

Chapter 1

BEING-TOWARDS-DEATH AND THE LIMITS TO TOTALIZING ONE'S OWN POTENTIALITY FOR BEING

The first chapter of Division Two of *Being and Time*, which really opens our access to a phenomenology of temporality (something the analysis of Care had merely hinted at), is devoted to being-towards-death. Its theme is straightforward: only by way of a relation to its death can *Dasein* grasp its own temporality. This positive relation—as opposed to the *flight in the face of death* that in several ways characterizes the attitude of the 'One'—is called *vorlaufen*, “running ahead.” What is meant by this movement of “running ahead” in the face of death? It is neither a “thinking about death” nor an investigation into actual death, but a way in which *Dasein* can *approach its extreme possibility*, one that is ultimate and “unsurpassable,” because there can be no possibility beyond it. This pure possibility of no longer existing, Heidegger notes, cannot be interpreted as a lack, something yet to be added to *Dasein* to make it complete. For when this possibility falls due, *Dasein* no longer is its “there.”

How is this anticipation of death possible? Given that we are not dealing with some kind of speculation about death here, what does it mean “in practice” to preserve a possibility *as* possibility, to meet it without effecting it? Does not *Vorlaufen* already presuppose the notion of that which is one's own? To run ahead of “my” death—is this not to project *my Dasein* as limited, as finite? Is not *my death* only another term for designating the finitude of my temporality whose futural horizon is indeterminate? Moreover, is not *being-towards-death* a name for the will to self-possession, to the self-appropriation of *Dasein*? Can such a will be satisfied?

However these questions stand, Heidegger attempts to extricate death from its dimension of generality (the mortality of man) and factuality (the biological fact): death as a possibility that *Dasein* always already *is* is not the fact of dying, of passing away, of “physical disappearance.” This interpretation, which belongs to the ‘One’, betrays an “inauthentic,” that is, nonproper, relation to death: one must distance oneself from it! One will die, but for the moment one is not dead! One thereby consoles or reassures oneself. As ‘One’, no one ever dies. To be authentic, that is, to be *ourselves*, it is necessary to posit the possibility of death as mine and as possible at any moment. Is this not nevertheless, no matter what Heidegger says, a “thinking about death”? Death is indeed theoretically possible at any moment, yet it is not true that I am objectively threatened at every moment. Thus the proximity of possible death can result only from an effort to imagine what is abstractly possible, but improbable most of the time.

Once again, it seems that death is an emphatic underlining of the finitude of presence. Being-“there” implies the potential for not being-“there.” Yet this possibility of not being our “there” does not *of itself* seem to be a positive one, otherwise there would be no need for an effort, an *élan*, a will to *vorlaufen*.

In any case, the Heideggerian analysis rejects any *abstraction* from the potentiality for dying, so as to make it the core of authentic temporality. Being-towards-death is the indispensable mediation for passing from temporality as a unitary structure of the three dimensions of time to temporality as the opening of oneself for oneself as projection. Being-towards-death makes temporality possible. Temporality first presents itself as Care, that is, as the unity of the three “ekstases”: projection, facticity and falling. Care makes possible being-towards-death, which is called a *concretion* of Care, no doubt insofar as the potentiality for dying—to the extent that it represents a contracting—contracts the *entire* concrete unity of existence into a single point in advance. Being-towards-death contains the possible totality of *Dasein*, not as a dead totality, but as a totality ahead of itself, a totality in the making. Being-towards-death exists authentically only as running ahead, as a projected totality of oneself.

A long tradition makes death into a passage towards the beyond or a leap into the nothing. As early as the 1925 course *Prolegomena to the History of the Concept of Time*,¹ Heidegger excludes

1. GA 20.

taking any stance on this issue. In the phenomenology of death “no decision is at stake regarding the question of knowing whether something else comes after death, or something in general, or whether nothing comes after it.”² Is such neutrality possible without amputating “the face not turned towards us,” as Rilke puts it, from the phenomenon of death? In any case, the analysis reduces death to the pure immanence of its meaning, to *Diesseitigkeit*, to “this-sidedness” that, once again, implies an exclusion of part of the phenomenon. We shall return to this point.

Thus the Socratic problem of immortality and, in principle, the fear of death, which precisely the tradition (Epicurus, the Stoics, Montaigne) attempted to evoke, are bracketed out. Death ceases to be that opaque wall down there at the end of the road. It becomes repatriated into the heart of existence, as a transparent possibility. It no longer represents adversity, obscurity, but—via running ahead—is to become the very source of time proper, that is, of freedom. Death is thus illuminated, metamorphosed into a principle. It is no longer the enigmatic symbol, itself fleeting, of the fleeting nature of time and annihilation, but a fixed point, a positive pole, the heart of temporality. Heidegger never regards death as a possibility of destruction on this side: the decaying of physical and mental faculties in growing old, the painful loss of loved ones, the possible absurdity of death that prematurely interrupts a life, congealing it into a state of radical incompleteness. He does not explain how the principle of free temporality, once accepted, can also be the principle of pure adversity: physical and mental decay, bereavement, sclerosis, fossilization.

Is not the phenomenon of death thereby skillfully masked, metamorphosed, volatilized? Do we here not find a repetition of the dialectical optimism by which the negative is continually and uniformly converted into being? “Death, that unreality...,” as Hegel said. Is not being-towards-death similar to “the life that bears death and maintains itself in death itself,”³ to Hegelian negativity? Running ahead has something of the “magic power of the negative.” Anticipating the *potential for no longer being* reinforces *absolutely* the potential to be, opens for *Dasein* its being-in-full-time, its being to the limit of its time.

There is, therefore, in *Vorlaufen*, this self-founding movement that makes it comparable to the *cogito*, making it a point of anchor-

2. Ibid., p. 434.

3. Hegel, Preface to the *Phenomenology*.

age, a primary, unshakeable certainty. Heidegger himself makes the comparison. However, we may say that it is only an analogy, for *Vorlaufen* is not a *Vorstellen*: the relation to death is not a representation; it is *Dasein*'s movement towards its "ownmost" possibility, not an imagining of the end or of the "final moments." "*Sum moribundus*, yet certainly not as gravely ill or seriously injured. I am *moribundus* insofar as I am—the *moribundus* first gives the *sum* its meaning."⁴ A strange *cogito*, turned around.

In the "I am as having-to-die" (the gerund must be heard as a necessary and indeterminate future), the having-to-die *precedes* the *sum*, giving it its meaning in the first place (*allererst*). Death is a certain possibility, of a greater and more primordial certainty than the *I am*. The certainty of my death is older than "me"! "This certainty: that it is I myself in my going towards death, is the fundamental certainty of *Dasein* itself and is a genuine proposition concerning *Dasein*, whereas the *cogito* is merely the semblance of such a proposition."⁵ What does this imply? That it is in the time of mortal finitude that being appears; that the being of the *sum*, which is given to me only in the narrow horizon of having-to-die, manifests itself as mine only in this way. The Heideggerian position is here close to Kierkegaardian existentialism. It is opposed to abstract universality: "There is no death in general."⁶ It is in favor of a singularity that can find itself only in effecting itself.

Death makes me possible, and I remain "condemned," suspended in possibility until my effective death. *Dasein* completely joins being, in the sense of its own being, only in dying! "It is only in dying [*im Sterben*] that in a certain way I can say absolutely 'I am!'"⁷ A remarkable position! Death individualizes me, but until my de facto death I can preserve what is possible for me thanks to death as possibility. In this text, which dates from before *Being and Time*, Heidegger seems to oppose being to existence. Being, existence becoming a subsistent entity, would then be the ultimate fallout of existence. Or, to give a different interpretation: when I no longer exist, as it were, in dying, I rejoin my pure possibility of being that is about to disappear. Or again, I am what I am, I am identical to myself only unto death, and therefore death always precedes me as the open time where I am not yet, but where I have to be. For

4. GA 20, pp. 437–438 (Heidegger's emphasis).

5. *Ibid.*, p. 437.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 433.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 440.

Dasein, being is time. Existing, it can never say "I am" in the sense of a self-identity. Heidegger acknowledges this indirectly in *Nietzsche II*. There, in a series of definitions of *existence*, just after Kierkegaard's concept of existence, he includes existence as defined in *Being and Time*.⁸ In a sense, this definition signifies that I am never a subsisting entity, a *sum* in the Cartesian sense of substance, except when I no longer am. Thus my last word at the fateful moment would be, "I am," yet such that I have not been, having *existed!* I become a "subject" only at the hour of my death! To understand oneself in accordance with one's extreme possibility, to open oneself to one's own possibilities thanks to this extreme possibility, "to choose oneself,"⁹ would signify at once, and in an entirely reversible way: *being-towards-death* and *existing*. Now if death is *Dasein's* possibility of being ("*Dasein* thus essentially is its death"¹⁰), this possibility is reflected or echoed in all the structures of *Dasein!* Death as the potentiality for being becomes the equivalent of being-in-the-world in absolute singularity.

"Anxiety in the face of death is anxiety 'in the face of' one's ownmost, non-relational and unsurpassable potentiality for being. That which this anxiety is 'in the face of' is being-in-the-world itself."¹¹ Being-in-the-world becomes a synonym for death, and vice versa. In this way all the existentials become names for death. Thus an equivalence is established between death and *Geworfenheit* or thrownness, between death and *Verfallen*, falling. Thrownness, falling, inauthentic existence as a whole become other names for death, as do their opposites: projection, authentic repetition! "*Dasein* dies factually as long as it exists, yet at first and for the most part in the mode of falling."¹² However, as being-towards-the-end is a projection, so too death is a name for existence itself. Thus: "Existence, facticity, falling characterize being towards the end and are consequently constitutive of the existential concept of death."¹³ Fleeing in the face of death is nothing other than fleeing in the face of one's own *Dasein*. Death is one's own *Dasein*, but also *Dasein* as disowned, because the 'One' is an evasive recognition of being-towards-death. Anxiety on the one hand, detaching *Dasein* and

8. Though reinterpreting such existence as the "clearing of the *There!*"

9. GA 20, p. 440.

10. Ibid., p. 433.

11. SZ, p. 251.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., p. 252.

pulling it back from being lost in the 'One', and false security on the other hand attest *equally* to the fact that death is the being of *Dasein*. Why, if death is always already present in the midst of *Dasein* as its being, is it still necessary to run "ahead" of it?

Running Ahead and Freedom

As pure possibility, original and "ownmost" possibility, "death gives nothing to be actualized" within *Dasein*, because its actualization marks its abolition.¹⁴ What does it mean to run ahead of this possibility? What is meant by running ahead, and what does it add to this possibility? It is not meant to add anything to it, but merely "to leave it in place as possibility."¹⁵ It is not a question of "making this possibility actual,"¹⁶ and suicide is explicitly excluded. To commit suicide would be precisely to betray the possibility as such. "Through suicide, for example, I precisely relinquish the possibility as possibility."¹⁷ Running ahead of death as possibility means *excessively* intensifying its possible being. Running ahead increases, exaggerates the possibility of death. It is certainly excessive, for example, without any concrete representation and beyond any cause or circumstance, to imagine death as possible at any moment. Yet running ahead has indeed something of this about it: it is a question of an *intensification of possibility* that remains remote from every concretization. Heidegger here rejects two ways of approaching death: on the one hand "thinking about death," and on the other, *expecting* it. For it to remain pure possibility, death must be as little manifest and palpable as possible. Running ahead means attaining a *nonpresent proximity*. The thought of death, ruminating and meditating on the moment or the manner in which it will arrive, "weakens death through a calculating will to dispose over death."¹⁸ Expecting, for its part, does not anticipate the possible as such, but its realization. Something actual is expected, and thereby "expecting drags the possible into the actual."¹⁹ In approaching death in running ahead, it is a matter of penetrating

14. *Ibid.*, p. 262.

15. GA 20, p. 439.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

18. SZ, p. 261.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 262.

into and letting oneself be penetrated by pure possibility, via an effort to *understand* what this possibility comprises, in particular with respect to the certainty of death. To run ahead towards death is simply to understand it better, that is, not to “stare at some meaning, but to *understand oneself* in the potentiality for being...”²⁰: “In running ahead towards this possibility, it becomes ‘even greater’, that is, it unveils itself as one that knows no measure whatsoever, no greater or lesser, but signifies the possibility of the immeasurable impossibility of existence.”²¹ “Immeasurable” because extreme, situated beyond every other, this possibility offers no additional “support” (*Anhalt*) on which to base whatever project, no basis for “portraying” something that could possibly be realized or for thereby “forgetting the possibility.”²² Unrepresentable, being-towards-death nurtures no imagination of the future. It seems impoverished, empty.

We now see it undergo a reversal. And the reversal is marked in the following way: running ahead into being-towards-death, now affirmed and grasped by *Dasein* in turn, becomes what makes the potentiality for death possible. “Being-towards-death as running ahead into possibility *makes possible* this possibility in the first place *and frees it* as such.”²³ “In the first place” (*allererst*), prior to running ahead, death is not something truly possible; following this “movement,” *Dasein* is *free*, face to face with it and face to face with itself. It has discovered its own truth. “In this unveiling of running ahead..., *Dasein* discloses itself to itself with respect to its most extreme possibility.”²⁴ “Running ahead in becoming free for one’s own death frees us from being lost in contingent possibilities...”²⁵ “Running ahead discloses... a renouncing of oneself and thereby shatters any ossifying in an existence already attained.”²⁶ In other words, *Dasein* is liberated both from factual possibilities, from possibilities belonging to others, and from its own ossifying or becoming immobilized in choices already made. Yet why a “renouncing of oneself” (*Selbstaufgabe*)? Is it not paradoxical that supreme freedom should imply the “sacrifice” of oneself? Through running ahead, which places it before

20. *Ibid.*, p. 263 (emphasis added).

21. *Ibid.*, p. 262.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.* Heidegger emphasizes *makes possible*; emphasis added: *and frees it*.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*, p. 264.

26. *Ibid.*

death, *Dasein* is free from everything, including itself. In *Aufgabe* there is *Gabe*, the gift; *Aufgabe* means the “task.” *Dasein* is capable of *giving* itself entirely over to its tasks, at the risk of losing itself. It has taken on the risk of death. It is no longer desperately attached to an ‘I’, to a *sum* that would precede the *moribundus*. Nor is it ossified in itself any more, ignorant of the possibilities of others. On the contrary, it can freely perceive them: “*Dasein* dispels the danger that it may...fail to recognize that it is being surpassed by the possibilities of existence belonging to others, or that it may misinterpret them and force them back upon its own.”²⁷

We can thus comprehend the ultimate significance of running ahead. It is *Dasein*’s turning back on itself in attaining the “absolute” point at which it can give itself what is possible for it. “*Dasein* can only *authentically* be *itself* if it makes this possible for itself of its own accord.”²⁸ Do we not have a full-blown idealism? *Dasein* wants itself, posits itself in its most extreme possibility, like the absolute Hegelian Subject and like the Will to Power. *Dasein* takes every possibility back to itself and into itself by force, by an act of will. The four features of death—being one’s ownmost, nonrelational, unsurpassable, and certain possibility—are quite explicitly the effects or results of an effort, something gained by running ahead. In fact, death becomes this absolute possibility only through “acts” of running ahead. For it to be one’s *ownmost* possibility, it must be “torn” from the ‘One’. How can *Dasein* be torn from the ‘One’? Because it “can in each case, in running ahead, tear itself free.”²⁹ That which is one’s own is proposed in advance. Likewise for the nonrelational character of this possibility: “Running ahead into its nonrelational possibility forces the entity running ahead into the possibility of taking on its ownmost being from out of itself of its own accord.”³⁰ In other words, *Dasein* forces itself to posit itself in its own singularity. Similarly, once again, for the unsurpassable character of being-towards-death, by definition (it is almost tautological) running ahead frees us for a possibility that no other possibility could succeed. Running ahead also gives *Dasein* the possibility of projecting itself as an *existentiell totality*. “Because running ahead into this unsurpassable possibility also discloses all the possibilities lying ahead of it, it entails the possibility of an *existentiell*

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., p. 263.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., pp. 263-264.

anticipation of the *whole* of *Dasein*, i.e. the possibility of existing as a *whole potentiality for being*.³¹ From the summit of the ultimate possibility *Dasein* can in *advance* look upon its own concrete life as a completed whole. In the end the possibility can become *certain* only via running ahead itself: "The certain possibility of death only discloses *Dasein* as possibility through *Dasein's* running ahead towards it thus *making* this possibility *possible* for itself as its own-most potentiality for being."³² Only the *indeterminate* character of the possibility does not result from running ahead. Yet running ahead assumes this indeterminacy to the point where it itself seems (though this is impossible) to be able to awaken the *anxiety* linked to the *threat* of death: "In running ahead to its indeterminate and certain death, *Dasein* opens itself to a constant *threat* springing from its own There."³³ And as anxiety is the mood of this threat, we ought to experience a constant anxiety! It is indeed a question of a voluntarism—the theme of resoluteness makes it even more evident—that can be translated by a will to will. Not a will to death, but a will to disclose oneself to the extreme limit, to the point of losing oneself, to the abyss of "freedom," that is, of a self-transcending transcendence. Not a will to death, but "taking death to be true," catching it at its own game, getting the better of it, beating it on its own ground. Does not the dizzy spiral of freedom into which *Dasein* is dragged (Sartre would find a way of adding even more) represent the victory of an idealization of death? "Freedom for death" is said to be "impassioned, released from the illusions of the 'One', factual, certain of itself and anxious." The least evident of these attributes is that it is "factual": what facticity can remain for a *Dasein* that has made itself wholly possible, has freed itself unto itself and for itself? Free "for death," is not *Dasein* both free "for nothing" and for the whole of itself? How can freedom be detached from the whole and clamped to the ipseity of an absolute and unattainable ownness? Freedom certainly has its "elementary concretion"³⁴ in anxiety, but anxiety makes us "free for the authentic and inauthentic"; anxiety once again *detaches* us, not only from the 'One', but from all prior engagement.

Faced with this doctrine of freedom, it is difficult to prevent the impression of extreme rarefaction and abstraction, of *hypertranscenden-*

31. Ibid., p. 264.

32. Ibid. (Heidegger's emphasis).

33. Ibid., p. 265.

34. Ibid., p. 191.

dentalism. Let us nevertheless attempt to defend it. Heidegger conceives freedom as the making possible, via one's ownmost possibility, of factual possibilities that on their own are falling and not free. How can such a supreme possibility, so pure and even intensified by a true understanding, bestow a character of "freedom" on everyday possibilities? Obviously, a mediation is required between this unique, "nonsubstitutable" possibility of my death and the everydayness that gets on with its tasks. This mediation must be on the order of an *experience* that exits from the everyday and yet has an intimate relation to it. This mediating experience is that of anxiety. Anxiety alone reveals *concretely* to *Dasein* its potentiality for death and does so via a withdrawal, a retreat, an unattainability pertaining to world as a totality of goal-related activities or practical paths referring to one another. Only through anxiety can being-towards-death appear as a concrete possibility, a "concretion."³⁵ Without anxiety, it would remain a simple form. Therefore I can "authentically" do what I ordinarily do only if I act, not under the sway of a constant anxiety (anxiety is rare and intrinsically paralyzing), but "on the basis of" this attunement, by keeping it in mind. What does this imply? That "I must" have reference to the possibility, experienced at a particular moment, of the *impossibility* of doing what I ordinarily do; for example, my job. I will do it "well" only if I securely grasp its precariousness and provisional character in the time of my existence and in the time of the world, and if I am not engaged in it as some job in general, but as mine at this hour. The "I must" does not express a universal moral objection, but a premoral necessity: "mineness." How far removed we are from the Kantian idea of an action that is moral because it can be universalized, because it is deindividualized! We have precisely the reverse. Yet is it absolutely necessary to designate this dimension of "mineness" as "death"?

Is death really what is at issue in being-towards-death? If death is a present possibility, why then situate it away in some more or less remote future? Why should it disclose the future, since it definitively closes it off?

A Critique of Being-Towards-Death

Death, says Rilke, possesses an "invisible face turned away from us," an enigmatic face, necessarily turned either towards the

35. *Ibid.*, p. 251.

beyond or towards the nothing. This signifies that the *integral* phenomenon of death, in addition to its *Diesseitigkeit*, also comprises a *Jenseitigkeit*. The latter is not something invented by religion. Is not a phenomenology of death truncated and one-sided that overlooks its double character and treats it like a purely intraworldly phenomenon? By cutting death off from the side turned away from us, the side that escapes us, Heidegger entirely reintegrates death into *Dasein*. Furthermore, in making it the path of access to one's own, he transforms it into a transcendental faculty, into a possession and a potential, a certainty, a (scarcely abyssal!) foundation. Yet we can only ever take hold—if one can put it this way—of half of its being and its meaning, for we cannot know its other face.

What is more, in insisting on the potentiality for dying as an ontological possibility that is “exceptional, one's ownmost, non-relational, unsurpassable, and certain,” Heidegger separates existential death from the phenomenon of life, which is relegated to straightforward facticity. The potentiality for dying can be identified only with the pure potentiality for being at the expense of a *forgetting of life*. However, it is clear that if *Dasein* were not a living being, it would not be a being, and that its potentiality for dying is therefore not an original potentiality for being. Unless one considers—and Heidegger is not far from doing so—that *Dasein* gives itself its own being. How can being-towards-death legitimately be situated “*prior* to every ontology of life”? Because life, like nature, is an entity in the world that can be understood only in its being as a lesser being-in-the-world, by way of “a reductive privation with respect to the ontology of *Dasein*.”³⁶ In Heidegger we find a recoil in the face of life. No comportment of *Dasein* can be founded on life. *Urge (Drang)* and *inclination (Hang)*, to the extent that they imply the temporal unity of being-ahead-of-oneself, already-being-in, and being-alongside, are founded in Care and in thrownness. The urge, which cannot be uprooted, to let oneself live, to let oneself be borne by the world, belongs to a nonfree Care. “In pure urge, Care has not yet become free.”³⁷ It is impossible to annihilate the urge “to live.”³⁸ Life is alienation, the temptation of existence to fall below itself. The urge “to live” is not primordially the fact of life, but the fact of temporality forgetting itself as projection and, losing its being-

36. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

38. *Ibid.*

ahead-of-itself, becoming enslaved to the “only ever already-along-side...”³⁹

The Kantian theme of the condition of possibility always has priority over life. Vital spontaneity does not exist; it presupposes a prior possibility. The word *possibility* is sometimes hammered out in every sentence in certain sections of *Being and Time*; for example, in Section 53.

Yet how can possibility be that which gives potential? Does *Dasein* have the potential to make itself possible? The idea that it itself makes itself possible is incredible, no less remarkable than that of the *causa sui*. Would *Dasein* be like the Baron von Münchhausen, who took hold of his hair to lift himself into the air? Whence does the possibility—as it is not simply logical, but ontological—draw its power to make possible? *Dasein* makes possible only because it is. Can one say that it is, if it does not live? Heidegger separates being—which, however, is only the field in which entities appear—from life.

Is there not, however, a root common to being and to life, a point at which they can be identified with one another? It is true that, to the extent that it belongs to the essence of *Dasein*, death is a “possibility of being.” Heidegger indeed admits that *Dasein* is “thrown” (*geworfen*) into this possibility, but he nowhere acknowledges that this possibility depends on life. Why could *Dasein* not be thrown into being by nature or life? Why must thrownness only concern being?

It seems that the origin of facticity, of *Geworfenheit*, must, for Heidegger, remain indeterminate. It would be crucial, however, to elucidate the phenomenon of death to know what power “throws” *Dasein* into existence. Heidegger grants that the concept of *facticity* presupposes that *Dasein* understand itself “as bound up in its ‘destiny’ with the being of those entities it encounters within its own world.”⁴⁰ To what being of entities are we bound in our destiny—to life, to death—if not to the being of natural entities? Yet the entire effort of the existential analytic aims to extract us from the way we are intricately bound up with natural entities.

Does the fact that, contrary to the animal, we can and *must* “take over”⁴¹ death as such, as possibility, suffice to conclude that we can thereby make possible the very possibility of death? Is that

39. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 250.

not wanting to leap over one's own shadow? And yet this is what Heidegger does when he speaks of running ahead as "making this possibility possible."⁴² What does it mean to "become certain of the totality of one's potentiality for being"?⁴³ What can be meant by the "certainty" of a possible totality that goes before us in the future? The certainty of an unrealized possibility, even if it is yet to come, does not remove its coefficient of unreality.

Is not the very idea of running ahead ambiguous? "Projecting oneself towards," "running ahead of" the supreme possibility indeed seems to imply that it is somehow incompletely present, which is false. Running ahead does not entail any tension between a present and a future and therefore does not disclose any future. For as this élan for running ahead of death cannot be accompanied by any concrete "content" (whether thought, expectation, or suicide), "this being-towards-death that is existentially 'possible'," says Heidegger, "on the existentiell level remains a fantastical suggestion."⁴⁴ Is it not indeed a question of a movement occurring at an eminently *formal* level? For running ahead cannot mean *transporting oneself in advance*, in our imagination, over into the future at the moment when the possibility is about to be realized, that is, at the moment of death. Heidegger excludes this, and must do so. For in the instant that precedes factual death—where I would find myself in thought, if this is what were meant by running ahead—the possibility of dying would still remain a possibility. And if death arrived, its possibility would disappear.

At the end of the day, then, what are being-towards-death and running ahead if not the *forms* of *Dasein's* self-appropriation, forms eternally devoid of content? To run ahead of one's essential possibility is quite simply to run ahead of oneself, of one's own truth. Running ahead could just as well be called *resoluteness*, and it will be called this because the latter will be the existential that can equally be existentiell in the form of a decision whose pure existential, without possible concretion, was running ahead. It seems that the two allow *Dasein* radically to take hold of its initial disclosedness, to capture its own light, to enter absolutely into possession of itself, of its "freedom," to learn to "choose its choice."⁴⁵ An extreme voluntarism.

42. Ibid., p. 266.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid., p. 268.

Yet fairness obliges us to emphasize the reversal announced at the end of this very chapter. The first concrete, that is, ontic, existentiell content—which was absent from being-towards-death—will be found by the existential analytic not in resoluteness, but in the “call of conscience.” The ontic potentiality for being a whole announced by this call does not proceed from a voluntary act. “The call is not, is never planned, nor prepared, nor accomplished voluntarily *by us ourselves*.”⁴⁶ Through the call, as in anxiety, *Dasein* is brutally thrust towards its own potentiality for being, *without its having chosen it*. *Dasein* finds itself placed in the presence of itself by a superior power, and yet one that is none other than itself.

Does not the call of conscience, therefore, instead of giving *Dasein* absolute mastery of itself, in truth lead it towards an initial dispossession?

46. *Ibid.*, p. 275.