

FORWARD TO
TIME AND DEATH: HEIDEGGER'S ANALYSIS OF FINITUDE*

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There are already hundreds of books on Heidegger, why add one more? Because no one has successfully employed Carol White's strategy of interpreting Being and Time in the light of Heidegger's later works. White has taken up the most fundamental and difficult aspect of Heidegger's thought and has presented a coherent and plausible retrospective reading of his development. Her approach turns out not only to cast new light on the origin of Heidegger's later ideas but also to illuminate Being and Time as groping towards them. Thus, her account enables White to relate what Being and Time says about *human time* to Later Heidegger's talk of *the time of being*¹ thereby reconstructing for us what phenomenon, from beginning to end, Heidegger was struggling to describe. As White says:

I quote freely from the whole chronological range of Heidegger's works since one of my basic premises...is that he spent his life saying, to use his term, 'the Same.'

(Preface)

Of all the books written on his work, Heidegger would probably have preferred this one, since he himself was constantly reinterpreting his earlier works as attempts to articulate the one thought he was all his life trying to put into words.

White shows that, from his unfinished first attempt in Being and Time to the late essay, Time and Being, Heidegger is trying again and again to find the right way to describe the basic structure of finitude that makes possible our access to the world and to everything in it. Her book follows Heidegger's path of thinking by showing how he worked out the structure of finitude in terms of death and time. White argues convincingly that Heidegger's thought is unified by the insight, elaborated in detail in this book, that being human is historical, and, that, in the West, being itself has a history.

White's basic insight is that in Being and Time Heidegger already had a dim sense of what he was later to call the history of being, even though in Being and Time the history of our understanding of being is presented simply as a decline from the pre-

* Ashgate Publishing, 2005

Socratics' understanding of being as *presencing* through a series of metaphysical (mis)understandings of being as pure *presence*. Heidegger already had the idea that Parmenides' understanding of being was an originating leap that defined the history of the West, but he latter saw that this originating leap gave rise, not just to a gradual loss of the pre-Socratic's insight but, rather, to a series of radically reconfigured worlds. That insight, White contends, led him from an analysis of the finite timeliness of human being to the finite temporality of being itself.

Readers will, I hope, be able to find their own way through White's lucid reconstruction of Heidegger's deepening account of temporality. In this preface, I want to concentrate on what I consider one of the most important rewards of White's retrospective reading. I hope to show how her approach enables her to explain and fit together Heidegger's life long series of seemingly inconsistent pronouncements concerning death and finitude, and that this in turn enables her to give an original and convincing interpretation of the controversial section on death in Being and Time — an interpretation that is closer to the phenomenon and to the text than any interpretation so far presented in the many books and articles on this subject. Her ability to use the unifying thread of Heidegger's thinking (read back to front) to make sense of Heidegger's understanding of death is proof of the power of her approach.

But first, to prepare to understand White's masterful analysis of death and finitude, we need to turn to her account of what Heidegger means by being and how being can itself have a history.

I. The Phenomenon of Being

White is able to see Heidegger whole in spite of his constantly changing neologisms and higher and higher levels of abstraction, because, through it all, she keeps her eye on the phenomenon — the matter for thought as Heidegger would say. She sees that, from the start, what Heidegger means by being is not some super entity, nor some general property of all entities, but the intelligibility that makes entities accessible. And that, as he later saw, for us in the West, what counts as intelligibility depends upon the style of each particular cultural epoch.

As Heidegger first puts it in Being and Time, 'Being is that on the basis of which entities are already understood.'² He spells this out through a description of the intelligibility of the everyday world. World is the whole context of shared equipment, roles, and practices on the basis of which one can encounter entities and other people. So, for example, one encounters a hammer as a hammer in the context of other equipment such as nails and wood, and in terms of social roles such as being a carpenter, a handyman, and so forth. Moreover, each local cluster of tools, the skills for using them, and roles constitutes a sub-world such as carpentry, or homemaking, and each with its appropriate equipment and practices, makes sense on the more general background of our one shared, familiar, everyday world. Heidegger calls the way the shared background practices are coordinated to give us access to things and to ourselves our understanding of being. He says:

That wherein Dasein already understands itself ... is always something with which it is primordially familiar. This familiarity with the world ... goes to makeup Dasein's understanding of being (119).

Heidegger sees that this familiarity is so pervasive that it is easily passed over. As he puts it, it is nearest to us and so furthest away. White and I share the idea that to begin to see our own sense of familiarity and how it works we need a contrasting case of the style of another culture.

As White notes, sociologists point out that mothers in different cultures handle their babies differently and so inculcate the babies into different styles of coping with themselves, people, and things. To get a feel for the phenomenon — the way the background practices work to grant intelligibility — I'll elaborate her suggestive example in further detail. As long as we can use it to get a sense of how a cultural style works, we need not be concerned as to whether the sociological account is accurate or complete.

Let us suppose, as we are told by the sociologists, that American mothers tend to put babies in their cribs on their stomachs, which encourages the babies to move around effectively, while Japanese mothers tend to put their babies on their backs so they will lie still, lulled by the mother's songs. As the infants develop, American mothers encourage passionate gesturing and vocalizing, while Japanese mothers are much more soothing and mollifying. In general, American mothers situate the infant's body and respond to the

infant's actions in such a way as to promote an active and aggressive style of behavior, while Japanese mothers, in contrast, promote a greater passivity and sensitivity to harmony.

The babies, of course, imitate the style of nurturing to which they are exposed. It may at first seem puzzling that the baby successfully picks out precisely the gestures that embody the style of its culture as the ones to imitate, but, of course, such success is inevitable. Since *all* our gestures and marginal practices embody the style of our culture, the baby will pick up that pervasive style no matter what it imitates. Starting with a style, various practices will make sense and become dominant and others will either become subordinate or will be ignored altogether.

The style then determines how the baby encounters himself or herself, other people, and things. So, for example, no bare rattle is ever encountered. For an American baby, a rattle-thing is an object to make expressive noise with and to throw on the floor in a willful way in order to get a parent to pick it up. A Japanese baby may treat a rattle-thing this way more or less by accident, but generally we might suppose a rattle-thing is encountered as serving a soothing, pacifying function like a Native American rain stick. In general what constitutes the American baby as an *American* baby is its cultural style, and what constitutes the Japanese baby as a *Japanese* baby is its quite different cultural style.

Once we see that a style governs how anything can show up *as* anything, we can see that the style of a culture does not govern only the babies. The adults in each culture are shaped by it as they respond to things in the way they show up for them. The style of coping with things, out of which all conceptualizing grows, determines what it makes sense to do, and what is worth doing. It should come as no surprise, given the picture I have just presented of Japanese and American culture, that Japanese adults seek contented, social integration, while American adults are still striving willfully to satisfy their individual desires. Likewise, the style of enterprises and of political organizations in Japan serves to produce and reinforce cohesion, loyalty, and consensus, while what is admired by Americans in business and politics is the aggressive energy of a *laissez-faire* system in which everyone strives to express his or her own desires, and where the state,

business, or other organization's function is to maximize the number of desires that can be satisfied without destructive instability.

The case of child rearing helps us see that a cultural style is not something in our minds but, rather, a disposition to act in certain ways in certain situations. It is not in our beliefs but in our artifacts, our sensibilities and our bodily skills. Like all skills it is too embodied to be made explicit in terms of rules.³ Therefore it is misleading to think of a cultural style as a scheme, or conceptual framework.

Our cultural style is invisible both because it is manifest in everything we see and do, and so is too pervasive to notice — like the water to the fish — , and because it is in our comportment, not in our minds. And this is not a disadvantage or limitation. Like the illumination in a room, a cultural style normally lets us see things just in so far as we don't see *it*. That is, like the background in perception, the ground of intelligibility must recede so we can see the figure.⁴ As Heidegger puts it, the mode of revealing has to *withdraw* in order to do its job of revealing us and things, and it is the job of phenomenology to make it visible. In Being and Time he says:

What is it that phenomenology is to 'let us see'? What is it that must be called a 'phenomenon' in a distinctive sense? ... Manifestly, it is something that proximally and for the most part does *not* show itself at all: it is something that lies *hidden*, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself; ... but at the same time it is something that belongs to what thus shows itself, and it belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground (59).

Style, while remaining hidden, is what makes everything intelligible and is what Heidegger calls being. Each specific style is a specific mode of intelligibility and so is a specific understanding of being. Being never fully reveals itself, at least not as itself, so it turns out that, for Heidegger, being is the phenomenon that is the proper subject of phenomenological study:

[T]o lay bare the horizon within which something like being in general becomes intelligible is tantamount to clarifying the possibility of having any understanding of being at all — an understanding which itself belongs to the constitution of the entity called Dasein (231).

Heidegger is still saying the same thing in his last work: Time and Being.⁵ Being holds itself back 'in favor of the discernability of the gift,' i.e., of being in regard to the grounding of what-is.⁶ As White puts it: 'The contribution of the background practices recedes unnoticed in favor of the things that are.' (5.4)

We come a step closer to White's analysis of death when we see how she draws on this account of being to explain human finitude. One of White's most original and valuable insights is to see that our inability to spell out the understanding of being in our background practices is one important aspect of what Heidegger means by human finitude. Heidegger calls this condition ontological guilt, which he defines as the structural condition that Dasein cannot get behind its thrownness.⁷ White glosses this as the claim that 'our finitude prevents us from ... turning the background practices into explicit knowledge.' (5.1) And she adds:

[T]he finitude of knowledge is a matter of its grounding in an understanding of being which cannot be taken up in conceptual judgments. We should give up our quest for not only an absolute knowledge of things in themselves, as Kant thought, but also for explicit knowledge of the source of our knowledge (KPM 245/229f.). The goal of knowing the presuppositions of our knowledge, so devoutly pursued by Kant, Hegel, Husserl, and every other metaphysician, is unattainable. (5.1)

But, as Heidegger insists, there is nothing wrong with this structural condition that we can't make the background of our thought and action explicit, indeed, it serves a positive function in enabling us to make sense of things at all.

From this 'limitation' there follows a second important aspect of finitude. Already in Being and Time Heidegger stresses that the practices on the basis of which entities are understood cannot themselves be justified or grounded. Once a practice has been explained by appealing to what one does, no more basic justification is possible. As Wittgenstein later puts it in *On Certainty*: 'Giving grounds [must] come to an end sometime. But the end is not an ungrounded presupposition: it is an ungrounded way of acting.'¹⁸

This view is antithetical to the philosophical ideal of *total* clarity and *ultimate* intelligibility. Heidegger in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* suggests that there can be no such metaphysical grounding:

It remains to be seen whether the ground arrived at is really a ground, that is, whether it provides a foundation; whether it is an ultimate ground [*Urgrund*]; or whether it fails to provide a foundation and is an abyss [*Abgrund*]; or whether the ground is neither one nor the other but presents only a perhaps necessary appearance of foundation — in other words, it is a nonground [*Un-grund*].⁹

To relate this point to her account of finitude, White quotes a crucial but little-noticed remark of Heidegger's published five years after the publication of Being and Time:

So profoundly does finitude entrench itself in existence that our ownmost and deepest limitation refuses to yield to our freedom (WIM 108/118).
(5.1)

This understanding of finitude leads White to take *Dasein*, Heidegger's technical term referring to us, not as naming individual human beings, but as referring to a way of being of all human beings, viz. that they live in a world that is made intelligible by their shared background practices and that these background practices cannot and need not be made explicit and justified. White, therefore, warns against all individualistic readings of Being and Time. For her, Heidegger is not an existentialist emphasizing subjectivity and personal choice, nor is he a romantic holding that there is a deep inner self to which *Dasein* is called to be true. Heidegger is an ontologist interested in the conditions of the possibility of intelligibility, and he understands that the practices that make people and things intelligible can be pointed out and their general structure described but that the understanding of being in those practices cannot be spelled out in detail and given a transcendental or metaphysical grounding.

II. The History of Being

In the published part of Being and Time, Heidegger attempted to work out an ontological account of the universal structures of worldhood and thus ground a 'science of being.' He was, therefore, not interested in what he called ontic accounts of specific sub-worlds, other cultures, nor epochs in our own culture's understanding of being. It was only in the early 1930s that Heidegger was struck by the idea that, in our Western culture at least, the understanding of being has a history that is more than a story of decline. As he puts it:

[I]n the West for the first time in Greece what was in the future to be called being was set into work ...: the realm of what there is as a whole thus opened up was then transformed into entities in the sense of God's creation. This happened in the Middle Ages. These entities were again transformed at the beginning and in the course of the modern age. Entities became objects that could be controlled and seen through by calculation. At each time a new and essential world arose.¹⁰

It follows that each time a culture gets a new understanding of being, human beings and things show up differently. For the Greeks, what showed up and solicited attention were heroes and followers along with beautifully crafted things; for the Christians, it was saints and sinners, and things showed up as temptations and allegories of God's plan. There could not have been saints in Ancient Greece; at best there could only have been weak people who let others walk all over them. Likewise, there could not have been Greek-style heroes in the Middle Ages. Such people would have been regarded as prideful sinners who disrupted society by denying their dependence on God and encouraging everyone to depend on them instead.

White follows Later Heidegger in spelling out the way the sequence of world styles that have given us our sense of what is intelligible and worth doing comes to pass. A new understanding of being must be both incomprehensible and yet somehow intelligible. To account for this possibility, Later Heidegger elaborates an idea already touched on in Being and Time¹¹ that in a historical change, a historical figure makes history by retrieving some practices from the past and giving them a new central role in the present.

As Later Heidegger puts it, world disclosing is not the creation (*schaffen*) of a genius, but the drawing up (*schöpfen*) as from a well.¹² World-grounding takes place when a person or a work of art takes up and makes central some marginal practices already in the culture. A new style does not arise *ex nihilo*. Marginal practices of various sorts are always on the horizon. As Heidegger says: 'In the destiny of being, there is never a mere sequence of things one after another.... There is always a passing by and simultaneity of the early and the late.'¹³ For example, the printing press and Luther were already moving the culture in a new direction, which Descartes saw as a new individualism and freedom from authority. That idea became central in his attempt to take over his life and education from the ground up, and made possible Kant's definition of the Enlightenment as humanity reaching maturity, i.e. autonomy. Heidegger adds:

That which has the character of destiny moves, in itself, at any given time, toward a special moment of insight which sends it into another destiny, in which, however, it is not simply submerged and lost.¹⁴

Heidegger calls such a reconfiguration of the current background style a new grounding or an originating leap. But again he makes clear that this sort of ground is a non-ground. It does not guarantee that any given world will last forever. All past cultural worlds and the institutions that sustained them have died. As he remarks:

When ... we visit the temple in Paestum at its own site or the Bamberg cathedral on its own square — the world of the work that stands there has perished.¹⁵

Indeed, cultures, like the people and the things that focus their style, must die if new worlds are to be disclosed. Heidegger comments:

Where history is genuine it does not pass away by merely ceasing; it does not just stop living like the animals. History only dies historically.¹⁶

And White comments in turn:

In Western history, the rational animal died for *Dasein* to become the image of God; God's favorite creature died for *Dasein* to become the conscious subject. (0.4)

White sums up this view towards which Heidegger was groping in Being and Time as follows:

Dasein is rooted in the temporality of being. The changing revelation of being gives Dasein its possibilities: what it is able-to-be. The way being withholds itself imposes Dasein's impossibilities: what it is not able-to-be, at least not yet. (0.3)

And she adds:

Heidegger comments that his contemporaries do not wish to see this more profound sort of time because then 'they would have to admit that the foundations on which they continue to build one form of metaphysics after another are no foundations at all' (N4 163/219). (0.3)

III. Death and Finitude

Focusing on the background practices as a non-ground and on the history of being as the birth and death of cultural styles, enables White to give a new interpretation of Heidegger's account of death in Being and Time. Since her account, I will argue, is the most illuminating and convincing yet proposed, it is worth quoting at length the autobiographical passage in her Preface where she introduces it, before turning to the currently accepted accounts which her interpretation overthrows.

[Being and Time] had always seemed to fall apart into two halves. If we describe the view expressed in it as 'phenomenological existentialism,' then the first half seemed to be the phenomenology and the second the existentialism. The turning point comes at the discussion of death. From a discussion of tool-use, familiarity, language, and other practices, we seemed to turn abruptly to a discussion of how the individual ought to face death....

A fresh and careful study of the text began to reveal quite a different issue than the one that the familiar accounts of the matter addressed. Absurdities dissolved, and trivialities disclosed what lay beneath their surface. The new meaning taking shape in the chapter on death began to

reach out into the surrounding chapters, especially the ones on Dasein's experience of time. The ontological level of the whole discussion in the second half of Being and Time shifted from the personal and subjective to the cultural and historical. Soon it became clear that not only was the second half of the book a necessary extension of the first, but it tied directly into the works that followed throughout Heidegger's career.

(Preface)

The usual accounts of death in Being and Time assume that in talking about death Heidegger must be referring to the event that comes at the end of a person's life when that person ceases to exist, and Heidegger does begin his chapter on death by talking about such an *ontic* event which he calls demise. But Heidegger also says that an *ontological* interpretation of death reveals that death is not demise and that thinking of death as a future happening that will someday befall one is the inauthentic denial of death.

White situates her book as an attempt to cut through the critical confusion on this subject:

My book is devoted to articulating the vision of Heidegger's work which grows out of a new understanding of what he was trying to address in his discussion of death. I acknowledge that the discussion of this issue in Being and Time is far from clear; its intentional false starts and dead ends easily mislead the reader. But a careful study of the distinctions Heidegger makes there show many common assumptions about his analysis to be problematic. Comments about death in his later works sharpen the issue and bring the discussion of Being and Time into sharper focus, perhaps even for Heidegger himself. The consistency that this new interpretation of death brings to that book in its internal structure and in its relation to subsequent works suggests that he was driving at this understanding from the beginning, even if initially that drive was more of a grope. (Preface)

White is clear that much of the confusion is Heidegger's fault, but not because he should not have started with demise. The phenomenologist has to begin by describing and working through the everyday cover-up to arrive at the phenomenon that is being

concealed. What makes the chapter on death misleading is that Heidegger fails to make clear where his analysis of the inauthentic misunderstanding of death ends and the authentic ontological understanding of finitude begins.¹⁷

Thus we get interpreters like Sartre who, early on, took the account of death in the first sections of the death chapter to be Heidegger's own account and so end up with an existentialist account of death as an event in the future at which point a human being ceases to exist¹⁸ — an event one must hide to avoid facing the absurdity of life. Others, as White points out, 'recognize that Heidegger calls death a "way to be" (245) and that for him death is a matter of "being-toward-death."' But then, 'at best they have taken death to be a matter of a person's attitude about or relationship to physical death, that is, a way of caring about one's demise.' (2.5)

An example of such an approach can be found in the work of Michael Zimmerman, whose interpretation White singles out for telling criticism. Such interpreters assume that in writing about death, Heidegger must be talking about demise and think that, in the light of our mortality, we can gain a new seriousness and unity in how we live our lives. According to Charles Guignon, who holds a view similar to Zimmerman's, Heidegger thinks of an authentic human life as a narrative in which, by facing one's demise, one can gain a complete and coherent understanding of the whole of one's life-history. As he puts it:

The inauthentic anyone-self ... is dispersed, distracted, and fleeing in the face of its own death. To be authentic is to recognize the gravity of the task to which one is delivered over and to take full responsibility for one's life. Authentic Dasein lives resolutely, coherently, with 'sober joy', expressing in each of its actions a sense of its being-toward-the-end.¹⁹

Taylor Carman's excellent book, Heidegger's Analytic: Interpretation, discourse, and Authenticity in *Being and Time*, offers a profound critique of such moralizing views. Carman points out that according to this edifying interpretation,

[a] concept of death minimally appropriate to human beings as such must be a biographical notion, a notion of the conclusion or resolution of a human life understood as a series of actions, events, episodes, life experiences, and so on. Biographical dying is the ending of a life

inasmuch as that life can be understood retrospectively as a whole, perhaps narrated in part as a story. Dying, biographically understood in this way, is what Heidegger calls 'demise' (*Ableben*) (291).²⁰

Carman, in contrast, sees clearly that:

the very structure of being-in-the-world as my own ... makes it impossible in principle for me to take up a merely observational or biographical point of view on myself and my existence. I am so directly involved in my life that I can't understand my own existence as anything like a finite life span ... organized by a beginning, a middle and an end.²¹

William Blattner takes seriously that demise cannot be the ontological death that Heidegger is trying to describe and tries to work out what Heidegger must have had mind by death. He tells us:

[What Heidegger] is primarily interested in is not the being-at-its-end of human life, but a sense of end that is tied exclusively to the conceptual framework of Dasein's originary way of being, to existence and understanding. Human life stops; neither existence nor understanding can be said to stop as such, however.²²

Blattner thus distinguishes between '*demise*, which is the stopping of Dasein's life, and *death*, which is the end of Dasein in some other sense.²³ He goes on to note that fear of demise is a cover-up of death, which Heidegger says is 'the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there' (294), the possibility 'of the utter impossibility of existence' (307).

Blattner sees that death has something to do with the collapse of an individual's world. He contends that the death we cover-up by fearing demise is, in fact, an impending anxiety attack in which Dasein would lose its ability to cope with things and therefore lose its ability to be. To defend this original interpretation, Blattner gives a masterful account of what Heidegger means by anxiety that I can only touch on here. He tells us that:

Dasein's being ... is an ability-to-be. The end or limit of this ability is the inability-to-be. The condition Heidegger calls 'death' is a limit-situation for that ability-to-be, one in which one confronts this limitation.... This

situation occurs when Dasein is beset by anxiety, in which none of its possibilities matters to it differentially, in which all are equally irrelevant to it.²⁴

On this account, being towards death is being *ready* for an anxiety attack. As Blattner puts it:

Only through resoluteness — silently throwing oneself into the possibility of death, and being prepared for the attendant anxiety (343) — does one come face to face with what sort of entity one is, and hold on to that understanding.²⁵

But, since an anxiety attack is sudden and unmotivated — 'It is part of Dasein's being that death is always possible, that anxiety may strike it at any time'²⁶ — it is hard to see how one should live in order to be ready for it, and Blattner does not even try to explain what a life of readiness for an anxiety attack would be like. Perhaps, living like an epileptic, resigned to having breakdowns after which one has to collect one's wits and go on.

Indeed, it's not clear that Heidegger holds that Dasein *can* be ready for the sort of anxiety attack that Blattner equates with death. The text Blattner cites is about how resolute Dasein is ready for the anxiety of *conscience*. It turns out that, rather than being ready for anxiety, the highest form of resoluteness, *forerunning* resoluteness,²⁷ is *constantly anxious* without its world falling apart. Heidegger brings forerunning, resoluteness, death and anxiety together in the following summation:

[Forerunning] brings [Dasein] face to face with the possibility of ... being itself in an impassioned freedom towards death — a freedom which has been released from the illusions of the 'anyone', and which is factual, certain of itself, and *anxious*.²⁸

If *authentic* Dasein is *constantly* anxious, i.e. senses its finitude and lives appropriately, that would seem to suggest that authentic resolute forerunning, since it has already integrated its finitude into its life, needn't be constantly ready for the sort of anxiety attack that "may strike ... at any time" in which life is seen to have no intrinsic meaning, nothing matters, and Dasein is paralyzed.

But Blattner is surely right that an anxiety attack as a complete breakdown of Dasein and its world, bears a structural similarity to whatever Heidegger means by death

as Dasein's no more being able to be there. Perhaps, Heidegger would want to say that an anxiety attack, for which one can never be ready, and which one therefore flees, is the nearest experience an inauthentic Dasein can have to death.

In any case, as we shall soon see when we return to Blattner after discussing John Haugeland's and White's views, the kind of sudden and unmotivated world collapse experienced in an anxiety attack is the wrong sort of phenomenon to count as the ontological breakdown Heidegger calls death.

Taylor Carman's account of death offers an answer to how one can be *constantly* dying, not just *ready* for death, but it runs into its own problems. Carman sees, like White before him, that, with his ontological/formal understanding of death, Heidegger wants to cover

not just persons but projects, loves, hopes, epochs, cultures, and worlds dying off. Loves, hopes, and worlds die, and not just in a secondary metaphorical sense transferred from a more basic literal concept of the perishing of organisms or the demise of persons.²⁹

And Carman, therefore suggests that death is 'the constant closing down of possibilities, which is an essential structural feature of all projection into a future.'³⁰ He adds:

[S]uch things die by dying to us, or rather by our dying to them as possibilities.³¹

Our possibilities are constantly dropping away into nullity, then, and this is what Heidegger means when he says — what might sound otherwise hyperbolic or simply false — that 'Dasein is factually dying as long as it exists' (295). To say that we are always dying is to say that our possibilities are constantly closing down around us.³²

This, however, is a very implausible view. Possibilities are also always opening up. Moreover, as a reader of Kierkegaard, Heidegger could not have had such a narrow understanding of possibilities. It would be like saying that by making a defining commitment such as marriage you close down all the other possible marriages you might have had. But if your commitment is wholehearted, you sense it as closing down trivial possibilities to gain ones worth living for.

Besides, the constant closing of possibilities could not be the kind of ontological dying Heidegger has in view. Carman like White is right that the dying of a culture or a

love, like the loss of one's identity, are all ways in which a particular way of being can fail to make sense. As such, each is the total collapse of a current world and makes possible the arrival of another. But, for this very reason, Heidegger could not accept Carman's assimilation of death to the constant loss of possibilities each time we make a choice. The gradual closing down of possibilities does not have the right ontological structure to deal with the death of one world and the birth of another. A change of worlds, according to Kierkegaard and Heidegger, happens in a kind of discontinuity or leap. Carman's loss of specific possibilities is something that happens on the background of a stable world. His interpretation can't account for Heidegger's claim that death is 'the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all' (307) since this suggests a closing down to the zero point, which the nullity of choice doesn't involve. As something that happens *in* the world, choice simply does not have the structure of ontological dying — the total collapse *of* the world that Heidegger has in mind.³³

Carman may well have Heidegger's account of death wrong but his criticism of my account of death is dead right. He says:

[W]hereas Charles Guignon ascribes to Heidegger what seems to me an overly robust or metaphysically optimistic account of the ontological structure of the self, Hubert Dreyfus sees in the account of forerunning resoluteness what I think is an overly impoverished or pessimistic conception of authentic existence.³⁴ What anxiety reveals, he suggests, is 'that Dasein has no possibilities of its own and that it can never acquire any.'³⁵ Hence, 'anxiety is the revelation of Dasein's basic groundlessness and meaninglessness.'³⁶

It's true that in my Commentary I avoid all reference to demise by claiming that death means that Dasein's identity can never be definitively settled. That is, that Dasein can never have an 'eternal' identity in the sense proposed by Kierkegaard in Fear and Trembling, one that defines Dasein for its whole life,³⁷ and that alone rules out the Zimmerman and Guignon interpretation. In my Commentary I take this to be a serious structural lack in Dasein's way of being. Heidegger does, indeed, hold that one has to be constantly ready to give up one's defining commitment, but, as Carman sees, this vulnerability looks like a negative feature of Dasein's finitude only to those with a

metaphysician's longing for absolute certainty.³⁸

He also sees that somehow for Heidegger death is something positive, but he and I are, unfortunately, on the list of those who have failed to find the phenomenon that makes sense of this claim.

Julian Young makes a valiant attempt. First, like White, he notes an important shift in Heidegger's understanding of death from an individual to a cultural phenomenon:

In Being and Time Heidegger's primary (though not exclusive) focus is the individual — individual 'Dasein'. Authenticity, anxiety in the face of death, mortality itself, its key concepts, are all, in their primary application, individual attributes. During the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s, however, his focus shifts strongly away from individual and on to collective Dasein. What concerns him during this period is, above all, the health or otherwise of the culture as a whole.³⁹

But, whereas White sees Heidegger as having always been concerned with cultural death and so retroactively reads early Heidegger's apparent concern with individual death as a sign of Heidegger's confusion, Young claims that while Heidegger later changed his mind, death in Being and Time clearly denotes the individual Dasein's encounter with nothingness, i.e. with total meaningless destruction:

Being and Time is, I suggest, a work of 'heroic nihilism'. It is heroic because it advocates 'living in the truth' about death, nihilistic because the 'truth' it discovers is that beyond the intelligible world of entities, is the absolute nothing, 'the abyss' (194).⁴⁰

Young, then, goes on to claim that, after Being and Time, Heidegger totally changed his account of death. He tells us:

No longer is [death] to be thought of as the 'abysmal', 'empty' or 'negative' nothing. Rather, it is to be understood 'positively' as the nothing of 'plenitude', the nothing that is to be sure 'something completely and utterly Other (*Anderes*) than entities, but, for all that, undoubtedly 'something (*etwas*)' (Gesamtausgabe 15, 363)... [A]s Schopenhauer succinctly put it, that the 'Other' of entities is not an 'absolute' but only a 'relative' nothingness.

According to Young, this change has important implications not only for understanding the death of cultures, but for the attitude an individual should assume in the face of his or her inevitable demise.

Understanding one's (in Kantian language) 'membership' [in] the mystical realm of 'plenitude' abolishes anxiety, establishes one as ultimately secure in one's world because one understands, now, that that which surrounds the clearing is no longer abysmal but is, rather, the richness of all those concealed (and unintelligible) possibilities of disclosure which, in addition to one's ego, one is.).⁴¹

But this is a view White would certainly not accept. Young's idea of plenitude reifies the worlds that may someday arrive as if they were already fully formed and waiting in the wings. It, thereby, misses the finitude that White so well shows to be essential to world disclosing. Heidegger denies the metaphysical plenitude of other worlds waiting to be born, and offers, instead, a down-to-earth, finitist, account of that plenitude:

[A]bsence is not nothing; rather it is precisely the presence, which must first be appropriated, of the hidden fullness and wealth of what has been and what, thus gathered, is presencing, of the divine in the world of the Greeks, in prophetic Judaism, in the preaching of Jesus.⁴²

The plenitude turns out to be marginal practices still remaining from other cultural epochs. New worlds for Heidegger, then, are not present but hidden. They are not, as Young cites Rilke as saying, like 'the other side of the moon.' Rather new worlds arise by a leap that shifts marginal practices from the wings to center stage.⁴³

Like Schopenhauer's view of the 'relative nothingness' of the Other that Young alludes to as the Other of entities, Rilke's account of the plenitude that lies outside the current clearing is a view that Heidegger would certainly not accept. One must remember that Heidegger's recounting of Rilke's views cannot be assumed uncritically to be Heidegger's own views since Heidegger thinks that Rilke is, in the last analysis, still in the grip of metaphysics.⁴⁴

Even more implausibly, Young, like Schopenhauer, wants to use this metaphysical conception of relative nothingness to ground a sort of immortality for Dasein. As he tells us:

One feels safe, that is dwells, in one's mortality because, knowing that one belongs also to the realm of immortality, one can, in the words of Rilke that Heidegger quotes, 'face ... death without negation' (Poetry, Language, Thought, 125).⁴⁵

Just as the will, for Schopenhauer, is what is essential while the self is an illusion so that the will survives the death of individuals precisely because it has nothing to do with selves, so Young claims that, for Heidegger, what is essential about each individual Dasein, viz. being a world-discloser, somehow survives the individual ego's death. He says:

Understanding one's transcendence transforms one's world into an unconditionally 'safe' place because one knows that nothing that happens in it can annihilate one's essential self.⁴⁶

But this talk of a substantive essential self is not at all Heideggerian. Being a world-discloser is, indeed, what is essential about Dasein but, since Dasein's openness or transcendence arises from the finite stand it takes on itself through its activity in the world — i.e. its essence is its existence — it cannot suffer the loss of its ability-to-be without total annihilation. Or to put it another way, Heidegger never takes back his claim in Being and Time that Dasein's essential feature is its *mineness*.

The most illuminating and convincing account in the critical literature on Heidegger on death outside of White's, and indeed, an account very similar to hers, has been proposed independently by John Haugeland. He approaches the question of death in Heidegger by starting with Kuhn's account of scientific revolutions, which are after all the collapse of one world and the arrival of another.⁴⁷

Haugeland has from the start pointed out that in Heidegger's thinking Dasein does not refer to an individual human being but to a way of life that could include science or a culture.⁴⁸ He, therefore, can use his parallel of death with a scientific revolution as a model to give a convincing account of how, in Being and Time, Heidegger understands the dying of Dasein. Haugeland's account of resolute being-towards-death is 'living in a

way that explicitly has everything at stake.⁴⁹ And this means that the resolute Dasein lives in a way that is always at risk. As Haugeland puts it, 'authentic Dasein faces up to and takes over the ultimate *riskiness* of its life as a whole — it lives resolutely as and only as ultimately *vulnerable*.⁵⁰

This interpretation makes sense of Dasein's forerunning into death as a way of life that is constantly ready for radical transformation. It fits Heidegger's remark that:

[F]orerunning discloses to existence the uttermost possibility of giving itself up and thus shatters any rigidity in the existence reached at any time (308).

Haugeland explains:

[H]olding itself free for taking it back belongs just as essentially to existential responsibility as does sticking to it as long as one reasonably (responsibly) can. The existential *understanding* that belongs to resoluteness — ... just *is* perseverant being toward death.⁵¹

Thus, on Haugeland's account, 'being-towards-death' in Being and Time means working steadfastly to preserve one's identity and world, while also being able to give them up. For example, I have to be open to the possible collapse of my identity should my marriage fail or should my project to change my culture be no longer relevant. As Haugeland once said: 'Resolute Dasein sticks with its identity without getting stuck with it.'

Haugeland's use of Kuhn supports the interpretation that resolute Dasein must be sensitive to anomalies in its life and, moreover, be ready for a possible crisis in which these anomalies reveal that its identity is no longer livable.⁵² In the face of such a crisis, resolute Dasein must lucidly accept the collapse of its world, its 'way of life,' so as to be open to disclosing a new world in which these anomalies make sense and are central.

Haugeland has not yet published the obvious extension of his analysis of Dasein's death as world-collapse to cultural epochs. In her book, White explicitly makes the move Haugeland is poised to make, and applies the Kuhnian model not just to individualized ways of life but also to cultural styles. She also takes an exegetical step beyond Haugeland in grounding the analysis they share in the relevant texts. She notes the following suggestive passage from an essay by Heidegger on Parmenides:

[T]he essence of mortals calls upon them to heed the call which beckons them toward death. As the outermost possibility of mortal Dasein, death is not the end of the possible but the highest shelter (the gathering sheltering) of the mystery of calling disclosure (EGT 101/248). (0.4)

Young would no doubt give this passage a metaphysical, quasi-Schopenhauerian, interpretation according to which the gathering sheltering that calls for disclosure would be other possible worlds, somehow waiting in the wings to be actualized. If one remembers, however, that gathering is for Heidegger the way the practices collect together to call to thinkers and artists to bring a new world into being,⁵³ one can understand the 'gathering sheltering' calling for disclosure as the marginal practices themselves moving toward a new coordination and thus bringing forth a new style.

The marginal practices, in Haugeland's terms, the anomalies, draw the current world toward collapse, as well as being the reserve that will form the basis of a new one. As White puts it, 'It is being which "calls" to mortals, to ourselves as Dasein, disclosing itself in new ways and calling Dasein to its proper being.'⁵⁴ (0.4) The new world with its new possibilities arises from the collapse of the old world, and someday it too will die. That is, it will make sense no longer, become impossible, unthinkable, and so give place to new forms of intelligibility.

As White points out, already in Being and Time we hear that human beings sense (anxiously) that they live in a finite, ungrounded, and vulnerable world so that it is always possible that their world will cease to make sense. Human beings as cultural preservers, therefore feel called to work hard to preserve the intelligibility of their current world. Indeed, they cannot preserve what they would otherwise take as fixed. They could not actively preserve marriage, for instance, if they thought that it was divinely created and preserved in heaven. They could only honor it. Only by knowing that everything human, cultural, and so forth is vulnerable does preserving or transforming it make sense. Thus, only if there is the constant possibility of their world becoming impossible is there room for human beings to fulfill their essential nature as world disclosers. In Later Heidegger, the cultural world is seen to be ungrounded and so constantly threatened. Thus everyone is called to understand his or her self as a world preserver, which also

means each one must be ready to accept the pain of the collapse of the shared world and to begin anew.

White cites a convincing text that comes close to, but at the same time casts doubt on, Young's account of Otherness while supporting her interpretation of the relation of death and world disclosing:

In lectures in 1943 Heidegger warns us of the 'the suffering in which the essential otherness of what-is reveals itself in opposition to the tried and usual.' He adds: 'The highest form of suffering is the dying of death as a sacrifice for the preservation of the truth of being [i.e., being able to give up one's familiar world while being receptive to a strange new understanding of being HLD]. This sacrifice is the purest experience of the voice of being' (P 166f./249f.). (2.2)

This passage also bears on Blattner's understanding of death as an anxiety attack. Readiness for anxiety would be readiness for a sudden and unmotivated breakdown of the world. It is hard to see what such readiness could be. How is it humanly possible to commit oneself to one's world (or identity) *and* at the same time envisage that at any moment it could stop making sense? It seems clear that, in the case of death, readiness for world collapse cannot mean imagining what it could be like and being ready to give up one's world, but, rather, being open to the vulnerability of one's world, and that means not building up defenses, i.e. not resigning oneself to living in the world of the Anyone. So far, Blattner, Haugeland, and White could all agree.

The important difference between Blattner and Haugeland/White is that, for Blattner, death as an anxiety attack is an unmotivated and sudden collapse of all meaning, whereas for Haugeland and White death or world-collapse is motivated by anomalies and takes place gradually, although, like any world transformation — like falling in love or grieving for example — world-transformation, like a gestalt switch, takes place in a special temporal way that Kierkegaard calls an Instant (*Augenblick*). One can't experience it in incremental steps. Such a transformation requires a willingness to let the old world go, to make a *sacrifice* as Later Heidegger says above, which is not like being hit out of the blue. Blattner's account is true to early Heidegger's description of the phenomenon of anxiety, but that precisely precludes it being an account of the

phenomenon of the death of cultural worlds — a phenomenon that both Haugeland and White argue Heidegger is groping towards in Being and Time. According to White, this is the phenomenon that Heidegger only finally succeeds in describing when he talks of the sacrifice involved in letting go of one's current cultural world to make way for another.

Thus, White goes beyond Haugeland's published account of death in Being and Time by seeing that comparing being-towards-death with revolutionary science is not just a way of getting a grip on what Heidegger means by Dasein's authentic being-towards-death as a way of life, as if being-towards-death were always someone's way of life. Rather, coming back to the death chapter in Being and Time from her reading of Later Heidegger, White sees both the parallel and the difference between individual being-towards-death as accepting the vulnerability of an *individual identity*, and world-preserving in the face of the vulnerability of *a whole cultural world*. She says:

[T]hroughout Heidegger's discussion of the inauthentic and authentic views of death he tacitly relies on an analogy or proportion between my demise as a person and my existential death as Dasein. I am to my death qua person as Dasein [being-in-the-world] is to its death qua Dasein [i.e. world-collapse]. In both respects I confront a 'nothingness' impenetrable to my understanding, and death constitutes a sort of 'other side' to what is.... The tacit analogy, which lets him say similar things about both conceptions, actually hinders the distinction from being as clear as it should be.⁵⁵

To make Heidegger clear, White reverses Haugeland's approach. She contends that, from Later Heidegger looking back, we can see that ontological death does not have to do with the finitude of individual human lives at all, but solely with the fact that there have been a series of understandings of being in our culture, a series of cultural worlds, and each has died, i.e. become impossible and given way to another. Because Heidegger was unclear about this distinction, she claims, his death chapter in Being and Time is murky and misleading, but he gets clear about the distinction later. His ontological account of death is only fully worked out and consistent once he has discovered the

history of being and so discovered what it means for the style of the culture to become unintelligible or impossible and so for a cultural world to die.

What, then, for White is death as a cultural way to be? A culture is an ungrounded world. (1) Ungrounded worlds harbor the constant 'possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all'. (2) Thus cultures require world preservers who make sacrifices to keep them alive. But (3) being-towards-death is a world preserver's readiness to give up a culture and let the world go, when the culture no longer makes sense. (4) This is a prerequisite for receiving a new understanding of being.

This might seem to make world transforming by being receptive to a new understanding of being higher than world preserving by being receptive to the current understanding of being. This may well be Nietzsche's view, but it is not Heidegger's. Being receptive to and acting on an understanding of being is as good as it gets for Heidegger. Sometimes for contingent reasons you can preserve. Sometimes you've got to transform. These contingent reasons are the stuff of history.

According to White's retrospective reading of Heidegger's work, Heidegger, once he had discovered the history of being, sees that he should never have tried to present a phenomenological ontology of the death of individual human beings, rather, the proper subject of thought is the finite timeliness of shared human practices that make possible the birth and death of cultural worlds which, in turn, gives rise to the temporality of history. As she puts it:

Now we can see why Heidegger thinks that fundamental ontology must include consideration of 'the problem of the finitude in man as the decisive element which makes the understanding of being possible' (KPM 240/225). Our finitude is not just an incidental feature of our being. It is established in our relationship to being, more particularly in the relationship between Dasein's timeliness [the temporal structure of shared human practices] and the temporality of being [the history of understandings of being] and the role existential death [world-collapse] plays at their intersection. (2.5)

IV. Summary

We have now examined eight different ways to interpret Heidegger on death and dying. To sum up, I'll group them by category in the order of their increasing plausibility.

1. Death is the inevitable event that ends a human life, an event that Heidegger calls demise.

- a) The simplest and most clearly mistaken way to understand Heidegger on death is to think of death as the *event* at the end of a human life when that life is annihilated, and to think of dying as the name for this process. (Sartre, Edwards, Philipse)
- b) More sophisticated, but still repudiated by the text, is the view that, while demise is the end of Dasein's possibilities, *dying* is a way of life that takes account of the certainty of that final event. Thus, dying, or being-toward-death, as a way of life gives life, seriousness, and a narrative structure, and so makes possible a life that makes sense in terms of a beginning, middle and end. (Zimmerman and Guignon)

2. Death is not demise at all.

- a) Death is the closing down of possibilities. Each choice I make makes some other courses of action impossible. (Carman)
- b) Dasein is essentially an ability-to-be and death is having an anxiety attack in which Dasein loses its ability to be. Dying would then be readiness for anxiety. (Blattner)

3. Heidegger is formalizing death and dying, and so treats death as a structural feature of all human lives.

- a) The negative version sees death as the structural condition that an individual's identity can always be lost. Dying is, then, the resigned, heroic, acceptance of this condition. (Dreyfus)
- b) The positive version holds that what is essential about human beings, viz. that they are world-disclosers, survives individual death. So identifying oneself with one's capacity as a world-discloser makes possible a 'good death.' (Young)

4. Death is equated with world-collapse, and dying is understood as readiness for world-collapse.

- a) Death is equated with the sort of world-collapse that can befall individual human beings, and dying is staking all on one's current world, while sensing its vulnerability and being ready and able to give it up if it can't be made to work. (Haugeland)
- b) Death is equated with the sort of world collapse that can befall a cultural epoch, and dying is striving to preserve the culture's understanding of being while being ready to sacrifice it when confronted with anomalous practices that portend the arrival of a new cultural world. (White)

White sees the individual and the cultural accounts of death as opposed, and holds that Heidegger finally arrives at the latter view. 'Authentic Dasein is in fact a harbinger of a new understanding of being,¹⁵⁶ she contends, and she cites texts that clearly show that Later Heidegger thinks more and more about the death of cultures, and hardly at all about the death of particular human beings. Still, Haugeland is right that, while Heidegger in Being and Time is never concerned with the physical death of particular persons, he is, nonetheless, describing a possible way of life of individual human beings in the face of death.

To see how these two persuasive but opposed accounts of death can be related, it helps to spell out what White sees as the role of the individual in the 'intersection' of cultural Dasein's timeliness and the temporality of being. It turns out that, according to White, authentic dying requires a special relation of the individual to the vulnerability of the cultural style:

For Heidegger dying is a particular way of existing. Dasein can die either authentically or inauthentically. As Dasein we always have to take up being-toward-the-end either by taking being for granted and thus simply moving within the possibilities of being that our culture has laid out, or by making an issue of it and thus determining where the limits of our cultural possibilities of being actually do lie. (2.7)

According to White, once we see how the dying of individuals relates to the death of cultures, we are in a position to grasp the understanding of death and dying Heidegger is groping for.

Standing with a foot on each of Haugeland's and White's shoulders, the reader, then, can see that they have each discovered *a general structure of finitude* which has both an individual and a cultural instantiation. Haugeland, on the one hand, focusing on Being and Time, tells us how authentic individuals can integrate the vulnerability of their identity into their way of life. He thus convincingly spells out the existential side of Being and Time while treating the cultural parallels, in this case scientific and cultural revolutions, as analogs. White, on the other hand, argues, on the basis of her retroactive reading, that, from the start, Heidegger meant to restrict his account of death to the collapse of cultural understandings of being and, as we have just seen, she contends that authentic dying is the way individuals relate to the finitude and thus the vulnerability of their culture.

The way authentic *individuals* live their death, then, is by total commitment that stakes everything on their individual identity. They then show steadfastness in working to bring out that individual identity while accepting its vulnerability. That is, they live in anxiety and thereby remain open to anomalies that can show that their current way of life is untenable. If their current way of life breaks down, they are already building on the anomalies to form a new one.

On the cultural level, authentic *culture preservers* sense that their culture's finite understanding of what is meaningful and worthy is not grounded in reason or God but depends on them, so they devote themselves wholeheartedly to articulating the culture's current understanding of being. Moreover, since such authentic world-preservers sense the vulnerability of their current understanding of being, they keep the culture open to the anomalies that may eventual lead to its collapse, at the same time remaining receptive to the marginal practices that may become central and ground a new world.

Once we appreciate the different phenomenon revealed by each interpretation, we can see that these phenomena are isomorphic so that one does not have to choose one interpretation at the expense of the other. Rather, we can abstract the structure of death and finitude from each interpretation and so see that, for each, death is world-collapse,

and authentic dying means both resisting world collapse by preserving and trying to make sense of anomalies, while at the same time, remaining open to possible world-collapse, thereby being able, should it happen, to accept it as making possible a new beginning. If we are authentic, we are always actively preserving or transforming. Indeed, preserving and transforming each imply the other. One can only preserve what is transformable. One can only transform what requires preserving.

V. Conclusion

So far, all contributors to the above discussion of Heidegger's understanding of death either identify death with demise, or else deny that death as a structure instantiated in individual or cultural world-collapse has anything at all to do with the event at the end of a human life that Heidegger calls demise. But, if one is to do justice to the phenomenon and to the text, it is important to be clear that those who identify death with world-collapse need not deny that the structure of world collapse can also be instantiated in a terminal condition coextensive with the event of demise — in which, as in all instances of world-collapse, 'Dasein is no longer able to be there' (294).

We must bear in mind that, when Heidegger says that death is 'the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein,' he is not making the *biographical* point that Dasein's current world will someday collapse. Heidegger is clear that the *existential* possibility of death is a possibility that can never become *actual* in the way something understood as potential can finally get realized. Yet Dasein does finally cease to exist for good.

Thus, there seems to be an important difference between terminal death, so to speak, and all other forms of existential breakdown. Even if, as White so convincingly argues, by their very nature as disclosive, both an identity and a world must be vulnerable, still, an individual might be lucky enough *never to experience the failure of his or her identity*, and the members of culture need not experience culture-collapse. And conversely, one can actually *experience* identity and world-collapse only if the collapse in question is not the terminal one.

One can, of course, abstract from these differences and arrive at a 'formal' existential-ontological conception of death that covers both the repeatable and the final versions. What makes death 'possible,' in a special sense of possible then, is not that it can never become actual, but that, like all forms of existential-ontological vulnerability, it has to be taken up by Dasein and lived in a way that affects its life from beginning to end. Heidegger tells us that, 'The authentic possibility of the being of death is grasped only when the relationship to this possibility is such that it is thereby understood as a certainty of my being.'⁵⁷ Death, then, becomes, as White puts it, a way of life. In this sense, all forms of ultimate vulnerability are equally certain. Still, there is something special about the *final* collapse of being-in-the-world; terminal death, unlike other forms of world-collapse, is *inevitable*.

Heidegger, true to the phenomena as usual, does not deny physical death's inevitability. Unlike all other forms of existential-ontological breakdown, Heidegger tells us 'Death is something *distinctively* impending' (294). And, indeed, when thinking of terminal death, Heidegger goes beyond speaking merely of certainty and says, 'death as the end of Dasein, is ...certain...and *not to be outstripped*' (303 — some italics removed).⁵⁸

Here death as *certain* and death as *inevitable* part ways. I can be certain of my *vulnerability* to identity or world collapse as a *possibility* without ever experiencing it, but the terminal death that is co-extensive with demise, while, indeed, an instance of vulnerability, is inevitable, not just *possibly* inevitable. Thus, the existential death co-extensive with demise must be lived with a paradoxical combination of putting everything at stake in living one's identity, while at the same time acting in a way that is open to its *inevitable* (not just possible) final collapse.

Thus, something like demise comes back, requiring some interpretation. Even when we are clear that death can't be a future event, we are left open to Sartre's and Camus' conviction that, however one describes the non-event that terminates our lives, it might well make all our previous commitments seem absurd. Just how is one supposed to live steadfastly putting one's identity at stake while at the same time being open to its *inevitable* utterly final collapse? This is where phenomenology seems to leave off and ontology or faith must take over.

In the end, Heidegger eschews faith and turns to formalized ontology. But, as we have now seen, there is a tension in his ontology. There is a way in which *terminal* collapse has the same ontological structure and the same existential role in an authentic Dasein's life as do all other forms of existential-ontological breakdown. But there is also a way in which my final end is unique. In non-terminal breakdown, Dasein as an ability-to-be does, indeed, collapse, but something remains aware of the collapse and survives to open a new world.⁵⁹ In terminal breakdown, as far as we can tell, awareness and world disclosing are over for good.

The deep confusion in the death chapter in Being and Time — a confusion that White notes but that her single-minded focus on cultural world-collapse doesn't allow her to see — is that sometimes Heidegger is proposing a formalized account of the essence of existential-ontological collapse *in general*,⁶⁰ and sometimes he is giving an account of the *distinctively final* character of terminal death, which, if *essential*, would prevent it from being merely another instance of existential-ontological breakdown. What White's approach does enable one to see, however, is that Heidegger may well have thought of distinctive, terminal, individual death as the essential or paradigm case, in Being and Time, but that Later Heidegger came to think of the death of cultural epochs as essential or paradigmatic.

Thus the complexity in the phenomenon itself leads Heidegger to lay out two existential-ontological accounts of how to live in the face of death that are in tension. The one White brilliantly works out and defend takes world-collapse as essential and so gives an account of demise merely as an instance of existential-ontological breakdown, ignoring the distinctive character of physical death's inevitability and finality. In White's version of Heidegger's account of finitude, one is called constantly to experience one's vulnerability with anxiety, but one also senses that this vulnerably is a necessary condition of the joy of being a world-discloser, so that, far from *fear* of my inevitable *demise*, Dasein's authentic attunement to the world while disclosing it is anxious joy. As Heidegger says: 'Along with the sober anxiety which brings us face to face with our individualized ability-to-be, there goes an unshakable joy' (358).

But Heidegger is rightly unwilling to take a stand on whether there is an afterlife waiting for something like Dasein. He is clear that 'if "death" is defined as the "end" of

Dasein – that is to say being-in-the-world – this does not imply any ontical decision whether "after death" still another being is possible' (292). Heidegger is therefore not going to give us advice as to how to live our lives in the face of the *inevitability* of the terminal collapse of our being-in-the-world. He can say that we are called to live the possibility of this final collapse, as we are called to live the possibility of all forms of world-collapse, by breaking out of the inauthenticity of the Anyone that sees death as a future event that can be ignored for now. Thus, 'the analytic makes forerunning resoluteness basic as an ability-to-be which, in an existentielle manner, is authentic' (360). But, in the end, Heidegger was enough of a phenomenologist to realize that there was nothing *positive* he could say about how to live a life taking account every moment that it is bound to end in total annihilation. He does not claim that in this case existential-ontology can give us binding guidance. 'Existential Interpretation will never seek to take over any authoritarian pronouncement as to those things which, from an existentiell point of view, are possible or binding' (360).

Despite interpreters' attempts to find Heidegger's existentiell recommendation for how to live in the face of our inevitable final end, one finds not Sartrean denial, nor the traditional Christian belief in an afterlife, nor Kierkegaard's claim that, without belief in an afterlife, faith can still reconcile vulnerability and total commitment, nor secular heroic nihilism in the face of the absurd. One finds, instead, the suggestion that none of these responses to terminal death need undermine finite forerunning resoluteness with its joy in the possibility of either preserving vulnerable identities and cultural worlds, or letting them go and disclosing new ones. But, beyond that, it seems that each of us, without Heidegger's guidance, has to relate to the inevitability of finally no longer being able to be there in his or her own way. Carol White chose to spend twenty years laboriously writing a masterful meditation on finitude and death that will long outlive her.

Hubert L. Dreyfus

NOTES

¹ In translating Heidegger's technical terms, I've followed the editor's recommendations. I've also modified all quotations from Heidegger's texts to make them consistent with this decision.

² Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 25, 26. Henceforth page references to this translation appear in parenthesis after the quotation.)

³ For an argument to this effect, see Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus, Mind over Machine: The Power of Human Intuitive Expertise in the Era of the Computer (New York: Free Press, Revised paperback edition, 1988).

⁴ The exception, according to Heidegger, is cultural works of art like temples and cathedrals, the acts of great statesmen, and the writings of thinkers, each of which shows the style by articulating and glamorizing it. See Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art,' in Poetry, Language, Thought, trans. Alfred Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

⁵ Martin Heidegger, On Time and Being, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷ Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, 330.

⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, On Certainty, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright and translated by Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

⁹ Martin Heidegger, Introduction to Metaphysics, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1961), 2, 3.

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art,' 76, 77.

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, Section 74.

¹² Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art,' 76.

¹³ Martin Heidegger, 'The Thing', in Poetry, Language, Thought, trans. Alfred Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 184, 185.

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, 'The question concerning technology,' in The question concerning technology and other essays, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977), 37.

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art,' 40, 41.

¹⁶ Martin Heidegger, Introduction to Metaphysics, 189.

¹⁷ White focuses on this basic misunderstanding in Paul Edwards' ridiculing of Heidegger's account of death. She rightly dismisses all such interpretations in her article, Paul Edwards, 'Heidegger on Death: A Deflationary Critique,' The Monist, Vol. 59, no. 2 (April, 1976), 161-168. As White says succinctly: 'I want to argue that the problem which Heidegger is addressing has been fundamentally misconceived by both these authors as well as many others.... To understand what Heidegger is saying we must make a radical distinction between the death of a person and the existential death of Dasein.' [Carol J. White. 'Dasein, Existence and Death,' Philosophy Today, XXVIII (Spring 1984), 53.]

But the mistake is still being made. For example, Taylor Carman does a careful and devastating job of showing that Herman Phillipse's recent discussion of Heidegger on death in Heidegger's Philosophy of being: A Critical Interpretation (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998) is an 'astonishing misreading' of the text. See Taylor Carman, Heidegger's Analytic: Interpretation, discourse, and Authenticity in Being and Time (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 278.

18 Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Pocket Books, 1966).

19 Charles Guignon, Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1983), 135, 136.

20 Taylor Carman, op. cit., 279.

21 Ibid., 272.

22 William Blattner, 'The concept of death in Being and Time', Man and World 27 (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994) 49-70. Reprinted in Hubert Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall, editors, Heidegger Reexamined, Vol. 1, Dasein, Authenticity, and Death, (London: Routledge, 2002), 323.

23 Ibid., 324 (my italics).

24 Ibid., 325.

25 Ibid., 314.

26 William Blattner, Heidegger's Temporal Idealism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 88.

27 For a discussion of Heidegger's distinction between resoluteness and forerunning resoluteness, see Hubert L. Dreyfus, 'Could anything be more intelligible than everyday intelligibility? Reinterpreting division I of Being & Time in the light of division II,' in Appropriating Heidegger, ed. James E. Faulconer and Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

28 Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, 311 (Heidegger's italics removed; my italics added).

29 Taylor Carman, op. cit., 284.

30 Ibid., 285.

31 Ibid., 281.

32 Ibid., 282.

³³ As an explanation of Heidegger's view of existential dying, or death as a way of life, Carman's account faces not only phenomenological difficulties but exegetical ones as well. Heidegger does, indeed, mention the sort of nullifying of possibilities Carman describes. Carman quotes the crucial passage:

Having an ability-to-be [Dasein] always stands in one possibility or another: it constantly is *not* other possibilities, and it has waived these in its existentiell projection (331).

But though this loss of possibilities is described as a nullity of projection, it is not the null projection of death. Heidegger is not talking at this point in the text about the existential projection involved in death; rather he is referring to the nullifying effect of ordinary existentiell choice. He says, 'the nullity we have in mind belongs to Dasein's being free for its existentiell possibilities. Freedom, however, *is* in the choice of *one* possibility, that is, in tolerating not having chosen the others, and one's not being able to choose them' (331). This loss of particular possibilities due to our freedom of choice cannot be 'the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all' (307).

That this nullity of choice has nothing to do with dying should also be clear from its place in Heidegger's exposition. The nullity of choice is mentioned only once and then only in the guilt chapter; never in the chapter on death. Recognizing this problem leads Carman to the implausible and unjustified assertion that death is a subcategory of guilt, something

Heidegger never says. In fact it's clear from Heidegger's placement of this mention of freedom and choice in the chapter on guilt that the nullity of choice is a sub-specie of guilt if it is to be subsumed under any other nullity. More likely, the nullity of choice is supposed to be a third nullity — the nullity of the present — as opposed to the nullity of guilt, which is the nullity of the past, and of death, which is the nullity of the future.

34 Ibid., 271.

35 Ibid., 286. See Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time*, Division I (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1991), 305.

36 Ibid., 286, 310.

37 Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hanny (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986).

38 Carman rightly notes that I made the same mistake in assuming that ontological guilt in *Being and Time* means that there is something wrong with Dasein, viz. that it can't get behind its thrownness; whereas it is precisely the metaphysical demand that we overcome our finitude and achieve total clarity about our taken for granted understanding of being that Heidegger rejects.

39 Julian Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 127.

40 Ibid., 131-132.

41 Ibid., 132-133.

42 Martin Heidegger, 'The Thing,' op. cit., 184.

⁴³ Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy and History,' in *Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Book, 1984), 84. Not *all* marginal practices, however, need come down to us from what Heidegger calls our heritage. As my mention of the printing press suggests, some new practices are introduced by technology; others might be introduced by cultural invasions, and so forth.

44 As evidence that Rilke has not worked his way out of the metaphysics of the subject, Heidegger cites the very claim to deep inwardness, that Young would like to think of as Heidegger's own view.

Heidegger quotes Rilke as suggesting that however vast the world of space and time may be: 'it hardly bears comparison ...with the dimensions of our inwardness, which does not even need the spaciousness of the universe to be within itself almost unfathomable.' [Julian Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art*, 146]

Another hint that Young mistakenly attributes Rilke's views to Heidegger is that, after quoting a passage on Rilke's angels, Heidegger says, that the angel is '*metaphysically the same* as the figure of Nietzsche's Zarathustra.' [Martin Heidegger, 'What are Poets For?,' *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Alfred Hofstadter, (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) 134 (Heidegger's italics).

White anticipates Young's mistake when she rightly observes that 'Some remarks that Rilke makes obviously strike a responsive chord in Heidegger, but I have resisted quoting them in the body of the paper since sorting out the difference between the two thinkers would require too much space.' [Carol J. White, 'Dasein, Existence and Death,' 65. Reprinted in *Heidegger Reexamined, Vol. 1, Dasein, Authenticity, and Death*, 343].

45 Julian Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art*, 133.

46 Ibid.

47 John Haugeland, 'Truth and Finitude: Heidegger's Transcendental Existentialism,' in Heidegger, Authenticity, and Modernity: Essays in Honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus, Volume 1, ed. Mark Wrathall and Jeff Malpas (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

⁴⁸ See John Haugeland, 'Heidegger on Being a Person,' in Heidegger Reexamined: Vol. 1, Dasein, Authenticity, and Death and 'Truth and Finitude,' op. cit., footnote 6.

Haugeland points out that Dasein is always a public way of life. According to Haugeland, then, Heidegger's essential point is not that death is the death of an individual, but that Dasein can take over its death in a way that individualizes it. A resolute individual therefore dies to the extent that his or her way of life does, but that's far from the whole story. For Haugeland, then, the Kuhnian account of scientific revolutions is more than an analogy; it is a correct description of the life and death of scientific Dasein as a way of life.

In this Forward, I've limited myself to one aspect of Haugeland's published account of death in Being and Time. (I've also left aside his promised account of historicity in Being and Time and the history of being in Later Heidegger.) I'm thus restricting and distorting his view in order to bring out an important opposition between an account of world-collapse restricted to individualized being-in-the-world, on the one hand, and, on the other, White's claim that, one can see in retrospect that Heidegger's account of the death of Dasein was never meant to be about individuals at all but was supposed to be exclusively aimed at describing the death of cultures.

49 Haugeland, op. cit., 73, I would have preferred he said 'lucidly' rather than 'explicitly,' since lucidly avoids making it seem that this way of life is conscious or reflective, and so it better captures Heidegger's Kierkegaardian notion of transparency, i.e. letting one's unconditional commitment become apparent in every aspect of one's life.

50 Haugeland, op. cit., 352, footnote 9. One might think that world-collapse is an event in the future that, like any possibility, can turn into actuality. If so, it would suffer from what Carman criticizes as the assumption that death is some *possible* future event that could become *actual*. But world-collapse escapes this objection because the possibility of the annihilation of a world is the annihilation of *all* possibilities, not the actualization of any possibility in the world.

51 Haugeland, op. cit., 74.

52 For a more detailed account of the role of anomalies, see Charles Spinosa, Fernando Flores, and Hubert Dreyfus, *Disclosing New Worlds: Entrepreneurship, Democratic Action, and the Cultivation of Solidarity*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), especially footnote 25 on page 193.

53 When Heidegger wants to emphasize this nonmetaphysical sense of how new understandings of being arise, he calls the way practices gather into a new style to bring things out into their own, '*Ereignis*', usually translated as 'the event appropriation.' Thus, in Time and Being he can say that the *Ereignis* sends being (op. cit., 19).

54 Even in very late Heidegger when he is talking of things thinging, mortals are described as those who die, which presumably means those who while contributing to the temporary world set up around a thing such as a celebratory meal, at the same time accept its ungroundedness and vulnerability. See Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Spinosa,

'Highway bridges and feasts: Heidegger and Borgmann on how to affirm technology,' Man and World, Vol. 30 (1997).

⁵⁵ Carol J. White. 'Dasein, Existence and Death,' 63, *op. cit.*, 341.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 64, *op. cit.*, 342.

⁵⁷ Martin Heidegger, History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena, trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 317.

⁵⁸ Piotr Hoffman, 'Dasein and "its" Time,' Blackwell Companion to Heidegger, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (forthcoming 2004) points out that Heidegger says in Being and Time that 'a "time" has been allotted to Dasein,' (463) and uses this quotation and others like it to support his claim that the sort of death Heidegger is analyzing in Being and Time must, like demise, be individual, inevitable, and terminal. But this notion of an allotted time alone does not distinguish individual death from cultural death. Cultures too have their allotted times and invariably die. But neither does the notion of an allotted time support the counter-claim that both the *inevitable* and final end of a human life and the *contingent* collapse of an identity or of a cultural world are instances of the same structure. Indeed, since Heidegger can't say that terminal death is *necessary* but only that it is *inevitable*, it is hard to see how to state the distinctive differences among the ways cultures *invariably* die, identities *might* die, and individual terminal death is inevitable.

⁵⁹ This raises the difficult question: just what survives world or identity-collapse so as to be aware that collapse has occurred? Clearly, Dasein, as being-in-the world is precisely no longer there. Heidegger would certainly resist the Cartesian claim that what survives is consciousness. What must survive, then, is what survives the breakdown of Dasein in an anxiety attack, the lack of a world, or what Heidegger calls naked thrownness or the that-it-is-and-has-to-be (174). Heidegger says all that is left in an anxiety attack is an 'individualized' '*solus ipse*' (233) which, we must presumably understand not as a self-sufficient Cartesian subject and not as part of some larger All, but as pure, isolated, world-needy mineness. But, here, even a master phenomenologist like Heidegger may have run up against the limits of phenomenology.

⁶⁰ Blattner claims, in effect, that we should treat anxiety attacks, although they are neither inevitable nor terminal, and are not a response to the anomalies in the current world, as another form of world collapse related to death. That seem to be a plausible proposal, but it makes Heidegger's job of finding a formal ontological level of description that covers the essential features of all ways that Dasein becomes impossible, even more difficult.