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Article

Heidegger and the Possibility of a Hermeneutic Ethics

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Abstract: This paper explores the possibility of hermeneutic ethics through critical engagement with Gadamer and Heidegger. While Gadamer emphasizes the ethical significance of interpretation, application, and tradition, his hermeneutics has often been criticized for its alleged conservatism and limited critical force. The paper argues that this limitation can be addressed by supplementing Gadamer's account with Heidegger's analysis of authenticity. By reconstructing moral action as a hermeneutic and expressive practice, the paper shows how Heidegger's concepts of being-toward-death, conscience, guilt, and resoluteness disclose an existential structure of responsibility in which ethical norms may be appropriated and transformed through singular commitment. Authenticity is not treated as a moral norm, but as an enabling condition under which ethical bindingness becomes intelligible for an agent. The resulting hermeneutic ethics accounts for moral creativity as a bifurcation within tradition rather than a rejection of it.

Keywords: Gadamer, Heidegger, Heideggerian ethics, hermeneutic ethics

The idea of hermeneutic ethics is hardly alien to philosophical hermeneutics. Hans-Georg Gadamer's corpus repeatedly affirms the profound linkage between hermeneutics and practical philosophy. Early in his career, he immersed himself in the ethics of Plato and Aristotle, and numerous texts explicitly probe the ramifications of philosophical hermeneutics for ethics and practical philosophy.[1] Yet Gadamer never forged

[1] The pivotal text is Hans-Georg Gadamer's 1931 Habilitation thesis, *Platos dialektische Ethik: Phänomenologische Interpretationen zum "Philebos"*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 5 (hereinafter *GW*) (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985), 3–163, which emphasizes the practical and dialogic nature of Platonic ethics, in contrast to Neo-Kantian readings of Plato as a purely theorical metaphysician. Representative later discussions include "Hermeneutics als praktische Philosophie," in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 10 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 285–297, and "Über die Möglichkeit einer philosophischen Ethik," in *GW* 4 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 175–188;

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a systematic ethics or practical philosophy. In his magnum opus, *Truth and Method* (*Wahrheit und Methode*), the three main sections examine the experience of truth in art, social sciences, and language; practice surfaces only obliquely as the dimension of "application" (*Anwendung*), an indissociable aspect of understanding.[2]

Gadamer's scattered writings on practical philosophy and ethics yield precious insights but fall short of a fully elaborated hermeneutic ethics. His insistence for the affinity between philosophical hermeneutics and practical philosophy thus remains more programmatic than realized. Critics, nonetheless, impugn the practical implications of his hermeneutics, particularly its ability to transcend the conservation of conventional morality and function as a critical tool for contesting traditional values and norms. The primacy accorded to interpretation, they argue, may hinder transformative action in the world.[3]

The most prominent critique of Gadamer's hermeneutics comes from Jürgen Habermas. In their 1967 exchange—later anthologized in "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality"—Habermas impugns its ethical deficits, arguing that Gadamer's ontological prioritization of linguistic tradition precludes transcendence of potentially distorted consensus.[4] Scholars such as John Caputo and Georgia Warnke further probe whether Gadamer's repudiation of Enlightenment subjectivism overcorrects into an uncritical deference of authority, restricting critique to the bounds of tradition.[5]

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see also his mature synthesis from the late 1970s in "Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles," in *GW* 7 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), 128–227, which further clarifies how the classical conception of the good underlies the hermeneutic structure of practical reason. For Gadamer's own retrospective summary of this early ethical orientation, see also "Die Idee der praktischen Philosophie" (1983), in *GW* 10 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 238–246.

[2] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutik I: Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, *GW* 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986).

[3] It is a prominent strand of criticism to frame Gadamer's hermeneutics as politically conservative, rooted in his historical context and reluctance to confront the Nazi-regime. Richard Wolin, for instance, in *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), accuses Gadamer of ideological accommodation during the 1930s-1940s and argues that his rehabilitation of "prejudice" (*Vorurteil*) as a condition of understanding risks legitimizing inherited authority. A related, though differently motivated, concern arises in Hans Blumenberg's reflections on hermeneutics' preference for metaphors of hearing and listening. Cf. Hans Blumenberg, *Ästhetische und metaphorologische Schriften*, ed. by Anselm Haverkamp (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), 138–176, esp. 164.

[4] See especially Jürgen Habermas, "Der Universalitätsanspruch der Hermeneutik," in *Hermeneutik und Dialektik I. Hans-Georg Gadamer zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. by Rüdiger Bubner, Konrad Cramer, and Reiner Wiehl (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1970), 131–132 and 134–135.

[5] Cf. John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 111ff. Georgia Warnke, "Hermeneutics, Ethics, and Politics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. by Robert J. Dostal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 79–101.

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This lineage of critique stems from an aporia at the heart of Gadamerian hermeneutics: the tension between contextualizing the subjectivity and retaining its power of reflection and criticism. For Gadamer, the hermeneutic alternative to the Enlightenment subject is an interpreter fully immersed in effective history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), who tacitly assumes the fundamental soundness and completeness of tradition.[6] Understanding, on this view, unfolds itself mainly in an enrichment of tradition when facing a new historical moment, rather than a radical break or revolutionary critique—thereby posing a persistent obstacle to critical engagement with tradition and the emergence of transformative ethical perspectives.

We argue that conservatism is not an inevitable consequence of philosophical hermeneutics and its core insights are compatible with an ethics able to critique and to reconfigure inherited norms and values. To demonstrate this, we propose to amend and fortify philosophical hermeneutics, drawing in particular on Martin Heidegger. We will proceed in three stages. First, we outline a hermeneutic ethics based on Gadamer's key insights, privileging theoretical potential rather than strict exegesis. Then we will pinpoint elements in Gadamer's model that tilt toward conservatism. Finally, we enlist Heidegger's notion of authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) to sharpen a hermeneutic ethics capable of breaking with convention and generating ethical innovation.[7]

Outline of a Hermeneutic Ethics

The very core step of a robust hermeneutic ethics lies obviously in extending the hermeneutic situation beyond textual interpretation to encompass action and practical experience—an extension that echoes

[6] The crux of the aporia we address is perhaps nowhere more explicit than in Gadamer's reply to Habermas's critique, "Rhetorik, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik" (1967) in *Hermeneutik II: Wahrheit und Methode. Ergänzung. Register*, 5th ed., *GW* 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 232–250. There, Gadamer explicitly asserts the ontological priority of effective-historical consciousness over reflective subjectivity, claiming that it possesses "more Being than consciousness" (*mehr Sein als Bewußtsein*). See Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Rhetorik, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik," 247.

[7] For a more sympathetic yet still critical reading that anticipates our own turn to Heideggerian resoluteness as a corrective, see Lawrence J. Hatab, *Ethics and Finitude: Heideggerian Contributions to Moral Philosophy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000). Hatab explores how Heidegger's notions of guilt, conscience, and resoluteness—though ontological—have clear "ethical registers" and provide a background structure for ethical existence, see esp. ch. 3. He also recognizes the conservative tilt in Gadamer's dialogical model but does not pursue the systematic grafting of Heideggerian singularity that we undertake here.

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Gadamer's own claim of the "universality of hermeneutics."[8] However, action is hermeneutic just because it expresses meaning and significance. In regard to the ethical, the agent articulates and exhibits values, norms, moral ideals, and ultimately himself through what he does.

In *Truth and Method*, this ethical expressivism runs parallel to the aesthetic concept of "presentation" (*Darstellung*). Ethical action gains moral weight not only from its ends or from its conformity to universal norms but also from the ethical significance it expresses and how effectively it does so. Like finding the right word for a situation, ethical action consists in appropriately articulating moral values, norms, and ideals in concrete contexts. Here Gadamer's emphasis on "application" becomes clear. Drawing on Aristotelian ethics, he casts ethical action as the *applicative link between universal and particular*. The agent encounters the good in specific situations, and practical rationality (*phronēsis*) discerns "what the concrete situation asks of" him. And it is significant that Gadamer equates this demand with viewing the situation "in light of what is asked of him [i.e. the agent] in general."[9] To discern the implicit moral demand of a particular situation, application involves *interpreting* the particular in light of universal values, subsuming it under the fitting moral category—e.g., identifying it as a situation requiring courage, justice, or integrity.

Conversely, Gadamer also insists that the universal itself *transforms* through application or *Darstellung* (presentation). The universal is not static but evolves through its particular enactments; it earns as Gadamer characterizes an "increase in being" (*Zuwachs an Sein*)[10] and to a certain extent, a different sense.[11] Hence, this dynamic suggests a circular relation between universal and particular in the hermeneutic situation, which can be articulated as *a structure of double interpretation*. Not only is the particular situation interpreted in light of inherited moral ideals and virtues, but, conversely, those ethical heritages are also articulated and interpreted in and through the specific situation in question. This double-sided integration—particularizing the universal and universalizing the particular—lies at the heart of Gadamer's concept of the "fusion of horizons," in which understanding arises precisely through the interplay between tradition and the present circumstances.[12]

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[8] Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Die Universalität des hermeneutischen Problems," in *Hermeneutik II: Wahrheit und Methode. Ergänzung. Register*, 5th ed., *GW* 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 219–231.

[9] Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 318.

[10] *Ibid.*, 145, 156.

[11] *Ibid.*, 302.

[12] *Ibid.*, 311.

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To sum up, in order to construct a viable hermeneutic ethics, we propose three interrelated premises, which build partially on Gadamer's insights:

(1) Moral action is inherently hermeneutic.
(2) It is bound to sense and significance.
(3) It is expressive in nature.

Among these three premises, Gadamer clearly endorses the first two premises: he recognizes the hermeneutic character of action and the constitutive role of sense and significance in moral life, and his repeated critiques of instrumental reason reinforce the interpretive constitution of morality. The expressive dimension of moral action, in contrast, appears to be a systematic lacuna within Gadamer's framework. It is precisely here that Heidegger's thinking—especially his account of authenticity—proves particularly illuminating.

The Turn to Heideggerian Ethics of Authenticity

Heidegger famously refuses to write an "ethics" in the traditional sense. Yet, as the *Letter on Humanism* and countless marginal notes make clear, he never stops asking what must be true of human existence for anything like moral life to be possible at all.[13] From being-in-the-world and care (*Sorge*) to thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) and projection (*Entwurf*), he relocates normativity within our finite, factual, and irreducibly interpretive existence. Ethical life, on this account, is rooted less in universal rules than in the ways we understand and disclose the world in which we dwell.

Within this horizon, indirect but significant ethical insights abound. For instance: Heidegger's analyses of equipment, concernful circumspection (*Umsicht*), and worldhood sketch a practical intelligence that amounts to an existentialized *phronēsis*: situated, skillful, and responsive. This offers a salutary corrective to moral formalism and decisionism. His distinction between forms of solicitude (*Fürsorge*)—"leaping-in" (*Einspringen*) and "leaping ahead" (*Vorausspringen*)—furnishes critical resources for thinking paternalism and empowerment in an ethics of care. Finally, his later re-thinking of *ethos* as a manner of inhabiting—dwelling in the releasement

[13] Cf. Martin Heidegger, "Brief über den Humanismus (1976)," in *Wegmarken*, *GW* 9, ed. by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1976), 313–364, here 354–356. Heidegger's attitude in *Being and Time* is a clear deferral and ontological re-grounding of ethics. He does not refuse to engage with the ethical straightforwardly, but he insists that it is only possible after fundamental ontology has clarified the structure of Dasein. See Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §4, 17th ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1993), 286.

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(*Gelassenheit*)—together with the critique of enframing (*Gestell*), has inspired environmental and technological ethics oriented less toward prohibition than toward practices that let beings be disclosed in their own manner.[14]

We do not intend to diminish the significance of these indirect ethical insights. Yet it is theoretically more fruitful to situate them within a systematic account of hermeneutic ethics.[15] Doing so enables us to discern Heidegger's distinctive contribution—namely, a phenomenology of responsibility and authenticity that both *enriches* and *corrects* the existing hermeneutic framework.

In brief, the proto-ethical situation is simultaneously hermeneutic and existential. It is *hermeneutic* in the sense that, as Gadamer emphasizes, moral action integrates the universal and the particular. The agent receives the ethical claim of a situation in light of an inherited ideal and interprets that ideal through the demands of the concrete case. This yields the double interpretive structure of moral action outlined earlier. It is *existential*, however, in the sense that the circular movement of interpretation is at times *broken open* by the expressivity of singularity, where what is called forth appears to challenge the purported universality of the inherited ideal. In such situations, the inherited universal has to be suspended in the projection of one's *ownmost* possibility. At times, Dasein is uneasy with the past and is compelled to "break its ground" in order to create and appropriate his own "whereto" (*Wohin*) within the open field of practical possibilities.

Authenticity, in this respect, emerges as a breach in the traditional lineage. Yet it does not simply negate the hermeneutic circle of the event of meaning; rather, it intersects it and displaces its center of gravity by requiring that the agent *own* and *give form* to the ideal in action—such that moral life becomes the *self-expression* of a finite, historically situated singularity.[16]

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[14] For a comprehensive reconstruction of an implicit "originary ethics" running through the whole of Heidegger's path of thinking, see Joanna Hodge, *Heidegger and Ethics* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995), esp. chs. 3–4.

[15] Secondary literature on Heideggerian ethics is extensive; seminal book-length studies include Joanna Hodge, *Heidegger and Ethics* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995); Frederick A. Olafson, *Heidegger and the Ground of Ethics: A Study of Mitsein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Lawrence J. Hatab, *Ethics and Finitude: Heideggerian Contributions to Moral Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000); and David Webb, *Heidegger, Ethics and the Practice of Ontology* (London: Continuum, 2009). For a concise recent overview see Sacha Golob, "Heidegger's Ethics," in *The Cambridge History of Moral Philosophy*, ed. by Jens Timmermann and Sacha Golob (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 623–635. The present essay differs from these approaches by pursuing a systematic grafting of the existential analytic of authenticity onto Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, with the explicit aim of overcoming the conservative drift diagnosed in Gadamerian practical philosophy.

[16] The appeal to authenticity in this context should not be understood as introducing a moral norm or obligation in the conventional sense. Authenticity names, rather, the existential condition under which any norm can become binding *for an agent at all*; and without singular ownership, normativity risks collapsing into mere social regularity (*das Man*). The ethical force

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The point is not to pit Heidegger against Gadamer, but to thicken hermeneutic ethics with an existential counter-movement. I would like to call it the *expressivity of singularity*: In the call of conscience and resolute projection (*Entschlossenheit*), Dasein does not "answer" by harmonizing all inherited claims into a completed sense. Instead, it owns a possibility as irreducibly *mine* and, in doing so, projects and institutes a "whereto" that did not previously exist within the publicly available nexus of meanings. Such projection is presented by Heidegger as awakening Dasein from its absorption in the tranquilizing norms of the "they" (*das Man*). The authentic projection does not abolish the hermeneutic circle; it breaks it open from within, re-anchoring it in a first-person act of world-disclosure—a grasping of ownmost possibility in the mode of "self-having". In ethical terms, responsibility includes—not only the apt integration of universal and particular—but also the creative self-commitment that *gives* the universal its shape here and now.

The significance of expressivity and authenticity in ethics can be illustrated through the famous moral dilemma in Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone*, one of the earliest explorations of irreconcilable moral demands in Western literature. The dilemma is well-known: Creon issues an edict forbidding the burial of Polyneices, citing the needs of the city and the inviolability of its laws, while Antigone chooses to follow what she calls the "unfailing, unwritten laws" of the gods and the claims of blood-kinship, which demand burial rites for the dead.[17]

The tragedy, however, is not merely a collision of two abstract normative orders—the legal versus the ethical, or the positive law versus the divine or familial duty. It is, more profoundly, a clash of two singular existences who express and bind themselves through their deeds. Creon's conviction is that the stability of the city depends on the unflinching execution of *his* word, and Antigone, to commit to piety despite death. She interprets the situation in light of a higher, *for her* more intimate obligation and commits herself radically to it.

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of authenticity is therefore not prescriptive but enabling, a kind necessity before normativity. It is well known that Heidegger explicitly resists construing *Eigentlichkeit* and *Uneigentlichkeit* as normative opposites, while at the same time insisting that the existential analytic of Dasein is prior to any philosophical ethics. The present argument takes up this suggestion by identifying the existential conditions under which ethical bindingness becomes intelligible for an agent. The "call of conscience," despite its silence with respect to determinate norms, exposes Dasein to an ineluctable responsibility for its own possibilities and thereby discloses a proto-ethical dimension of existence. In this limited, enabling sense, authenticity bears ethical significance without being elevated to a substantive moral principle.

[17] Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. by Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2001), ll. 454–457.

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As Heidegger reads her in 1942, Antigone becomes the very figure of the human "unhomeliness"; she is the most "unhomely," (*unheimischst*), and thereby "the most uncanny of all the uncanny" (*das Unheimlichste alles Unheimlichsten*): [18] she is torn from everyday being-at-home in the polis precisely by committing to her ownmost possibility. Her action does not mediate or reconcile the conflicting claims; it interrupts the public horizon and discloses a new, uncanny "whereto" that the inherited order could not foresee.

This classical drama highlights the fault line between an ethics of values and norms that preserves the given order and a creative, interpretive ethics that risks transgressing it for the sake of what the situation demands. It is along this fault line that hermeneutics—especially in the wake of Gadamer and Heidegger—becomes ethically salient. Gadamer insists that understanding is always application, a fusion of horizons in which the universal finds its truth only in the particular case. Heidegger presses further, disclosing how such understanding is rooted in the structures of being-in-the-world, being-with-others, historicity, and the existential stance of resoluteness. A "hermeneutic ethics," if possible at all, would neither legislate from nowhere nor capitulate to the "they"; it would interpret from within our shared world, sometimes continuing what has been handed down, sometimes breaking with it for the sake of authenticity.

From integrative understanding to expressive projection of singularity

While Gadamer's hermeneutics excels at describing the integrative mediation of universal and particular, it marginalizes the moment when an agent does not merely apply an inherited ideal but disrupts and re-originates it through resolute action. Heidegger's existential analyses—of anticipatory running-ahead to death, the call of conscience, being-guilty, and resoluteness—fill this gap. These analyses reveal the authentic transformation of Dasein's fundamental existentials (projection, discourse, thrownness, disclosure) and illuminate what we have called the *expressivity of singularity*: the ethical phenomenon in which the agent institutes a hitherto unforeseen "whereto" by owning a possibility as irreducibly his own and committing himself to it in action.

The four moments of authentic existence can further be reread as the fundamental moments of moral life: (1) Anticipatory running-ahead to death *singularizes the future.* (2) The call of conscience summons Dasein from the

[18] Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymne »Der Ister«* (Summer 1942), *GA* 53 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1984), 129.

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anonymity of the "they" and awakens it to *self-responsible present*. (3) In Being-guilty, Dasein *bears its past* as its own and assume its own accountability. (4) Finally, resoluteness integrates these insights into a *committed* stance in which Dasein resolutely owns and enacts its clarified possibilities. Taken together, these four moments outline an existential phenomenology of moral agency in a proto-ethical situation. They show how responsibility, value, and commitment emerge from the structures of human existence itself. Let us now turn to a closer explication.

Being-to-Death and Personalization of the Future

Everyday projection disperses itself into the endless, interchangeable possibilities offered by the "they." Anticipatory running-ahead to death radically *individualizes* projection by confronting Dasein with its so-called ownmost, non-relational, and not-to-be-outstripped possibility.[19] Death is not an event among others; it is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of any further possibility, as articulated by Heidegger. In running-ahead, Dasein does not contemplate death abstractly; it experiences itself as finite through and through.

Ethically, this is the moment in which value ceases to be average and public and becomes irreducibly *personal*. Under the horizon of mortality, possibilities lose their indefinite postponability. What formerly appeared as "one can always do it later" or "others will take care of it" now reveals its true weight. The universal—courage, justice, piety, love—is stripped of its comfortable interpretability within the "they" and forced to show what it can possibly mean when only this one life, and no other, is available to answer for it.

The expressive achievement of "*Vorlaufen*" is therefore the birth of genuine mattering. A possibility is no longer something one "takes over" from tradition; it becomes something for which I must stake my singular existence. The universal is not abandoned—it is *personalised*, wrenched into the mode of "this matters ultimately for me," and thereby prepared for a projection that can truly bind me.

Conscience and Self-Responsibility

Heidegger's conscience is not a faculty that issues maxims but a phenomenon of call (*Ruf*) that "comes from me and yet over me," summoning Dasein out of absorption in the anonymous "they."[20] Its summon is however

[19] Cf. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §§50–53.
[20] Cf. *Ibid.*, §§57–58.

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strikingly reticent (*verschwiegen*). It says nothing determinate, offers no prescription, withholds every concrete "about-what." [21] Precisely this uncanny reticence is what individualizes: by refusing all ready-made justifications furnished by the chatter of the "they," the call leaves Dasein naked before itself.

Read ethically, the call is the moment of *existential critique* within hermeneutic life. It interrupts the seamless fusion of horizons by suspending the tacit equation of moral success with social congruence. The power of conscience lies in exposing the singular agent and placing the entire burden of justification on her: whatever ideal I now invoke, whatever course I choose, I can no longer hide behind the anonymous "one does," "one must," or "tradition demands." The call clears the space in which an inherited value ceases to be received sense and becomes a possibility I must *personally answer for*—and, in answering, singularly shape.

The practical counterpart of the call's silence is the reticence of resolute action itself.[22] The authentic agent does not proclaim an inner creed; he shows his answer in the deed. The call thus inaugurates the expressivity of singularity: the moment in which the agent is summoned to give the universal a form that only he, here and now, can bear.

Being-Guilty and the Personalization of the Past

Heidegger's analysis of guilt is expressly *non-juridical*. To "be guilty" (*schuldig sein*) does not first mean "to have violated a rule," but to be indebted—*answerable*—for one's thrown-projective existence.[23] If the call of conscience commits Dasein to his ownmost whereto, the "being-guilty" is its deliverance into its *wherefrom* (*Woher*). Dasein always already finds itself delivered over to possibilities, and yet it must project itself among them.

This is the decisive moment that suggests in the ethical realm a non-derivative, non-transferable responsibility. Even the most justified norm, the most hallowed tradition, cannot relieve me of the necessity to take it up as mine and answer for how I let it shape my action. Roles, institutions, collective values—none can substitute for singular ownership. I cannot start a real ethical life if I do not bear my concrete standpoint pregiven in the ethical world—someone's son, brother, relatives, friend and enemy. My ethical standing is irreducibly mine; I am delivered over to it, and yet I must project it. The ethical haunts us already from where we are and not what we have done.

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[21] Cf. *Ibid*., §§56–57.

[22] Cf. *Ibid*., §60.

[23] Cf. *Ibid*., §58.

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Resoluteness as Singular Commitment

Lastly, resoluteness is the full enactment of the expressivity of singularity—the situated unity of disclosedness of existence in which anticipation of death, the reticent call, and existential guilt are held together in action.[24] Resoluteness is identified as the "most original, because authentic truth of Dasein";[25] it is hence primarily not a rigid willfulness but an *openness* that remains responsive to the concrete situation while refusing to surrender its singular "whereto."

The agent binds himself to a possibility he has made irreducibly his own and, in doing so, institutes a direction that did not previously exist within the public web of meanings. The universal is neither dissolved nor mechanically applied—it is performatively re-originated, given new historical flesh through the committed deed. Resolute action is reticent yet publicly disclosive: it shows itself in what is done rather than in proclamations, inviting recognition or contestation from others without ever surrendering its singular character.[26] In resoluteness, the moral agent finally becomes what Heidegger, in a rare direct formulation, calls "the conscience of others" (*Gewissen der Anderen*)[27]– not by preaching, but by the sheer fact that his singular commitment discloses a possibility of the good that the tradition itself did not yet foresee.

These four existential moments, taken together, constitute the ontological architecture of authentic moral agency. They do not deliver a catalogue of norms, but they do something more fundamental: they reveal the existential conditions under which an agent becomes capable of genuinely binding himself to a value, interrupting inherited meanings when necessary, and giving the universal a singular, transformative enactment that only this one life can achieve.

Final Remark: Authenticity as Bifurcation Within Tradition

Heidegger himself addresses the relation of authentic existence to its tradition in §74 of *Being and Time*, where the problem of "historicity"

[24] Cf. *Ibid*., §§60, 62.

[25] *Ibid*., 297.

[26] This public dimension of resoluteness is often underemphasized in existential readings. See Olafson, *Heidegger and the Ground of Ethics: A Study of Mitsein*. Olafson sets out to work out a concept of *Mitsein* that provides the foundational understanding necessary for inquiry into the ground of ethics.

[27] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 298: "Das entschlossene Dasein kann zum »Gewissen« der Anderen werden. Aus dem eigentlichen Selbstsein der Entschlossenheit entspringt allererst das eigentliche Miteinander ...."

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(*Geschichtlichkeit*) is at issue. He insists that authentic Dasein does not simply receive tradition passively; it retrieves (*Wiederholung*) a possibility handed down in the heritage (Erbe) by explicitly choosing it.[28] Hence his striking formulation that resolute Dasein "chooses its hero" (*wählt sich seinen Helden*).[29] This is not a call for idolatry but for exemplarity: in selecting an exemplary possibility and "repeating" it, Dasein frees that possibility for today and binds itself to it in action.

Authenticity, therefore, is not a disguised form of pure subjectivity that abandons tradition for a self grounded in itself. On the contrary, it is a mode of belonging that *bifurcates* tradition from within. It interrupts the seamless continuity of the tradition by singling out a line of exemplarity. In this sense, it simultaneously disrupts and preserves, continues and re-originates. The ethical upshot is decisive. Moral creativity is not the spontaneous invention of values; it is selective fidelity that re-originates the universal in the singular act of resolute retrieval. In doing so, the moral agent sets a measure for himself and, potentially for his generation, by choosing a hero he can answer for—a possibility he is prepared to hand down in turn as a renewed heritage.

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[28] *Ibid.*, 385–386.

[29] *Ibid.*, 385.

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