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1. Introduction

Both Martin Heidegger and Harry Frankfurt have argued that the fundamental feature of human identity is *care*. Both contend that caring is bound up with the fact that we are mortal beings related to our own impending death, and both have claimed that caring has a non-instantaneous, future-oriented, and ultimately circular temporal structure. In this chapter, I argue that Heidegger's conception of the temporal articulation of caring elucidates a misunderstanding at the heart of Frankfurt's view of the relations among care, death, and time. The temporal, existential, and normative significance that Frankfurt finds in a hard-wired instinct for self-preservation, what he calls a person's "love of living," is more compellingly captured by Heidegger's idea that a human identity is lived out in the manner he calls "being-toward-death."

2. Preliminary Remarks

Heidegger gives the name "care" [*Sorge*] to the ontological structure of human existence that he spells out in *Being and Time*. He contends that for me to be a person, or "Dasein," is for me to relate to my life by caring about it. My own being is *an issue* or *at stake* for me. Heidegger writes that "any entity is either a 'who' [a person or Dasein] ... or a 'what' [a mere thing or object]," adding that, for the latter, "their being is [to them] 'a matter of indifference' [*gleichgultig*]; or more precisely, they 'are' such that their being can be neither a matter of indifference to them, nor the opposite" (Heidegger 1962: 71, 68, my gloss in the brackets).¹

The phenomenon of care, according to Heidegger, cannot be captured by the everyday conception of time as a linear sequence of discreet now-points. Care stretches our time; it has an

"ecstatically" articulated and ultimately circular temporal structure Heidegger describes as "being-ahead-of-myself-already-in-the-world." Put abstractly, to care is to be related to the present by way of pressing into the future on the basis of what already matters. Caring, Heidegger contends, is rooted in how I *already* find myself, yet it is essentially futural (BT 376).

To care is thus to have final ends "for the sake of which" we carry out our daily activities and in terms of which we organize our time and have a meaningful orientation in our everyday world (See BT 116-119).² The final ends that define our identities are not *goals* that we aim to achieve at some discreet now-point in the future and then leave behind in the past. They are that "towards-which" a person always conducts himself. It is helpful here to appeal to an example from William Blattner's discussion of this point: the difference between having the *goal* of getting tenure and having the identity of *being* a teacher (Blattner 1999: 39-43). The goal is something you aim at, achieve at a certain moment, and then 'leave behind' in the past. But futural final ends that define a person's identity of *being* a professor remain "always outstanding"; they are never "settled" or "actualized" and left in the past, at least as long as the person understands and identifies himself in the relevant way. That is one thing Heidegger means by claiming "Dasein is constantly 'more' than it factually is," and that Dasein "*is* existentially that which ... it is *not yet* (BT 185-186, cf. 287). The "not yet" here is the ecstatic "stretching out" into the dimension of the future that is characteristic of care according to Heidegger.

Frankfurt has been interested in the same realm of phenomena. With a feigned tentativeness, he writes: "Perhaps caring about oneself is essential to being a person. Can something to whom its own condition and activities do not matter in the slightest properly be regarded as a person at all? Perhaps nothing that is entirely indifferent to itself is really a person"(Frankfurt 1999a: 89-90). Especially since his essay "The Importance of What We Care

About," Frankfurt has consistently sought to distinguish caring from the over-burdened notion of *desire*. He does so in terms of their differing "temporal characteristics": while desire has "no inherent persistence" and can obtain in a merely instantaneous present "now," caring is essentially "prospective," involving, as Heidegger saw, a *futural* thrust: "The outlook of a person who cares about something is inherently prospective; that is, he necessarily considers himself as having a future" (Frankfurt 1988: 83). Frankfurt contends, again in a Heideggerian vein, that caring provides "continuity and coherence to a life" (Frankfurt 1999e: 162) and prevents it from being merely a sequence of events" (Frankfurt 1988: 83). Echoing Heidegger's denial that the temporality of care can be understood as a "pure sequence of 'nows'" (BT 377), Frankfurt remarks that the "moments in the life of a person who cares about something...are not merely linked inherently by formal relations of sequentiality" (Frankfurt 1988: 83). Caring is a matter of the person's "continuing concern with what he does with himself and with what goes on in his life" (Frankfurt 1988: 84).

Both Heidegger and Frankfurt relate the phenomenon of care and its futural directedness to the fact of human mortality. In his later work, Frankfurt claims that the instinctual avoidance of death, a manifestation of what he calls the "love of living," plays "a comprehensively foundational" role in the constitution of personal identity and in grounding the importance of what we care about (Frankfurt 2006b: 41).³ Heidegger agrees that human mortality is somehow the source of importance in human life. However, Heidegger would strongly reject Frankfurt's understanding of the significance of death in terms of a naturalistic, instinct-conception of care.

In Frankfurt's efforts to rebut the claims of Kantian rationalism, a still widespread view that sees reflective self-consciousness and rational principles at the core of human identity, he, like Heidegger, holds up care as a phenomenon that does not depend upon and indeed enjoys a

certain priority over reason or reflective self-consciousness. Frankfurt, though, does not see how to defend this anti-rationalism without swinging all the way to the opposite dialectical extreme and defending an implausible foundationalist naturalism in his conception of care.

Frankfurt mistakenly sees the priority of care over rational self-consciousness as implying the *priority of the factual over the normative* in questions of human identity. He understands the "love of living" as the "biologically embedded" instinct for self-preservation (RL 30), a fundamental and defining personal commitment that is "determined for us by biological and other natural conditions, concerning which we have nothing much to say" (RL 48). Frankfurt thus conceives the most fundamental commitments definitive of a person's practical identity —what he calls "volitional necessities"— on the model of *natural facts* about which normative questions of justification, appropriateness, or evaluation *cannot* arise at all.

From Heidegger's perspective, this is to misunderstand the significance of the relation between caring, dying, and human identity. Heidegger's emphasis on care is also part and parcel of his overall anti-rationalism. Yet Heidegger's view helps us see how Frankfurt's naturalistic interpretation of volitional necessity is motivated by a misunderstanding of the significance of the temporal structure of caring. For Heidegger, human identity cannot bottom-out in any fundamental commitments that are hard-wired like natural facts. Against Frankfurt's naturalist foundationalism about ultimate personal commitments, Heidegger would emphasize that the question of who I am can always arise anew and that my identity remains ever at stake. According to Heidegger, there are no substantive commitments that are in principle immune to revision or rejection; not even the ones Frankfurt claims are biologically embedded in human nature. In order to understand all that is at stake in this nest of issues, we need to back up and get more details of these arguments on the table.

3. Frankfurt on Identity and Care

Frankfurt launches his reflections on caring by considering what is involved in posing and answering what I will call "the practical question," the question that asks: "Who am I going to be? What am I going to do?" According to Frankfurt, answering this question takes the form of hierarchically ordering the relative importance of the things a person cares about (RL 23). This is because a person's caring about something "consists...in the fact that he *guides* himself by reference to it" (Frankfurt 1999c: 111). The important thing about caring is not captured by thinking of it as some kind of affective or cognitive state. Caring is a matter of having certain practical dispositions; it is about what I am prepared or able to do.

Ranking the relative importance of the things I care about clarifies for me how I can carry out my life in terms of what is of "greatest importance" to me (Frankfurt 1999d: 132) so that I have something worthwhile to do rather than being bogged down in paltry trivialities or being dispersed in activity that is merely "locally purposeful but nonetheless fundamentally aimless" (RL 89, 53).⁴ Living in terms of what you care about enables you to live a *meaningful* life characterized by "a fundamental kind of freedom" (RL 53, 97, 99). Caring about something (a person, ideal, cause, etc.) consists in the fact that the person is effectively motivated to pursue its good or interests, structures his activities in accordance with them, and is affectively vulnerable to their diminishment or enhancement (Frankfurt 1988: 83). Hence, caring involves the person both practically and affectively in his own life and activities. To see why this counts as a meaningful life, it helps to consider what a *meaningless* life consists of for Frankfurt. If a person did not care about anything, Frankfurt claims, he would "languish": "the results would be a fragmentation of life, passivity, and boredom" (Frankfurt 1999a: 88). Why is a carefree life

boring? Because nothing matters. Again, mattering is not a subjective feeling; it is largely a pragmatic notion. Mattering means there is something *you have got to do*.

The specter of boredom accordingly comes to hold a central position in Frankfurt's middle and late analysis of the self.⁵ "Boredom," he writes, "is a serious matter. It is not a condition that we seek to avoid because we do not find it enjoyable. In fact, the avoidance of boredom is a profound and compelling human need" (RL 54).⁶ Frankfurt even claim that "avoiding boredom ... expresses a quite primitive urge for psychic survival... [an urge appropriately construed] as a variant of the universal and elemental instinct for self-preservation" (RL 54-55, my gloss).⁷

Reflectively posing the practical assists one in coming to a wholehearted (i.e., non-ambivalent) *identification with* or acceptance of the motivations that the person finds move him to act. "Being wholehearted means having a will that is undivided. The wholehearted person is fully settled as to what he wants, and what he cares about" (RL 95). But this being "fully settled" presupposes that the person "understand[s] what it is that [he himself] really care[s] about, and [that he is] decisively and robustly confident in caring about it" (RL 28). Asking the practical question is aimed at "articulating what we are to care about" and enabling us "to get clear concerning what is to be important to us" (Frankfurt 1999a: 92). In Frankfurt's picture, as in Heidegger's, to be guided in your action by what you care about is to be identified with your motivations and thus to be autonomous, "self-owned" ("authentic" [*eigentliche*] in Heidegger's term). For both, such autonomy is a response to your receptive sense of the way things *already* matter. However, Frankfurt and Heidegger understand the significance of this "already" and the experience of being identified with it in radically different ways.

4. The Circular Structure of Care

Both Frankfurt and Heidegger see the phenomenon of care as having a distinctive temporal articulation: while being essentially futural or prospective (caring gives us something *to do*, it orients and moves us toward the execution of certain ends), it is rooted in a pre-constituted situation in which a person *already* finds himself. The peculiar interrelationship between the past and futural dimensions of caring shows that it has a temporally *circular structure*, one that comes to light especially when we consider how caring shapes the way a person deliberately poses and answers the practical question. Both Frankfurt and Heidegger see that this question involves a kind of circularity. Frankfurt writes that it involves "a rather obvious sort of circularity" (RL 24) and when Heidegger writes that "an entity [Dasein] whose own being is itself an issue has, ontologically, a circular structure" (BT 195), he means to capture (in his own terminology and among other things) the circular structure of the practical question.

To say that the practical question has a circular structure is to deny that it can be intelligibly posed from any kind of original position or stance of detached neutrality. Someone can only pose the question of who and how to be – and press reflectively into the future – from out of a substantive prior orientation provided by the way that things *already* matter. This "*already*" captures the temporal dimension of the past. Where you are going is shaped by where you are coming from. Your past does not "follow along after" you, Heidegger claims; it "always already goes ahead" of you (BT 41).

The prior orientation required for any meaningful posing of a practical question reflects and anticipates the answer that will be given to it. Being able to pose the question means you have already got a grip on its possible answer (Frankfurt 2006a: 23). The question cannot be

meaningfully posed in abstraction; it seeks a concrete answer, and it does so by an evaluation of a definite range of possible ways of living and final ends that are already intelligible and appealing (otherwise they would not show up in the deliberation in the first place). Frankfurt makes these points helpfully:

In order for a person to know how to determine what is important to himself ... he must already know how to identify certain things as making differences that are important to him. Formulating a criterion of importance presupposes possession of the very criterion that is to be formulated. (RL 25-26)

In deliberating about how to go on, the person does not *decide* what is important to him, but *finds* himself already finding it important (RL 26). Similar to Heidegger's arguments against a conception of freedom as a *liberty of indifference* (BT 183), Frankfurt compellingly criticizes the notion of freedom as unconstrained choice:

Unless a person makes choices within restrictions from which he cannot escape by merely choosing to do so, the notion of self-direction, of autonomy, cannot find a grip...[and] the decisions and choices he makes will be altogether arbitrary. They cannot possess authentically personal significance or authority, for his will has no determinate character (Frankfurt 1999c: 110).

Frankfurt and Heidegger, though, understand the significance of the preceding dimension of selfhood in drastically different ways.

According to Frankfurt, the circularity of the practical question shows "that the question is *systematically inchoate*" and that, if it is able to be intelligibly posed and answered, it must be grounded in and oriented by some factually stable aspect of the person's identity about which no normative questions can be raised (RL 25). Richard Moran, in his review of Frankfurt's *The Reasons of Love*, helpfully explains what is wrongheaded about this claim.

Certainly the inquiry about how to live must begin somewhere... And it is also true that any such inquiry must begin with a provisional sense of "the criteria on the basis of which the exploration is to be pursued." But it's not obvious that this makes the question itself "systematically inchoate," any more than ordinary theoretical inquiry is inchoate

since it must begin with, and rely on, an initial set of beliefs and standards for making progress. This would amount to begging the question being raised only if the resultant inquiry did not allow for revision or correction of the assumptions with which it began. Similarly, it may be agreed that the normative question of how to live cannot get going without a provisional answer to the factual question of what one indeed cares about, but so far that is just a reason to begin the inquiry there, not to give the factual questions any other priority. (Moran 2007: 468)

From the Heideggerian perspective, Moran shows in this passage that the circular structure of the practical question is an instance of the more general phenomenon involved in any understanding whatsoever: the *hermeneutic circle*. A brief explanation of Heidegger's understanding of the hermeneutic circle will help us begin to clarify the differences between Heidegger and Frankfurt.

Understanding is a temporally articulated event with both a past and a futural dimension. It is easiest to explain this with reference to linguistic understanding, although Heidegger sees a general structure here that also holds for our understanding of the equipment we deal with in our daily life, as well as our understanding of ourselves and our situation of action. Understanding always proceeds out of a pre-given context (the dimension of the past, or what Heidegger calls "having-been-ness" [*Gewesenheit*]) on which a person has a more or less stable and explicit grasp and in terms of which he forms certain anticipations regarding what is coming next (the dimension of the future, what Heidegger calls "projection"). The better your prior grasp on (your "pre-understanding" of) the context, the better you will be able to make sense of the content. So, for example, it is much easier to understand a conversation you hear between two people (especially if it is in a language which is not your native tongue) if you already understand something about the subject matter and have a sense of the positions and commitments held by the interlocutors.

Next, part of the experience of understanding is the satisfaction of a more or less vague anticipation of what is coming next. If you are understanding the words you are reading right

now, the words and phrases that immediately follow next will not come as a shock. The more you read of a book or listen to someone speak, the more you know about where he is coming from and the better you can anticipate what he will say next, where he is going; this is why reading a book or watching a movie twice or three times can be such a different experience; the pre-understanding in terms of which you initially approach the text gets enriched and altered with each repetition.

The projective or anticipatory aspect of understanding normally is so much a matter of course that it is not noticed. It becomes evident in cases of breakdown, when your anticipations fail to be satisfied. In such a case of conversational breakdown we might say, "I thought I knew where you were going with that, but now I'm not *following you* anymore." These expressions track the *futural* dimension of understanding, what Heidegger calls "projection" [*Entwurf*].

Gadamer's comment on this is helpful:

A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection [*Vorentwurf*], which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there. (Gadamer 2004: 269)

When we no longer follow the meanings being presented to us, we need to readjust ourselves and revise the initial grasp on the situation that gave rise to our frustrated anticipation, that is, we need actively to appropriate our "projections" and attempt to figure out why we have misunderstood and formed faulty and unsatisfied anticipations of meaning. As Moran put it, this is the moment in which we tend to a "revision or correction of the assumptions" in terms of which we were initially oriented in the conversation or inquiry. In Heidegger's view, this is the work of interpretation, which he describes as the active development or cultivation [*Ausbildung*],

working-out [*Ausarbeitung*], appropriation [*Zueignung*], and making-determinate [*Bestimmen*] (BT 188, 203, 89) of the pre-understanding at work in our initial grasp of our situation. Those interpretive determinations or appropriations accordingly feed back into our sensitivity to the context and then serve to aid the generation of more precise and adequate understanding and anticipations of meaning. This is, abstractly speaking, how the process of coming to a better understanding by way of an interpretation works.

As Frankfurt saw with respect to the particular case of practical deliberation, all processes of coming to an understanding involve a projective (future-oriented) determination of meaning based on one's prior understanding of the context in which he already finds himself (past-oriented). But, according to Heidegger, the fact that one's deliberation concerning what to do (and one's understanding of written and spoken language) is always pre-structured in terms of a prior substantive understanding of oneself and one's situation does not reveal any special problem in need of a solution as Frankfurt thinks. As a structural feature of understanding and interpretation itself, the hermeneutic circle is not a threat to the intelligibility of the practical question and it is not something to be avoided, straightened-out, or grounded in some deeper fact. In Heidegger's words: "What is decisive is not to get out of the circle, but to come into it in the right way...It is not to be reduced to the level of a vicious circle, or even a circle which is merely tolerated" (BT 195). Frankfurt does seek to get out of the circle. He does so by conceiving the most basic personal commitments presupposed in any concrete posing of the practical question on the model of *naturalistic facts* foundational for the normative and existential space of human everyday life.

5. Frankfurt's Misunderstanding of the Circular Structure of Care

From the hermeneutically sensitive premise that practical reflection operates within a prior orientation in which the person already finds himself and which he cannot freely or rationally choose, Frankfurt draws the following unjustified conclusion:

The most fundamental question for anyone to raise concerning importance cannot be the normative question of what he *should* care about. That question can be answered only on the basis of a prior answer to a question that is not normative at all, but straightforwardly factual—namely, the question of what he actually does care about. (Frankfurt 2006a: 23-24, my underlining, italics in the original; see also RL 26)

Conceiving our basic commitments on the model of "straightforward facts" not only allows Frankfurt to plug up what he mistakenly regards as a problematic regress; it supports one of the most important theses involved in his battle against conceptions of human agency and selfhood that are "excessively intellectualized or rationalistic" (Frankfurt 2002: 184). The claim is that a person's deepest commitments ("volitional necessities") are not based in *any* – actual or possible – consideration of the reasons supporting them. Frankfurt asserts that "loving is not the rationally determined outcome of even an implicit deliberative or evaluative process" (Frankfurt 2006a: 41). On the contrary, loving is the factual basis for any practical reasons a person has, "it is the ultimate ground of practical rationality" (RL 56). By construing basic commitments on the model of natural facts, Frankfurt thereby seals them off from being grounded in reasons and secures the foundational status he wants to attribute to them, thus chagrining the rationalist.

In order to support the idea that our prior fundamental commitments are best seen on the model of a factuality and located totally without the space of normativity, Frankfurt appeals to what become in his later writings his central paradigms for the logic (or *lack thereof*) of being identified with one's commitments and motivations: a person's "commitment to the continuation of [his life], and to the well-being of [his] children" (RL 29). Questions of justification or evaluation do not arise here because these most basic commitments are "biologically embedded"

and thus "determined for us by biological and other natural conditions, concerning which we have nothing much to say" (RL 30, 48). Driving this point home, Frankfurt adds that the love of living is a "prerational urge" (Frankfurt 2006a: 37) with a special foundational status:

[O]ur interest in staying alive has enormous scope and resonance. There is no area of human activity in which it does not generate reasons... Self-preservation is perhaps the most commanding, the most protean, and the least questioned of our final ends. Its importance is recognized by everyone and it radiates everywhere. (Frankfurt 2006a: 35)

How is the importance of staying alive supposed to "radiate everywhere"? I can see that love of living gives me reason to look both ways when I cross the street and to avoid drinking bleach, but how does love of living "give rise to the more detailed interests and ambitions that we develop in response to the specific content and course of our experience" (Frankfurt 2006a: 38)?

Frankfurt's point comes across more clearly when we see it in the context of a criticism he makes of Bernard Williams. According to Williams, the primitive drive to go on living that Frankfurt claims is rock bottom itself needs to be sustained by the person's having certain fundamental projects or "categorical desires" which make life worth living at all for him, i.e., which settle the question of whether or not they have any interest in just staying alive in the first place (Williams 1973 and 1981). For Williams, life itself is not a meaningful final end. Our interest in staying alive derives from our investment in certain projects and relationships. Frankfurt's view is directly opposed to Williams's: "Surely Williams has it backward. Our interest in living does not commonly depend upon our having projects that we desire to pursue. It's the other way around. We are interested in having worthwhile projects because we do intend to go on living, and we would prefer not to be bored" (Frankfurt 2006a: 36-37). With this, we can now turn to Heidegger's version of the relations between care, death, and time.

6. Heidegger on the Circularity of Care

Like Frankfurt, Heidegger emphasizes the receptive aspect of our identities. Things *already* matter to us. We do not answer the question of who and how to be by standing back and neutrally choosing or endorsing which identities to have. Prior to all of that we already find ourselves with – or, in Heidegger’s phrase, we are already *thrown* into – a richly textured practical orientation whose motivational efficacy does not depend on our being aware of it or seeing reasons for it. For Frankfurt, this prior orientation is conceived primarily from the perspective of what matters to *me*, in *the first person singular*, whereas for Heidegger, a person’s prior practical orientation has to do with what tends to matter to *us*, in the *first person plural* (though, as we’ll see, Heidegger uses the third person singular – what matters to “one” – to make his point).

According to Heidegger, I get the prior orientation in terms of which I am able to pose and answer the question of who and how to be not by a brute instinctual endowment, but by having been socialized into an everyday normal way of doing things, of understanding what is important and appropriate, and by non-reflectively taking over a range of identities which express the normal way *one* does things. “The one” [*das Man*] is Heidegger’s substantivized term for the functioning of social normativity; it comes from such phrases as “One eats noodles with a fork; One drives on the right side of the road; One uses chalk to write on the chalk board, not to write on the wall or to throw at students,” and so on. Heidegger writes:

From the world [Dasein] takes its possibilities, and it does so first in accordance with the way things have been publicly interpreted by the one. This interpretation has already restricted the possible options of choice to what lies within the range of the familiar, the attainable, the respectable—that which is fitting and proper. (BT 239)

The shared everyday way of understanding what is important and appropriate tends to orient us in the world without our being reflectively aware of it as such, behind the back of our self-consciousness; it operates tacitly with "inconspicuousness and unascertainability [*Unauffälligkeit und Nichtfeststellbarkeit*]" (BT 164), and thus with a self-evidence or "instinct-like" immediacy. Heidegger worries that this everyday inherited way of understanding ourselves enables and *encourages* us to avoid a real, *eigentlich*, confrontation with the question of who I am and what finally matters, and tends to pressure one to absorb oneself in more or less trivial and self-instrumentalizing forms of taking care of our "urgent" everyday business and daily grind. As an unavoidable feature of human identity, this tendency is a built-in liability, a tendency towards living out my life, not in terms my own best sense of what really matters and what this particular situation calls for from me, but in terms of the safe and conventional thing that *one* does.⁸

Heidegger calls this "fallenness": "Dasein has, in the first instance, fallen away from itself as an authentic ability-to-be its self" (BT 220). As such, the person allows the question of who and how to be to be *answered by what "one does"*: "The one ... supplies the answer to the question of the 'who' of everyday Dasein" (BT 165-166). This condition is what Heidegger calls "inauthenticity," [*Uneigentlichkeit*]. It is a "socialized" version of heteronomy, a matter of being moved into action by socially imposed and sanctioned motivations with which the person himself does not finally identify.

In the Heideggerian view, a person's own experience of Frankfurtian wholehearted identification with such social motivations cannot be taken at face value. A person may have the experience of being identified with effective motivations of "the one" (they can be so obvious that questions do not arise), yet nevertheless be alienated from these determining grounds of his action (they may not reflect his own best sense of his final commitments and what is to be done

in a particular situation of action). According to Frankfurt's later view, the mark of being identified with one's motivations and thus of being autonomous, is "satisfaction," which amounts to a lack of "interest in making changes" (Frankfurt 1999b: 104). Frankfurt compares satisfaction to being relaxed (Frankfurt 1999b: 105, n.16). Yet, for Heidegger, two features of inauthenticity are: (1) tranquilization [*Beruhigung*] (BT 222), and (2) Untroubled indifference [*unbehelligten Gleichgültigkeit*] (BT 299). A person with such comfort "has no urge for anything," Heidegger writes, adding that such self-satisfaction "demonstrates *most penetratingly* the power of [self-] forgetting in the everyday mode of concern which is closest to us" (BT 396). Going along with the habits and routines of one's social milieu may feel perfectly natural and relaxing, but that should not be taken as conclusive evidence of being *identified* with them. Such a satisfaction with *what one does* may actually be a symptom of a failure, a "forgetfulness" regarding the challenge to actively appropriate my own individual identity and ultimate commitments.

Hence, although Heidegger and Frankfurt both prioritize a person's receptive sense of how things *already* matter, they conceive of the significance of the preceding dimension of our identities in thoroughly different ways. Frankfurt overlooks the social aspect of human agency that preoccupies Heidegger and that figures into his hermeneutic conception of the circular structure of human identity. Lacking any other resources for combatting the claims of the rationalistic conceptions of the self he opposes, Frankfurt ends up conceiving of the preceding, receptive dimensions of identity on the model of natural instinct, identification with which supposedly provides an ultimate, spade-turning foundation for individual identity and practical normativity. Heidegger conceives of the prior and receptive practical orientation in terms of a tacitly operative and socially shared sense of appropriate and acceptable patterns of conduct,

what *one does*. Doing so importantly re-frames the issue of whether or not a person identifies with his or her basic, pre-reflective motivations, because the practical orientation provided by our social upbringing can seem so natural and a matter of course that questions do not arise about it. But this is no guarantee of our being identified with such motivations.

Heidegger's view, then, leads him to pose the question concerning the possibility of identification with the preceding social dimensions of identity that mediate our individual self-understanding. Heidegger's response to this issue leads him to a reflection on the basic *futural* dimension of human life: its directedness towards death. This offers a suggestive parallelism and subtle corrective to Frankfurt's appeal to the supposedly foundational role played by an instinctual fear of death.

Whereas Frankfurt argues that the substantive identity of the individual self gets its pre-rational ultimate grounding in an instinctual avoidance of death, Heidegger argues that human identity can never bottom-out in such ultimate facts. Yet, in Heidegger's picture too, death is somehow the source of importance in the world. Moreover, appreciating my special relation to my own impending death is what enables me to be released from the satisfying, instinct-like grip of my taken for granted everyday motivations, and thus provides the possibility of being more fully receptive to my own unstable sense of what and how things finally matter so that I may express that in my activities. I qualify this as an "unstable" sense in order to highlight a crucial aspect of Heidegger's conception of death and human finitude: no sense of what matters, no matter how self-evident or satisfying it may be, can be taken as the ultimate, brute ground of identity that Frankfurt is looking for. In order to spell all of this out in more detail, we have to turn to Heidegger's conception of death.⁹

7. Heidegger on Death and the Importance of Being Finite

We should first note the distinction Heidegger makes between "death" conceived (1) as the event of the cessation of biological functions of plants and animals, what he calls "perishing" [*Verenden*] (BT 284), (2) as a significant event that inevitably happens at the end of a *person's* life, what he calls "demise" [*Ableben*], and (3) death as "a way of being," what he calls, variously, "dying" [*Sterben*], "being-towards-the-end" [*Sein zum Ende*], and "being-towards-death"[*Sein zum Tode*] (BT 291 and §§50- 51).

Heidegger describes death as the final 'end' [*Ende*] of Dasein (BT 276). To be towards this end is to be an essentially *finite* [*endliche*] entity. To *be finite* in Heidegger's sense is to relate to your own being as something that *matters* and calls you to give it significance (a stand on who you are and how you are going to be). In Heidegger's words, to be finite is for your own being to be *an issue* for you, to be ever *at stake* for you. It is our understanding of the fact that our lives end in *demise* that makes it possible for things to be important to us. Importance obtains only in a world of mortals (beings who perish) who *understand* that they are *going to die* (beings who demise); these are the beings who exist in the manner Heidegger calls "being-towards-death."¹⁰

Heidegger's claim that Dasein's way of being is a finite being-towards-its-death is essentially a reformulation of the basic claim that Dasein's own being is an issue for it, the claim that to be a person is to be always and unavoidably faced with the questions: Who am I? How should I be? This doesn't mean that we are always anxiously going around like a character in a Woody Allen movie in a state of existential breakdown, wondering what the meaning of it all is. Rather, the question of who I am is never settled once and for all, as though it were a question of observer-independent fact. For Heidegger, to be open to the possible revision of my

commitments and sense of identity is a sign of hermeneutic health, not of identity-undermining ambivalence.

With his conceptions of demise and death I see Heidegger trying to get at the following train of thought. Coming to appreciate the fact that inevitably my life will come to an end can result in a *relativization of the trivial* vis-à-vis what calls me as important and worthwhile.¹¹ I get a better grip on what is of final importance to me and actually makes my life worth living and I experience a call to give myself an identity in terms of that rather than letting my identity be determined by unquestioned ideals and prejudices concerning what is important, what *one* should do. In short, the fact that I will perish and meet my demise gives me something *to do*, for it is because I die that my own being can matter to me in a special way. Living only matters because we die.

From the Heideggerian perspective, the very fact that there are significant differences between what is worthwhile for us and what is trivial is grounded in the fact that we will all, in Raymond Chandler's words, "sleep the big sleep." Life is not in itself a worthwhile final end and source of meaning, at least not without respect to its ultimate termination in death. This is what we can call "the importance of being finite." I will now sketch out the position that I think is behind Heidegger's emphasis on death and the importance of being finite. I'm aware that being totally convinced by the following "argument from the importance of being finite" would involve some auxiliary assumptions that I don't defend here, but it nevertheless helps to capture the spirit of Heidegger's conception of death and its relation to time for our present purposes.

First, when something matters to you, this is not only an affective state; it involves a temporally articulated pragmatic disposition. Mattering is a matter of *what* you do *when*. Mattering consists in how the commitment in question has an effect on what you do and when,

how your projects are prioritized and hierarchized in time. Second, it is because we have an essentially limited amount of time in life — because we will meet our demise — that we have the need to give our time and activities a hierarchical structuring. If you had unlimited time as an immortal you would have no pressure to do something now rather than later. It would not matter *when* you do what, or *what* you do when. You could do it all later.

It is the definite limit imposed by demise that puts the felt pragmatic pressure on our time, the pragmatic pressure to relativize the trivial. Without such limitation significant differences, pragmatically speaking, are leveled; it would become practically impossible for one thing to matter more than another, because it would not essentially matter when you do one thing rather than another. This is why living itself is not the source of value, life is not itself the ultimate source of our interest in having worthwhile projects. Death is. Death is the background against which the distinction between trivial and worthwhile can show up. Death is our deadline.

Heidegger's view of "inauthentic everydayness" as bogged down in instrumental trivialities is directly connected to his view that it promotes a "constant tranquilization about death" (BT 298). The tranquilization is expressed in the everyday attitude to death that presents it as a neutral, third-person event: "One of these days one will die too, in the end; but right now it has nothing to do with us" (BT 297). In such an attitude the impending fact of my own death is avoided, I live life *as if* I were immortal, and can come back to what really matters to me *later*.

The proper "authentic" [*eigentlich*] response to human mortality, the response in which the inevitability and finality of death is grasped as the source of importance such that it pervades and temporally structures one's way of life, is what Heidegger calls "anticipation" [*Vorlaufen*]. Anticipation involves becoming receptive to and getting a grip on your "ownmost" possibilities: those things and activities that finally matter for their own sake according to you (see BT 308

and 435). Living authentically means structuring your everyday activities in terms of such commitments, yet at the same time living in light of the possibility that you may fail at them, or that you may have to reject, revise, or re-hierarchize them. You have no ultimate foundation for your identity.

8. Conclusion

The point of the foregoing account of Heidegger's conception of human finitude was to explain how he maintains a point that is one of Frankfurt's animating concerns, and does so without a misguided appeal to a supposedly foundational instinct for self-preservation. The Frankfurtian concern is to explain how there can be a distinction between final ends that matter for their own sake and define a person's identity, on the one hand, and trivial or merely instrumental ends, on the other. The mode of agency that manifests the former is agency that is both autonomous and meaningful, what Frankfurt calls "self-identified," and what Heidegger calls "authentic."

Heidegger's conception of the importance of being finite provides a compelling alternative to Frankfurt's claim that all importance ultimately "radiates" from biologically embedded foundational instinct for self-preservation. We have seen how Frankfurt was driven to the instinct-model of care because of a misunderstanding of the significance of the hermeneutic circle and the fact that we cannot choose and thus always presuppose a sense of what is finally important. The fact that something is always presupposed in the posing of the practical question does not grant it any special or fundamental priority, only a provisional one. Heidegger builds directly into his view a recognition of the fact that, in the course of living and struggling with the

question of who and how to be, a person may lead radically to revise the most basic aspects of his or her own self-understanding, even perhaps the commitment to staying alive. Previously unquestioned or unquestionable identities might have to be "taken back" (BT 355) or "given up" (BT 443) in accordance with the demands of a particular situation or in favor of what comes to grip the person as a higher end. These are the risks and challenges that accompany the importance of being finite.

¹ I'll refer to Heidegger 1962 (*Being and Time*) as "BT" from now on.

² The "for-the-sake-of-which" [*das Worumwillen*] is Heidegger's name for the substantive final ends or commitments that define a person's identity. See (Heidegger 2009: §11) where he explicitly connects his notion of the "for-the-sake-of-which" [*das Worumwillen*] to Aristotle's conception of final ends.

³ I'll refer to Frankfurt 2006b (*The Reasons of Love*) as "RL" from now on.

⁴ This is almost exactly how Ernst Tugendhat interprets Heidegger's conception of "inauthentic fallenness," which we will discuss below. See Tugendhat 2001: 81.

⁵ I divide Frankfurt's work into an early, middle, and late period. The periods can be differentiated according to the way he conceives of the phenomenon of identification and the primary examples he uses in his explanation of it. In the first or early phase, the example is that of a willing addict who is moved irresistibly by his physiological addiction to nicotine but who desires, that is, *prefers*, to be so moved. In the second or middle phase, Frankfurt's favored example is Martin Luther who is also moved into action irresistibly by means of a necessity, not of physiological addiction, but of personal commitment of the deep kind that Frankfurt calls "volitional necessity." Luther is irresistibly and yet willingly impelled by his most cherished commitments to an act of protest, and in doing so expresses his sense of what is most important. In Frankfurt's third or late phase, Luther drops out and the privileged examples become the parent who, given his biological make-up, irresistibly loves his children, or the person who, given his natural instincts, irresistibly loves life and has an uncontrollable urge to stay alive.

⁶ Heidegger also comes to see boredom as a phenomenon of human being with rich existential implications. This is not a coincidence, but there is no space here to discuss the significance of this overlap. For Heidegger's analysis of boredom, see Heidegger 1995.

⁷ For more on the "primitive human need" of psychic self-preservation, see Frankfurt 1999a: 88-89, and Frankfurt 1999d: 139.

⁸ See Rouse 2013 for a detailed explanation of how Heidegger's focus on the social dimensions of human identity deeply shapes his account of agency, motivation, and answerability.

⁹ Among recent interpretation of Heidegger's conception of death, the view I present here is close to those sketched by Wrathall 2005 and Richardson 2012.

¹⁰ By claiming a pivotal role for the event of demise in Heidegger's understanding of the significance death, I am going against the grain of some of the best recent Heidegger scholarship on this issue. See, for example, Thomson 2013 and Schear 2013. Both Thomson (p. 217) and Schear (p. 365) construe Heideggerian death as a world-collapse (collapse of the intelligibility of a way of life), which has little to do with the common sense understanding of death as the event that happens at the end of life. John Richardson also criticizes other interpreters for construing Heideggerian death in a way that implausibly "takes it out of any direct relation to the biographical event of death" (Richardson 2012: 146-147, n.15). Richardson, like me, argues explicitly that the impending event of demise plays a crucial role in Heidegger's account (Richardson 2012: 152).

¹¹ Here I am indebted to helpful conversations with Cristina Lafont. I am also grateful for conversations and exchanges with Roman Altshuler, Hubert Dreyfus, Axel Honneth, Michael Sigrist, and audiences at Berkeley, the American Philosophical Association in San Francisco, George Washington University, Northwestern University, and the University of Frankfurt.

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