number of different ways in which we might deal with—live around—it. This is no challenge to the truth of the descriptions of the objects under which we see these objects when we deal with them in these ways. But it does draw our attention to the fact that I cannot expect those objects to—as it were—themselves dictate their meaning for me, the aspects of them that are *worth* my describing and which I *ought* to consider when I act: they cannot 'determine me and my being'.

But who would ever think that they would or could? No one—wittingly. But the above Wittgensteinian reflections show how naturally we fall into this kind of confusion. The confusion about the samples exposed above arises out of our taking the objects around us to be—so to speak—exclusively and inherently what they represent in the practices in which we merely happen to be engaged; we treat the bus's redness as something like its essential meaning, when, in fact, it is merely the particular aspect of it in which we happen to be taking an interest. (To adapt an expression of Wittgenstein's, '[w]e predicate of the thing what lies in the mode of representation' (Wittgenstein 1967: §104).) But crucially, for many of us, our first encounter with Wittgenstein's reflections on ostensive definition is precisely an experience of surprise, in light of which indeed we look at our samples—to which we have previously turned without pause in explaining our words—as now somehow strangely dumb, exposed as unfit to convey the meaning we intend because—as we now recognize—they carry a babble of indefinitely many meanings. In our engaging with the entities in question in a way informed by our use of particular concepts, the entities present themselves to us—up until such moments of reflection—in those terms; and the surprise comes because we have—so to

speak—fallen into the habit of taking these entities to simply—essentially, exclusively—*be* what those terms present them as being. The fact that we are shocked reveals that we have ‘fallen’ in this way.

There is, one might suggest, an animistic quality to our confused ambition for our samples here: it is as if we expect an entity to determine which of the many concepts under which it falls we should use in thinking of it. That very multiplicity means no answer is there to be found and what we hear when we allow ourselves to think that one is is merely an echo of the concepts which we already happen to be applying to these entities. By forgetting, as it were, that we are already describing and living around these entities in these ways, and that we could—and perhaps at other times do—describe and live around them in other ways, we succumb to an illusion that the former ways are *the right* ways of describing and living around these entities. In this way, this animistic fantasy supports and is supported by a fantasy of a certain anonymity: I am an anonymous observer who simply deals with the world as the world itself dictates it should be dealt with, the legitimacy—indeed necessity— of the way I relate to the world seeming to follow from a simple description of what is there before my eyes.

Wittgenstein shows us how natural this confusion is. But more importantly given our present concerns, this is a confusion that tallies closely with the inauthentic person’s experience of his world as Heidegger describes it.

## **7. Heidegger’s Depiction of Inauthenticity II - The Desire to be ‘Lived’ by the ‘World’**

That the way we deal with an entity—embodied in our understanding of its ‘Being’—might be read off that entity is a confusion that Heidegger clearly identifies and links to inauthenticity. As he puts it, ‘Being can never be explained by entities but is already that which is “transcendental” for every entity’: ‘entities can be experienced “factually” only when Being is already understood’ (*SZ* 208, 315).<sup>13</sup> But ‘common sense’ ‘fails to recognize’ this;

‘[w]hat is distinctive in common sense is that it has in view only the experiencing of “factual” entities, in order that it may rid itself of an understanding of Being’ (SZ 315); and ‘common sense’, of course, Heidegger associates with inauthenticity.<sup>14</sup>

When inauthentic, I ‘cling’ to ‘what is proximally at [my] everyday disposal’ (SZ 195)—which I suggest we identify with the entities I encounter as they are understood within the life I happen to lead. ‘I deal with this object, this person, this piece of land, etc. in this way because that’s what it is!’, I insist. And, of course, it may be. But that will be only one of the indefinitely many things that it is, and my way of dealing with it only one of many possible ways of dealing with it. Inauthenticity could be seen as a motivated forgetting of this; as Heidegger puts it, this is a ‘levelling off of *Dasein*’s possibilities to what is proximally at its everyday disposal’ (SZ 195), an obscuring of the indefinitely many possible ways in which those objects might be lived around and found meaningful. In this condition—this ‘dimming down of the possible as such’—I take the way the world presents itself to me to simply and exclusively *be* the world—*the* world, ‘the facts’; all ‘other possibilities’ are ‘crowded out’ or ‘closed off’ and what remains—those entities so understood—‘becomes the “real world”’ (SZ 195). I have ‘rid myself’ of the Understanding of the Being of these objects that I bring with me—in that I have forgotten the role that my living the life that I live around such objects plays in determining the meaningful face that they present to me; but thereby, I allow myself to imagine before me a justification for my way of life, for the Understanding of Being that that life expresses: ‘I deal with this object in this way because that’s what it is!’

What I am experiencing—to adapt an expression from *BPP* 174—is actually no more than ‘a mirroring back of the self from things’ and, in anxiety, I see through this fantasy. I become aware that there are no ‘meanings’ to objects that are ‘inherent’ or ‘essential’ in this sense: objects lack ‘importance in themselves’ (SZ 187). Instead I see that the meaning of the objects that I encounter is determined by the life I happen to be living, a responsibility that this fantasy—illicitly and confusedly—projects on to the objects themselves.

When one is in the grip of this fantasy, the realisation that entities have no such inherent or essential meaning will indeed come in the form of a kind of dizzying alienation, a certain

(hazily-imagined) basis for those lives being swept away: '[e]veryday familiarity collapses' (SZ 189) and one feels 'uncanny', 'not-at-home' in the world. But Heidegger identifies the 'being-at-home', of which we there feel the loss, with a confused state, and our discussion explains why: this state of 'tranquillized self-certainty [*beruhigte Selbstsicherheit*]' (SZ 188) is one in which—*per impossibile*—the entities I find around me 'help' me, 'determin[ing] me and my being'.

We see here the combination of animism and a craved anonymity that the Wittgensteinian analogy suggested, a combination that Heidegger evokes in yet more striking formulations. What anxiety reveals as doomed is a desire of *Dasein*'s to 'lose itself in'—to 'absorb' itself in, or to 'submit' to—'something with which it might be concerned' (SZ 344, 186, 348). *Dasein* 'allow[s] itself to be *chosen* by whatever it immerse[s] itself in' (CTR 50), desiring to be 'lived by ... the world which concerns it in this or that way' (HCT 245, italics added).<sup>15</sup> Anxiety disrupts this comforting but confused illusion. In anxiety, entities present themselves as *Vorhanden*, merely present, merely occurrent,<sup>16</sup> showing up, as Heidegger vividly puts it, in a *leeren Erbarmungslosigkeit*—an 'empty mercilessness' or 'pitilessness' (SZ 343). We cannot be 'lived' by such entities, because they have no 'life' of their own; or, as one might instead put it, they have too many lives, and no particular interest in—or pity for—ours.

## 8. The Upshot of the Fantasy being Recognized

What then is the upshot of this? Does it follow that our lives *are* meaningless? Or that the way we live our lives in this world is a matter of a 'liberated' 'free choice' that 'goes all the way down'? There are indeed analogues of these thoughts in the rule-following literature. As mentioned, our samples can now seem dumb, and that can seem to show that 'meaning vanishes into thin air' (Kripke 1982: 22); or—to the realisation that '[t]here is nothing ... which forces [us] to apply a word in the way [we] do' (Glendinning 1998: 102)—one might be tempted to add 'so it's up to us': it's a matter of convention. But such views—meaning scepticism and conventionalism—are both deeply problematic;<sup>17</sup> and, significantly, there is quite a broad consensus in that literature that they are not the morals to be drawn from the

rule-following considerations. I want to suggest that their analogues are not the morals to be drawn from Heidegger's discussion of anxiety either.

An alternative response to the rule-following considerations is often thought to lie in the fact that certain extrapolations of series of samples simply come naturally to us, 'there being no need for hesitant and questionable interpretation' (Sullivan 2011: 185): while others strike us as artificial or odd, these extrapolations 'speak to us', one might say, just as—without need for justification or other persuasion—we naturally take arrows to point from tail to tip (Wittgenstein 1969: 141).

There are a number of quite different ways in which one might develop these thoughts. Some philosophers see them as providing the basis for reductive, *naturalistic* accounts of meaning, according to which meaning is determined by, among other things, our shared dispositions to react to samples. But others see them as playing a role within an anti-reductionist strategy, according to which we should reject the *need* for the kind of underlying justification or determination of our ways of thinking and talking of which meaning scepticism and conventionalism feel the absence.<sup>18</sup>

The latter approach derives sustenance from the fact that our grasping *any* explanation of how a word should be applied presupposes that we already see the world in the terms that that explanation itself uses. But this would seem to show that eventually—at the end of any such chain of justifications—I must simply find myself '[a]t home in the world', in a condition in which 'I can simply say what I see' (Sullivan 2011: 184).<sup>19</sup> Despite the fact that the entities I encounter have an indefinite number of different things to 'say' to us in instantiating an indefinite number of different possibilities, it remains the case—to adapt Blattner's words—that I must 'find myself differentially disposed towards the possibilities the world'—these entities—'has to offer'. Among those possibilities must be ones that I have not been persuaded ought to be attended to or taken as salient, as mattering. Here, as Wittgenstein puts it, reasons 'come to an end' (Wittgenstein 1967: §1).



Whether either the naturalistic or the anti-reductionist understandings of these themes ultimately can be defended is the subject of much controversy in the rule-following literature;<sup>20</sup> and I won't pursue those matters here. Instead I want to develop an analogue of the anti-reductionist view in filling out my reading of Heidegger's discussion of anxiety. I will argue that the resultant reading has some independent philosophical plausibility, meets our interpretive requirements (1-4), and offers a viable alternative to the analogues of meaning scepticism and conventionalism that we have encountered in Sec. 2-4.

## 9. Projects that Speak to Us

Consider then the possibility that certain projects strike us as worthwhile in themselves, and as *not needing* justification. Prime examples for many of us might be taking care of our loved ones and pursuing our vocations.<sup>21</sup> I may see that there are many other, perhaps recognizably worthwhile ways in which a person might spend their lives, and I can offer no reason—no case—for being a good father being the—or indeed a—good way for me to spend my life. But reasons 'come to an end', and it may be precisely here that I feel no *need* for such a reason: I do not experience the absence of such a case as a failure or an embarrassment. That absence leaves me—at least when outside of my philosophical closet—unmoved, my commitment to these activities unshaken: I lead that life 'without justification' but—I feel—'not without right' (Wittgenstein 1967: §289).

Characterising our relationship to such projects is difficult and we inevitably reach for metaphors. Such projects might be said to 'speak to me', though not in the sense of *telling* me what to do or ordering me to do such-and-such; I respond to them without any sense of needing to be compelled or persuaded to respond. To give a twist to a metaphor of Heidegger's which we have already seen Sullivan echo, we feel 'at home' in such activities, though not in the sense that I see them as somehow determined as the right ways to behave by the fabric of the world around me. Similarly, they strike me as 'natural', but—again—not in the sense that they conform to the 'inherent' meaning of the entities I encounter—or, for that

matter, to ‘the ontological structure of the self’. Rather they strike me as natural in that I feel no need for a confirming conformity with any such validating standard.<sup>22</sup>

Such projects need not be unique to me or otherwise idiosyncratic: my grasp of fatherhood and of my vocation clearly arose out of my enculturation in the kind of society in which I live. But were my society to abandon the values that inform such projects, my reaction would be ‘So much the worse for that society!’ Those values have become my values; those ways of finding the world significant have become my ways of finding the world significant; and the reasons that they give one to act have become my reasons.

Given that society isn’t likely to transform in the ways described, it falls to anxiety to reveal this. ‘[A]nxiety individualises’, as Heidegger puts it (SZ 190-91, quoted above), in that it throws into relief those projects in which I continue to feel ‘at home’ even when ‘the world’—‘and every other’ *Dasein*—have ‘nothing more to say to me’ (HCT 291). In anxiety, the ‘world’ ‘become[s] *hinfällig*’—superfluous or unnecessary (WM 90). But, with respect to my being a good father, this is just what it is: I feel no need of ‘the world’s’ ‘mercy’, ‘pity’ or ‘help’. In this respect, I am ‘ready for anxiety’.

I may be ready with respect to being a good father; but am I ready full-stop? Many of the projects we undertake in life will not speak to us in this way—my standing in this queue, or filling in this form, or walking up this hill with these heavy bags. Some of these projects may be tied to particular offices I hold, roles I occupy, or norms current in my society. I may or may not find those offices, roles and norms themselves intrinsically meaningful and, if not, some may be tied to serving further projects which I do. The ‘tranquilizing’ fantasy that anxiety/death sweeps away is that the entities with which we deal somehow take care of these issues for us, and that sweeping away forces upon us once again the question of which of my activities fall within which of these categories. If one were to label those projects that speak to me ‘my ownmost’, those that here and now serve my ‘ownmost’ ‘provisional’,<sup>23</sup> and those that do not ‘accidental’, one might then say—with Heidegger—that, in anxiety/death, *Dasein* ‘understands itself unambiguously in terms of its ownmost distinctive possibility’,<sup>24</sup> ‘every accidental and “provisional” possibility driven out’; such an experience ‘snatches one back

from the endless multiplicity of possibilities which offer themselves as closest to one'—not in order to force us to choose what 'our ownmost' possibilities are to be—but rather to help us recognize what they are: it 'gives *Dasein* its goal outright' (SZ 384).

## 10. Our Requirements Revisited

Let us return now to requirements (1-4). Obviously enough, the above account solves MP (requirement (2) above); and it does so while preserving senses in which anxiety reveals that the world is meaningless (1), and its being an experience for which some of us—the authentic—are ready (3). It is also worth noting that it accommodates the thought that *Dasein* is a creature of a meaningful world, which—as Sec. 1 indicated—seems to be a consequence of other important themes in Heidegger's thought.

According to the above account, *if* one understands the world as the source of a particular kind of justificatory meaning, *then* anxiety reveals that the world is—in this sense—meaningless; in this way, anxiety embodies a 'window on the truth'. This realisation paralyzes some of us—the inauthentic—who have 'clung' to such justifications. But others amongst us do not need the 'pity' that that fantasy promises: the authentic are 'ready for anxiety' because they have tied their lives to projects that speak to them and for which they feel no need of such a justification: anxiety 'neither inhibits nor bewilders' them. There is then also a sense in which our anxious experience of the meaninglessness of things is deceptive: the meaning that we come to see things lack is essential only to a fantasy of what it takes for our lives to have meaning, and recognizing this fantasy for what it is is crucial to the real moral, so to speak, of anxiety.

Herein lies the similarity to my reconstruction of Thomson's view. Central to that was the idea of identifying and rejecting a fantastical vision of what a meaningful life-project is: in that case, 'the ontological structure of the self' determining the 'single correct choice to make'. The place of delusion in my view too is that anxiety shocks those who *bring a delusion with them*, a fantastical conception of what would make the world and our lives meaningful. But it

is a conception to which some of us cling, because it serves—as *SZ* 190-91 quoted above puts it—to ‘disguise’ the real demands of a meaningfully lived life; and once that disguise is removed, a second—and genuine—revelation of meaninglessness becomes possible: I may now come to see that, as a matter of contingent fact, my life has been meaningless—genuinely meaningless, one might say—in being devoted not to projects that I myself find intrinsically worthwhile, but to ‘the endless multiplicity’ of ‘accidental’ possibilities which merely ‘offer themselves as closest to’ me. The collapse of this delusion, like the collapse of Thomson’s ‘paralyzing belief’, restores us—as I put it earlier—to our real motivational world in that it reveals the real touchstones for meaning in our lives: the projects that strike us as intrinsically worthwhile but with which our lives, as a matter of fact, may fall out of alignment.

However, our earlier reconstruction of Thomson’s view failed: the fact that the fantasy upon which it focused is a fantasy does not entail that one is free to choose one’s life-projects (even if only constrainedly), as Thomson’s view maintains. It is no consequence of my view either that we might choose which projects speak to us. But fortunately, my view points to a quite different understanding of the role that notions of responsibility, ‘choosing to choose’ and ‘choosing oneself’ play here (requirement (4)), as well as to a quite different understanding of the challenge that being authentic is.

## **11. Choice, Responsibility and Authenticity Revisited**

The authentic person’s acting on those possibilities that speak to her can, I suggest, be understood as her having ‘chosen to choose’. Heidegger tells us that, ‘[w]ith *Dasein*’s lostness in the “They”’, ‘*Dasein* makes no choices, [and] gets carried along by the nobody [*Niemand*]’ (*SZ* 268); deciding how one will live ‘from one’s own Self’ (*SZ* 268), on the other hand, is choosing to let one’s own fundamental projects—those that strike one as worthwhile in themselves—guide one’s life. To act on one’s own reasons—rather than those of others or the They—is to have chosen to choose oneself how to live, rather than letting others—and their reasons—decide for one. Similarly, when Heidegger talks of ‘choosing one’s self’, the

‘choosing’ in question is not choosing *one’s self*—as if one had freedom to select from a range a self and its view of what a worthwhile life is—but choosing *oneself*—choosing to be guided by one’s own fundamental commitments rather than those of others. It is my choosing myself over ‘the world’ or ‘the public’, as Heidegger puts it—my choosing to act on reasons that speak to me, rather than those of the They.

I suggest we see such a choice described in the passage from WDR 168 from which I quoted earlier:

*Dasein* can comport itself in such a way that it chooses between itself and the world; it can make each decision on the basis of what it encounters in the world, or it can rely on itself. *Dasein’s* possibility of choosing offers the possibility of fetching itself back from its having become lost in the world, that is, from its publicness. When *Dasein* has chosen itself, it has thereby chosen both itself and choice.

To echo the last sentence here, in making decisions on the basis of my own reasons, I am deciding both to decide and to be the one who decides. I am choosing myself as the one who will choose—rather than deferring the judgment in question to someone else—to ‘the world’ or the They—and their assessment of what matters. This is also recognizably something that could be called ‘assuming responsibility for oneself and one’s actions’. The above passage continues:

This choosing ... is the *choice of responsibility* for itself that *Dasein* takes on and that consists in the fact that in each instance of my acting I make myself responsible through my action.

Willingness to make decisions oneself—choosing to choose—is not choosing—*per impossible*—what to care about, but choosing to live in line with what one fundamentally cares about. The challenge in doing so is acknowledging that one has an opinion, refusing to disburden oneself of one’s own judgment; and accepting this burden—actually acting on that opinion, that judgment—is taking responsibility oneself for one’s actions.

Such a person manifests what one might well call a form of ‘*eigentliche Selbstsein*’ (SZ 268), a form of ‘being-oneself’ [*Selbstsein*] and an ‘authentic’ or ‘owned’ [*eigentliche*] form at that. The authentic ‘own’ their existence in that they take responsibility for their lives; they themselves take as much control as they can of the course their lives take, in endeavouring to shape their lives to their own sense of what matters: they attempt—as SZ 188 quoted above puts it—to ‘take hold of’ themselves. The inauthentic, on the other hand, renounce that task and thereby hand this responsibility on to the They by default. ‘The public relieves *Dasein* of its choice, its formation of judgments, and its estimation of values’; in doing so, ‘it relieves *Dasein* of the task, insofar as it lives in the They, to be itself by way of itself’ (HCT 247).

## 12. Two Possible Philosophical Objections

There is a naturalness now, I would suggest, to many of Heidegger’s other claims about the authentic, such as that their ‘readiness for anxiety’ is their ‘[w]anting to have a conscience’, the ‘*call* of conscience’ ‘summoning’ them to themselves (SZ 296, 273). But clearly it is beyond the scope of a paper of this length to embed my reading within a full account of the cluster of concepts that Heidegger’s reflections on authenticity involve (including ‘conscience’, ‘guilt’, the ‘nullities’, ‘being a whole’, and, of course, ‘Being-towards-death’), those that inform his more fine-grained description of inauthenticity (including ‘idle talk’, ‘curiosity’, ‘distantiality’, and ‘ambiguity’) or those that inform *Being and Time*’s broader project and its ‘Question of Being’. The previous section contributes a little to the first process; but I cannot hope to complete any of them here.<sup>25</sup> Instead I will end by looking at two philosophical objections that my account may seem to invite. The first asks ‘Isn’t there something worryingly uncritical about my governing my life by projects that “speak to me”?’ The second asks ‘What if *nothing* “speaks to me”?’<sup>26</sup>

There are several points to make in reply to the first objection.

(i) Let us first be clear about what my account does rule out: criticism of a person's projects on the basis of their mismatch with the fantastical standard that is the 'inherent/essential meaning' of entities. I hope that, by this stage, any felt need to defend the possibility of that particular kind of criticism has dissipated.

(ii) As indicated above, my account does, in fact, make central critical reflection on one's supposed authenticity, in the form of reflection on whether our day-to-day activities are indeed tied to our 'ownmost' projects. Being a good father is not something one can do in the abstract; rather one does it by doing other things: by taking one's children to that after-school club, by refusing to buy them yet another present, etc. But one might also perform such activities for other reasons—such as because everyone else takes their children to that club and because one is miserably tight-fisted—and identifying the reasons that are actually driving our acts certainly calls for some critical and possibly painful reflection.<sup>27</sup>

(iii) There is a danger, moreover, that we may not see the wood for the trees here. The projects that we recognize as those that speak to us pass a very particular test: they withstand trial by anxiety, while many others do not. The latter reveal themselves as 'provisional' or 'accidental' for us, while we come to see that we will act on the former come what may, irrespective of whatever legitimation or confirmation 'the world' may offer.<sup>28</sup>

(iv) We also need to recognize that in praising someone for living her life in line with her 'ownmost' possibilities, we are doing *no more* than acknowledging her authenticity, her 'ownedness'. We may criticise her on the grounds that those possibilities are immoral, misguided or the like; but that does not mean that we cannot recognize that she has indeed devoted herself to them. Irrespective of the value or disvalue of the possibilities to which I believe I devote myself, the question of whether I actually do devote myself to them remains, as a question of the 'internal economy' of my life, so to speak. Similarly, trial by anxiety may not reveal the most morally admirable or least misguided path for me to take; but it can reveal what I

fundamentally *take* to be the most morally admirable or least misguided, *and* whether I am indeed taking that path. The genuine meaninglessness that anxiety may reveal to me is my having ‘abandon[ed myself] to whatever the day may bring’, my ‘distraction’ by ‘entertaining “incidentals”’ (SZ 345, 338, 310). This is a misalignment not with some external standard of meaningfulness but—first and foremost—with my own deepest sense of what matters. So there is at least *prima facie* reason to think of the assessment of authenticity—as I have suggested it be understood—as a different dimension on which a person—good or bad—might be assessed, just as we may assess him by reference to how imaginative or energetic or determined he is. We do so despite the fact that we may wish—in the case of the bad—that he were not quite so imaginative, energetic, determined or—the case in point—authentic.

(v) In criticising someone’s weddedness to a particular project we must also recognize that we do so by reference to some other standard or commitment. Among the consequences of this is that, if my account is correct, then the only such critical judgment that we may ourselves ‘own’—or make on our own behalf, one might say—is one by reference to another standard or commitment that speaks to us. A judgment by any other standard might be correct in some other sense—my actions may indeed be immoral, for example—but my accepting that judgment will be my deferring to an opinion I have perhaps been told to adopt, or to an opinion I am merely going along with, rather than truly sharing. One sometimes perhaps should act in that way, that ‘should’ being a moral, aesthetic or rational imperative, say; but it still represents a falling short of a recognizable ideal of how we govern our lives.

Finally, let us turn to the second objection, that *nothing* may ‘speak to us’. That, one might indeed suggest, is ‘the modern condition’, the malaise of modern humanity to which existentialism gives striking expression and, in particular, in its explorations of anxiety.

It is not my concern to deny the possibility of such an experience—which might well be compared with ‘world collapse’—or to deny its broader cultural and philosophical significance: it may well be a focal concern of some philosophers we label ‘existentialists’.



But such an experience cannot play the role that anxiety (or death) plays in Heidegger. In particular, it is an experience in the face of which one can do nothing; and, therefore, it cannot be the experience for which the authentic are ‘ready’ and the inauthentic not. I have argued instead that the challenge that the former meet and the latter fail is one set for those to whom some possibilities *do* speak. Those to whom none speak have problems of their own.

I touched above on Wittgensteinian views according to which our life with language rests on contingent facts about our readiness to find natural certain reactions to samples and other multiply-interpretable explanations; and it is tempting to propose that the very possibility of meaningful action requires that there be projects that similarly speak to us—that strike us as worthwhile in themselves.<sup>29</sup> This returns us once again to Sec. 1’s notion that *Dasein* must be ‘at home’ in—is a creature of—a meaningful world. Indeed both of the objections that this final section considers invite a further response in the form of an *ad hominem* argument: those whose views I have questioned here themselves *need* possibilities to ‘speak to us’. Blattner believes one’s existence as a person depends on one’s ‘find[ing] oneself differentially disposed towards the possibilities the world has to offer’; he sees the authentic in particular as recognizing ‘that we are called upon to answer to the situation, and not just the Anyone’, ‘to *see* what is factually possible and *important* and carry through with it’ (2006: 155, 167, 166, italics added). Thomson too needs us to find the ‘needs of [our] time and generation’ ‘pressing’ and ourselves possessed of ‘ontic cares’—or at least he must if he wants our choices in the face of anxiety/death to be more than merely arbitrary choices (even if constrained arbitrary choices). We must—Thomson says—be ‘responsive to the emerging solicitations of ... [our] particular existential “situation”’ (2004: 454).<sup>30</sup> So although notions such as that of possibilities that ‘speak to us’ and in which we are ‘at home’ are obviously metaphorical and pose difficulties, it would appear that I am not alone in feeling that—at some stage or other—we must turn to some such notions.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In what follows, I generally follow the established translations of Heidegger's works and, in the case of *SZ*, that of Macquarrie and Robinson.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. also WM 88-92. For difficulties involved in the interpretation of 'readiness-to-hand' and 'presence-at-hand', see McManus 2012: ch. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Compare a worry of Okrent's: 'it does not follow from the fact that it is possible to doubt each of our identities that it is possible to doubt them all at once. ... And the fact that under duress some of us despair of each of our identities does not imply that we can ever be human without any such identity' (1999: 73).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Blattner 2006: 140: 'Death turns out to be the same experience as anxiety.'

<sup>5</sup> Another influential proponent of a 'world collapse' view is Haugeland, whose reading I discuss in McManus forthcoming-a.

<sup>6</sup> See n. 25 below.

<sup>7</sup> For criticisms of the form to be discussed, see Murdoch 1970: 36, Scruton 1983: 165-66, and Taylor 1985 and 1991.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Thomson 2004: 455 and 2009: 41-42.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Blattner's criticism of Dreyfus and Rubin 1991 in his 2006: 161.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Thomson 2004: 450 and 452, and 2009: 39. Thomson 2013: 288 mentions two other understandings of how the 'contingency' of such projects renders them 'vulnerable', but neither would seem to render these projects meaningless.

<sup>11</sup> Experience of anxiety/death might lead us to give up this belief—I believe Thomson believes—because this experience reveals that 'what is most basic about us' is 'the pure, world-hungry projecting we experience when we are unable to connect to our projects': we come to see that we are 'a *projecting* into projects'—'not any particular self or project'—and that shows that there is no 'substantial self' that might determine 'a single correct choice' for us (2013: 271-72). The work described in n. 25 raises further worries about this view.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *SZ* 270 on *Dasein* ‘project[ing] on possibilities of its own or ... [being] absorbed in the “they”’.

<sup>13</sup> For further discussion, see Young 2002: 6-7 and McManus 2012: sec. 2.1.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *SZ* 288 on ‘[t]he common sense of the “They”’.

<sup>15</sup> For other examples of this motif of ‘being lived’, see *PRL* 170, *CTR* 45, *WDR* 118, and *SZ* 195 and 299.

<sup>16</sup> See n. 2 above.

<sup>17</sup> For criticisms of conventionalism, for example, see Baker and Hacker 1985, who see it as leading to ‘a kind of logical existentialism’ (p. 95).

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Minar 2007: 199: ‘Our ordinary reasons as they operate in our practices’—our ordinary explanations of our words—‘do not stand in need of the support of anything deeper to constitute them as reasons.’ Cf. McDowell 1987.

<sup>19</sup> For a related discussion, see McManus 2006: 106-18, 185-86 and 203-212,

<sup>20</sup> For example, Sullivan worries that Wittgenstein’s invocations of natural human inclinations and the like actually jeopardise the anti-reductionist view (2011: 174-75).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Parfit’s list of ‘the best things in life’, ‘the best kinds of creative activity and aesthetic experience, the best relationships between different people’, etc. (Parfit 2004: 18).

<sup>22</sup> Clearly, I might say a great deal in response to the question of why being a good father matters to me. But the important question here is whether what I say provides an independent ground for its mattering, rather than being an expression of its mattering to me, as might my insistence, for example, that ‘I now can’t imagine life any other way’.

<sup>23</sup> Serving them is a ‘hypothetical imperative’, as it were.

<sup>24</sup> Complex questions I will not discuss here are: ought there only to be one project that ultimately ‘speaks to me’—for some relevant discussion of which, see Thomson 2013: 285 and 2004: 444, 462 and 464—and what sense can we make of the idea of ‘my judgment’ (see below) if there are many, and/or these fluctuate with time?

<sup>25</sup> I attempt to take further steps in McManus forthcoming-b and as-yet-unpublished papers on conscience and death.

<sup>26</sup> Other chapters in this collection raise issues for my proposals here, and vice versa. To take just five examples, how does my reading stand to Haynes' complex mapping of the anxiety discussion, Käufer's account of Jaspers' 'spiritual types', Withy's account of our 'owning' of our *pathē*, Wrathall's discussion of 'fluid action', and the claim that 'normative force' can never be a 'given' (discussed by Blattner (pp. ####) and Crowell (pp. ####)), which might well seem incompatible with my notion of projects that 'speak to us'? But I won't address these issues here, as this editor feels he ought not to give himself the last word.

<sup>27</sup> A further complexity that this touches on is that our on-going engagement with life—with the many situations demanding of action that we encounter—constitutes an on-going trial of what we take our 'ownmost' possibilities to amount to. This brings into play Heidegger's elusive discussion of 'the Situation' (*SZ* 302) and his appropriation of the notion of *phronesis*. But I will not discuss these matters further here.

<sup>28</sup> This ties naturally into some familiar thoughts about what confrontation with death reveals to us, though I must leave those for another day, as I must some other ways in which worries related to that raised above might emerge: what if, for example, certain possibilities speaking to me is the product of my being brain-washed? Such cases may indeed show that there is more to our understanding of autonomy and of having reasons of one's own than the above account captures.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Okrent's remarks quoted in n. 3 and Taylor's discussions of 'strong evaluation' and 'inescapable horizons' (in, e.g., his 1991: ch. 3).

<sup>30</sup> Thomson (2004: 456) also quotes with approval Guignon's talk of the need to 'identify what really matters in the historical situation in which you find yourself' (2004: 69). For other examples of commentators endorsing the need for such 'found' meaning, see Crowell 2002: 109, Kukla 2002: 21, Mulhall 2005: 142-43 and Poellner (this volume) p. ####.

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