Authentic Existence

Autentisk Eksistens

Fall Semester 2019

Bendik Bjørnstad

Universitetet i Bergen
Institutt for Filosofi og Førstesemesterstudier
Masteroppgave FILO350

Supervisor
Anne Granberg

Acknowledgements

My parents
For unconditional support

Anne Granberg
For excellent mentorship above and beyond the call

Joakim Vindenes
For intellectual contributions and contributive discussions

The Philosophy department at the University of Bergen
For a continuing list of deeply supportive, passionate and inspirational mentor figures

The Philosophy department at the University of Tromsø
For use of resources, reading space and professional guidance during a research spell

English Abstract

In this paper I present my research on Authentic Existence. I argue how, contrary to popular self-help literature, authentic existence does not involve adherence to a more self-realized or self-actualized aim, but really is about dissolving the inauthentic sense of alienated selfhood. The key components of what authenticity is, how it is to be found, what it disputes and its relationship to our conception of selfhood is explored in this paper. The role played by what is called *problematic thoughts* as they relate to inauthenticity and the problems of modernity are similarly themes of exploration. The paper discusses how the removal of inauthentic mental constructs, such as emotionally charged personal negative narratives, problematic thoughts and ruminating thought loops all tied to an I-construct lead to the re-discovery of a pre-reflective mode of being which is authentic. The paper explores how the constituent parts of the narratively created 'I-construct' can be explored and discarded phenomenologically, and explores how a repeated use of this process via existential inquiries removes the problematic thoughts in the form of neurotic internal "chatter". It is argued that an adherence to self-inquiry returns subjects from alienated states caught in ruminating thought patterns into an abidance in authentic modes of being. In closing the paper investigates supportive parallels from emerging brain science as it relates to the thesis of authentic existence.

Norsk Abstrakt

I denne teksten presenterer jeg forskningen min på Autentisk Eksistens. Jeg argumenter for at autentisk væren ikke innebærer former for selv-aktualisering sett i moderne selv-hjelp litteratur. Istedenfor viser jeg hvordan autentisk væren innebærer en dekonstruksjon av en inautentisk form for selvhet. Denne teksten tar for seg hva autentisk eksistens er, hvordan det kan bli oppdaget, hva det motsier og forholdet til selvhet. Rollen til det jeg kaller problematiske tanker og deres forhold til inautentisitet og problemene i samtiden er også temaer som blir utforsket. Jeg diskuterer for hvordan man, ved å fjerne inautentiske mentale konstruksjonen slik som følelsesladdede personlige negative 'narrativer', problematiske tanker og ruminerende tankemøsntre bundet til et slags 'jeg-konstrukt' leder til en gjennoppdagelse av det som har blitt kalt en pre-reflektiv eksistensiell modus, som oppleves som autentisk. Teksten går gjennom hvordan oppbyggende deler av dette narrativt-genererte 'jeg-konstruktet' kan bli utforsket gjennom det fenomenologiske perspektivet, og hvordan en gjentatt bruk av denne prosessen via det som kalles 'eksistensielle undersøkelser' fjerner problematiske tanker i deres form av nevrotisk intern 'selvprat'. Det blir argumentert at en gjenntakelse av eksistensiell selv-undersøkelse kan brukes som en måte til å overkomme inautentiske måter å være på til autentiske måter å være på. Avslutningsvis vil teksten utforske paralleller til denne tesen i form av nylig forskning av hjernens struktur og aktivitetsmoduser og hvordan dette relaterer til tesen om autentisk eksistens.

Contents

---

8. *Phenomenology and Existential Ontology*
    a. *Dasein, ontological inquiry and inauthenticity*
    b. *Mind and Body*
    c. *Cartesian Concerns*
    d. *Intentionality, Reflexivity and Pre-reflective Self-Consciousness*
    e. *The Consequence of the Reflexivity of Intentionality*
9. *No Self*
    a. *Examples of theories of non-selfhood*
    b. *Authentic existence and no self*
10. *Two Networks and two modes of Being*
    a. *Brief remarks regarding Science and Philosophy*
    b. *The Task Positive Network and the Default Mode Network*
    c. *The Default Mode Network and Mental Health*
11. *Conclusion*

List of References

"*All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone.*"

– Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*

1. *Introduction*

Authenticity, and the pursuit of a life lived authentically, has long been a central theme in the existential canon. Few concepts – with the possible exception of freedom – has received more attention from the existentialists. As I see it, it is not just the existentialists who has engaged with questions relating to authentic being. I think that the problem of authenticity is represented in philosophy long before the advent of existentialism under different terminology. As I see it, the problem of existing authentically is a modern version of a much older philosophical pursuit, that of living *the good life*.

The search for the good life was originally a personal existential commitment to living a life in balance with all the varying aspects of being human and engaging in the world. Wisdom was meant to represents the means to reach this goal, and thus the love of and search for wisdom was the highest pursuit to which man could aspire. As I see it, in today's modern, interconnected and vastly more complex world this pursuit is more important and necessary than ever before. Because we today have access to all sorts of easy distractions, from smartphones, television, radio, podcasts and especially social media, the pursuit of the authentically lived life is more important than ever. According to a 2018 article in *The Guardian*, we check our phones on average every 12 minutes.

Besides distracting us from what is actually going on in the present moment, these emergent behaviors of distraction and escape also represents an escape from a very basic human activity, that of being by oneself and being comfortable alone in silence. This comes as no surprise, as the phones and applications are designed with this intent in mind. As I see it, the trend of neglecting paying attention to one's life in the pursuit of creating and maintaining a glorified social construction is detrimental to our long term future. I worry that, as a species we find ourselves distracted from our authentic natures to the point where it endangers us.

I am not alone in this, either. Such sentiments have been expressed by most of the writers who were gathered under the label of *existentialists*. It is my suspicion that if the 'father' of existentialism, Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813 – 1855) was writing today his tone would very different than his cynical, charismatic and humorously amused one. As the prolific

and complex writer that he was, Kierkegaard wrote with an occasionally humorous trademark wit against the established silent conformism of his time. I worry that we still have not come to terms with what Kierkegaard was trying to tell us, and I suspect his tone today would be less of a cynically amused one and more urgently prophetic, if not one of complete denouncement and resignation. Another thinker, the German phenomenological existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976) saw back to Athens and wrote about the neglect of the question of what it *means to be* in his 1927 work *Being and Time*. According to Heidegger, the question had today been forgotten, and had been largely left untouched since the time of the Greeks. He states that "this is not just any question. It is one which provided a stimulus for the researches of Plato and Aristotle, only to subside from then on as a theme for actual investigation" (Heidegger, 1927, first English translation 1962, p. 21).

As I see it, the insights of philosophy, especially among them the pursuit for a balanced, well-lived life has to re-enter our public attention. American philosopher William Barrett writes in his now classic textbook *Irrational Man, a study in Existential Philosophy* that "philosophers are really [the group] to deal with the problem human existence – and no other professional group in society is likely to take over the job for them" (Barrett, 1958, p. 3). As I see it, we are in a need for a change in approach to the way we live, to our very being. Fortunately, there is instilled in mankind an answer to the challenges posed by modernity. It is my contention that a change in our way of being should be oriented towards a retrieval and reconnection to a pre-existent mode of being, an authentic one.

As I see it, the return to an authentic mode of being is not a new solution, but one of the oldest known to our species, already pre-installed as it were. I will attempt in this paper to indicate its primacy of being, and show how most, if not all, of our current modes of being function in lieu of this primary existence. As I have come to understand it from my research, the return to a pre-reflective form of being entails a direct experience of something pre-given, which is experienced in a way best described as *authentic* and true to what Kierkegaard called *one's own subjective truth*. In his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard described such a truth as "the highest truth attainable for an existing individual" (Kierkegaard, 1846, first English publication 1941, p. 182). The aim of such a truth is not epistemological, as much as it is existential. While subjective truth does not give us absolute knowledge about the external world, Kierkegaard would argue that such pre-reflective and ontologically prior states are more fundamental because it gives me knowledge about *who I am* and how I should live my life.

As I see it, there is in man an *authentic mode of being*, characterized by a stillness at the core of our being. We are in need of a reconnection with this pre-reflective inner stillness as a different way to operate in today's world, fundamentally different from being distracted by apps, likes, short lived dopamine hits, selfhood-related attention and reality escapes. What is needed, I think, is an existence lived in accordance with a primary feature in mankind – our existential curiosity. The world is vast, and we are, despite everything, a very curious and adaptive species. Previously we did not only seek approaches to nature designed to utilize it, but we also sought a deep concern for the question of ourselves. Socrates famously began philosophy with the slogan of "Know Thyself". It is a return to this very fundamentally human pursuit with which this paper will be concerned.

There is, fortunately a relatively contemporary philosophy with a modern vocabulary which is more attuned to the needs and perspectives of the modern individual than the writings of the Greeks. The search for the good life has not been neglected in philosophy, neither historically nor contemporary. Today we find its expression as the pursuit of authenticity. To translate the ambition of the Greeks into existentialist terms: *being-in-the-world* as an *already previously engaged individual* leads us to the *inescapability of our existence as problematic* and thus raises the central existentialist questions *"Who am I?"* and *"How should I live?*" Barrett writes regarding the Greeks that philosophy "instead of a specialized theoretical discipline, philosophy was a concrete way of life, a total vision of man and the cosmos in the light of which the individual's whole life was to be lived" (Barrett, p. 5).

I wish to posit that these existential concerns, the inward oriented pursuit of what I call self-inquiry – questions like "*who am I*?" especially – represents the means to *recover* authentic existence. By uncovering what we truly are, and casting aside our stories about ourselves, our limited belief structures, our attachments to specific outcomes and opening up to the already given moment, we uncover a means to living the good life and bringing some peace, clarity and sanity back into our current lives and troubled world. Addressing existential questions can be seen as a means to uncover authenticity. Questions like "who am I?", "how should I live", and "what is man?" are all contemplations which in themselves denote authentic being. To *engage* with reality as phenomenological experienced, to turn the gaze around at one's own ontology and question it, is, to my mind, one of the activities that define human beings and separates them from other life forms. As such it can be considered their most natural and *authentic* undertaking.

These are broad claims, and I write with an awareness that many of the intellectual freedoms I permit myself would have been hard to permit under any other philosophy than existential philosophy. In a certain sense, concepts like authentic existence are as much terms of art as they are philosophical terms. However I permit myself a certain amount of leeway as it is hard to avoid when dealing specifically with existential thinkers. I write this paper with the sincere belief that there is a pressing need for authentic being. There is something flat, dead, dare I say unsatisfactory about modern life, something which the smartphones are but a symptom of. Not to beat a dead horse, but as Socrates famously said, "*The unexamined life is not worth living"*.

Note that in this paper the focus is not on authentic *personhood*. Rather, the term authentic existence designate a *way of being* – a mode of existence – which is existentially authentic. If the claim that an authentic way of being is of pressing relevance to our time seems unfounded, keep in mind the significant and unfortunately very real ramifications of alienation. While concerns about alienation may seem vague, speculative, so foreign as to be redundant or even unfounded, I think it is important to note that this picture only lasts until one start considering and factoring in that alienation actually represents a sincere problem which has seen substantial philosophical, literary, artistic and poetic reference by some of the greatest minds, poets and writers we have had. Alienation was, in their eyes, a sincere reflection of both the human condition, but also of the age, with potential species wide ramifications.

As a potential way of thinking about alienation, not as "yet another concern" to pile upon our shoulders on top of things like climate change, politics, inequality, poverty, corruption or famine, consider that it holds very real implications when treated as a potential *root cause* of the distress we see as opposed to yet another symptom. I did not set out to do this research as research on a forlorn topic of ages past in the interest of dusting off old tomes. Rather I engage with this in full belief that it is a pressing contemporary concern, as we shall see in section 2 and 9 where I discuss the nature of *problematic thoughts*. Similarly, I do not think it is accidental that *alienation* has featured so prominently in existential philosophy, or that this philosophy saw a previously unprecedented level of public interest in turn.

In this paper, I hope to make the case that a reconnection to what I call authentic states is of contemporary relevance. If authenticity is presented in this paper as the solution, then the encumbrance of *problematic thoughts* may be seen as the problem to which authenticity responds. A recurring notion which shall emerge at different points in this paper before it is ultimately dealt with is the role of existential *self-inquiry* as a means to uncover authenticity. Self-inquiry is a technical term in this paper, which will be explored rather late, but suffice it to

say it is a 'red thread' of sorts to be aware of, as the promise of authentic existence for our contemporary problems lies in existential self-investigation. In other words, the aim of living *an examined life* is to be taken as very seriously related to, and as a means of *living the good life*.

2. *The problem of Thoughts*

As I see it, I consider one of the leading problems of our time to be one of *Problematic Thoughts,* and as stated I think authenticity is the best means to overcome this challenge. To my mind, authentic being or refers to an existential state, which as noted are marked by the reduction and concern posed by several philosophical dualisms. That of mind/body, subject/object, internal/external and so on. As we shall see later the overcoming of dualisms in favor a pre-reflective engagement with the world, sometimes referred to as being-in-the-world by Heidegger, has been a recurring existential theme. By authenticity then, I mean a state characterized by a reduction of *problematic thoughts*. It also follows that existentially *inauthentic* states are ones which are lived significantly within the confines of the disconnected mind, the "thinking substance" of Descartes, referred to in this paper as *cogito*.

A shared critique of inauthentic being by the existentialists is a life lived within the confines of our narrative realities about who and what we are. Cooper echoes this when he writes that "existentialists reject […] the whole idea of the isolated subject caught in an 'egocentric predicament' of trying to acquire knowledge about a public world on the basis of private experience" (Cooper p. viii). Cooper similarly remarks that one of the most salient aspects of existentialism is the onslaught on Cartesian notions of the self or subject and on the dualisms which they inspire (p. 16). I contend that the sense of alienation and separation are constructed by what I call problematic thoughts – building blocks of the cogito one might say. I wish to maintain that the presence of these kinds of problematic thoughts are the signature feature of *alienation*, a common existential theme.

A shared critique leveled at modernity by most, if not all, of the existentialists is the diagnosis as our current predicament as inauthentic, living with feelings of alienation and *angst*. I think there lies some truth to this. It is not wholly unfounded to consider our current way of being as mired by inauthenticity. However I do not wish to categorically blanket modernity as

fundamentally inauthentic, suggesting that we were better off in some perfect past. The only way forward is forward, and I do not think there is a return to mythological 'garden' in any sense of the word. I wish instead to reiterate the existential hope – the "good news" as it were – that there is a way of being which relates to the overcoming of alienation and its accompanying ails. That is to say that there is merit to overcoming our ways of being which are bound to limiting beliefs about ourselves and the world, and that such a response to alienation is still valid and relevant.

As I see it, we have a problem with *thoughts*. Now, in making this statement I wish to be very careful. I am not trying to say that *thinking is bad*, or that making use of our cognitive abilities – as in problem-solving, reasoning, planning or writing – is somehow inauthentic. Much to the contrary, as I shall hope to argue, a return to an authentic mode of being is functionally enhancing, to all aspects of being, thinking included. The increase in functionality that authentic being brings about is applicable to everyone, both to people engaged in knowledge work professions, like philosophy, and those engaged in other ones.

As I see it, there is a vast and significant difference between two different *kinds* of thoughts; compulsive self-referential negative chatter on the one hand and non-self-concerned related problem solving activities on the other. For example, we can be lost in spiraling thoughts, ruminating, worrying and stressing about our work, our place in a given social hierarchy or about what others might think about us. Or, we can function effectively to execute tasks, such as learning, problem solving, writing articles and so forth.

What we are after, and shall attempt to account for in this paper is a certain form of increase in one's *existential competence*. That is to say, one's 'skill' or ability to adapt to the various challenges and features of existence. As I see it, authentic modes of being are characterized by personal increases in enjoyment, functionally enhancing uses of thinking, existential increases in competence and task related completion. Meanwhile inauthentic ones are marked by unhelpful, cumbersome, conflicted and negative thought.

It is my thorough belief that authentic states are not a debate only viewable in the hindsight mirror of history, but can serve as guiding lights on the path forward through history. In other words these concerns are not ones of a trivial nature, or ones of narcissistic "self-actualization" in praise of the ego as they sometimes are defined. The driving force of this paper is not something akin to "people feel fake and I'd rather they did not" or something of that nature. Neither is the problem of inauthenticity, I think, a problem divorced from the world, an arcane

subject to be tackled by airy scholarly debates running through the centuries. Quite the contrary, I consider the uncovering to be vital. If existentialism got anything right, it was the identification of the paramount importance and urgency of a *new way of being.* What was needed, they expressed in different ways, was a new way of relating and being which addressed the challenges of modernity. As I see it, a new and important way of being is related to realizing the role played in inauthentic being by *problematic thoughts* and subsequently overcoming them.

a. *The Structure and Effect of Problematic Thoughts*

To my mind, one of the more disturbing and confusing human problems today is the near constant stream of personal 'narrative' thoughts, often negatively charged. By narrative I mean thought loops which hold us to a certain storyline about ourselves and the world, often untrue when examined and certainly self-limiting. The problematic thoughts which form these narratives take the shape of thoughts about what persons "X" and "Y" think about me, exaggerated or compulsive concerns about one's social standings with this group or that group, past feelings of reject, memories of poorly performed social situations, taxing self-encumbered unexamined storylines and so on.

Of course, this is not to say that the sort of experiences of temporary setbacks and social repudiation are not useful for learning and adapting constructively to a changing environment. They are, it is how we avoid making the same mistake twice. However, to carry an expanding container of specifically negative personal experiences that are decades in the past serve no such adaptive function. The lessons they were supposed to bestow has passed from historical relevance.

Note that, when attempting to account for problematic thoughts, one encounters a very peculiar problem. It is my experience that in attempting to illustrate the difference between problematic and non-problematic thoughts, a common response is what I have come to call the *Either/Or* response. One might find oneself going to the completely opposite point regarding the specific thought in question, seemingly coming to their defense as it were. When this happens I ask the person to feel very truthfully whether such a response feels rational and valid or if it is a response that comes from a defensive, reactionary place.

For example, if I were to put forth the notion that compulsive and stressful concerns about a situation we cannot change are unproductive, there might arise a response like “but if I *never* worry about anything I would not be able to function!” This is a common representation of the *Either/Or* response. The question to be asked is whether or not this rebuke is a fair assessment of the point about cumbersome mental activity that was being made. Of course, in attempting to critique thought, it is very important to be *clear* and *concise*. Let me in that regard be very clear. It is no part of this thesis that the use of concern, thinking, planning, adapting, reasoning, learning or any *productive use* of thinking will be removed or discarded by a return to pre-reflective authentic states.

In my mind, the *Either/Or* response fails to account for the subtle, but significant difference that is being suggested. There is an Aristotelian middle ground to be found between the extremities of virtues, such as being overly daring and overly cautious for example. Similarly there is the recognition that our current *way of thinking* is often unproductive in its intensity, not necessarily in content. An insight or a useful thought like “how do I get to the lecture?” is unproblematic. Notice the subtle but important difference between that and “how the ¤#/% do I get to the lecture?!” “I always get there too late!” “The others are going to notice!” “I’ll be laughed at”, etc. It is useful to keep this in mind, which I why I stress the problem as correct use of reason rather than a blanket dismissal of it.

It is, in my experience, difficult to focus on important thoughts with the interference from problematic thoughts. For example, an intellectual problem like “How can I best convey the essence of Kant’s response to the problem of induction posed by Hume?” competes for brain resource with problematic thoughts like "why did Peter treat me the way he did?", "I will tell him next week what I think of him", "I should stop eating ice cream - Greek yogurt would be better", "What should I wear tonight?", and so forth. These latter thoughts are not helpful in solving the problem-at-hand, and rather pulls our attention away from our work and productive contribution. The contention between these two kinds of thoughts is regarding how intellectual resources are used.

As we know the brain consists of neurons. It is also not too far a stretch to consider the brain as related to thinking activities – although I am saying this with tongue in cheek awareness of the myriad of multifaceted philosophical problems regarding to the brain, consciousness and thoughts. It is not my aim to champion for any particular theory of consciousness. If we take the perspective that thinking is in some ways related to the brain, irrespective of what metaphysical theory we adopt regarding consciousness and its origin, then it follows that

thinking relies upon what makes up the brain, i.e. neurons. Note that thoughts, thinking, consciousness etc. might not reside in, or be based on, or even connected to the brain. I wish to make as few conclusive statements as possible regarding the metaphysics as possible. However if we adopt the perspective that thoughts relate to brain activity, and that brain activity relates to the constituent parts of the brain – like a car relies on the different parts of the engine, say – then the competition between useful and problematic thoughts can be seen as competitions regarding use of these parts. In other words, the relation of productive and problematic thinking regards how neurons are being used and how the connections between them - called synaptic connections – are oriented. In this sense the function of these two kinds of thoughts can be considered as a literal competition for physical territory. What this means is that one kind of thinking will – to some extent – disallow the activity of the other kind.

Consider it this way: if we had an infinite amount of capacity for thought – literally infinite – then we could, in theory, think every thought possible at all times, simultaneously. Since we by and large do not exhibit such feats of intellectual prowess, it stands to reason our capacity for reason is not *literally* infinite. Neither is it none. We have a certain, but limited, amount of available resources for intellectual work. If we accept the view that thoughts relate to brain activity, whether or not the "space they appear in" has its foundation on the brain or not, then it stands to reason to frame the limits of reason as a territorial problem of neurons and their wiring. Unfortunately, this opens us up to the consideration that as we become encumbered by problematic thoughts, the less space there is for the well-adaptive functional thoughts like solving intellectual problems.

Problematic thoughts can be very negative and painful, and getting caught in a "sticky" stream of them also consumes large amounts of energy. It is often advised for individuals suffering from depression to take frequent walks outside and avoid spending a lot of time indoors by themselves, as they may be pulled into such negative spirals. This is not only relevant in the cases of mental illness, such problematic thoughts on a whole waste a lot of the brain's "bandwidth" as well. Energy which could be used productively. Ultimately, increases in the energy of negative, emotionally-charged memories can lead to depression, anxiety, excessive worries, craving, attachment to specific outcomes and so forth.

As an indicator of how these problematic thoughts manifest themselves, consider the unfortunate times we witness people faced with "bad news" or situations they could not handle, control or expect. Occasionally, we see this in others, and sometimes we see it in ourselves. In these times we react in ways best described as problematic; losing both composure and

behaving quite unrestrained and emotionally unrestrained. These kinds of moments, when the world reveals itself as lacking in comfort or adherence to our internal scripts can be quite challenging to the untrained mind, especially one which is confined to constant spirals of negative self-chatter. By carrying around these heavily encoded narratives about "the way the world has to be" we are in a way set up for failure when the world fails to unfold to our liking. I think such reactions reveal very deep pain that people hold inside. It is not too far a stretch to envision this as a runaway effect of inauthentic being. Barrett writes about this, saying that "irritation usually arises when something touches a sore spot in ourselves, which most of the time we would like desperately to hide; rarely if ever does the fault lie totally with the provoking object" (Barrett, 1956, p. 43).

b. *Alone with your thoughts*

> *"Everything depends on 'the moment'. And this is the tragedy of so many lives. That they never sensed 'the moment', and that in their lives the eternal and the temporal were always separate. And why? Because they could not* be silent*."* (Kierkegaard, *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air,* 1849)

The uncomfortable nature of the problematic thoughts have not just been the topic of existential philosophy, but has recently been the subject of recent scientific studies. One particular study, from Timothy Wilson et al. called *Just think: The challenges of the disengaged mind* published in the journal *Science* in 2014, (p. 75-77) had some very interesting findings. The research subjects in the study were asked to spend 15 minutes alone in a room with their thoughts, after which they were asked to report on their experience, which most of the participants reported as problematic or uncomfortable. The authors proposed that one of the things suggested by the findings in the study is that the distraction devices which we currently use may be causally involved in this. The abstract states

> *"Nowadays, we enjoy any number of inexpensive and readily accessible stimuli, be they books, videos, or social media. We need never be alone, with no one to talk to and nothing to do. Wilson et al. explored the state of being alone with one's thoughts and found that it appears to be an unpleasant experience. In fact, many of the people studied, particularly the men, chose to give themselves a mild electric shock rather than be deprived of external sensory stimuli."* (Wilson et al., p. 75).

Surprisingly – but tellingly – in the eleven studies Wilson and his team conducted, what they observed was that the participants of the studies found the activity of spending six to fifteen minutes in a room by themselves with nothing to do but think "deeply uncomfortable and unenjoyable". The subjects in the studies, ranging from college students to a broader sample size consisting of general community participants (from 17 – 77 years old, median age 48.0 years) enjoyed doing mundane external activities much more than being alone with their thoughts, and a significant number of the participants preferred to *administer electric shocks* to themselves rather than being left alone with their thoughts. The abstract concluded that "most people seem to prefer to be doing something rather than nothing, even if that something is negative" (p. 75).

The authors of the research paper notes that two questions arises from the findings. Do people *choose* to put themselves in ruminating thought states by disengaging from the external world, and secondly, when they are in this ruminating mode, is it a pleasing experience? According to their observations, people did not choose whether or not to engage in problematic thoughts, but were "subjected to their activity" regardless of preference. The subjects also did not enjoy being alone with their thoughts, and reported enjoyment levels rose when given an external activity such as using cell phones, reading a book or surfing the web was offered. "We have seen", the paper reads "that most people do not enjoy "just thinking" and clearly prefer having something else to do. But would they rather do an unpleasant activity than no activity at all?" (p. 76).

The answer, surprisingly, is yes. The research subjects were offered the chance to self-administer painful electric shocks if they wanted to. "We went to some length", the paper reads, "to explain that the primary goal was to entertain themselves with their thoughts and that the decision to receive a shock was entirely up to them" (Wilson et al., p. 76). A quarter of the women, and 67% of the men opted to receive painful shocks rather than be alone with their thoughts in a neutral scenario, the research location. They were also offered the chance to redo the experiment in their homes. Surprisingly, the mean reported enjoyment was actually lower when they were at home than when they were in the laboratory. Wilson et al. considers this "striking", and notes that simply being alone with their thoughts for 15 minutes was so aversive that it "drove many participants to self-administer an electric shock that they had earlier said they would *pay to avoid*." (p. 76).

A key question given these findings, which the paper raises, is "Why was thinking so difficult and unpleasant?" This is a major philosophical question in itself, which the research paper largely glosses over. They offer one suggestion however, which resonate with the problem of

problematic thoughts "One possibility is that when left alone with their thoughts, participants focused on their own shortcomings and got caught in ruminative thought cycles" (p. 76).

Admittedly the authors conceded that there is no doubt that people are sometimes absorbed by interesting ideas, exciting fantasies, and pleasant daydreams. What is telling, they note, is that the research thus conducted suggests that our minds are difficult to control, and that it might be particularly hard to "steer our thoughts in pleasant directions and keep them there" (p, 76). The difficulty involved in controlling our thoughts and the pleasant nature when we manage this has been suggested by similar findings in related fields, like psychology. For example, in his 1990 book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi discusses the pleasant nature observed of the mind when unencumbered by problematic thoughts and writes about the relation between the unencumbered brain and subjective pleasant experiences. Whether pro athletes, chess grandmasters, joggers, swimmers, musical performers or hammer-wielding carpenters, to make a Heidegger reference, when the subjects entered a state of *flow* they reported marked increases in subjective enjoyment (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990).

I suspect that most of us have at different times in our lives experienced such moments of 'flow' or what can be called being "in the zone", where one experienced a cessation of the problematic narrative thought streams I have described. In my experience, when these states occur, the accompanying fear, anxiety and worries involved with these thoughts either go away or dial down significantly. These states occur, for example, when we are able to lose ourselves in a creative process, like writing philosophy for example. Pyschologists also refer to this feeling as feelings of mastery. There are many examples of this, Jean-Paul Sartre viewed jazz as a representation of freedom and authenticity, for example, and Heidegger discussed being-in-the-world as emergent in fluency with readiness-to-hand like flow, famously mentioning the carpenter with his hammer and nail.

In conclusion, the Wilson et al. article states that the hardship involved in steering and controlling our thoughts "may be why many people seek to gain better control of their thoughts with meditation and other techniques, with clear benefits". "Without such training, people prefer doing to thinking, even if what they are doing is so unpleasant that they would normally pay to avoid it. The untutored mind does not like to be alone with itself" (p. 77).

Given the problems related to problematic thinking, it stands to reason that we might benefit from ways of taking back control of our runaway minds. I consider it useful and potentially of

great productive value to note that such ambitions have already seen engagement in existential philosophy, in what is called authentic existence.

3. *Terms of art*

The books which have formed the basis for this paper are works of Husserl, Sartre, Heidegger, and Kierkegaard. Notable works are Dan Zahavi's books on Husserl, Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927), Sartre's early work *The Transcendence of the Ego* (1936) and Kierkegaard's *The Sickness unto Death* (1849) and *Fear and Trembling* (1843). I have not been able to integrate the literary figures and works associated with existentialism, however in a larger context I wish I could as the problem of authenticity is poetically and beautifully depicted in many literary works associated under the label of existentialism.

Very useful and important has been introductory and supplementary tomes to existentialist thinkers like David E. Cooper's classical *Existentialism, A reconstruction* (1990, second edition 1999). Likewise the iconic *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (1958) by William Barrett, which, according to goodreads.com is "Widely recognized as the finest definition of existentialist philosophy ever written", has been useful.

More recently the contemporaneous book *Existentialism, An Introduction* (2014) by Kevin Aho has also been of great value. Not only because Aho takes into account new research done on the classical writers, but also because it dedicates a couple of chapters to existentialism's contribution to contemporary challenges. These include oppression of civil rights, psychiatry health and illness, contributions in ethics and existential perspective on climate change. As Aho argues, viewing the climate challenge through an existential perspective can help to make it urgently relevant and a matter of personal significance (Aho, p. 152).

Interestingly, the introductory volumes are very different from each other. Barrett for example, perhaps due to having written in a time when existentialism was more contemporary recent, bring more of the 'living spirit' of existentialism to the pages than does Cooper or Aho. Barrett also writes with passionate existential tones, reflecting authentic dread, hopelessness and despair. I found it way more taxing than the other two scholarly works. Sometimes Barrett's approach is reflected in this paper by some parts striking a different tone than the more informative, scholarly tone otherwise aimed for. Barrett writes with a full engagement with

what can be called “the existentialist spirit”, which can occasionally be quite infectious. Cooper attempted in the 1990’s to reintroduce existentialism as an analytical philosophy, by rephrasing the history of modern philosophy as one centered around alienation and its overcoming, a claim which Barrett echoes when writing that “alienation and estrangement constitute the whole problematic of existentialism” (Barrett, p. 29). Aho on the other hand focused more on reclaiming the relevant insights without championing for the validity of the philosophy generally, presenting most of the ideas divorced of their more transcendent aspects. These three are not the only introductory textbooks to existentialism – there is a vast and near inexhaustible list of works to draw on – however Barrett and Cooper are generally considered to be of the more respected and influential ones, while Aho is the most contemporary and reasonably cited.

What becomes clear when reading through the various works in the existentialist canon, philosophical or literary, is that the concepts in use – like authentic existence – function like *terms of art*. That is to say, they have multiple layers of meaning imbued to them, and function most effectively if they be afforded a kind of *patience*. Rather than demanding a mathematical-like level of instant rigor, a certain amount of *reflective reception* is needed. The meaning is, in some cases ‘behind the words’. As with poetry, the deeper level of significance imbued in the terms resonate with the inner workings of man’s psyche and being, while it may not leave the clinical scalpel of disinterested or disembodied reason anything to slice.

This was in stark contrast with other fields of philosophy I had previously engaged with, like epistemology or philosophy of language, and it took some adapting to. However, I found it useful that the phenomenological tradition employed similar language, and certain overlapping themes. For example, investigations into the structure of selfhood, the ego as shown to consciousness and the function and directionality of consciousness are all themes which the phenomenological tradition explored.

Regarding terms of art, David Cooper writes that “*existence* […] is a constant *striving*, a perpetual *choice*; it is marked by a radical *freedom* and *responsibility*; and it is always prey to a sense of *Angst* which reveals that, for the most part, it is lived *inauthentically* and in *bad faith*. And because the character of a human life is never *given*, existence is *without foundation*; hence it is *abandoned*, or *absurd* even. The reason why recitation of this existentialist lexicon does not, of itself, advance our understanding is that, without exception, these are *terms of art*. None of them should be taken at face value, and the thinking of Sartre and others is badly misconstrued if they are” (Cooper, p. 3 – 4).

As Cooper suggests, what these terms point towards are insights which require a suspension of critical thinking. As I read them, I became aware that the writings yielded most meaning when I afforded them patience, realizing that, as Jazz legend Miles Davis famously said, "the music is the space between the notes".

That is not to say that existentialism is not logical, or not philosophy. Aho notes that "to be sure, existentialists are concerned with issues of truth and knowledge, but knowledge of what it means *to be* human" (p. 22). In one sense, terms like *authenticity, inauthenticity, alienation*, *angst* are technical terms, which have designated uses (they mean one thing, and not another for example). Such terms have in addition a poetic or intuitive side to them, they can only point to something, not explicitly spell it out; their deeper value lies past the immediate face value of them. Both Cooper (p. 25) and Barrett (p. 42 – 65) highlights the resemblance and similarities to existential themes and human expressions in poetry and art. Cooper remarks this when he writes that the insight inherent in art may present an "all-absorbing essence in which subject and object can no longer be distinguished". However Cooper is aware that such descriptions may sound too romantic to some ears, and adds that "it may be that the sense of alienation is resistant to literal, analytical definition" (p. 25).

Similarly to how a person's attempts at transcendence is always inherently subjective – it is always something the existing individual has to attain on the basis of its own layout. The wisdom imparted in these terms lies as much in their resonance with one's subjective intuition – which could be called gut feeling if one was so inclined – as it does with its formal philosophical notions. The formal definitions of their philosophical meaning can only take you so far in the attainment of personal authenticity, say. What the words *point to* is what is important.

The topic of transcendence has seen historical attention in philosophy. According to Aho, there are two conflicting traditions which have informed our sense of who we are, Hebraic faith and Greek reason. Both traditions offer the idea of the human being as unique to the extent that we are self-conscious and have 'higher' potentialities that allow us to surpass or transcend our finite early existence (Aho, p. 1 quoting Dreyfus 2009, 2012). Traditionally, the Platonic means to attain an "escape from time" was to strive for a "God's eye view" over time and abstract ideas (*eidos*), so as to gain access to eternal essences. For the existentialists, transcendence is oriented largely towards the overcoming of dualisms inherent in the Cartesian schism between mind and body, and the engagement with the *lived experience* of the body (Aho, p. 2 – 3). Aho writes that "for Plato transcendence was not attained by the passionate faith of the whole person" (as is the

case of the biblical story of Job or Abraham in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*), "it was achieved when reason, the higher or divine part of the soul rose above the lower animal part" (Aho, p. 2).

Since transcendence is ultimately personal, and due to the inherent difference in human individuals, what leads one person to their subjective truth may not stimulate or work for another, and vice versa. If one is confused about what is meant by personal transcendence or subjective truth, imagine a time when the mundane concerns of day to day living where suddenly overcome. Maybe on a nice, relaxing vacation, or a spell of solitude out in nature. Moments where the worries, problems, ruminations and anxieties we carry with us faded away, and revealed a deep and satisfying moment of inner clarity, peace and stillness. Such moments, albeit rare, do exists, and it is the thesis of this paper that they can be cultivated.

Regarding terms of art, as I see it, to deeply engage with and open up to poetry, literature and philosophy generally – not just existential – requires a certain willingness to do so, or better yet, a *suspension of disbelief* and critical dismissive thinking, much like enjoying a play at the theatre or watching a movie. For example, it would not be a very effective means of enjoying a play if one was to constantly point out the arbitrary nature of how one is watching paid professionals in makeup and costumes read lines from a script. The emergence into the play beyond disbelief allows one to take part in the activity of the theatre. This participation allows one to reexamine one's values and beliefs, explore sympathies for the human condition unconstrained by egoic attachments and escape the concerns of one's day to day concerns.

Both Aristotle and Plato wrote about the societal function of the theatre. Aristotle pointed out how imitation (*mimesis*) of life in the form of drama permitted for *catharsis*, the release of corresponding negative emotions in the viewer, saying "tragedy is an imitation of an action. It achieves, through pity and fear, the catharsis of these sorts of feelings" (Stanford, *Aristotle*, section 13, siting the *Poetics* 1449b, p. 21–29). Plato similarly engaged with mimesis. Suffice it to say that the two disagreed about its value for society and its role.

While engaging with the theatre, the movies or books, what occurs is that you are being *shown* something, thought its full or deeper meaning might not be immediately accessible. That two plus two equals four yields its truth immediately, it is full on the surface. Understanding or experiencing Meursault however, the main characters of Albert Camus' *L'Étranger* (The Stranger) requires a different, more resonant approach than mathematics. In order to experience, be frustrated or confused by Meursault's lack of interest in life, even to the point of murdering

someone without feeling remorse, one has to be *moved*. What the novel shows is illogical behavior, which is exactly the point. Life is absurd, thinks Camus, and what better way to convey this absurdity than telling a story which uncovers our modern, alienated state, with no solution being presented. These are insights of a different nature than "2 + 2 = 4"; they are insights of wisdom – knowledge for the soul one might say – as opposed to insights of reason.

When exploring the terms of art approach, one almost gets the feeling that one is being *offered* a perspective, urged in a way to "try it on", as it were, as opposed to deconstructing the previously held perspective or position permanently in the favor of now permanently adopting a new one, such as in going from a coherentist view of knowledge to a foundationalist one, say.

As Cooper, Barrett and Aho remarks, the insights aimed for by philosophy, and perhaps existential philosophy specifically, cannot always be adequately put directly into a system, and occasionally elude words. To my mind, this is because philosophy is not a cooking recipe. One either "hears the notes", as it were, or one does not. For this reason, Kierkegaard had "no interest in the Socrates who figures as the mouthpiece of Platonism (Barrett, p. 157). His interest lay with the man Socrates, the concrete man of flesh and blood, who said that he had no system or doctrine to teach, that he had no knowledge of his own, but could only play the midwife to other men in bringing to birth the knowledge they had within themselves. For Socrates, philosophy was a *way of life*, and he *existed* in that way" (p. 157-8).

4. *Authenticity in Philosophy*

One of the challenges of conducting research on a term which originates from a movement which features so many diverse thinkers has been employing correct terminology. For example, whole papers could be written on the relationship between the terminology employed by Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, who all used terms like *ontology, being, existence,* and *phenomenology* in their works. All employed different conceptions of phenomenology for example, different methods and different results (Stanford, *Phenomenology*, section 4). Sometimes their uses vary, and on occasion they are similar. Sometimes these differences are subtle and other times significant, as with Husserl's notion of formal ontology and Heidegger's foundational ontology, for example.

As it stands, terms such as *authentic* and *inauthentic* are hard to categorically define, at least in a sentence. The search for a categorical definition is complicated by the fact that the existentialist writers wrote at different times and different languages and employed differing terminology. Kierkegaard wrote in Danish, Heidegger and the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) both wrote in highly complex and inventive German and the French philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Albert Camus (1913 – 1960) wrote in French, centuries after Kierkegaard.

According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy the word 'authenticity' stems from a word invented by Heidegger, *'Eigentlichkeit'*. The word 'Eigentlichkeit' in turn comes from the German word eigentlich meaning really or truly, built on the stem eigen, which translates into the Norwegian 'egen' or the English word "own" (Stanford, Authenticity, section 3.1). The word 'authenticity' became closely associated with Heidegger from the early translations of *Being and Time* into English. Heidegger's notion about *ownedness* was seen as the way to be the "most fully realized human form of life*"* (Stanford, Authenticity, section 3.1).

According to Aho, the word 'authentic' derives from the Greek *authentikos*, meaning original or genuine. Aho further notes that while Heidegger is the only one who liberally uses the word, existentialists are generally united in emphasizing the significance of authenticity as *being true* (p. 80). Aho notes that "the commitment to one's own truth is difficult because our normal tendency is to drift along conform to the average expectations and meanings of the public world" (p. 80).

A complicating matter regarding research into such themes is that, due to the particular cultural popularity of existentialist philosophy, the terms 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' found themselves adopted for personal individual interpretations, sometimes by people largely uninterested in reading Kierkegaard, Heidegger or Sartre themselves. Fringe or counter cultural behavior or norms found themselves justified by youth as attempts of living "an authentic life", "being authentic" or "being true to one's self". Today this finds its expression in self-help literature which instructs people to, among other things, be a more 'true' self. As we shall see, the concept of authentic existence has less to do with self-aggrandizing expressions of self-absorbed narcissistic behaviors and more to do with a fundamental inquiry into the ontology of the ego, a reexamination and rejection of one's egoic structure altogether. The self-help literature of Californian origin is not filled with remarks about deep and persistent existential inquiry of the sort "who am I?", and for good reason: it does not sell.

Regardless, what I came to realize from researching this paper is that authenticity is currently an obscure area of contemporary philosophy. I suspect this is not only because of the rather poetic nature of the term, but also due to the commitment and complexity involved in researching it. Sincere and fruitful research into these subject areas are complicated by the fact that uncovering existential authenticity represents an *existential undertaking* on the part of the researcher. Because what one is investigating is the subjective nature of one's own existence and how it can be authentically lived, the role of the researcher cannot be ignored. While this might seem foreign today, consider that for the Greeks, the pursuit of philosophy was inseparable from the philosopher himself.

To understand this, consider philosopher Stephen Mulhall's quote from his Routledge philosophy guidebook to Heidegger (2005):

> *"To invoke questions of authenticity within the precincts of philosophical endeavor was once a commonplace: to engage in philosophizing was long understood as a way, perhaps the way, of acquiring wisdom about the meaning of human existence, and thus of leading a better life. Nowadays, the idea that one's success or failure at philosophizing can legitimately be assessed at all in personal terms is not often considered; and the idea that one's philosophical position might be criticized as existentially inauthentic might appear either ludicrous or offensive. Such reactions betoken a conception of the subject that represses the fact that it is human beings who produce philosophy, that philosophizing is a part of a human way of living. It is, of course, perfectly possible to act out such a repression; nothing is easier than to write philosophy in a way that represses the fact of one's own humanity. But, as Kierkegaard pointed out, such forgetfulness – particularly when one's very topic is what it is to be human – is liable, where it is not comic, to be tragic in its consequences." (Mulhall, p. 33-34)*

The attainment of authenticity was a central themes and primary goal in the writings of the existentialist writers. This is similar to how the *praxis* of living the good life was the aim of the Greeks. This is an aim I resonate with, and it is my guiding perspective that by authentic states are meant existential states which are in union with a pre-existing mode of being.

Another obstacle to research into authentic existence is the tradition from which authenticity emerged, existentialism. Whatever one thinks of existentialism (and there are many good reasons for rejecting much of the sensationalism associated with it), it cannot be denied that it

is a philosophy deeply committed to the lived life of the individual. It could be argued that if a philosophical concept which merited sincere research were to emerge from that tradition – which I believe authenticity is – that research into that term could be discouraged for no other reason that its origin.

The Stanford encyclopedia article on existentialism reflects on this, saying that "if existentialism's very notoriety as a cultural movement may have impeded its serious philosophical reception, then, it may be that what we have most to learn from existentialism still lies before us" (Stanford, *Existentialism*, section 5).

5. *The appeal of Existentialism*

Let me just state for the record that it is not my aim to argue for existentialisms place in, and relevance of, the philosophical canon. I think that as a 'movement' it is well dead and buried. I do however hope to show that authentic existence is a topic which still merits philosophical attention. Because our lives are, on occasion, lived inauthentically, I consider authentic existence to be a resonant and pertinent theme for today. This is reflected, I think, in the peculiar popularity existentialism received.

There are many ways to think about existentialism, with many "catch all" definitions failing to catch all the subtleties involved. Cooper, Barrett and Aho all write extensively about the history of the movement, with different aims and definitions. One of their shared agreements is that there lies an actual philosophy behind all the fluff and flash. They all agree that existentialism has its place in the history of philosophy and not merely as a post-war literary and stylistic phenomenon. As Cooper writes it, "existentialism grew, in part, out of Husserl's phenomenology, which in turn was a critical response to nineteenth-century materialism and positivism: it was certainly not a bolt from the blue" (Cooper, p. 13). The flash and scandal attached to it is unfortunate, I agree with Cooper's claim that underneath all of the flash and dread of existentialism there lies a "systematic, coherent, definable and structured philosophy" (Cooper, p. 6).

Cooper continues to note that the special meaning which informs the existentialist's use of the term 'existence' comes from Kierkegaard, who apparently got his inspiration for the use by attending the lectures of Schelling (Cooper, p. 2). The view of Kierkegaard as the father of the

movement is not unchallenged however. According to the Stanford article on Existentialism, it was Heidegger, in his phenomenological pursuit of the categories that govern being-in-the-world, who became the reluctant father of existentialism (Stanford, Existentialism, point 1). Although – the entry remarks – if this is the case then it is so because he drew inspiration from two seminal, though in academic circles then relatively unknown, nineteenth-century writers, Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche. To link the history of the term exclusively to these two thinkers is also somewhat incorrect, as one can find anticipations of existential thought in many places (for instance, in Socratic irony, Augustine, Pascal, or the late Schelling), however the roots of the problem of existence in its contemporary significance lie in the work of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche (Stanford, Existentialism, point 1).

Aho agrees with Cooper when he writes that existentialism, when viewed historically cannot be dismissed as a "moribund, decade-long episode in postwar France" (p. 17). Cooper echoes this, when he remarks that all the best-known existentialist works were written prior to the beginning of the war, or before it ended (p. 13). The reason Cooper and Aho make these remarks is to refute what they see as prevalent and misleading notions about existentialism. They do this not to reawaken the more populist, scandalous and irrational part of the cultural impact, but to advocate for the fact that behind the noise lies an actual philosophy.

Barrett wrote that "the very themes of Existentialism were something of a scandal to the detached sobriety of Anglo-American philosophy… Matters as anxiety, death, the conflict between the bogus self and the genuine […] are scarcely the themes of analytic philosophy. They are, however, themes of life: people do die, people do struggle all their lives […] and we do live in an age in which neurotic anxiety has mounted out of all proportion" (Barrett, 1958, p. 9).

As Barrett notes, the popularity of the movement probably had to do with the engagement with the lived life of the everyday man. Spanish existentialist Miguel de Unamuno, for example, engaged with "the man who is born, suffers, and dies" (Aho, p. 11). Aho takes an interesting perspective, writing that existentialism "represents a centuries-long engagement with the most fundamental of human questions: '*Who am I?'* and *'How should I live?*'" (p. 17) and refers to a "diverse group of philosophers and literary figures who were concerned about the question of what it means *to be* human" (preface, p xvii). On this view, it engages in themes not only found in modern philosophy, but also in Athens.

As I see it, and without succumbing to hyperbole, Existentialism, in this view, can be seen as representing a potent flourishing of themes which has been developing in western philosophy, like the mind/body dualism. This becomes clear when we gain some space from the preceding century, and when we read Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger in their own rights.

Barret wrote about the appeal as it was fading, or in the very recent past, saying that "existentialism is the best in the way of a new and creative movement that these rather uninspired postwar years have been able to turn up. We have to say at least this in a spirit of cool critical assessment, even when we acknowledge all the frivolous and sensational elements that got attached to it." (Barrett, p. 9) Since the time of his writing, 1956, was a very different one from the current day Barrett's perspective is limited by the horizon of history, and yet there is still a fair point to be extracted about existentialism. Barrett continues:

> "The important thing … was that here was a philosophy that was able to cross the frontier from the Academy into the world at large. This should have been a welcome sign to professional philosophers that ordinary mankind still could hunger and thirst after philosophy if what they were given to bite down on was something that seemed to have a connection with their lives" (Barrett, p. 9).

As the history of philosophy has played out since the 1950's, the perspective of existentialism as a vibrant and flourishing philosophy has not taken hold. As best as I can gather, existentialism is well represented in the camps open to it, and systematically ignored in the camps whose fancy it fails to catch. At this point I sincerely doubt that any amount of scholarly attention will demand its most ardent opponents to give it its due.

Perhaps it is precisely the final and ultimate destruction of a medieval world picture – one where this world is somehow a privileged realm tailor made for humans, guarded by an omniscient and meaning-bestowing deity that gave existentialism its enduring relevance to the everyday man. In the wake of religious answers to the problem of alienation, what remained for the person in tune with the problem of existence was to attempt to face up to this fact philosophically and still attempt the pursuit of a good life.

However this kind of heroic *rebellion* against one's absurdity, to use Camus' terms, or the ambition of a Nietzschian 'Overman' (*Übermensch*) to own up to one's finitude seems more and more rare. Kierkegaard would underscore how this was our factual state, and as such an escape from this facticity was not possible. While redemption in the figure of Christ might not be a realistic resolution, Kierkegaard's diagnosis of the existential dilemma is well put. We do,

after all, already exist. What the thinkers attempt to make clear is essentially a simple yet potent point, that existence is not a cumbersome predicate which mean spirited existentialists want to forcefully designate us, rather it is a pre-given for our lives which is inescapable.

The motivation of man today seemm not to be pursuits of Socratean commands like *knowing oneself* or living an *examined life*, but instead the motivation seems to be to one of escapism. On the existentialist view, the escape is from *alienation*, and we see it in the form of technology, work, drugs or romantic affairs. As I see it, the problem is that by seeking to escape the dualistic and alienated sense of self, to escape himself as it were, man also is removed from the means of *overcoming* the alienation he feels from society and the world altogether. Rather than facing himself and investigating the sources of his alienation, the current cultural *mood* (*moods* being a shared existentialist theme) of the time seems to be one of a rampant escapism at all costs.

In an absurd world where no creator grants any essence, and where morality is bound up to social systems showing their clear deficiency, leading to horrors like concentration camps or nuclear warfare, it can be understood that man comes face to face with existence with no answers. It is precisely at this moment – when the absurdity of continuing an old and redundant way of being cannot any longer be reconciled with one's subjective intuition – that man has arrived at the point where the search for a reconciliation with one's authentic existence becomes necessary.

If I may offer a closing remark, the shift into escapism which we observe in our time with things like smartphones and drug addictions worries me. Alienation and estrangement has been a recurring theme in the literature of our century to far a greater degree than in the past, and I worry on occasions that alienation might be increasing.

6. *Terms and Themes*

In this section I will present briefly terms and themes as they relate to the investigation into authentic existence. This is done because the investigation may be difficult to undertake without a certain understanding of the tradition and insights upon which they rest. Therefore, in this section I present the relevant terminology and thematic engagements shared by existentialist writers as they relate to the subject in this paper.

As mentioned, existential terms sometimes function like terms of art. Because of this, the best way to form a coherent and holistic picture is to observe what emerges when reading the different writers and looking for how they are *similar* and *converge*, as opposed to how they might differ. It has been my approach in this paper to search for an emergent coherency rather than focusing on defending specific interpretations. This is done in order that a holistic multileveled picture may emerge that captures the best insights all the thinkers have to offer. In this regard I am influenced by Cooper.

The terms *existence* and *being* are used interchangeably. Both denote, for our use, the *facticity* of our existence, the fact *that we exist* at all and that our existence is a moment-to-moment engagement, which is on occasion problematic.

The thesis regarding authentic existence is presented throughout the paper as opposed to being saved for a specific section. The points are made either by direct references, or sometimes more subtle intonations that arises as an emergent picture arises. When the philosophical terminology and their use are understood and a coherent picture has formed, we can move on to the topic of existential self-inquiry and authentic existence.

a. *Ontology and Existence*

> *"It is said that 'Being' is the most universal and the emptiest of concepts. As such it resists every attempt at definition."* (Heidegger, 1927, p. 21).

Classically, the term ontology was used to denote that which existed, as opposed to that which did not exist. Historically, different philosophers and systems had different ontological commitments and accompanying metaphysics. As a first approximation, ontology can be defined as the study of what there is (Stanford, Logic and Ontology, section 3.1).

The classical view of ontology is something the existentialists critique, because as they see it, the whole perspective upon which such aims are done is a mistaken one. What the classical picture of ontology presents is the activity of performing ontology and attempting to create rational systems of sense regarding the existing entities. What this view fails to account for is the fact that, as existing beings, we fundamentally already exist, and that this is to be viewed as primary. We could not perform ontological inquiries if we did not first *were*.

Instead of ontology, existentialists prefer the term 'Existence'. Existence can be understood as *what it is like* (to use Thomas Nagel's term) to be one's ontology (in the sense of what exists). However, this use complicates matters because the phrase "what it is like to be one's ontology" can be confused with the act of 'performing ontology', in the sense of conducting ontological inquiries, for example. To clear this up, picture the following. There is something existing, let's take a cat as an example. A cat exists. Is there 'something it is like' to *be* the cat? Is there a first person point of view, some(thing) which the sensory apparatuses deliver its content to? Assuming there is, this cat has an ontology (it formally exists), and it is also *something it is like* to be that cat. It has a phenomenological perspective, one might say.

We must express and experience the phenomenological perspective that our ontology includes. As formally existing beings, performing formal ontology (in the sense of making ontological lists) is one activity we can perform on the basis of our existence. Existence, then, denotes both the fact that we *are* and the sense of *what it is like* to be that being.

The problem, as Heidegger points out in *Being and Time,* is not that existence is a better word than ontology, but that the task of ontology is to *explain Being itself*. By *Being itself*, Heidegger aims to denote the fact that we *are* and what this entails as the *true* aim of ontology, as opposed to theoretical concerns with ideal essences, for example. Heidegger expands on this in his analysis of *Dasein*, his term for the kind of beings we were. Essentially, he remarked, it is existing beings who must perform ontological inquiries. And because the *type of being* which we are has the possibility and option to perform such an inquiry as one of its modes of being, Heidegger thinks that Dasein is uniquely suited to undertake this activity, the ontological investigation into being.

Dasein is then at once the inquirer and what is inquired into, which Heidegger writes as "in so far as Being constitutes what is asked about, and 'Being' means the Being of entities, then entities themselves turn out to be what is interrogated" (Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 1927, first English translation 1962, p. 26). He continues by noting that "to work out the question of Being adequately, we must make an entity- the inquirer – transparent in his own Being. The very asking of this question is an entity's *mode of Being*; and as such it gets its essential character from what is inquired about – namely, Being. This entity, which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term *Dasein*" (Heidegger, 1927, p. 27). In this way, it might seem that Heidegger aims to reinterpret human beings from the Aristotelian definition of the rational animal to the ontologically investigating human.

Stephen Mulhall's interpretation of Heidegger and his inquiry into being is that "Heidegger thinks that Dasein is the type of entity which must be interrogated in any exercise in fundamental ontology. The aim of any such exercise is to interrogate Being as it makes itself manifest through the Being of an entity, and the fact that Dasein's essence is existence makes the relationship of its Being to Being a peculiarly intimate one (Mulhall, 2005, p. 13).

To my mind, what Heidegger points out is that what we are investigating is being itself and not something that is made apparent in virtue of being, such as ideas, concepts, chairs or ontological metaphysical systems. He also points out that the very asking of this question, i.e. "what is being" was our very *mode of Being.* In other words, the way we are, for Heidegger, is curiously inquiring ones, performing *self-inquiry*, one might say. It might be that Heidegger here is referring to the activity of ontological inquiry as inherently authentic, as we "get our essential character from what is inquired about – namely *Being*".

Heidegger would give further credence to this reading when he says that "the question of Being is nothing other than the radicalization of an *essential* tendency-of-Being which belongs to Dasein itself – the preontological understanding of Being" (Heidegger, s. 32). Similarly, he notes that "We are each of us the entity to be analyzed. The being of this entity is always mine" (Heidegger, s. 41). We can begin to note here in Heidegger some beginning tendencies towards phenomenological inquiries into ontology as primary for humans.

In conclusion, the way I see it that in whatever metaphysical framework one operates, it is an inescapable fact that in order to construct or subscribe to a system – any system: ethical, political, metaphysical or ontological – one must first exist. What this entails is that by *existence* is meant the fact that existence is primary, which is to say that it precedes essence.

b. *Existence precedes essence*

> *"So far as he logicizes, man tends to forget existence. It happens however, that he must first exist in order to logicize"* (Barrett, p. 305).

The point has been made rather stridently by Kierkegaard and by other existentialists that there is something pre-given, something that is more direct, personal and immediate than our thinking. This "more primal" aspect is our existence as such. For Kierkegaard, one's subjective truth – the truth of the individual – was infinitely more important than objective truth. For Kierkegaard it was only by committing to one's own subjective truth that one could "lead a

complete human life" (Aho, p. 24), and this commitment could never be grasped through appeals to disinterested reason because it constitutes my own singular experiences, emotions and needs. In pushing this point, Kierkegaard breaks rather demonstrably with Cartesian traditions which pictured a disconnected rational mind as primary.

What Kierkegaard was trying to remind his readers, and the philosophical tradition generally was that prior to detached reflection, *existence occurs*. Another way of making this point, is saying that one must first exist in order to think. As a response to idealistic systems, such as the one presented by Hegel, Kierkegaard raised the objection that these ignores and is detached from the flesh and blood particulars of individual existence for the sake of abstraction and objectivity (Aho, p. 25). By interpreting truth subjectively, Kierkegaard undermined the traditional view of the self as a disinterested mind or *cogito* – this is because prior to detached reflection I *exist.* The real subject, according to Kierkegaard was not the cognitive subject, but the existing subject (Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* first English translation 1941, p. 281). This is summed up by Kierkegaard when he says "I must exist in order to think" (p. 294).

What this reflects, I think, is that everything done by a human agent has required, and been dependent on the existence of that human agent. Even in fringe cases, or extreme conditions, like drug-induced trances, deep states of hypnosis, sleepwalking or near-death, there is still a necessary condition that an agent *exists* before the agent can do actions. Logic seems to require the existence *of a being* to occur as a necessary condition for any *action* the being undertakes. I, for example, may only write this paper because I satisfy the condition of existing, and likewise a similar principle applies for whoever reads it.

Therefore, if someone, a philosopher for example, wishes to address existence through some kind of formal system, there is a necessary condition that that philosopher existed. Existence seems necessarily primary. A rationalist arguing that by means of logical reasoning one could construct a system or schema to prove otherwise seems for me to miss the point entirely. Namely, that she or he must exists in order to undertake this task.

The theme of existence as primary is particularly clear in Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* (1844), in one sense, it is axiomatic of the whole tradition or 'movement'. Sartre would expand on this concept, coining the explicit formulation "e*xistence precedes essence"* in his 1946 lecture *Existentialism and Humanism*, which subsequently became somewhat of a slogan for the 'movement'.

Another aspect to this slogan – one of its most salient meanings – is that one must first exists before instantiating any *essences*. Traditionally in philosophy, lending much from Plato, *essences* were taken to be what was primary. Permanent and timeless essences where instantiated by 'mere' existing things. As we have seen, the existentialists critique aims to point out that the opposite is the case. Existence is what is *primary*, not only ontologically, but also prior to disinterested reason or philosophical systems as a whole. As Kierkegaard noted, "I must first exist in order to think" (1941, 281).

For Sartre, the slogan had an ethical dimension to it as well: human beings created their own values and determined their own meaning for their life. They had the ability to do so because they, as humans, do not possess any inherently given essence. Their identity was then left open to the individual to create. Indeed, the individual had no other choice, he was, in Sartre's words, "doomed to be free". Interestingly, when Sartre coined the term in his 1946 lecture *Existentialism and Humanism*, he made explicit references to Heidegger:

> *"Atheistic existentialism, of which I am a representative, declares with greater consistency that if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man or, as Heidegger has it, the human reality. What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards"*

And indeed, in *Being and Time* Heidegger writes "The essence of Dasein lies in its existence" (Heidegger, 1927, p. 67). Sartre echoes this, when he writes "I recognize, as entirely authentic, that man is a being whose existence precedes his essence" (Sartre, 1946, p 52).

These remarks opens the way for the task of ontic inquiry as a primary concern. Related to this notion, and as we shall see in later sections, I consider the task of existential self-inquiry to be the means of exploring this existential authenticity. Following Kierkegaard, Heidegger would expand significantly on both the historical neglect of this area of philosophy, and the potential of this study in his exploration of what he termed 'Dasein'.

c. *Reason and Thinking*

The existentialist tradition has had a long engagement with reason and its relation to existence. One of the more salient critiques of the existential tradition is against uses of *thinking*. Indeed,

one of the enduring contributions of existentialism has been its critique of what Merleau-Ponty called "high-altitude thinking" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 73). Kierkegaard, as we saw, made similar points when he said that only by committing to one's own subjective truth could one lead a complete human life. Reason, to use Heidegger's word, is one activity available to Dasein, it is not Dasein.

This reflects a common existentialist protest: that we cannot take the traditional standpoint of theoretical detachment and objectivity when it comes to questions about what it *means to be*. This is because, insofar as we exist, we are already caught up in the concrete situation that we find ourselves in. This means that one's existence can be accessed only from 'inside', that is, from within one's own situated, affective, and embodied point of view (Aho, p. 17).

Kierkegaard presented this critique by attempting to express the differences between the impersonal and the objective truths on the one hand and what he calls "The highest truth available for an existing individual" on the other. Accordingly, these latter truths are subjective and are fundamentally uncertain and inaccessible to logic and reason. Thus, according to Kierkegaard, these subjective truths cannot be thought, they can only be *felt* with inward intensity in the course of living one's life (Aho, p. 4).

What motivates this critique of reason is the urgent *primacy of the human experience as it is lived*. This is a shared and unifying concern of the existentialists, even for Nietzsche, Jaspers and Merleau-Ponty, they are insistent on recovering a personal awakening from modes of estrangement, which is of existential significance – be it via religious commitment or the abandonment of our old restrictive views – which Sartre called Bad Faith.

This is in stark contrast to an enduring philosophical assumption – that by adopting a standpoint of theoretical detachment and objectivity we can arrive at a rational explanation of human behavior (Aho, p. 22). This has led to some thinkers reexamining the role and potential of reason in general, at least insofar as it relates to understanding existence. As early as the seventeenth century the French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) introduced the phrase 'logic of the heart' (Logique du coeur) in an attempt to give an account of the affective mystery of human existence that traditional reason and logic could never access (Aho, p. x)

Heidegger would echo a similar claim regarding the relationship of *existence* to *thinking*, writing that "thinking only begins at the point where we have come to know that Reason, glorified for centuries is the most obstinate adversary of thinking" (quoted by Barrett, p. 207). Barrett echoes this point when he writes "Existence and a theory about existence are not the

one and the same, any more than a printed menu is as effective a form of nourishment as an actual meal" (p. 158). Nietzsche echoes the critique on reason when he remarks that the belief that our actions were grounded in rational explanation set in a universe of mechanism, stability, order and control was nothing more than an invention – an intellectual fable of sorts – which we told ourselves to deny how "transient aimless and arbitrary human existence actually is" (Nietzsche, 1954, p. 42).

According to Cooper, the existentialist's claimed that the classical aim of providing fundamental understandings of the world through reason rested on misconceptions regarding the relation between understanding and the world. Cooper notes that the "vehicles of fundamental understanding are not the theories but practical activities and situated moods" (p. 15). Heidegger reflects this when he writes about "'cognition' reaching far too short a way compared with the primordial disclosure belonging to moods" (Heidegger, 1927, p. 134). Before we can cognize the world we must first encounter it, both understandingly and affectively, as a world of things to be embraced, avoided, used, discarded and so on.

This theme is very relevant to authentic existence, as we shall see in the subsequent sections. The pursuit of authentic existence, of subjective existential truths generally, involves a 'putting aside' of reason alone, in the sense of a mind-enclosed thinking substance that can cognate and control the world from its solipsistic mental hideout. In authentic existence, this perspective is cast aside in favor of a pre-reflective mode of being. This is echoed by the point which the writers are striving to make: that when it comes to the concrete concerns of the human situation, reason is inadequate. They argue that we are *taken in* by thoughts, to the point where we confuse our existence (the immediate experience of this moment) with the ideas *presented* to this existence. To my mind, it is very much like treating the images on the cinema screen as real while ignoring the fact that you are looking at the screen itself.

However in stating this I am aware of the issue that, by stressing the limits of reason to understand existence, one may quickly find oneself in what might seem anti-rational or irrational tendencies. This is neither my aim, nor the aim of the philosophers who make these remarks. Kierkegaard does write of himself in his *Journals* that "it was intelligence and nothing else that had to be opposed. Presumably that is why I, who had the job, was armed with an immense intelligence" (Barrett, p. 149). It is easy to read this as an all-out attack on sense or coherency generally. However, this would be a misrepresentation of the existential aim. As I see it, it is not the removal of the faculty or capacity for thinking Kierkegaard was after, but the *attachment* to thinking as the means and measure of all things against which he was opposed.

Kierkegaard would analogously refer to the role of suspending reason in the search of something more existentially inherent in his quote from *The Sickness Unto Death*: “to have faith is precisely to lose one's mind so as to win God”. The word God is fairly loaded, but suffice it to say that Kierkegaard pointed to the attainment of a higher personal truth by the intentional suspense of reason (my contention).

Regarding the limits of reason, Kierkegaard has us note that the founding story of philosophy has Socrates sentenced to death by drinking hemlock, found guilty of “corrupting the youth” and “mocking the gods” by expounding the *limits of knowledge* (Barrett, p. 156-8). Socrates professed himself as the wisest, because at least he knew how little he knew. These aims are shared by Kierkegaard, whose self-imposed task was similar to that of Socrates. Much as the ancient Socrates had played the gadfly for his fellow Athenians, stinging them into awareness of their own ignorance, so Kierkegaard would find his task in raising difficulties for the easy conscience of an age that was smug in the conviction of its own material progress and intellectual enlightenment (Barrett, p. 157).

The debate regarding passion and reason, between pre-reflective claims to knowledge and disembodied thinking substances has seen itself expressed throughout philosophical history, not only in the classical A priori/a posteriori manifestation. The etymology of philosophy itself reflects a certain ambiguity, as it can either be interpreted as the love of wisdom or the love of knowledge. It seems to me that the existentialists take preference towards the former rather than the latter.

The theme regarding the vision of philosophy seemingly goes back to the beginning, as Socrates and Kierkegaard’s approach is in stark contrast to another Greek thinker, Parmenides, who had stated that “it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be”. According to Parmenides, “what cannot be thought cannot be real. If existence cannot be thought, but only lived, then reason has no other recourse than to leave existence out of its picture of reality” (Barrett, p. 158-9). Kierkegaard would find himself opposed to similar remarks in the form of the idealist system of Hegel, who claimed to have knowledge of the whole of reality.

Incidentally, there is a lot to be said about the relation between thinking and existence, both for the existentialists and philosophy generally. Barrett in particular seemed acutely intent on exploring this subject. However a further engagement with the critique of reason would take us too far afield from authenticity. Suffice it to say that much of what motivated the existentialist response was a reply to overreliance of thinking. Barrett notes that “certain German forerunners

of Kierkegaard had also attempted a critique of the intelligence, and that earlier opponents of rationalism, men like Hamann and the later Schelling had spoken out forcefully for the instinctive, the intuitive and the mythical against a time that seemed no longer able to understand such things" (Barrett, p. 150).

Because we cannot come to grips with the ontological aspect of the human being through theoretical detachment, the question then become how to gain a methodological access to human existence if not through disinterested reason. The answer to this is twofold, first it involves paying attention the phenomenological first-person perspective, and secondly it involves viewing humans not as disconnected thinkers but as *Being-in-the-world.*

d. *Being in the World*

As opposed to the view of humans as disembodied rational observers, seeking a vantage point on time and space from the perspective of infinity, or a Gods-eye-view as Plato described, the existential phenomenologists instead referred to human beings as *Being-in-the-world.* That is to say, insofar as we are caught up in the world, we embody a pre-reflective understanding that enables us to handle things and move through the world in a smooth and seamless way. Insofar as we exist, we are already caught up in the concrete situation that we find ourselves in (Aho, p.17).

This means that in the flow of everyday life, our actions are usually unaccompanied by mental intentions (Aho, p. 46) and any reflective awareness of our perceptions and actions always presupposes a non-reflective, non-self-referential way of being-in-the-world (Dreyfus, 1991, 54-59). This non-self-referential way of being to which Dreyfus refers is, to my mind, indicative of authentic existence. Existentialists are not denying that deliberate, self-referential actions take place; they are simply making it clear that every day and for the most part they do not. In our ordinary activities we are not thinking about what we are doing because we already embody an understanding of the relational context that we are involved in (Aho, p. 46).

One of the core insights of being-in-the-world is that much of our ordinary activity can be described and understood without appealing to a self-referential mind, as it is largely through the embodied, pre-reflective acts that our projects, roles, identities and equipment make sense to us (Aho, p. 47). Under such a Heideggerian/existentialist view, the opposite account of the human being as a self-enclosed mind set over and against objects is 'mistaken' because we are,

first and foremost, a situated way of being that is already engaged in contexts of meaning, and it is this fluid engagement that allows things to matter us in the ways that they do (p. 47).

Aho describes the workings of pre-reflective engagement when he points out that he does not, for example, first stare at a computer and reflect on its objective properties before he uses it. He notes that "as a professor involved in the acts and practices of the academic world, I already inhabit an understanding of the computer in terms of its practical function and use. My hands simply begin to press the keys, with my eyes leveled at the screen and my elbows resting on the desk. This kind of oriented and purposive activity is preformed pre-reflectively, without the accompaniment of mental representation" (p. 36).

The state of being-in-the-world is similarly described by Sartre. As Aho notes, in my everyday acts and practices, there is no 'inner/outer' distinction because I am already involved with and directed toward intra-worldly things (p. 29). And as Sartre says, when I am late for work and chasing the bus down the street, I do not encounter myself as a bundle of desires and beliefs in a mental container; rather I encounter my self as "running-towards-the-bus" (Sartre, 1957, p. 49).

e. *Existence as problematic*

> "*As beings who are self-conscious, our existence is always penetrated by feelings of uncertainty and doubt; we experience anguish in the face of our own death, in the radical contingency of our choices, and the sheer arbitrariness that anything, including ourselves, exists at all"* (Aho, p. 22).

As we have seen, humans exist in such a way that precedes any essence. As such, this leaves us with existences which are *problematic* for us, as most of the existentialists have been hard pressed to point out. The existentialists keep insisting on the lived experiences as it currently is, encouraging us to remove ourselves from our dogmatic assumptions about ourselves and the world so as to recover our pre-reflective authentic states.

In Sartre, for example, we find the description of humans as *condemned to be free* (Sartre, 1946, p. 34). Since our existence is problematic for us, it requires us to *engage with* it on a moment-to-moment basis. This can be great if what one experiences is pleasurable, and horrible if what one experiences is un-pleasurable. Heidegger conceived of our being, which he called Dasein, as relational. The term Dasein is now so loaded with philosophical weight and varying

interpretations that the genius of employing it – using a word completely unloaded with philosophical baggage – is wearing off. However what Heidegger attempted to say was to my mind rather simple. That in living out our lives, we always already care: for each of us, our being is always at issue and this is made concrete in the specific actions we undertake and the roles we enact (Stanford, *Authenticity*, section 3.1).

For Heidegger, our being is one of *care* (*Sorge*). While he does not take this to mean that we are constantly worrying about things, or paying solicitous attention to them, the term reminds us that we are creatures for whom the kind of life to be lived matters, and is an 'issue' (Cooper, p. 74).

As touched upon, existence is not a cumbersome predicate which mean spirited existentialists want to force upon us to cause us harm or unnecessary malcontent, rather it is an inescapable fact from which we cannot escape – try as we might. Existence, for the existentialists, refers only to the kind of existence enjoyed by human beings (Cooper, p. 4). Human existence is also to be understood as the kind of existence which has a *concern* for itself. Kierkegaard famously said that human beings not only exists but is "infinitely interested in existing". Or as Heidegger noted, humans are such that their being is in question for them, an issue for them. Cooper notes that existence is a constant striving and is always prey to a sense of *Angst* which reveals that, for the most part, it is lived *inauthentically* and in *Bad Faith* (p.9).

This view of human beings as inauthentic emerges from Heidegger's view of what it is to be a human being. Heidegger's perspective on human beings – Dasein – sees humans as 'relation of being' and not as solitary subjects. This view echoes Kierkegaard's description of the self as *relational and in conflict*. On Heidegger's account, Dasein is not a type of object among others in the totality of what is on hand in the universe. Instead, human being is a "relation of being" (Stanford, *Authenticity*, section 3.1).

Human beings, thus, has an existence which is inescapable. It is *their own*. Despite their best efforts to conform to a society, becoming part of a herd or "falling asleep" to their own unconscious mental structures, human beings *are* in the world. Kierkegaard captures this beautifully in his 1843 work *Repetition*:

> "*You stick your finger in the ground to smell what country you're in. I stick my finger into existence – and there is no smell at all. Where am I? What is that supposed to mean – in the world? What does the word mean? Who has lured me into all this and then left me standing here? Who am I? How did I get into the world? Why was I never asked?*

Why was I not taught the rules and customs here but just struck into the ranks as though I had been bought from some traveling slave-trader? How come I am a participant in this huge enterprise known as Reality? Why should I be a participant? Is there no choice in the matter? And if there is no choice, then where is the manager – there is something I want to say to him. Is there no manager? Then to whom shall I address my complaint? (Ferguson, 2013, p. 10, quoting Kierkegaard, 1843).

f. *Overcoming Dualism*

The view in this paper is in agreement with a common existentialist claim, that to be in authentic states involves dissolution of the sense of being a separate subject that is alone, alienated and isolated. One of the most salient aspects of existentialism is the onslaught on Cartesian notions of self or subject, and on the dualisms which they inspire (Cooper, p. 16). Existentialism is, in part, directed to the overcoming of those dualisms" (p.13).

In a more passionately, personally engaged way, Barrett writes about man, modernity and alienation, saying that the whole problematic of existentialism unfolds form the historical situation, which he marks as "Alienation and estrangement; a sense of the basic fragility and contingency of human life; the importance of reason confronted with the depths of existence; the threat of Nothingness, and the solitary and unsheltered condition of the individual" (Barrett, p. 36). While this is stark, it is also a very accurate representation of the effect of *moods* – both cultural and personal – with which existentialism deals with a great deal.

I think it accurate to view Existentialism, on a whole, as deeply committed to the *overcoming* of dualisms, especially the dualism of subject/object and the 'gap' between our inner life and the world. Aho writes that one of the great legacies of existentialism is its dismantling of the subject/object metaphysics that 'has been largely axiomatic to the Western worldview since the time of Descartes' (p. 149), and Sartre writes in the early pages of *Being and Nothingness* that the "dualism of being and appearance is no longer entitled to any legal status within philosophy" (Sartre, 1943, p. 1, introduction).

Existentialism is in a certain sense practical, because it recognizes that getting lost in seemingly endless debates over intellectual concepts distracts from the rather immediate problematic of our direct personal experience. The aim of overcoming philosophical dualisms is not a 'mere' theoretical exercise for the existentialists. Many attempts had been made to overthrow Cartesian

dualisms prior. However where existentialist differed from many other critics of Cartesian dualisms was in relating the overcoming of that tradition to the conduct of an *authentic life* (Cooper, p. viii).

When it comes to living a life dedicated to overcoming of dualisms, I suspect existentialists owe a great deal to Socrates, who, as Cooper writes, is for many *the* philosopher, not because of theories he taught, but because of his enquiring, honest, courageous life. Overcoming dualities inherent to man as a means to uncover authenticity suggests the notions that there are *kinds of understandings* which "transform a person's stance towards reality, and hence his life" (p. 21). With his famous dictum of "*Know Thyself*", Socrates certainly gave the go-ahead for existential self-inquiries.

The existentialists maintained that the overcoming of alienation could be made a return to a pre-reflective mode of being, which Heidegger called being-in-the-world. The picture of man as fundamentally a being in the world, engaged in a pre-reflective engagement with that world directs philosophical attention away from a dualistic picture of a mind-enclosed substance or *cogito*. For this reason, it is to my mind a fair assessment that existential philosophy has been concerned with the uncovering of existentially authentic ways of being as a means of overcoming the duality imposed by mind. As I see it, the duality is experienced as *alienation*, which take the form of problematic thoughts.

g. *Selfhood*

Historically, formal technical terms like ontology and being had varied, complicated and contrary uses to them. While the same holds true for existential terms – like existence, being in the world, moods, *angst*, death, subjective truth, alienation, dread, facticity, freedom, transcendence, absurdity and of course authenticity – it is not just *terms* which are shared by existentialists, *themes* also have a strong undercurrent thought the existentialist writings. The existentialist canon has, for example, had a long and enduring engagement with the theme of *no underlying permanent self*. This is particularly found in Nietzsche, who viewed selves as a kind of *convenient fiction*. The view on selfhood, especially the perspective regarding a disconnected thinking *cogito* have been the interest, not only of both existentialist and phenomenologists, but contemporary and historical thinker's voice similar sentiments. Philosophers like Hume, and contemporary figures like the late Derek Parfit and Daniel Dennett all share critiques on the view that there was a fixed self. The French phenomenologist

philosopher Paul Ricoeur explicitly explored a narrative theory of selfhood, and refers to the engagement with selfhood as "*Philosophies of the cogito*".

On the existentialist view, selfhood is either understood as relational (Kierkegaard), already previously engaged in the world (Heidegger), or without any guiding or rule-giving essence (Sartre). Aho writes that the existentialists developed a conception of selfhood that dissolved the substance-centered view of the self, views held by Descartes or Plato (Aho, p. 49). Classical substance ontology tended to regard the self as an encapsulated mind or will that was separate and distinct from objects (p. 49), but what the existentialists are arguing is that this view ignores the fact that in our everyday involvements we are *already bound up* in meaningful situations. Given this account, the standard view of the self as a detached cogito is a mistake that assumes the existence of an independent mental sphere that is somehow detached from the outer world. For the existentialists, there is no 'inner/outer' distinction (Aho, p. 49).

The *theme* of no fixed self means that, on the one hand, existentialism can be described as a reactionary, or at least contrary movement in philosophy, away from an isolated Cartesian subject and into the direct experience of the lived human life. For Nietzsche, the self was a 'fiction' which was "invented by people who required something inside others to blame, and inside themselves to go on to an afterlife" (Nietzsche, The Will to Power, 1968, section 485 and The Genealogy of Morals, 1968, part 2).

As we shall see later, I consider the relationship between selfhood, inquiry and authentic existence as intimate, and relateed to the notion regarding the Cartesian *cogito* or "I" as ontologically fundamental.

h. *Alienation*

A theme which is shared by nearly all the existentialist and is relevant to this paper is the theme of *alienation*. There has been a vivid and acute description in existentialist philosophy and literature, about alienation and its related subjective feelings of finitude and despair. Almost without exception, the existentialists all dealt with alienation, although sometimes accompanied by or described in their own words – words more in tune with their specific message – such as *absurdity* (Camus) *nausea* (Sartre), *anxiety* (Heidegger) and *angst* (Kierkegaard).

Much like different doctors might offer different treatments or prognoses based on the same diagnosis, the existentialists all agree upon this central feature of their 'doctrine' – Man is

alienated, from himself, from his society and from whatever his authentic nature, his 'inner truth' is. Alienation is in one way so salient a feature of existentialism, that the movement might justifiably have been named "*alienationism*" (my contention). Barrett notes that alienation and estrangement constitute "the whole problematic of existentialism". Much like all the thinkers have offered different approaches to overcoming alienation (if, indeed, they offered one), my thesis is that by *authentic existence* is meant precisely a state free of alienation. This might even suffice as a formal definition. Alienation points towards self-deception, a state which the existentialists make clear that it is possible to be *shaken out of* (Aho, p. 81).

The moods which existentialists talk about all share the common feature of being able to pull us out of self-deception, to pull us out of inauthentic being. Aho writes that to the extent which we conform to the ready-made identities of the public world "we are alienated and inauthentic". By this he means that we disown ourselves by simply going along with the crowd, never having to face up to the truth about who and what we really are. What are we really?" (Aho, p. 62).

Cooper proposes an interesting perspective, namely that the most serious question with which philosophy has to deal is that of alienation in its various forms (Cooper, p. 8). According to Cooper, the entire history of western philosophy, especially epistemology, has revolved around the central topic of alienation. In his reasoning, the problem of self and world, and the problem how to obtain certain knowledge of the outside world is one in a larger context of alienation. Cooper writes "that neither puzzlement nor awe, neither a thirst for knowledge nor a craving for clarity has been the abiding inspiration for philosophy. Rather this has been the perpetual threat posed by the sense that men are hopelessly alienated from their world" (p, 23).

This is an unusual perspective, which Cooper is aware off, writing that he can hardly intend in a few paragraphs to rewrite the history of philosophy. While probably incorrect, what it points towards is an important perspective in my opinion. The theme of overcoming alienation offers us not just a unifying perspective of philosophical traditional inquiries, but also a shared goal: that of returning to a less-conflicted state of being. It hardly seems too broad a claim to make that philosophy aims for clarity so as to make better sense of the world.

Alienation can be seen as a feature of the modern world view, a feature which has been shared by the existentialist thinkers, even way before Kierkegaard. Aho goes back to Pascal, and notes that he experienced the new mechanistic and de-animated world of science not with optimism, but with dread (Aho, p. 6). Particularly in his *Pensées,* where Pascal gives a rather striking description of the modern world, stripped of any trace of divinity or overarching meaning. Aho

remarks that it is descriptions like those of Pascal's which brings attention to *alienation* as coming to the fore in European thought:

> *"This is what I see and what troubles me. I look around in every direction and all I see is darkness. Nature has nothing to offer me that does not give rise to doubt and anxiety. If I saw no sign there of a Divinity I should decide on a negative solution: if I saw signs of a Creator everywhere I should peacefully settle down in the faith. But, seeing too much to deny and enough to affirm, I am in a pitiful state… The eternal silence of these infinite space fills me with dread"* (Pascal, 1670, this English translation 1995, p. 201, 429).

Whether one shares Pascal's sentiments or not, descriptions such as these has found recurring expressions during the modern era. Take for example the words of Nietzsche, who wrote about the 'darkening of the era'.

> *"'Where has God gone?' [the madman] cried, 'I'll tell you where! We've killed him – you and I! We are all his murderers! … Aren't we wandering as if through an endless nothing? Isn't empty space breathing upon us? Hasn't it gotten colder? Isn't night and more night continuously coming upon us? Don't lanterns have to be lit in the morning? … God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him!'* (Nietzsche, 1882, p. 125).

It has been said that no philosopher was more tuned into the upheavals of modernity than Nietzsche, who "vividly conveyed the frightening sense of abandonment and forlornness in the modern age, where moral absolutes can no longer serve as a source of security and meaning for our lives" (Aho, p. 9). The point is put forth by Barrett that what is sometimes overlooked in philosophy is the *sheer struggle* for everyday living voiced by the existentialists. Less concerned about the ultimate nature of essences and more concerned with making it to the next morning. Camus is especially poignant in this respect when he describes existence both as alienated and problematic: *"Sometimes, carrying on, just carrying on, is the superhuman achievement"* (Camus, *The Fall*, 1956).

Interestingly, the existentialist's concept of self-estrangement is virtually equivalent to what Heidegger calls 'inauthenticity' (Cooper, p. 101). As Heidegger puts it, "when *Dasein*'s ownmost potentially-for-being is hidden from it, this alienation *closes off Dasein* from its authenticity" (p. 178). Similarly, Sartre's authenticity is the 'self-recovery of being' which is lost during self-estrangement.

Self-estrangement for the existentialists is intrinsically tied to an oft-explored theme, that of existential *angst*. Kierkegaard devoted more than one book to it, and Heidegger stated that angst and anxiety "provided the phenomenal basis for explicitly gasping *Dasein*'s primordial totality of Being" (1927, p. 182). Heidegger and Sartre's debt to Kierkegaard is well considered, as Cooper notes, saying "both Sartre and Heidegger were exponents of existential phenomenology, and both were concerned [with addressing] the issues of human existence, such as *Angst* and authenticity, bequeathed by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche" (p. 198).

While it was Kierkegaard's original term of *Angst* which influenced the later existentialists, the different writers refer to the subjective feeling of alienation in their own ways. Sartre called it *anguish*, Karl Jaspers referred to it as 'metaphysical fear' and Heidegger referred to it as anxiety or dread, depending on the German translation. The importance of *Angst* for the existentialist's are that since they describe everyday life as lived in bad faith, sunk in the "they" and under the sway of the "Other", they presupposed an authentic existence from which average, everyday life is a 'fall' (Cooper, p. 127-128).

Having explored in brief the nature of alienation, we now turn towards the existentialists thoughts on how this feeling is to be overcome.

i. *Waking up from the natural attitude*

> "*The story is told by Kierkegaard of the absent-minded man so abstracted from his own life that he hardly known he exists until, one fine morning, he wakes up to find himself dead".* (Barrett, p. 1)

The realization of the unexamined nature of one's life is another shared feature of the thinkers. I have, during the course of my research, taken to referring to all the different descriptions collectively as waking up from *the natural attitude* – a term which originates in the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938). What the existentialist's urged was *waking up* from this unexamined approach to life as a means to uncover authentic existence. In this sense it can be seen as a Socratic and Aristotelean aim, in the sense of urgently tending to examining and *knowing ourselves* in order to *live the good life*.

In Kierkegaard's *The Sickness Unto Death,* Kierkegaard outlines a step-by-step progression towards what he called the 'crisis', a state where one wakes up from dogmatic assumptions to the inefficiency of their unexamined beliefs to give meaning and growth to one's life. The move

towards a crisis of one's unexamined assumptions came from a state in which the sufferer was not even aware of their own sickness of the spirit, a sickness which he called the sickness unto death (Kierkegaard, 1989 p. 3). Sartre named this unexamined state living in Bad Faith (French: *mauvaise foi*) and the realization of one's unexamined attitude and awakening from this state was referred to as realizing one's radical freedom.

As a philosopher, Sartre was very attentive to the moments when the world lost its meaning and we started to notice how weird everything is. He was very attentive to what he called the "absurdity of the world". In states of opening and separation from the narrative conformity of our natural attitude we were acutely reminded that the logic and usage we ascribe to thing is arbitrary – nothing but constructs in our mind to help navigate the world. While these stabilizing assumptions might be in some sense useful to us for enjoying our day-to-day routines, they can quickly become prisons of habit which we use to fall asleep to, consciously or unconsciously. As it plays out, generally once such a system of understanding the world has been put sufficiently in place, we are able to live our lives more and more on "autopilot" (my term). The aim of casting off our unexamined notions is not to dismiss intellectual pursuits, but to return to and concentrate on what is already pre-given in the moment - the lived experience of the individual – and not "get lost in thought", as it were.

However, as the existentialists in general are hard pressed to point out, this way of operating in the world has several shortcomings, and when we are confronted with the arbitrary and insufficient nature of our mental constructs we are usually struck by a sense of confusion, or even angst. For Sartre, such moments point us to us that we are free – sometimes terrifyingly so. However, as I see it, the consequences of awakening from the natural attitude of the world into its absurdity is not necessarily terrifying. As Sartre points out, it can be immensely liberating. It permits us the opportunity to no longer be bound to what we thought was our 'essence', but to encounter existence as a freeing and self-defining enterprise. In other words, things do not have to be the way that they are. While Sartre used the term *Angoisse* (Anguish) to describe this, this to my mind rather reflects the predictable initial reaction to waking up from the natural attitude rather than how it persistently feels once discarded.

For this reason, our freedom to make of our existence what we want – Sartre meant we should not live in what I called autopilot, and what he called "Bad Faith". We are, for Sartre, in Bad Faith when we shut our eyes to other ways of thinking and persist in what Husserl called the natural attitude. Insisting persistently that we have to live our life the way it is currently lived because "that's just the way it is" is a prime example of living in Sartrean bad faith.

Kierkegaard, meanwhile, similarly wanted us to give up attachments to traditional systems of behavior. He was particularly skeptical of the claim that the institutions of society – the state, church and marriage – permanently equipped life with a purpose or meaning. His critique was especially salient against the established Danish church and its systems of religious norms prescribed to offer enough spiritual guidance to "patch up" alienation but leave us ultimately unsatisfied and unaware until it was too late. As seen by his use of the term *Angest* (angst) in his 1844 book *The Concept of Anxiety,* Kierkegaard wanted to illustrate the infinitude of choices we face, and the impossibility introduced in ever choosing one of them wisely. We see clear echoes of Sartre's concept of Anguish at our radical freedom.

As is the case with most of the existentialists, Kierkegaard's diagnosis of what the problem was (in part our unconscious attachment to the natural attitude) is a lot more employable than the prescribed remedy for it. Much like Kierkegaard espoused surrender to God via the archetypical figure of Christ, and Sartre preaching the near utopian promises of Marxism, their diagnosis of the problem we face is potent and relevant despite the quality and validity of their proposed solutions. Some existential thinkers, like Camus, offers no seeming solution or "way out", but instead invites or encourages us to heroically embrace life's seeming lack of pre given meaning and live our lives with passion and fury at high speed.

Heidegger similarly diagnosed human beings with certain sicknesses of the soul. Primary among these is that we have forgotten to notice that we are *alive*. Barrett echoes this when he writes that the estrangement from Being itself is Heidegger's central theme (Barrett, p. 207). To put this into Heideggerian terms, performing ontological inquiry is one of the modes of being available to Dasein. According to Heidegger, what we were running away from was the opposite of being, what he called *Das nichts* (the nothing). What was important were the moments when we regained a sense of astuteness to the oneness of being and overcame our sense of alienation. Heidegger introduces the term *Geworfenheit* (*thrownness*) to indicate how we are caught up in a world, thrown forward into being. To my mind, I can picture that Heidegger attempted to point out the *pace* at which our lives unfolded and how rapidly we are pulled in by the sway of our inauthentic tendencies.

Interestingly, it was by realizing and understanding our *throwness* that we were able to rise above it. In so doing, we could move from inauthentic modes of being (*uneigentlichkeit*) to authentic modes of being (*eigentlichkeit*) (Heidegger, 1927). However, while asleep to the natural attitude we are unable to uncover our authentic existence and we remain alienated and divorced from our being. For Heidegger, one aspect of this involved succumbing to the societal

and social norms presented to us, which he called the '*they-self*'. As I see it, this reminds us of the urgency of waking up from our unconscious beliefs, especially in the face of our own impending deaths.

Both Heidegger and Kierkegaard made references to the theme of our death, as something which informed both the temporal dimension of our lives, and that our lives is irredeemably our own, and which we must face ourselves. No one can die for us, as it were. To keep this is mind – that all societal prescriptions are indeed not for the benefit of our authentic nature but for the role we play in society – is what the perspective of mortality can help remind us of.

Regarding death, Albert Camus posed in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* that *"There is only one really serious philosophical question, and that is suicide"*. While seemingly dramatic, by *suicide* Camus was not referring only or explicitly to physical suicide. He also put forth the notion of *intellectual* or philosophical suicide, which involved an ignorance of appeals to question what is given, falling asleep to our dogmatic assumptions. The likeness to suicide is interesting, as it points out the urgency to which existentialists believed the task of owning up to our lives involved.

What all these thinkers point at is inauthenticity, a separation of man's attunement with his own subjective truth, his authentic existence. As I see it, and as the existentialist's remind us, the first and initial step to uncovering authentic existence is waking up from our unexamined life, the everyday complacency and our self-deception by disclosing the fundamental freedom and finitude of our situation. Doing this allows us the opportunity to be honest with ourselves and own up to our lives with renewed passion, intensity and focus.

7. *Husserl and the origin of existential phenomenology*

Waking up from our previous ways of thinking about ourselves and the world is an often described first step on the existential journey. To my mind, the ability that humans display which the existentialists refer to – that of waking up from an alienated state – points to the fact that there is something to awaken *to*. In other words, we can only be inauthentic because it is in obstruction to something pre given and authentic. While some interpreters of existentialism generally, like Cooper, have described the end stage of this 'awakening' with the description of

being-in-the-world as a radically free, ethically engaged individual, I maintain that the existentialists themselves, and certainly Husserl, points to a deeper ontic layer of existence, which our inauthentic structures are contingent upon. This underlying, pre-reflective reality is what I mean by authentic existence. The presence of this underlying stillness and a methodological approach to it has, as I see it, been systematically explored by Husserl and those who came after him. In this section I wish to explore the relationship between Husserl and his contribution to authentic existence.

One source from which existentialism derives its name is that in in its mature form it is existential *phenomenology*. In order to understand how the search for authenticity comes about as a means of existential *inquiry*, it is important to understand how phenomenology operates. I consider understanding Husserl to be relevant to understanding authenticity, a claim which Cooper agrees with, writing that "we should not ignore existentialist echoes of Husserl's conviction that philosophy is no mere intellectual exercise, but a procedure of self-discovery and self-liberation as well. […] the idea that the philosopher is engaged in a kind of withdrawal that is also a movement of freedom is an important theme in existentialism" (p. 47-48).

Barrett similarly consider Husserl as relevant, remarking that "by insisting that the philosopher must cast aside preconceptions in attending to the actual concrete data of experience, Husserl flung wide the doors of philosophy to the rich existential content that his more radical followers were to quarry" (Barrett, p. 12).

Some of this research is based on prior research of mine on Husserl's relevance to existentialism, which was submitted as part of the preparatory research article to this project for the course *Research Project in Philosophy* (FIL314) supervised by Franz Knappik. In that paper I made use of Danish philosopher Dan Zahavi' 2003 book *Husserl's Phenomenology*. I have expanded upon that research significantly in this paper – supplementing with various approaches and readings both from research papers and review articles like the Stanford Encyclopedia and Zahavi's 2017 book *Husserl's Legacy*.

a. *The early Husserl*

It is certainly the case that if Kierkegaard was the father of existential philosophy then Husserl was the father of phenomenology. While not the first to coin the term 'phenomena', and not the first of Brentano's students to expand upon the thesis regarding intentionality of consciousness,

Husserl did throughout his life and works found the school and methodology of phenomenology.

Beginning with an interest in formal logic and mathematics, Husserl's philosophy initially started from a rejection of a position known as psychologism. This critique was inspired by what was to be Husserl's overarching aim, the quest for certain knowledge. Psychologism maintained that psychology was to be the founding science upon which all other sciences, including logic, mathematics, philosophy and the natural sciences could be built. Cooper has us note that the German '*Wissenschaft'* (Norwegian: '*vitenskap'*), unlike the English 'science' can apply to such disciplines as history and philosophy as well as the natural sciences (p. 40) could designate nearly all areas of human knowledge. While Husserl initially wrote favorably about psychologism, he was made by his own studies and contemporary critique to change his position. The classical story is that it was Frege's intense critique which led him to change, but as Zahavi points out this is in dispute by other Husserl scholars like Mohanty (1977), Bernet, Kern, and Marbach (1989) (Zahavi, 2003, p. 148).

In his first major work, *Logische Untersuchungen* (1900-1901), Husserl wrote passionately against psychologism, and called for a distinction between the *ideal* and the *real* which Husserl held that the empirical science of psychology overlooked when trying to ground logic and mathematics in human brains. Husserl's distinction between the two is in many ways similar to the German philosopher Gottlob Frege's (1848 – 1925) distinction. However, unlike the Fregean critique of psychologism, Husserl believed it to be necessary to follow up on this criticism by way of an analysis of the *intentionality* of consciousness, and this interest in subjectivity and the first-person perspective is not shared by Frege (Zahavi, 2003, p. 11).

Zahavi notes that the initial distinction Husserl draws between the real and the ideal is so fundamental and urgent that in his criticism of psychologism he occasionally "approaches a kind of (logical) Platonism". Husserl responded to the critique of himself as being a Platonist, point out that he was engaged in a defense of the validity of ideality and was not trying to argue for the existence of ideal objects in a separate supernatural realm. In short, he was advocating a logical and an ontological investigation into ideality (Zahavi, 2003, p. 148).

Psychologism, Husserl maintained, could only be truly overcome if it was possible to present an alternative account of the status of logic and objectivity. In order to do so, it was necessary to *pay direct attention* to the *ideal objects themselves* and not merely make do with empty and speculative hypotheses. Husserl thus called for a return "*to the things themselves",* which was

to be somewhat of a founding slogan for phenomenology. This involved an emphasis on *direct experience* (Zahavi, 2003, p. 11-12). Husserl's move here sees him move dramatically away from any association with Platonism, as he now champions for the understanding of the direct appearance of noumena (the way things appear) in awareness as opposed to idealist access to special realms.

For Husserl, the return to the things themselves meant that if we wanted to clarify the true status of ideal logical principles or real physical objects too for that matter, we had to turn toward the *subjectivity that experiences* these principles and objects. One can already begin to see the appearance of direct appeals to personal experience as a critique to the stalemate of problems presented by the technique of disinterested reason. Concerns which Kierkegaard has voiced years prior. I doubt Husserl himself was motivated by Kierkegaard, but his switch to direct experience was an essential historical turning point for existential thinking.

Husserl explored his return to the things themselves by making use of the *intentionality* of consciousness, which simply states that consciousness is always awareness *of something* – what it is directed or intended towards – and never a thing in itself. As an aside, according to the Stanford encyclopedia article on Consciousness and Intentionality, there is a difference between phenomenological perspectives and intentionality. For example, to say you are in a state that is phenomenally conscious is to say that you have an *experience*, or a state there is *something it is like for you* to be in (Stanford, Consciousness and Intentionality, introduction). Intentionality, however, has to do with "the *directedness*, 'aboutness' or reference of *mental states*". As an example of mental states, the article names that one may think *of* or *about* something. For the contemporary discussions into intentionality, the definitions include – and is sometimes seen as equivalent to – what is called "mental representation" (Stanford, *Consciousness and Intentionality*, introduction).

Husserl, however, labeled the units of consciousness *intentional acts* or *intentional experiences*, since "they always represent something *as* something, thus exhibiting what Brentano called intentionality" (Stanford, Edmund Husserl, section 2). Sometimes intentionality is described as the *nothingness of consciousness* by the later Husserl (my contention).

Regarding intentionality, Aho writes that phenomenologists agree that all experience has an intentional structure, that is, my experience is always *about* or *of* something; it is always *directed toward* an object (p. 29). He further remarks that this entails a rejection of the Cartesian view of the self as an encapsulated mental receptacle of 'inner' thoughts, desires and beliefs

that is somehow separate and distinct from 'outer' objects. The relation of Husserl and Cartesianism is complicated historically, with some commenters like Barrett casting Husserl as a Cartesian outright. Others, like Aho frames Husserl as a direct opponent to Descartes' position. A full analysis of just the historical interpretations of Husserl could fill a book. Suffice it to say that Husserl is not universally considered either as a Cartesian or a non-Cartesian by contemporary Husserl scholars. Some have even cast Sartre as a Cartesian. So loaded is the term, and so open to interpretation are the meanings that it would be outright overwhelming to present all the camps. Suffice it to say I agree with Aho, Cooper, Zahavi and others who view the position of the late Husserl as opposed to Cartesian mind/body dualism.

Regarding the mind/body split – one of the dualisms heavily critiqued and dismissed by the existentialists – the early Husserl similarly rejects questions as to whether there is an external reality on the basis that such are *metaphysical questions* which has no place in epistemology. Note that the question of an external reality was a pressing philosophical concern at the time, derived from the skeptical tradition. Zahavi points out that in Husserl's early phenomenology he did not want to commit himself to a specific metaphysics, be it a realism or idealism. Instead, he wanted to address formal questions of a more Kantian flavor, particularly questions concerning the condition of possibility for knowledge (Zahavi, 2003, p. 8).

The initial phenomenology developed in *Logische Untersuchungen* was a purely descriptive phenomenology of the way things *presented* themselves to consciousness. In other words, the study not of whether they were real in any ontological sense, but how they came to us in their own right. With this method, Husserl wanted to study in a scientific manner the ways objects in consciousness yielded themselves to knowledge, or yielded themselves to *meaning* as some interpreters prefer (see Cooper and Stanford, Husserl).

Husserl's aim was not merely to explore objects, but to seek an ontologically secure basis upon which to base certain knowledge and science, and this motivation was to persist through all the evolutions of his phenomenology (Zahavi, 2003, p. 7). Because Husserl initially wanted phenomenology to serve as a foundation for science, based on the indubitable *certainty* of consciousness he similarly saw phenomenology as a 'strict science'. The aim of ontological security aim was in part a *response to* the skeptical tradition, notably from Hume and Descartes (Stanford, *Edmund Husserl*, section 1) and not a shared aim (my contention).

Note that the certainty os consciousness is given irrespective of the ontological status of the objects presented in consciousness. Whether the world, or anything for that matter (to give

Descartes his due) is real or not, the fact remain *that* you are conscious of them. As such, this could prove a certain grounding for all further knowledge. Descartes might have been able to doubt the world, himself and everything else, but he could not doubt that he doubted, he could not doubt that existence occurred, since doubt required existence. For Husserl, whether we doubt the ontology of the world, or ourselves, or a higher being which confers certainty, the fact remain that *consciousness is occurring*. Even if what is presented in consciousness is completely and utterly ontological fabrication, the fact remains that we are conscious of it (my contention). In a way this has parallels to the point I made about existence precedes essence. Because it is the case that both consciousness and existence are predicates which presentation or the existence of a world depends on, the certainty of the fact of their occurrence is at least proven – by virtue of the fact that they occur – whether or not their contents are true (my contention). While this could lead us to the question of *what* or *who* these objects are presented to, Husserl himself did not express such concerns in his early writings.

In response to the problems posed by skepticism, such as the existence of the external world, or the epistemological problem of certain knowledge generally, Husserl's wanted phenomenology to serve as a firm grounding upon which to ground certain knowledge, like necessary logical truths and mathematical certainty. The problem of the existence of an external world entails that when we are aware of objects – anything from lamps, to chairs, or our own limbs – the question of skepticism was how can we be certain that we are aware off *really exists? Out there, in the real world?* This is what is known as the classical problem of skepticism regarding the external world. Unlike Descartes' methodological doubt which sought to question the existence of the external world, Husserl's methodology does not involve questioning beliefs in the external world, but to set it out of action. Disconnect it, as it were (Cooper, p. 41).

Husserl was extremely cautious not to make any metaphysical commitments in his early phenomenology, either to idealism or realism. In a way this also applies to his analysis of consciousness. He is interested in its mechanism of action, its structure of intentionality and leaves aside the metaphysical claim that consciousness is contingent on human beings. Zahavi reflects that, for the early Husserl, "phenomenology was supposed to be neither more nor less than a faithful description of that which appears (be it subjective acts or worldly objects), and should, as a consequence, avoid metaphysical and scientific postulates or speculations" (Zahavi, 2003, p. 13-14).

While his aim of seeking a secure foundation remained the same throughout his thinking, Husserl eventually came to realize the insufficiency of a purely descriptive phenomenology and instead turned towards what he called a transcendental phenomenology in his 1913 work *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie undphänomenologischen Philosophie* (*Ideen 1*) (Zahavi, 2003, p. 42).

b. *The Natural Attitude*

In *Ideen 1,* Husserl introduced what he called the *natural attitude*. The "natural attitude" refers to the state characterized by naïve acceptance of several metaphysical assumptions, such as the unexamined position regarding the ontological status or nature of objects in consciousness. For Husserl, one of the most obvious assumption we tended to make in the natural attitude was our implicit belief in the existence of a mind-, experience-, and theory-independent reality. Regardless of how obvious and natural the assumptions might seem, Husserl insisted that it was philosophically unacceptable to take the validity of these beliefs for granted. As a response to the concern about whether those objects are fundamentally real or not, Husserl urged us not to dogmatically assume the validity of these beliefs.

Instead of being asleep in our own natural attitude, Husserl wanted us to 'bracket', or suspend the naïve belief in the way we think of things. He called the suspension of the natural attitude *Epoché*, a Greek word first used by Pyrrho of Elis. This was done in order to focus the investigation on *the ways objects present themselves to consciousness*, regardless of their ontological status. The bracketing procedure entailed a suspension of our natural inclinations, to forego conclusions regarding previous beliefs regarding what was taken for granted, for example the world – one's natural attitude. It was not his aim to instantly get rid of the attitude. Instead Husserl maintained that we should keep the attitude, so as to be able to investigate it, but bracket its *validity*. Zahavi notes that the Epoché entails *a change of attitude* towards reality and not an *exclusion* of reality (Zahavi, 2003, p. 45). As Husserl says, "in the Epoché, I debar myself from using any judgement that concerns spatio-temporal reality, but without denying or doubting such judgments" (*Ideas*, p. 98-100).

The *Epoché*, then, entailed a bracketing of the question of the reality of the external world. By leaving aside the question of the existence of the outside world, Husserl avoided, among other things, Kantean concerns of Noumenon and other questions about the validity of the external world, by 'bracketing' their truth value to focus only on the things themselves as they *appeared*

in consciousness. What this allowed Husserl to do was to suspend the immediate need for a yes/no, either/or answer, thus he was able to develop his theories further, rather than get stuck on the reality of the objects, which the classical debates had been for the better part of a decade.

Husserl noted that he himself awakened his uncertainty of grantedness regarding the given-ness of the objects of consciousness by an interest in the inquiry "what is?", stating that he got his question about the natural attitude from the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711 – 1776). To my mind, this illustrates the role and importance of a *curiosity* about oneself and the world as the beginning step towards casting off one's previous assumptions and begin to uncover a personally authentic mode of being. Without a *willingness* to forego our own previous conclusions about ourselves and the world, it becomes very hard to reach the point where we are willing to shed our previous beliefs in favor of more authentic ones, despite the subjective pre-given preference of authentic states, but I digress.

Husserl, after having bracketed or suspended the natural attitude with the Epoché, employed his transcendental phenomenology to examine the natural attitude – the way we, until now, saw the world. With the Epoché, he wanted us to realize that we could never be certain about the validity of the natural attitude, but we could be certain about the fact that it appeared to us – that we were in fact conscious of *something*.

The transcendental phenomenological method focused on the essential structures that allows the objects naively taken for granted in the natural attitude – characteristic of both our everyday life *and* ordinary science – to constitute themselves in consciousness (Stanford, Edmund Husserl, section 1). From this unshackled point of view, we could then use intentional consciousness as a basis to examine and cast off our prejudiced assumptions about ourselves and the world, and begin to explore perspectives, insights and viewpoints we had previously been ignorant or unavailable for. Zahavi writes that the Epoché is the term for our abrupt suspension of a naïve metaphysical attitude and likens it to a "philosophical gate of entry".

While this has some interesting overlap with the existential phenomenologists and their notions of casting aside unconscious and unexamined self-limiting notions, what I think is often overlooked generally is how *radical* a move this is by Husserl. The fact that he was led to his analysis of phenomenology on the basis of logically defined distinctions between ideal and real concerns of objects puts some rational validity behind his investigation. Having formally and logically cast aside the natural attitude in a manner which allowed *others to follow his thinking*,

he essentially laid the groundwork for phenomenological and existential explorations of the first-person perspective.

Why is logic so interesting a foundation? Consider the fact that Husserl – a logician – demanded a return to *living experience*. As Barrett points out (p. 300-302), another logician, Austrian-British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889 – 1951) urged us exactly the same. While it is true that Wittgenstein encouraged us to find the cure for the *bewitchment to words* which philosophy had ensnared us as a means to return the pre-given, Husserl has us cast aside the entire natural attitude of unexamined assumptions. In this way, Husserl's move is as Socratean as it is Humean. To understand ourselves and presume to know ourselves and existentially embrace the examined life is undeniably the essence of Socrates, while Hume urges us to question the tendencies we have to assume the inductive cohesion of the natural world. I personally think that the radical nature of Husserl's move is often overlooked by the technical sophistication inherent in his works, which is regrettable.

Husserl was not the only thinker to suggest a suspension of our dogmatic assumptions as means of investigation and exploration. Kierkegaard had raised similar concerns about our dogmatic belief in the structures of society and our willingness to believe in and bind ourselves to them. For Kierkegaard, the notion that our normative structures could be sufficient and transcendentally freeing was a sign of the great complacency of his age. Both Kierkegaard and Husserl echoed similar themes regarding a critical existential reexamination of our situated positions, Husserl with his rejection of the natural attitude and his phenomenology and Kierkegaard with his protest of contemporary society. Kierkegaard would probably have rejected the systematic building of a philosophical system like Husserl's, as he did with Hegel. Although it could be argued that since Husserl's philosophy was oriented towards the lived experience of the individual, Kierkegaard might have struck a different tune, but I digress.

By constructing his phenomenological method, Husserl laid the groundwork for contemporary and phenomenologically educated philosophers, so that they could themselves pursue explorations of consciousness, and perhaps ontological investigations of an existential nature without Kierkegaardian passionate rejections of all manners of established life in the search for their subjective truth. Such a truth could now be searched for via the exploration of the phenomenological space.

c. *Husserl, Heidegger and the Existentialist critique*

Through all stages of his thinking, Husserl remained deeply committed to the epistemological aim of reaching for the ideal of fully justified knowledge. He also had a guiding effect on one of his students and research assistants, the young Heidegger, who later echoed some of Husserl themes, like his concerns for a secure foundation, writing in his *Being and Time* that one needed to ascertain the "ontological presuppositions of ontic enquiry".

As mentioned earlier, the repudiation of one's dogmatic assumptions and rejection of unexamined beliefs – what can be called waking up from one's natural attitude – is an important shared concern between Husserl and all the existential thinkers, not just Heidegger. While the initial ambition behind Husserl's philosophy was considered idealistic and far removed from the concerns of the existentialists, it is also inescapable that Husserl's phenomenology would later lay the foundation for the existential phenomenology of Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and others. Cooper writes that "there is general agreement that the most significant versions of twentieth-century existentialism are developments, welcome or perverse, from phenomenology" (Cooper, p. 5). But as we have seen, the existentialists like Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre all had different phenomenological approaches and concerns than Husserl, especially the Husserl of *Ideen 1*.

The connection between Husserl and Heidegger is particularity interesting, and has been the focus of much scholarship. Their similarities are perhaps not surprising given the close relationship they shared. Husserl was the mentor of Heidegger, and the two worked closely together. Heidegger dedicated his 1927 work *Being and Time* to Husserl "in friendship and admiration". Their collaboration included both when Heidegger worked as Husserl's research assistant, and when they co-authored an article on phenomenology for the 1927 *Encyclopeadia Britannica*.

This article is interesting and has drawn much attention from scholars, as drafts of this article show their initial disagreements over the role and scope of phenomenology. Husserl, at this point had sought to use his investigation of phenomenology to explore the relationship between the "I" of the *cogito* – Descartes' cogito of the *cogito ergo sum* – and the transcendental "I" which Husserl understood as unhindered consciousness. In a move followed by Sartre, Husserl attempted to separate the "I" of the *objects* in consciousness from the 'nothingness' of consciousness itself – consciousness always being what it is directed towards and never a "thing" in itself.

By the time of the *Britannica* article, Husserl had already moved from his initial aims of refuting skepticism to seeking to separate the 'I' from consciousness via his *Epoché*. Interestingly, and important for the exploration of authenticity in this paper, Husserl wrote in the drafts for this article that "if I carry out the *Epoché* for myself, I am not a human ego". Heidegger wrote in the margin to this "why not, is not this activity a potentiality of man?" (Appignanesi, 2013, p. 69). We see in this argument the difference which was to separate Husserlian phenomenology and the existentialist's critique.

After the *Britannica* article, Heidegger employed Husserl's phenomenological method when he wrote his own phenomenological work *Being and Time*, which featured an analytic of what he called Dasein. As we have seen, the Heidegger of *Being and Time* urged the primacy of ontological inquiry. However, unlike Husserl, Heidegger treated ontological inquiry as *one of the aspects available to Dasein*, and *not* the essential nature of Dasein itself.

In brief, the existential phenomenologists focused more on the experience of consciousness as already involved and caught in a pre-existing world rather than an attempt to focus on a 'pure' or transcendental consciousness. It has for this reason been said that the origins of existential phenomenology rests on a rejection of idealist approaches to studying consciousness, in favor of the lived experience of the individual. This is an accurate description, as the emphasis on the *existing* individual caught in a pre-reflective engagement with the world is one of the defining characteristics of existentialism. As we shall see in the next section, the relationship between Husserl's method and being-in-the-world is a bit more nuanced, but it is certainly the case that Husserl has historically been viewed as a bygone figure to the existential phenomenologists.

Aho notes that the existentialist's break with Husserl has to do with how phenomena are encountered. As we have seen, Husserl intended his Epoché to bracket out or negate the worldly prejudices of the natural attitude that "tend to distort what is given in our conscious experience (Aho, p. 29). The existential phenomenologists rejected Husserl's early position in *Ideen 1* by reacting to the proposition of a presuppositionless starting point which could be arrived at by bracketing prejudices and give access to consciousness that is pure and undistorted. Heidegger would voice this critique, and, according to Mulhall, voice it by saying that "there is no neutral perspective from which we might begin our questioning; the idea of a presuppositionless starting point, even for an exercise in fundamental ontology, must be rejected as an illusion" (Mulhall, 2005, p. 13).

The reading of Husserl which the existentialists critique is to my mind quite simplistic. One of the things it overlooks, or presupposes, is that one merely "performs" the *Epoché* in a matter of moments and then enjoys unhindered access to a "pure" consciousness untainted by our natural biases. To my mind, this perspective of Husserl's method ignores that the ability to perform the *Epoché* and disengage from the contents of consciousness is trained systematically over years of practice. This is something which Husserl himself did and taught others who were interested in how to perform the method of Epoché, both by taking walks with interested groups and engaging in conversations. Also, when Husserl called for a return to the "things themselves", he urged a return to *direct experience* rather than the prefabricated conceptions we put in their place (Barrett, 1958, p. 213).

d. *The Late Husserl*

While Zahavi agrees that much of the existentialist's thinking rests on a critique of Husserl, and that Husserl's phenomenology is traditionally regarded as "foundationalist, idealist and at times, by some, solipsistic" (Zahavi, 2003, p. 141) he remarks that Husserl's phenomenology continued to evolve past the position so heavily critiqued by his later followers. Zahavi contends that the traditional account of Husserl is "misleading and outdated". The view of Husserl as a bygone figure, according to Zahavi, owes its endurance to the fact that his philosophical successors had a tendency to criticize him in order to emphasize their own merits, and that, as Jewish, Husserl was ignored by a whole generation of philosophers due to the recent historical events in German history (Zahavi, 2003, p. 144).

Towards the later stages of his thinking, Husserl's phenomenological method sought to wrestle with themes like world constituting consciousness, his notion of intersubjectivity (the existence of many subjectivities in the world) and what he called the *lifeworld* and *life of world consciousness* (*Weltbewußtseinslebe*) (Zahavi, 2003, p. 74). This sort of language and themes has the late Husserl resembling Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty far more than the initial Husserl which the existential phenomenologists all critiqued and responded against.

In order to make sense of this, we must keep in mind that Husserl lived, and philosophized, for a substantial amount of time, giving his last major lecture series just a few years before his death. Regarding the evolution of his thought, Zahavi notes that Husserl – like the other phenomenologists – later criticized his own presentation in *Ideen 1* and called it an abstraction to speak of a pure, worldless I-pole, writing that full subjectivity is a world-experiencing life.

The late Husserl would favor concepts like *lifeworld* and *life of world-consciousness* over the solipsistic subjectivity of his early works.

By these terms, Husserl envisioned intersubjectively engaged transcendental viewpoints, all engaged and socialized with each other. Far from an idealist Hegelian system, this view entailed deeply engaged existential subjects, all lived in ethical responsibility of having cast aside their dogmatic beliefs and assumptions inherent in the natural attitude, with the phenomenological perspective of each and every being experienced (my interpretation). However, the similarities with Hegel's system might require a bit more than a blanket dismissal, as there are merits to this comparison, or as Zahavi puts it, "if Husserl's final position should remind some readers of elements in Hegel's thought, this is probably not without reason". However, the seeming similarities is merely this, a seeming one. As Husserl's assistant Eugen Fink pointed out, Husserl's theory, no matter how speculative it might sound, is no speculative construction but a simple articulation of the fundamental insights of the phenomenological reduction (Fink, 1933, p. 378). Husserl's concept of subjectivity was to undergo a long evolution, but it gradually expanded until it surpassed or even undermined the traditional opposition between subject and object (Zahavi, 2003, p. 74).

The position of Husserl towards the end of his life presented by recent Husserl scholarship is based on previously unpublished research manuscripts and the works he left behind, which is still to this day being published and translated. In light of the previously unpublished research notes and his unpublished works, Fink remarked that "the topic of phenomenology is neither the world nor a worldless subject, but the becoming of the world in the self-constitution of the transcendental subject" (Zahavi, 2003, p. 75). As Husserl writes in the supplementary volume to his *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften* (1936) "it is apodictically certain that the 'I' must appear in the world as a human being".

Husserl offers the explanation that the transcendental subject can only constitute an objective world if it is *incarnated* and *socialized*. The transcendental subject was, for Husserl, the subjective point of view on the world itself. That is to say it was ontologically different from any objects or constructs of consciousness, such as an empirical "I", a personal ego or an isolated *cogito*.

The final position of Husserl takes self and world-constitution to go hand in hand (Zahavi, 2003, p. 76). The constitution of the world, the unfolding of self, and the establishing of intersubjectivity (multiple subjectivities all inhabiting the same world) are all parts in an

interrelated and simultaneous process. As Husserl writes in *Ideen 2* "we, and the world belong together […] Ultimately, the constitutive process occurs in a threefold structure, subjectivity-intersubjectivity-world" (Zahavi, 2003, p. 76).

This is remarkably close to Heidegger's concept of Dasein, an interconnected and engaged being-with or being-there-in-the-world. This similarities is not lost upon Zahavi either, who illustrates the similarities between Heidegger's description of Daseins being-in-the-world and Husserl's transcendental ego by directly quoting Heidegger. As the similarities this show is particularly striking, and is relevant to the Husserl/Heidegger distinction which will inform the next section, allow me to include it.

"The world exists – that is, it is – only if Dasein exists, only if there is Dasein. Only if world is there, if Dasein exists as being-in-the-world, is there understanding of being, and only if this understanding exists are intraworldly beings unveiled as extant and handy. World-understanding as Dasein-understanding is self-understanding. *Self and world belong together in the single entity, the Dasein* (my emphasis). Self and world are not two beings, like subject and object, or like I and thou, but self and world are the basic determination of the Dasein itself in the unity of the structure of being-in-the-world. (Heidegger 1989, p. 422)

Compare this with Husserl descriptions, such as "the topic of phenomenology is the becoming of the world in the self-constitution of the transcendental subject", "the constitutive process occurs in a threefold structure, subjectivity-intersubjectivity-world" and "intersubjectivity only exists and develops in the mutual interrelationship between subjects that are related to the world; and the world must be conceived as a common and public field of experience" (Zahavi, 2003, p. 76).

As I mentioned in *Terms and Themes*, the aim of this paper is to observe emergent similarities between the thinkers as they relate to the uncovering of authentic existence by self-inquiry. It is therefore not my intention to go in-depth or champion for specific interpretations of the thinkers. The point which is at hand to be made is whether Husserl's descriptions are *existential*, or at least closer to it than previously thought. But why is this important? It matters because, as I see it, Husserl's description of phenomenological investigation, his method of *Epoché* and his general contention that there was merit to exhaustive examination of subjectivity until the subject/object dualisms were overcome is very relevant to the pursuit of authentic existence.

While on the note of seeing emergent similarities between the thinkers, the similarities between Husserl and Heidegger is echoed by others than just Zahavi. Cooper notes that "whether my

'primordial' experience of others is 'Being-with' them in a public world, as Heidegger thinks, or 'Being-for' them as an object of their attention, as Sartre holds, this issue is less important than the single conclusion to which these experiences attest: that I am in-a-world in which others must also be present" (Cooper, p. 106). Sartre writes that "the For-itself arises in a world which is a world for other For-itselfs" (Sartre, 1943, p. 520).

Given these similarities, Zahavi "It is certainly striking how many similarities there are between Husserl's account of the relation between self, world, and other, and the accounts to be found among the later phenomenologists (Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty)" (Zahavi, 2003, p. 77). Barrett would echo this sentiment, writing that "in his last writings Husserl's thought turns slowly and haltingly in the direction of Heidegger's themes. The great rationalist is dragged slowly to earth" (Barrett, 1958, p. 12).

For me, when Husserl says that transcendental subjectivity remains hidden as long as we are absorbed in the pre-philosophical natural attitude, where we live in self-oblivion among objects, which the Epoché and the reduction is capable of revealing, I cannot help but be reminded of the existentialists and their rejection of the unexamined or non-self-aware life.

e. *Husserl's motivations*

With the continued evolution of Husserl's thought, we can begin to see how his ever-evolving method allowed for ontological and existential inquiries. Also, to my mind, his separation between the empirical I of the senses and of the transcendental I of consciousness via his Epoché gives a very suiting philosophical framework within which the attainment of authentic existence via existential inquiry can be framed and understood.

However, one more thing remains to be said about Husserl, and that is, as Zahavi notes, that one should take note of Husserl's *motivation* for pursuing his aim of certain foundations, and for doing philosophy generally.

Much of Husserl's philosophy is theoretical in nature, and is a representation of the culmination of philosophically relevant themes of his time. Husserl's works reflects much from the historical themes and concerns of modern philosophy (from Descartes onward), including the classic debates of the relationship between minds and the external world, the debate between Rationalism and Empiricism, the relation between subjectivity and selfhood and so on. Despite this, Husserl's motivations were never theoretical in nature, but rather *practical*. Even more

precisely, according to Zahavi, Husserl's motive for doing philosophy was an *ethical* one, "the ethical striving for a life lived in absolute self-responsibility" (Zahavi, 2003, p. 67, referencing Husserl's *First Philosophy* lectures, 1923-24, first English translation 2019, p. 197).

Throughout his life, Husserl pursued an "evidence-based, self-responsible life that the phenomenological search for a transcendental foundation makes possible" (Zahavi, 2003, p. 68). For Husserl, living in the phenomenological attitude was not a "neutral impersonal occupation, but a *praxis* of decisive personal and *existential* significance" (Zahavi, 2017, p. 22 – 24, referencing Husserl's *The Crisis of European Sciences*, 1936, first English translation 1970, p.140).

In other words, for Husserl, the aim of philosophy is intimately linked to an ethical life, a life based on *certain* truths, so as to live in accordance with the truest insights attainable. It was the responsibility of the ethical participant to make deep commitments to having ontologically secure bases upon which to ground his actions. Thus, the search for absolute evidence was based on the demand for absolute self-responsibility. Husserl's *driving force*, one might say, was the aim of an active, participating, curious and *alive* pursuit of verified truths in order to live an ethical life (Zahavi, 2003, p. 68). Husserl uses the term "presuppositionlessness" to describe the phenomenological and ethical state, a term which saw his phenomenology come under attack as idealistic.

However, one must keep in mind that for Husserl this represents an *infinite ideal* – a realized life in critical self-responsibility – rather than as a given starting point (Zahavi, 2017, p. 24, referencing *Erste Philosophie*, p. 196, p. 244, *Ideen 1*, p. 139 and *Cartesianische Meditationen,* p. 53).

Zahavi notes that this demand for absolute self-responsibility becomes of existential significance when what is addressed is our subjective experience, our very being, with the aim of actively and healthily engaging in a lifeworld with *other* transcendental subjects (Zahavi, 2017, p 23). I find it useful to use the term "subjective viewpoints on reality" to describe transcendental subjects. What is important to note is that this term designate consciousness as such, a phenomenological viewpoint as it were, and not the objects in consciousness, like the ego or objects of the world.

The ethical and existential significance of his aims are something Husserl links to the Socratic ideal. In Husserl's 1923-24 lecture series "*First Philosophy*" (*Erste Philosophie 1*) Husserl explicitly refers to this Socratic-Platonic idea of philosophy:

> *"Socrates' ethical reform of life is characterized by his construal of the truly satisfying life as a life based on pure reason. Such a life is one in which human beings, through unremitting self-reflection and a radical giving of account, exercise critique – ultimate evaluating critique – on their life-goals, and then, of course, mediated through these, on their life-paths, on their means of achieving these goals. Such giving of account and critique are carried out as cognitive processes, and moreover, according to Socrates, as a methodical return to the* original source (my emphasis) *of all legitimacy and our knowledge of it. Expressed in our terms, this occurs by recourse to perfect clarity, "insight," "evidence.""* (Husserl, 1923-24, first English translation 2019, p 9).

Interestingly, Husserl references his motivation by looking back at the Greeks, in this case Socrates. Heidegger would similarly look back to Athens for his research, and it is possibly a result of Husserl's influence. By looking back to the Greeks, Husserl puts emphasis on the critical *potential* of reflection. According to Zahavi, by doing this Husserl is already indicating that his methodological use of reflection has other uses than "just compiling introspective reports" (Zahavi, 2017, p. 23).

Husserl would also, in *Krisis,* critique the sciences – the *Wissenschafts* – for losing sight of the metaphysical frameworks within which they operate. Husserl notes that questions like 'What is truth?,' 'What is knowledge?,' 'What is reality?,' 'What is a good and meaningful life?,' and the like have all been categorically neglected by the *Wissenschafts* as a result of this neglect. Thus, not only was the sciences – the *Wissenschafts* – in need of an ontological and epistemological clarification, they had also lost their existential relevance. This is why Husserl accuses them of having gone bankrupt ethically as well as philosophically (Zahavi, 2003, p. 126).

With such concerns in place, and the contribution of the method of phenomenology as it relates to what I call existential self-inquiry thoroughly explored, we can now turn to how Husserl's method can be used for the aim of achieving personal authenticity.

8. *Phenomenology and Existential Ontology*

Phenomenology reflects the existentialist project in certain aspects. As we saw from the preceding section, Husserl's method – in all its manifestations – maintained that any theoretical

demonstrations or proofs about the nature of reality are derived from and made possible by what is originally given in *lived* experience (Aho, p. 28-29). While this is true, it is also true that the critique of Husserl which motivated the existentialist response was a reappropriation of phenomenology, not as the study of objects as they appeared, but the study of ontology – of existence – of *being-in-the-world* as a pre-reflectively engaged human being, and not as an disconnected Cartesian mind or cogito inspecting sensations from a foreign and potentially unconnected mental realm. Merleau-Ponty especially would categorically deny subject/object dualism in his approach, even to the point of coming close to leaving out the first-person perspective altogether (my critique). Likewise, it is the case that the initial phenomenology of Husserl was rejected, expanded upon – or used – for other concerns by the existentialists. To see how the reapproprication of phenomenology played out, let us turn to Heidegger.

a. *Dasein, ontological inquiry and inauthenticity*

Heidegger had a view about human beings which was very different from traditional accounts of humans as a disembodied subjectivity. For Heidegger, as we saw in his 1927 *Encyclopeadia Britannica* article disagreement with Husserl, performing what he called "ontic inquiry" was one of the *modes of being* which was available to the beings which we were, which he called *Dasein*. This was in contrast with Husserl's observation that if I can perform the Epoché on my '*self'*, then ipso facto he was not the self or human ego but whatever was aware off it. Heidegger was not uninspired by this however, and his point regarding existential self-inquiry in the form of ontic investigations into being was central to his description of Dasein. To see this, consider these remarks from the early pages of *Being and Time:* "In so far as Being constitutes what is asked about, and *"Being"* means the Being of entities, then entities themselves turn out to be what is interrogated" (Heidegger, 1927, p. 26). Or this quote;

> "*Thus to work out the question of Being adequately, we must make an entity- the inquirer – transparent in his own Being. The very asking of this question is an entity's mode of* Being*; and as such it gets its essential character from what is inquired about – namely, Being. This entity, which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term "*Dasein". (Heidegger, 1927, p. 27).

Interestingly, Heidegger specifically remarks in his description of Dasein that it is an entity which "each of us *is* himself" which had, or included, "*inquiring* as one of the possibilities of

its Being". Since these investigators are beings – i.e. they exists, they *are* – they themselves are what is investigated, they are then both what is investigated and the investigators. Additionally, Heidegger remarks that "*the question of Being is nothing other than the radicalization of an essential tendency-of-Being which belongs to Dasein itself – the pre-ontological understanding of Being"* (Heidegger, 1927, p. 32).

While Heidegger's Dasein is a very well researched term, and interpretations are multivaried and subject of ongoing research and disputes, as far as this paper is concerned, the relevant focus is that Dasein designates existing beings which have investigation into beings as an option. Translated rather crudely, what I take this to mean is that since humans can ask questions such as "who am I?", the asking of such questions is a way of being available to them. In other words, humans could not have performed existential examinations of both themselves, or Being generally, if doing so was not an existent option for them.

To illustrate this, picture the following. We can easily imagine a reality of fully conscious humans, beings exactly like us in every conceivable regard except one – these beings could not analyze their own being, could not perform self-inquiry. Heidegger's point is simple, but, to my mind, profound. We *have* the option of questioning existence – curiously turning the intentionality of consciousness back unto itself and asking where it is coming from. If we did not have this option – existentially permitted by the way reality operates – then we could not do it. In fact could we even have conceived of it? Could these humans who were like us, but unable to pose ontological self-investigative questions of existential significance have realized what they were missing?

This is reflected by Heidegger, when he notes that the categories bequeathed by the philosophical tradition for understanding a being who can *question* his or her being are insufficient (Stanford, Existentialism, point 1).

Consider similarly Heidegger's remark that "the question of Being is nothing other than the radicalization of an essential tendency-of-Being which belongs to Dasein itself – the pre-ontological understanding of Being". I think this illustrates the point that the investigation into Being is not just an option for us, but points to a *pre-given* inherent ability or 'tendency' which we already have. Heidegger even called it an *essential* tendency, the pre-ontological understanding of Being. As I see it, this remarks why existentialists have referred to authentic existence as *authentic* existence, because it is in unison with a pre-given existence or nature,

which enables the possibility of inauthentic existence, such as living in self-estrangement from this pre-reflective being.

In a way, this is similar to a point Kierkegaard was attempting to make clear to members of his society – that they already *were*. In addition to already existing, they already had, and knew of, *despair* as a backdrop to their life. This posed a lot of questions for Kierkegaard, which he attempted on numerous accounts and in many ways to answer. First of is *why* they were in despair. Why was not their existence unmarred by feelings of *inauthenticity*? Does not the presence of feelings of inauthenticity necessary entail an authentic mode from which they were estranged? Secondly, Kierkegaard remarked *how* people were able to self-deceive themselves. Why would they need stabilizing societal structures or to escape from contingencies if they were at heart content with life in all the ways it could be lived? How were they able to live so effectively in self-denial as to not see this? Thirdly, for Kierkegaard, how could the implications of this not be of the utmost importance to them every day? If *boredom*, a theme which he explored significantly in *Either/Or*, did not function as a convincing hint to the unsatisfactory nature of their mundane pursuits, that they were actually forsaking something else to which boredom indicated, something more pressing, urgent and pre-given to us, then what ever could?

According to Robert Ferguson, in his book *Life lessons from Kierkegaard*, he notes that "with increasing severity during the course of *Either/Or,* [Kierkegaard] warns us that boredom is the most sinister and destructive of all enemies, driving us to fill our days with activity as we try to make life seem meaningful and important" (Ferguson, p. 14).

Aho's earlier remark, that "as beings who are self-conscious, our existence is always penetrated by feelings of uncertainty and doubt; we experience anguish in the face of our own death, in the radical contingency of our choices, and the *sheer arbitrariness that anything, including ourselves, exists at all*" is similarly to the point.

b. *Mind and Body*

We have already touched upon the critique of the view of man as a disembodied thinking substance, and this critique is one which Heidegger both explores and expands on. For Heidegger, our ordinary human life moves within a *preconceptual* understanding of Being, and it is this everyday understanding of Being in which we live, move and have our Being that Heidegger wants to get at as a philosopher (Barrett, p. 213). Cooper similarly remarks that the

“human being is, in Heidegger’s phrase, Being-in-the-world. This entails that phenomenological understanding must be ‘existential’, not ‘pure’” (Cooper, p. 6).

An important point to note is that by turning phenomenology toward the question of *what it means to be*, Heidegger insisted that the question was to be raised *concretely*. In other words it is not primarily some academic exercise, but a burning concern arising from life itself – the question of what it means for *me* to be. According to the Stanford encyclopedia, “existential themes take on salience when one sees that the general question of the meaning of being involves first becoming clear about one's own being as an *inquirer*” (Stanford, Existentialism, section 1).

For me, this highlights how Existential phenomenology is the description of a method for existential inquiry into the nature of our being, and that what this sort of understanding strives for is a reexamination of what our being means for us, and a thus a search for *who,* or *what, we are*. I have referred throughout to this kind of inquiry as self-inquiry, which involves examination of one’s being. Cooper notes that “existential freedom was understood in terms of a capacity to distance oneself from, and perhaps ‘refuse’ any of the beliefs and values which shape one’s directives” (Cooper, p. 177).

A shared point of departure from Cartesian traditions is that this distancing of ourselves from objects of awareness which shape our beliefs about the world involves a removal of the dualistic perspective of ourselves as disconnected I’s, located either in an external mind-enclosed realm, or located somewhere *in* the body.

When I say that we distance ourselves from *objects of our awareness*, it may sound a little to Husserlian, and some might even find Cartesian undertones in it. This is not my intent. The point is rather that, as the existentialists all go to great lengths to explore, we are self-alienated from the world and ourselves, and this alienation is imposed by the limits of our beliefs about ourselves and the way the world “has to be”.

As Merleau-Ponty and others have stressed, we are situated pre-reflective bodies in the world. However I would contend that we, of course, have *access* to subjectivity – to a phenomenological perspective as it were. That is to say we have an awareness of the world in consciousness. Similarly, the limiting beliefs we hold are also capable of being analyzed and investigated through this awareness, either as vague feelings or as linguistic narrative structures like “I’m not the kind of person that can do *this* or *that*” etc.

So far this seems unremarkable, almost a commonsensical view, one that should not pose too many problems for either the existentialists, the phenomenologists, or the view of regular ordinary humans. The notion that we have internal access to sensations, a subjective perspective as it were, should not in and of itself entail that we are a Cartesian disconnected *cogito*, or inhabitants of Platonic realms removed from a factually existing world. As beings in bodies, involved with a world, reading and walking and talking and opening doors pretty much pre-reflectively, we are also presented – or encumbered – with thoughts.

This duality – this *split* – between "mind" and body has been the subject of a great many debates in philosophy. What the existentialist point out, building on Husserl's notion as phenomena as primary, is that world, mind, body or whatever else, is ultimately *presented to* an existential predicate, an intentional correlate, or awareness if you will. Existence does precedes essence for the existentialists, and since "nothing is sacred" in the view of this, neither *thoughts* (or mind if one prefers), *the external world*, or *my own bodily sensations* are *existentially prior* to existence itself – they are all able *to be* by the fact of existence occurring.

In other words we have bodies, we are conscious of an external world with other people in it, and we also have access to mental images, mental chatter and thoughts – thoughts like judgements, preconceptions, prejudices and imagined scenarios about remembered past events or imagined future ones. To see that this is so, consider that the opposite of this statement entails the refusal of having a body, being conscious, having mental events like memories or imagination and existing at all. I remember a personal insight I had once from reading Hume, thinking that "*existence occurs*… but anything beyond that is pretty much speculation".

The point to be made is that the debate between whether or not we are minds aware of bodies or bodies aware of minds is, to my mind, not the correct question. This is in fact yet another a dualistic picture of things, and the existentialists were adamant that what they all were after was the destruction of dualisms in favor of an authentic or "not-dual" (my interpretation) existential state. In essence, their view can be summed up as saying "the body is *how I am*, a relational way of being-in-the-world that dissolves the subject/object opposition altogether" (Aho, p. 31). To my mind, this account leaves out that existential phenomenology is still *phenomenology*, a study of the first-person perspective. For instance, both Sartre and Heidegger used phenomenology for ontological concerns, and as such they write *from* a viewpoint of the first-person perspective. The (in my mind mistaken) view which Aho and Cooper sometimes present is that by simply describing the human being as a being-in-the-world, to treat it as sufficient to simply refer to the body as pre-given and pre-engaged, and seemingly forget or omit the

existence of subjectivity. This has its obvious errors. For one, it ignores the phenomenological point of view, and on the other it attempts to solve a dualistic problem by ignoring it.

It is an historically accurate description of the existentialist critique on 'disembodied reason' or the Cartesian *cogito* as an inherently different substance from bodies, I do not think that a blanket dismissal of one of these views in favor of the other is sufficient either. That is to say, neither of these caricatured extremes offers the whole picture of the human situation (my view). Rather, I wish to propose that it is the case that human beings *oscillate* between these two ways of being and understanding themselves.

At times we are caught 'in our head' and at times we engage with the world in a certain kind of flow with our tasks and environment. Neither of these are mutually exclusive of the other, and both are part of the way we experience our life. That is not to say that both are equally preferable however.

While we are 'stuck in our heads' as it were, encumbered by thoughts and pressed with the marker of alienation of inauthenticity, the question for that existing being does not become one of theoretical analysis of mind/body dualism, but rather becomes how to *overcome* the alienation which results from this perception. This, as Cooper remarked, has been the approach and ambition which has informed and motivated the entire existentialist enterprise.

To adopt either one of these views as conclusive and exclusive view of the human being does not permit the existing human being any reconnection with one's own truth, or a means to overcome alienation. If the person considers himself as a disembodied mind, he will find it disconcerting to realize all the times he is pre-reflectively engaged with the world, and if he considers himself exclusively as a *being-in-the-world* he will find himself confused and guilty whenever he is encumbered by the presence of thoughts in his subjective awareness.

This is an important point for my thesis. The way I see it, the human being is currently caught in a duality imposed by *problematic thoughts*. That is to say, the presence of a pre-reflective consciousness and a body in pre-reflective engagement in the world are not the problem which confronts us as alienation. The duality which causes our alienation from our authentic mode of existence is rather posed by *problematic thoughts* presented to pre-reflective awareness. As we saw in the section on problematic thoughts, we have a tendency to identify with the narrative chatter in our minds, and believe negatively loaded storylines about ourselves. This to my mind is what is inauthentic. Subjectivity, the first person perspective or the fact that consciousness

exists is not the problem, reason is not the problem, and the body is not the problem – the problem is the 'I', the alienated self, the tendency to treat our thoughts as 'what we are'.

While the picture of the human being in a 'fluid engagement' with the world is, to my mind, certainly closer to "what it is like" to be in an authentic existential state as opposed to one encumbered by personal narratives, it is not sufficient to simply describe this state and convince oneself of its validity. After all, as Kierkegaard noted, what use is a system in which I myself cannot inhabit? If we are conflicted by problematic thoughts to the point where we are restrained from productively functioning or being in the world to the best of our abilities, then it is not hard to imagine why the alienated state has received descriptions such as inauthentic. Underlying such descriptions is the vague, but very human intuition that it is not actually supposed to be this way.

It is to my mind a significant misunderstanding to treat authentic existence as a perspective one adopts once, via the cool disconnected approach of reason and is done with, as opposed to an existential Socratic life-ideal of persistent self-inquiry into knowing oneself.

c. *Cartesian Concerns*

In support of this perspective, consider that Husserl and the existential phenomenologists were concerned with the overcoming of dualisms generally. If this seems strange, and the picture of Husserl as a Platonic Cartesian only interested in a disembodied mind observing an external world still seems prominent, consider Husserl's opening move in establishing his phenomenology, made in his critique against psychologism. By focusing on the *phenomena* or way things appeared to us in consciousness *exclusively,* as a response to the stalemate between idealism and rationalism, Husserl's opening aim of his method was the removal (which was done simply by 'bracketing') of dualistic concerns. Also keep in mind that Husserl also wanted us to keep the bracketed perspective, so as to analyze it, rather than just push it away into some dark recess to be left there as a hidden 'exception to the rule'.

The interest did not lay with disproving or proving the notion of a Cartesian subject caught in an ontologically unprovable world. This was bracketed – put aside – so as to focus *on the things themselves*. That Husserl's phenomenological Epoché would later lead him to disabuse himself of the notion of an empirical ego altogether serves to illustrate the persistence of his investigation. Cooper writes that the two egos described by Husserl – the empirical and the

transcendental – differ in their most fundamental respects. The empirical ego is a *natural* object, related to other objects through causal connections, whereas the transcendental ego is pure intentionality (Cooper, p. 50). To my mind is it unfortunate wording by Husserl to maintain the term 'ego' in both descriptions as it suggests a sort of 'higher order' 'I-construct' not confined to the body. Regardless, since Husserl's descriptions of intersubjective involvement by transcendental viewpoints (or egos) in a interconnected lifeworld rules out all forms of monism and solipsism, this wording is only unfortunate, not indicative or suggestive of a transcendental or metaphysical *cogito* (my contention).

The important ambition Husserl showed was the persistent investigation and dismissal of anything subject to his Epoché; be it his natural attitude, his internal sensations, the empiricial ego or his own latent tendencies, nothing would go outside the phenomenological Epoché. To envision this as a world-independent, mind-oriented Cartesian perspective is, to my mind, to totally miss the point. As I see it, Husserl sought the deconstruction of the empirical ego for much the same reason he did everything else, the radical existential commitment to a life lived in full self-responsibility with the most correct picture possible.

If the notion that Husserl sought after the deconstruction of the empirical ego in consciousness as a means of living an ethically engaged life – or a transcendentally unobscured one – might similarly seem contradictory to popular notions about Husserl, let us reexamine it by considering Husserl's notion of lifeworld. Zahavi remarks that "Husserl's analysis of the lifeworld can be regarded as a new introduction to, or way toward, the transcendental-phenomenological reduction, a way that radically questions a number of Cartesian motives in Husserl's thinking and that understands the relation between subjectivity and world in a very different manner than *Ideen 1"* (Zahavi, 2003, p. 125).

I consider the picture of Husserl as a Cartesian, or as a fundamental idealist opposed to existential concerns as mistaken. To see this, keep in mind the similarities between Husserl's notion of the natural attitude and the existentialist's rejection of the unexamined life. When Husserl says that "transcendental subjectivity remains *hidden* as long as we are absorbed in the pre-philosophical natural attitude, where we live in self-oblivion among objects, which the Epoché and the reduction is capable of revealing", I think it clear that we can see parallels to the existentialist's rejection of the unexamined life spent in Bad Faith.

In the introduction I mentioned the Socratic aim of living an examined life as a means of living the good life. With this in mind, I think that it was Husserl's *persistent inquiry* into the ontology

of the empirical ego (the "I" as presented to consciousness) which led his later philosophy to be both transcendental and *existential* (my contention). As I see it, Husserl's *constant* examination of the structures of consciousness through his phenomenological method and reduction was motivated by his unceasing effort at establishing an ethically motivated secure foundation upon which to understand oneself.

Husserl noted that one does not only "do philosophy during the office hours". For him it was a praxis which followed into his daily life, his philosophy then informed his approach to life, and his life informed his philosophy. Far from being motivated by a Cartesian methodological doubt – or fear of somehow being confined to a solipsistic void – Husserl's persistent *engagement with a world* shows him as an active, if not relentless, investigator of an interconnected lifeworld. If anyone can be said to live the Socratic command to a fault, it would be Husserl.

We may even ask ourselves whether this kind of life, a life spent in constant self-investigation and questioning is really *a good life*. We might have a certain ethical or moral incentive to analyze ourselves so as to be better persons and more just actors in the world. But is not Husserl's engagement a bit much? Would it not better to simply "kick back and relax", as it were? Husserl's aim might even – with a certain sense of irony – be called idealistic. Do we not have the spouse, the children, the work, the societal implications, and recently, the obsessive social media concern with how everyone else is living their lives to first attend to?

There is much to be said in response, and there might even be a point to be made for Aristotelean temperance among the virtues of assiduous and lazy. Who knows what Husserl's response would have been, then and now? It should be noted that, for the phenomenologist dealing with the things themselves as primary, or the existentialists dealing with existence preceding essence, the search of self-understanding could be argued to be that in lieu of which we are able to have things like a spouse, a career, and a happy family. After all, do not these things require a certain amount of *skill*, both to achieve and then maintain? As I see it, the pursuit of self-investigation – self-inquiry – is not inherently *work* as we traditionally think of it, as in "yet another thing to deal with". Rather, it represents a way of *knowing ourselves*, to partake in the soul's search for meaning, to put it poetically. Such pursuits need not be taken only on vacation, or when alone in nature for example. It can be brought into every aspect of one's life.

d. *Intentionality, Reflexivity and Pre-reflective Self-Consciousness*

Regarding waking up from our unexamined lives, which I have taken to gather under the label of waking up from the natural attitude, we have seen how Sartre warned against living in Bad Faith, Heidegger about falling asleep to 'the they' and Kierkegaard about the *Angst* involved with the silent conformism to society. As we have touched upon, I suggest that both the existentialists and Husserl were pointing towards the same phenomena, that of waking up from the natural attitude.

Whether viewed as a strictly theoretical state regarding the objects in consciousness or a state of living alienated unexamined lives, all the thinkers are adamant that a reexamination of them in order to live more existentially authentic lives are both possible, in order or important. Part of what this waking up entailed was discarding what we are not, what was not truly our own, such as the beliefs and unexamined assumptions about our lives.

One way to bring about such awakenings is by coming to terms with a consequence following from the intentionality of consciousness, which Husserl explored. A brief note on intentionality, since most of the subsequent argumentation rests on it. The word 'intentionality' is a philosopher's word (Stanford, Intentionality, introduction). The word has two particular areas of usages, one is in philosophy of mind and language, in which we can wonder how mental objects like sentences or images can be about something that does not exist in the world, for example, and the other is in relation to consciousness and phenomenology. As such, there are two entries in the Stanford encyclopedia relating to the problems of both uses. The latter use is the one which we shall be concerned with.

According to the article, to say you are in a state that is (phenomenally) *conscious* is to say – on a certain understanding of these terms – that you have an *experience*, or a state there is *something it is like for you* to be in. "Feeling pain or dizziness, appearances of color or shape, and episodic thought are some widely accepted examples". *Intentionality*, on the other hand, has to do with the directedness, aboutness, or reference of mental states—the fact that, for example, you think *of* or *about* something. Intentionality includes, and is sometimes seen as equivalent to, what is called "mental representation" (Stanford, Consciousness and Intentionality, introduction).

In order to avoid spinning into an in-depth analysis of intentionality, it suffices to note that, for Husserl, for a mental state to be conscious was for it to be an experience (*Erlebnis*), a part of some "stream of consciousness". Experiences in this stream of consciousness sense include, for Husserl, "perceptions, imaginative and pictorial representations, acts of conceptual thinking,

surmises and doubts, joys and griefs, hopes and fears, wishes and acts of will" (Stanford, Consciousness and Intentionality, section 3).

What we are concerned with is the phenomenological interpretation of consciousness, and its related nature of intentionality. In particular, we are concerned with Husserl's approach. First, consider Husserl's introduction of what he called "pre-predicative" experience in *Experience and Judgement* (1939). With this term, Husserl holds that the sort of judgments we express in ordinary and scientific language are founded on the intentionality of *pre-predicative experience*, and that it is crucial to clarify the way in which such experience underlies judgment (Stanford, Consciousness and Intentionality, section 3).

To help make sense of this, consider the following from the entry on self-consciousness: "If first-person thought is not grounded in [an awareness of] the self as an object, then some other account is arguably required to account for the capacity to entertain self-conscious thought (O'Brien 1995a). One suggestion is that subjects possess a form of "pre-reflective self-awareness" as a necessary condition of consciousness (Sartre 1937, 1943: Introduction; Zahavi 2005, 2007; Legrand 2006; cf. Kriegel 2009) (Stanford, Self-consciousness, section 3.2).

If this sounds strange, keep in mind that the term "conscious" is not esoteric. But, as we've seen, its use is not readily characterized in a manner that provides some coherent, impartial framework for disciplined investigation. This is part of why theorizing about consciousness is so hard (Stanford, Consciousness and Intentionality, section 2).

The ability of intentionality to be turned towards itself is called *reflexivity*. Reflexivity is essentially the relation of consciousness (in the sense of intentional directedness) and self-consciousness. According to the Stanford article, Reflexivity entails three things.

First, that necessarily, whenever there is a conscious state, there is, in some sense, some consciousness *of* it.

Second, it is only *occasionally* and only in *reflection* that a conscious state is simultaneously an *intentional object* for the one whose state it is.

Third, it entails that one's conscious states ordinarily include a *non-reflective consciousness of oneself*, not as intentional object, but "as subject" (Stanford, Consciousness and Intentionality, section 3). In contemporary philosophy, the third sense is called pre-reflective self-consciousness.

Regarding pre-reflective self-consciousness, one definition is that it is an implicit and first-order awareness rather than an explicit or higher-order form of self-consciousness. “Indeed, an explicit reflective self-consciousness is possible only because there is a pre-reflective self-awareness that is an on-going and more primary kind of self-consciousness” (Stanford, Phenomenological Approaches to Self-Consciousness, section 1). Although phenomenologists do not always agree on questions about method or whether there is an ego or self, according to the article they are in close to unanimous agreement about the idea that the experiential dimension always involves an implicit pre-reflective self-awareness.

Pre-reflective self-consciousness is to my mind a very interesting term. According to the Stanford encyclopedia entry it is called pre-reflective because it is an awareness we have before we do any reflecting on our experience, in other words it is a consistent backdrop to our lives, whether we are actively thinking, reflecting, introspecting or not. On my view, this means that as long as you exist, pre-reflective self-consciousness is the inescapable baseline of your existence (my interpretation).

The existence of pre-reflective self-consciousness is why examination of subjectivity and the first-person perspective is so important to reclaiming Authentic Existence. As the article notes, “along with Husserl, who maintained that consciousness always involves a self-appearance (*Für-sich-selbst-erscheinens*) and with Maurice Merleau-Ponty who states that consciousness is always given to itself and that the word ‘consciousness’ has no meaning independently of this self-givenness (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 488), Jean-Paul Sartre writes that pre-reflective self-consciousness is not simply a quality added to the experience, an accessory; rather, it constitutes the very mode of being of the experience”:

> *“This self-consciousness we ought to consider not as a new consciousness, but as the only mode of existence which is possible for a consciousness of* something (Sartre 1943, p. 20)”

“In short, unless a mental process is pre-reflectively self-conscious there will be nothing it is like to undergo the process, and it therefore cannot be a phenomenally conscious process (Zahavi 1999, 2005, 2014). An implication of this is obviously that the self-consciousness in question is so fundamental and basic that it can be ascribed to all creatures that are phenomenally conscious, including various non-human animals” (Stanford, Phenomenological Approaches to Self-Consciousness, section 1).

As I see it, an inquiry into the ontology of the ego or 'I' reveals it as dependent upon, and separable from, this pre-reflective self-consciousness, which serves as a kind of existential 'baseline' upon which other kinds of being can be. I maintain that adherence to self-inquiry enables one to discard the ego in consciousness (what Husserl called the empirical ego) while still existing. This is because, contrary to Cartesian notions, what is ontologically foundational is the ego, 'I' or *cogito,* but pre-reflective self-consciousness (my contention).

What pre-reflective self-consciousness is, is not transitive in relation to the state (of) which it is aware. To help see this, and how Sartre's expansion or adaptation of Husserl's works explored this, let us turn to his 1936 essay *La Transcendance de L'Ego* (first English translation 1960 *The Transcendence of the Ego*) where Sartre notes that "problems concerning the relations of the "*I"* to consciousness are *existential* problems" (Sartre, 1936, p. 35).

Note that, while Sartre's position in this work is largely critical of Husserl's notion about a transcendental I, it is not the aim of this paper to critically compare the two positions. What is important to note is that both these two thinkers engaged with the ontology of the empirical I and its relationship to pre-reflective self-consciousness (emergent similarities being the recurring theme). Also, since Sartre's conception of Husserl in this notion could not be based on Husserl's final position due to the censorship of Husserl by the Nazi's, to treat the Husserl Sartre opposes as a position to analyze is at best one of historical scholarship of an outdated position.

Sartre opens his essay by making a very clear statement, saying that "for most philosophers, the ego is an 'inhabitant' of consciousness […] We should like to show here that the ego is neither formally nor materially *in* consciousness: it is outside, *in the world*. It is a being of the world, like the ego of another" (Sartre, 1936-37, p. 1). In the essay, Sartre, like Husserl in his works, investigates the relationship between the 'I' and consciousness, and the constitution of the ego. While Husserl, at least in *Ideen II* and certainly in *Cartesian Meditations* believed the 'I' to be transcendental, i.e. world-constituting (and as we have seen Husserl moved away from this position towards the end of his career in favor of the intersubjectivity of the lifeworld), Sartre argues in *Transcendence* that what does the constituting is not a transcendental I, but rather a *field*. Sartre remarks that a feature of this field is that "the transcendental field becomes impersonal, or, if you like, 'pre-personal,' *without an 'I'* (Sartre, 1936, p. 36).

Are we then to understand that for Sartre, pre-reflective self-consciousness is prior to selfhood, the 'I' or the *cogito*? To answer these questions, Sartre writes that "pre-reflective self-

consciousness is the mode of existence of consciousness itself" (Sartre, 1936, p. 29), and that "a pure consciousness is an *absolute* quite simply because it is consciousness of itself. It remains therefore a 'phenomenon' in the very special sense in which 'to be' and 'to appear' are one. It is all lightness, all translucence" (Sartre, 1936, p. 42).

Similarly, is this pre-existent field or *absolute* for Sartre related to the *I Think* of Descartes in a way that supports thinking as primary or which treats it as secondary to existence? Sartre answers this by writing that "the '*I Think*' can accompany our representations because it appears on a foundation of unity which it did not help to create; rather, this prior unity makes the *I Think* possible" (Sartre, 1936, p. 36).

In his conclusion, Sartre clarifies his position, saying

> *"The conception of the ego which we propose sees to us to effect the liberation of the Transcendental Field, and at the same its purification. The Transcendental Field, purified of all ego-logical structure, recovers its primary transparency. In a sense, it is a nothing, since all physical, psycho-physical, and psychic objects, all truths, all values are outside it; since my 'me' has itself ceased to be a part of it. But this nothing is all since it is consciousness of all these objects* (Sartre, 1936, p. 93).

I agree with Sartre's position against the positions which holds the I or the '*I Think'* of Descartes as primary. I also think that by 'Authentic Existence' is meant this pre-reflective self-conscious unity which makes things like 'I', the empirical ego, thinking and inauthenticity possible and able to be experienced. Similarly, I maintain that we experience the separation from this underlying unity as inauthentic because it is a truer or 'more genuine' existential state to be in. As I see it, it follows that this split or duality-inspired separation separates us from this pre-existent authentic unity. Also, I consider the signature feature of this division is experienced as *alienation.* While these claims and my position rests on certain observations by Sartre, they are not equal to his positions, either in *Transcendence* or his later *Being and Nothingness*. Rather, I think this view is representative of a general underlying agreement between the existentialists that there is a pre-given mode of being, the attainment of and abidance in leads to feelings of *authenticity* and a separation of leads to feelings of *alienation*.

To quote Sartre again, "it is the non-reflective consciousness which renders the reflection [and any higher-order representation of it] possible" (1943, first English translation 1956, p. 20).

While Husserl's position is similar enough that it suits the emerging picture of authentic states as pre-given to consciousness, it is not completely similar to Sartre's. The Stanford article notes that "Husserl, earlier, in the first edition of *Logical Investigations*, affirmed a similar view. However, he did not claim, as Sartre sometimes seems to, that pre-reflective experience is "non-egological" in the sense of *being no one's*, or literally *selfless*, only that, phenomenologically, there are no grounds for regarding an *ego* as some unifying "center" of intentional relations (my emphasis) (Stanford, Phenomenological Approaches to Self-Consciousness, section 3).

A similarity is also found in Heidegger, who, historically, linked such basic reflexivity (self-disclosure) to the notion of an inescapable, everyday "inauthentic" or conventional self-understanding, to be contrasted with an authentic form that can emerge from this in a kind of ("*Angst*"-triggered) crisis of meaningfulness (Stanford, Consciousness and Intentionality, section 3). While not identical to Husserl or Sartre's views, it is nonetheless of the general agreement that an examination of reflexivity relates to inauthentic and authentic concerns regarding selfhood.

When it comes to the removal of the empirical ego or the self-inquiry into authentic existence, keep in mind that the use of reflexivity and intentionality as a means to orient towards pre-reflective self-consciousness is *done over time*, rather than instantly given as a 'presuppositionless starting point'. As I see it, one of the primary critiques of Husserl rests on considering the Epoché as an on/off switch regarding consciousness which we can instantly flip and so enjoy the fruits of what usually takes decades of introspective training to accomplish. Consider that most attentional training programs in fields like psychology is structured to function over at least 8-weeks in order to have clinical significance. The task of training awareness operates on a principle of *training*, much like the metaphor of training physical strength. To my mind the view that the Epoché represented an instant availability of transcendental 'unobstructed' awareness seems to be a very misleading critique.

e. *The Consequence of the Reflexivity of Intentionality*

Having indicated the role of pre-reflective self-consciousness in relation to Authenticity. There still remains to expand upon a consequence entailed by the reflexivity of intentionality. In all credit to Husserl, none of these explorations of either first-person perspective intentionality, examinations of selfhood, or reflexivity which he and his existential phenomenologists explored could have been done without his research. However, while previously I have

presented my own views largely by reflecting on the views of others, I here would like to present some of my thoughts regarding *how* to go about using phenomenology to use self-inquiry as a means to deconstruct the ego. Thus, what follows in this section is my own research, which builds on what we have explored thus far.

Note that while this is the original research for this paper, some is built on previous research of mine on the trainability of introspection. The research on introspective trainability was submitted in the course *Bachelor Essay in Philosophy* (FIL251), supervised by Gunnar Karlsen. In that paper I wrote about the epistemic role and nature of introspection in response to Eric Schwitzgebel's 2011 book *Perplexities of Consciousness*, where he brought attention to the implications posed by the fallibility of untrained, or "naïve" introspection. One of the central claims I presented in that paper was that introspection could be trained – that is, increased in reliability – and that this training could be proven by the subjectively experienced increase in introspective competence. This involved greater clarity, resolution, range, scope and access to mental phenomena which were presented to consciousness. While this paper does not deal with Schwitzgebel's claims, the relation between increasing awareness of objects in consciousness as it relates to existential phenomenological inquiries are relevant to this paper.

I think that the ambition of *investigating* and *discarding* the false, mistaken and limiting self-beliefs with which we normally live with and within is important to uncovering authentic existence, and I consider it to be found in both Husserl and the existentialists. While Husserl's approach was to investigate his first-person perspective with his Epoché, the existentialists not inspired by Husserl like Kierkegaard tended to speak about an existential *choice* with social consequences. Since intentionality of consciousness (and the nothingness of consciousness) means that consciousness is always awareness *of something* – what it is directed or intended towards – and never a thing in itself, the implications for reflexivity in relation to self-consciousness remains open for exploration.to be explored.

Since consciousness is, on the intentionality model, always awareness *of* something, it would follow logically that *what is experiencing* cannot *be* the object it experiences. Note that this is my contention and, as far as I am aware, not an explored part of any phenomenologists. By "what is experiencing" I wish to bring attention to a question which is rarely posed, even by the existential phenomenologists, and even more rarely answered. After all, what is it that *observes*? I ask this in the most general sense possible – I do not have an answer. The posing of this question is in a certain sense a form of Socratic dialogue. One answer might be that we take the view which Sartre proposed, that what it is that has the power to observe is a *field*, an underlying

unitary field which is removed of all objects, an *absolute* of sorts in which all reveals itself. But notice that descriptions like these come in the form of *words.* Not to paraphrase Wittgenstein, but notice that none of these words are, in themselves, what is actually observing. Words can designate entities in the world which are 'real' (like the coffee cup), and things which are 'not real' (like Centaurs). However, this is not a problem *of language* per se, rather, the question "what has the power to observe?" is an *existential* question which, like the process of death, is inescapably subjective to deal with. It is *your own* in a way that no one could ever resolve *for* you. In other words, if there is an actual *answer* to this question, it can only come to you in the form of an experience, as a subjective truth if you will, attained by the existing individual. For this reason, I shall not attempt to answer it better than Sartre already has.

Questions like these are self-inquiries: they have the existential-ontological character of Dasein's pre-existing mode of being as ontic inquiry. Other questions include "who am I?" or "where am I?".

When I say that what is experiencing cannot be the object it experiences, this is used to mean, in other words, that one cannot be both the experiencer of an object *and* the object experienced. Simply put, one cannot *be* what one can be aware *of*. This follows from introspection, for example. If I can be aware of a mental internal image introspectively, then I am aware of this image – it is presented to *something* which is different from this mental image. I call this principle that you cannot be what you can be aware of *the principle of attentional disqualification,* but it can also be thought of as the consequence of the reflexivity of intentionality.

To illustrate this, take the following example. If I can be aware of something, take my cup of coffee for example, I cannot *be* the coffee cup – it is "out there, in the world" so to speak. If I *were* the coffee cup, then cessation of the cup would mean the cessation of me, a hypothesis which any quick test involving a throw and a wall would invalidate. The problem becomes more complicated and certainly hits "closer to home" when one considers one's own physical body in this manner. For example, I can be aware of my right hand. By employing the same logic, it follows that this too, cannot be me. For instance, if I somehow lost my right hand, I would never make the claim that I had stopped existing, lost my first-person point of view or lost my *me-ness*.

Plenty of right handed amputees can live to tell the tale, and while they may certainly be reduced in functionality, their existence remains. Whatever existence is, it apparently does not reside in

the right hand, any more than it resides in the cup of coffee. Then, according to the implications of reflexivity of intentionality, we are necessarily aware of the objects in our first person perspective, but we never *are* the objects shown in our first person perspective. Again, this is my contention.

As a further example, you are now reading this text. It would be very strange if you believed yourself *to be* this text, with letters and words printed on paper. This is to say, you are aware of the paper and the text and its meanings in your awareness, they have not suddenly *become* you in virtue of being presented to you. Husserl actually does make some remarks in support of this thinking. For instance, his aim was to describe our experiences as it is given from the *first-person perspective*, and it is no part of my experience of the first person perspective of my right hand that something is occurring in my brain (Zahavi, p. 13, in reference to Husserl's *Ideen 2*, p. 215-216). In other words, when I look at my right hand, I am only aware of the right hand, not the apparatuses which enable sensory data, like vision, the physical eyes or the visual cortex.

Regarding this distinction, Zahavi writes that for Husserl, an objectively oriented phenomenology has as its main theme *intentionality*, and any proper investigation of intentionality must include an investigation of the *intentional correlate*. (Zahavi, 2017, p. 23 – 24). On my view, I do not consider the intentional correlate as a reference to a 'thing itself' behind the noumena, as it were. Husserl's bracketing had categorically ruled out such speculations, his concerns lay with what was available for exploration in consciousness. Husserl similarly referred to the *nothingness* of the intentionality of consciousness, stating clearly that consciousness was nothing but awareness-of. As such, for Husserl, the first-person phenomenological perspective was the only persistent and non-reducible or un-separate-able criterion of what we are (my contention).

To help illustrate this, keep in mind the second definition of reflexivity from the Stanford article on Consciousness and Intentionality:

"Second, it is only *occasionally* and only in *reflection* that a conscious state is simultaneously an *intentional object* for the one whose state it is" (Stanford, Consciousness and Intentionality, section 3).

Reflexivity, on the second definition, entails that the intentionality of consciousness can be turned back by means of *reflection* (or introspection) (my contention). A conscious state can then be an intentional object on reflection, and, as the article states, this only happens occasionally. If the existentialists critique is to be translated to these terms, then we can say that

the awareness of ourselves as *alive*, as beings which are able to turn the intentionality of consciousness reflectively back unto itself so as to investigate our ontology, happens all too occasionally.

It is my contention that a means of uncovering authentic existence is by the reflexivity of the intentionality of consciousness. Similarly, in all likelihood, one or more interpretations about pre-reflective self-consciousness overlaps with this. To help see this, consider the following passages:

"If (as some phenomenologists' views suggest) a pre-predicative, pre-reflective, practical understanding undetachable from the world is part of what makes us what we are, we may need to recognize the undetachability of our intentional consciousness" (Stanford, Consciousness and Intentionality, section 7).

"[…] we need to see – against this background – what kind of distinctive self-understanding *reflective self-consciousness* makes possible, if this is also part of what we are. We need to ask how much this sort of self-consciousness can do to detach us from social roles and practices, and what room this allows for authenticity, autonomy and self-constitution" (Stanford, Consciousness and Intentionality, section 7),

In light of both the contemporary and historical notions about the role of first-person reflection and pre-reflective self-consciousness, I consider reflexivity of intentionality to be equivocal to what I call 'self-inquiry'. While it is my own view that pre-reflective self-consciousness is related to authentic existence, there are philosophers and Heidegger commentators who lean towards this view. Consider for example the remark by Hubert Dreyfus that "any reflective awareness of our perceptions and actions always presupposes a *non-reflective*, *non-self-referential* way of being-in-the-world" (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 54-59).

As I see it, the ontological consequences of the reflexivity of intentionality is that the principle of *attentional disqualification* (that you cannot be what you can be aware of) holds true not only for external observation, but internal ones as well. In other words, I maintain that the same logical principle – that one cannot be what one is aware off – holds true for all objects in consciousness. Consider again the right-handed amputees. These are people who have lost their hand, but still exist. In other words, the ratio between existence and the physical body is not 1:1. You can lose part of your body, like your spleen, an arm, a leg, your blood, certain parts of your brain or a hefty chunk of your liver, and still *exist*. As a consequence of our ability to

perform introspection, it is my contention that this same principle holds for internal events as well.

As I see it, this is how Husserl, by carrying out the Epoché on himself came to disregard the ontological value of the empirical ego – the sense of 'I' which were subject to perception. Here, to my mind, we see the defining difference between Husserl and Descartes. While it is the case that Husserl investigated the first-person perspective, I think that his motivation was not one of skepticism or methodological doubt. This in fact was the very tradition he sought to undermine. I think that Husserl only carried out this ambition (the persistent investigation of the first-person perspective) because it already was a problem, an area of concern, a *feature of investigation* for him, and as such it merited analysis. Husserl did not set out to *make* a problem, but spent considerable time *investigating a pre-existent one*.

Where Descartes sought to glorify the cogito as a primary ontological principle, hoping to ascertain some certainty from his doubts, Husserl's method sought to systematically deconstruct the *cogito*. Zahavi reflects this view in his conclusion of Husserl, saying that "Husserl did not advocate a classical Cartesian-Kantian subject-philosophy, and that he was not a solipsist, but, on the contrary, treated intersubjectivity as a transcendental philosophical notion of utmost importance" (Zahavi, p. 140).

In closing, I would like to remark that the reflexivity of intentionality, when brought to bear on the internal features which make up the sense of selfhood, and when discarded by attentional disqualification reveals the ontology of the 'I' – of the sense of selfhood as a being in the brain – as false. These notions suggest that there is a certain amount of relevance and merit to an old philosophical critique, that of there being no permanent, underlying, persistent *self*.

9. *No Self*

In this section we will very briefly present some of the more salient critiques of selfhood historically. As I believe that the preceding section said what needed to be said about the phenomenological investigation about selfhood as a means to uncover authentic existence, I should like to briefly supplement this with references to other thinkers who has endorsed similar conclusions.

a. *Examples of theories of non-selfhood*

As we saw in the *Terms and Themes* section, selfhood has seen engagement by many philosophers. Nietzsche for example, viewed selves as a kind of *convenient fiction*. Similarly, philosophers like Hume, and contemporary figures like the late Derek Parfit and Daniel Dennett all shared critiques on the view that there was a fixed self. The French phenomenologist philosopher Paul Ricoeur explicitly explored a narrative theory of selfhood, and refers to the engagement with selfhood as "*Philosophies of the cogito*".

Regarding selfhood, existentialist philosopher Martin Buber (1878 – 1965) makes a salient observation, noting that "it belongs in the nature of experience to minimize the contribution made by the one who is experiencing to the constitution of the object experienced". This encouraged people to 'split' experience, wrongly, into two independent factors: a 'ghostly I' and a 'ready-made world' (Buber, 1923, first English translation 1937, *I and Thou*, p. 21, p. 26). As we have seen, this 'ghostly I' can, to my mind, be traced back to Descartes. What phenomenologists like Sartre and Ricoeur has attempted to argue, in line with Buber's claim, is that phenomenological inspection of the I reveals only its constituent parts (*narratives* for Riceur) and no permanent, ontologically stable foundation or 'sticking post' for the narratives which constitute selfhood (my contention).

Selfhood is currently a topic of debate in contemporary discussions, in fields such as philosophy of mind. Some contemporary philosophers of mind, like Daniel Dennett (1942 – present) has a deflationary theory of the self. For Dennett, selves are not physically detectable, they rather operate as a kind of psychologically convenient fiction. I have read through Dennett's 1992 book *Consciousness explained* where he introduced a term called *heterophenomenology*. Without going in depth, Dennett's approach to the existence of selfhood has been one which has been informed by natural science fields like neuroscience, psychology and artificial intelligence. What I could gather from the book was that human beings operate in the world by a reference to stories *about* that world and their place in it. In a sense they create a kind of "life story" about a character which they identify with and puts as primary. They feature the stories of their lives as this character of 'I' and that this convenient yet fictional character is what is meant by 'self' (Dennett, 1992). According to Dennett, the self was fictitious, and were to be thought of like an arbitrary point of gravity of a hoop is a point in thin air.

While Dennett's view is not uncontroversial, it has a certain following and some basis in established science. As far as contemporary approaches goes, it is a relatively well-researched

one. The viewpoint of the Self as a centerless collection of narratives is not new, some versions can be traced back to David Hume. As Hume writes in his treatise, when we look for the self *"we are never intimately conscious of anything but a particular perception; man is a bundle or collection of different perceptions which succeed one another with an inconceivable rapidity and are in perpetual flux and movement"* (Hume. A Treatise of Human Nature. I, IV, vi).

Nietzsche similarly, considered the coherent structure of the self to be illusionary, saying *"I am convinced of [ich halte] the phenomenalism of the* inner *world also; everything that reaches our consciousness is utterly and completely adjusted, simplified, schematized, interpreted, the* actual *process of inner 'perception,' the* relation of causes *between thoughts, feelings, desires, between subject and object, is absolutely concealed from us, and may be purely imaginary*" (quoted in Ricoeur, 1990, p. 16 (introduction)).

There are interesting similarities to Dennett's account of selfhood and the accounts of Hume and Nietzsche. Equally interesting is the theory of phenomenologist philosopher Paul Ricoeur, who also developed a theory of selfhood related to narratives. They all refer to the constituent parts of the sense of selfhood without conceding the existence of a sense in itself. While Dennett writes much as a contrary or reactionary figure, and Hume wrote from the recesses of history, the topic of the existence of something so close to us is bound to be controversial. Interestingly, Ricoeur expresses a fascination for a kind of self-inquiry question in relation to selfhood, and comes up with a narrative theory of selfhood. As I see it, this is suggestive of a common unison in the theory of selfhood as constituted by narratives, which can be unraveled by self-investigations.

Regarding the engagement with selfhood, Ricoeur writes in his 1996 paper *The Crisis of the Cogito* that, "If Descartes's Cogito can be held as the opening of the era of modern subjectivity, it is to the extent that the I is taken for the first time in the position of foundation, i.e., as the ultimate condition for the possibility of all philosophical discourse" (Ricoeur, 1996, p. i).

Ricoeur addresses the impact of language in the formation or layout of selves in his 1990 book *Oneself as Another*, writing "In introducing the problematic of the self by the question "who?", we have in the same stroke opened the way for the genuine polysemy inherent in this question itself: Who is speaking or what? Who does What? About whom and about what does one construct a narrative?" (Ricoeur, 1990, p. 19).

Regarding Ricoeur's theory, the Stanford article on him notes that "Narrative identity has to do not just with the identity of the characters in a story or history, but with the larger claim that

personal identity in every case can be considered in terms of a narrative identity: what story does a person tell about his or her life, or what story do others tell about it? In effect, narrative identity is one of the ways in which we answer the question "who?" Who is this? Who said that? Did that? Who is that? Who are we?" (Stanford, Paul Ricoeur, introduction).

b. *Authentic existence and no self*

We have seen throughout the paper how references to a state free from duality and alienation are definitions of authentic existence. We have also seen references to pre-reflective self-consciousness as an underlying unitary basis. My position regarding selfhood is that I consider it as inherently inauthentic and the source of dualistic alienation. I agree with philosophers like Hume, Nietzsche, Ricoeur and others and consider the self, in the form of a narrative structure held together by 'sticky' narratives to be inauthentic and ontologically false.

When I say that there is no self, I encounter the near impossible task of correct terminological use. *Selfhood* is understood in so many ways by different traditions within philosophy that even mentioning all the different positions is itself a difficult undertaking. For contemporary analytical philosophy, the problem of selfhood might be referring to the problem of personal identity, in the sense of the criterion that ensues sameness over time.

For some phenomenologists, like Sartre, 'self' might either refer to the ego which we see in consciousness, or for Husserl it might mean the transcendental ego which forms the basis for experience. For the sciences, like psychology, it might have a different meaning altogether. For the purposes of this paper, the terms 'self', 'ego', and 'I', are all used interchangeably to denote the fictitious core at the heart of our maladaptive operating system. What these terms designate is a supposed, though never actually shown or experienced 'self' residing somewhere in consciousness or the body.

What I mean to say is that in there is no *solid*, *fundamental*, *singular* "I" residing somewhere in the body. There is no little homunculus in the middle of the brain directing things. The "I" which we take ourselves to be, is a narrative construct which we have mistakenly identified with. This false sense of selfhood comes from narrative linguistic structures, which are perceivable. That is to say, one can become aware of the narrative thought loops which constitute the sense of separated selfhood, but can never be aware of the 'sticking post' for all these narratives, a core unit say, because it does not exist. Most narrative structures are self-

referential, that is, they point to a self which is posed, but never shown. One can be aware of the building blocks of the ego in consciousness, but never the ego itself, because it is fictitious. In other words, intentionality can be brought to bear on the mental constructs which constitute the illusion of selfhood, but never on the criterion for selfhood itself. It's just dark. In this sense, the 'I' is a linguistic-ontological illusion, whose manifestation in the form of *problematic thoughts* inform our sense of alienation and separation from ourselves, each other and the world.

What I mean to say is that there is a mental *construct* called "I", which lies at the root of narratives which all posit its existence, like "I want coffee". However, what authentic being entails and what existential inquiry reveals is that this I, although supposed, is not really there. It is fictional. It owes its endurance to the fact that the basis of its ontology is never inquired into. Inquiry into these structures, of the sort the existentialist have been writing about, take the form of self-inquiry questions like "who am I", "where is this 'I'? or "who hears?". By a persistent adherence to such existential inquiries throughout one's life, it is my contention that alienation can be overcome and the sense of self deconstructed.

What I think *is there* once the maladaptive I construct and its manifestations has been removed by self-inquiry is what Sartre called a unitary absoluteness, or what Kierkegaard writes about as the sweet and complete stillness of world, which holds, sustains and underlies everything. As the existentialists refer to with their conceptions of being-in-the-world and pre-reflective engagement of the body, from this sweet stillness, activity and action emerges – spontaneously, effortlessly – and without the ego narrating this dancerless dance, there is just a return home to authenticity.

Like Hume, and as a result of attentional training and existential inquiries, it becomes clear that, when I introspect, the only thing I am aware off are the s*tories* that circulates around and around 'in my head' as it were. I am never actually conscious of a 'self', only its constituents parts as they are presented to an intentional reflective pre-reflective self-awareness. What constitute the 'I' is a sort of linguistic, narrative-generating machinery. After all, when you go looking for this supposed Self, what do you find, but stories? The capital-S *Self* is a complex collection of narratives assembling themselves around themselves. Certain aspects of this view is found in phenomenologists like Ricoeur, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, but it is a view I consider to follow from the analysis of intentionality pioneered by Husserl (my contention).

Regarding the structure of the self as a production of narratives, let us turn to a metaphor. Picture a collection of fish swimming together in the same direction (called schooling). An example

would be a spherical shape. Every member swims around an arbitrary (randomly chosen) point of empty water, forming a large sphere shape. Since they tend to stack in height as well as length, they take the form of a sphere and not a circle. The point at which they circulate is just an empty point of water, but from the outside it might seem that they all rotate around some given core. This behavior helps safeguard the survival of the group. In the same fashion, picture a large gathering of interconnected linguistic formations (narrations, or stories) all pointing to a fictional point referred to simply as "I". You can imagine something like narratives circulating in and out of observation always pointing back to the other narratives, but no one narrative points to a fixed "substance" that would constitute a self. Such narrative formations are always pointing to, and thus begging the existence of, a core of selfhood that is never itself subject to observation. In my view, this makes these narrative formations *self*-referential, without ever being *self*-generating.

In this sense, what I term authentic existence is *Popperian*, that is, what is true and permanent cannot be stated (as in X is true). What is authentic and not subject to the principle of attentional disqualification can only *falsify*. If the ontology of the I was real, then inspecting its constituent narrative parts would not be of any ontological consequence, as it would just yield itself to presentation in full and remain. However the problem of introspective processes is that upon investigation into the origin and ontology of these narratives, they tend to go away and not come back. As I see it, ff something is ontologically *true*, or authentic, it would not disappear upon inspection. This is a very simple process, but impactful consequence of the disqualifying criterion of awareness.

By investigating the 'I', one is not subjected to agonizing suffering or horrible despair, but finds surprisingly a very sweet stillness, and that the body 'does itself' perfectly well. What the pre-reflective engagement of the body as being-in-the-world shows is that, contrary to rationalist tendencies, it is not the case that you have to *compulsively* think to beat your heart, or process the liver, or grow the bones. It is all done without the "I". I do not mean, of course, that the body would do itself without the *brain* – keep in mind the *Either/Or* principle I mentioned in the start of the text. The "I" is a kind of narrative fiction operating *in virtue of* the amazing capacity which is the human neocortex; it is not the other way around. Loss of a self-referential narrative formation does not instantly kill the body, as we can be without thoughts in modes of sleep, hypnosis, meditation or walks in nature without suddenly dropping dead.

Besides the insights yielded by direct personal first-person phenomenological experience behind a no-self view, it would also, to my mind, be challenging to pose the opposite view, that

of a core of permanent underlying selfhood. While commonsense, I think it would be complicated to defend if presented in its own merit. That is to say, a core of selfhood is, in my view, a problematic position to defend in itself, with or without my concerns addressed. Where would it be, for example? The self has no set location within the brain. The pineal gland does have many interesting neurological functions, but serve as the home for a self, living inside the brain is not one of them. To appeal to a smaller being living in the head is popular in fiction, the 1997 film 'Men in Black' feature such an example, and is appealing to the "I", as it gives it a spatial location to imbue, but does not solve the problem. To posit such a notion as a smaller human living in our head is to postpone the question. After all, what lives inside that beings head, ad infinitum.

One might ask why pose the question to begin with, does not the very posing of the question imply the lack of the criterion in a question-begging manner? To my mind the answer, and the reason to perform self-inquiry in general relates back to the problem of *alienation*. If there was no problem, then indeed this would seem a strange pursuit to endorse. However, when viewed from the perspective of the problem posed by *problematic thoughts* and the subsequent mental and societal impacts, I believe alienation has come to the forefront of our concurrent problems, not only as a poetic, vague 'literary expression of an age' but as an *actual* species concerning problem. In closing this paper, I wish to present recent emergent research on the brain as it relates to problematic thoughts and what I consider to be the problem posed by alienation.

10. *Two Networks and two modes of Being*

As mentioned, in this section I present some emergent research on contemporary studies on the brain. First, however, we touch upon the role of science in regard to philosophy.

a. *Brief remarks regarding Science and Philosophy*

It is my wish to suggest that the authentic and inauthentic modes of beings may have some physical correlation with some emerging findings in the field of cognitive neuroscience.

I am acutely aware that, by employing recent findings in the natural sciences to explain authenticity I am – intentionally or not – faced with questions regarding the relationship

between philosophy and science. By making reference to very recent scientific findings in a paper about an established and traditioned philosophical term, I am making all kinds of unexamined assumptions. The question regarding philosophy's relationship to the world as presented by the natural sciences is a profound and very complicated question. A whole vein of contemporary philosophy – philosophy of science – is dedicated to this and other related discussions. I could very well end up in lengthy – and conceivably productive – discussions relating philosophy and science, but it would take us too far away from the aims of this paper. Ultimately, since the claim I hope to make is that authenticity is urgently relevant to the challenges facing us today, I have decided in favor of presenting these findings as relevant to authenticity. They do not prove my position, but they are certainly interesting to consider. As someone who began their academic career in psychology and subsequently cognitive science (not the same as cognitive neuroscience) perhaps I was always going to lean favorably towards science as valid to philosophy, but I digress.

Merleau-Ponty, for example, drew extensively on empirical science and neurological case studies in developing his own account of perception and embodied agency (Aho, p. 43). Going back to Aristotle, who certainly had a passionate interest in the workings of the natural world, for the pursuer of wisdom as a means to living the good life, seeking insight from the observations about nature seems defendable.

b. *The Task Positive Network and the Default Mode Network*

As mentioned, I do not wish to indicate that thinking is categorically or inherently flawed or wrong. The critique of reason has had some engagement in existential philosophy, which met with its fair share of rebuttal, so I wish to be particularly clear about this. The use of planning, reasoning, problem solving and so on is vital, while the negative rumination into narrative storylines about a 'self' and is not. As it stands, separations between these two ways of using reason – of thinking, as it were – has a baseline in recent scientific findings.

As we saw in the beginning of this paper, a research experiment by Wilson et al. presented the findings that the research participants by and large found the activity of spending 15 minutes alone with their thoughts as uncomfortable. What Wilson et al. wrote about this, in addition to what has already been written in this paper, is that the neural activity (i.e. brain states) during the inward-directed thought which the participants were engaged in is called *default-mode processing*, and this neural activity has "been the focus of a great deal of attention in recent

years". Wilson et al. stated that "the default mode network is a network which consists of several disconnected brain areas; this suggests that the "I" is spread all over the brain, rather than having one specific location" (Wilson et al. p. 76).

The research on brain networks and functions began by the early 2000's and has since seen a rapid growth. Starting with interest in 2001 by the research papers *A default mode of brain function* by Marcus Raichle et al., and *Medial prefrontal cortex and self-referential mental activity: Relation to a default mode of brain function* by Debra Gusnard et al. both published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, a more recent 2010 paper by Andrews-Hanna et al. *Functional-anatomic fractionation of the brain's default network* published in *Neuron* has been a landmark paper which has led to a growing interest amongst scientific study.

According to the emergent research, the brain has two very distinct networks both responsible for two different modes of operating. While the research is still in its infancy, much interesting research has surfaced in the 2010's. Supposedly, there is a separate network for tasking and problem solving, referred to as the *task positive*/*task control* network and a network responsible for selfhood and ruminating self-related chatter, which was initially called the *task negative network*, now known as the Default Mode Network (DMN) or simply Default Network (DN).

Historically, before the research in the late 1990's and early 2000's, it used to be thought that when we were not involved in tasking or work, the brain just shut off and did nothing. However, with the new emergent research this picture has been replaced with the view that when the brain is not engaged in tasking, it switches to a separate network responsible for a default mode of being (i.e. the default state when not otherwise occupied) which has several functions related to agency, selfhood and self-related rumination. For this reason, it has sometimes also colloquially been called the 'selfing' network. As I could gather, today there is general agreement that when not engaged in specific tasks, the default mode network is active and engages in self-referential narratives, which are mostly *problematic*.

Interestingly, studies on popular awareness training techniques, indicate that medium to long term practitioners seem better able to remain engaged in the task positive network, also called the task control network, throughout the day. This suggestion was presented in a 2007 paper *Attending to the present: mindfulness meditation reveals distinct neural modes of self-reference* by Norman Farb et al. published in the journal *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*.

The research was conducted by using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) on participants either trained in mindfulness or not.

In the study by Farb et al., the fMRI scans were used to "examine monitoring of enduring traits (narrative focus) or momentary experience (experiential focus) in both novice participants and those having attended an 8-week course in mindfulness meditation". The paper describes the training as "a program that trains individuals to develop focused attention on the present" (Farb et al. 2007, p. 313-322). The conclusion presented in the paper is that "the results presented suggest a fundamental neural dissociation between two distinct forms of self-awareness that are habitually integrated but can be dissociated through attentional training: the self across time and in the present moment" (Farb et al. 2007, p. 313-322).

These findings are echoed by a 2011 Yale study by Judson Brewer et al. published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, which noted that people who meditated were able to decrease mind wandering (Brewer, et al. 2011). In this study, a lacking ability to regulate the default mode network was linked with a number of mental health issues such as autism, attention deficit disorder, anxiety and depression. Brewer noted that "the hallmarks of many forms of mental illness is a preoccupation with one's own thoughts, a condition meditation seems to affect".

While, Brewer et al. only demonstrated a correlation and not causation between these two regions and mediation, a 2013 study by Xiaotong Wen et al. from the University of Florida, *Top-Down Regulation of Default Mode Activity in Spatial Visual Attention*, published in the *Journal of Neuroscience* successfully demonstrated the causation. By examining the fMRI scans of subjects performing visual tasks which required concentration and tasks which did not, they were able to mark biostatistical data when observing how successful subjects were in performing the tasks and the correlation with what regions were activated.

The Wen et al. paper explored the relation between the task control network (TCN) and the default mode network (DMN), stating them as two fundamental cortical systems, and echoing the relation of DMN activity to autism (Wen et al. 2013). The study also showed that when the DMN is not sufficiently suppressed, it distracts and interferes with the TCN by sending it signals, causing performance to drop. The Wen et al. researchers states that "we have shown that when the task control network (TCN) suppresses the default mode network (DMN) the person can do the task better and faster. The better the default mode network (DMN) is shut down, the better a person performs" (Wen et al., 2013).

c. *The Default Mode Network and Mental Health*

The relation between default mode activity and mental health are echoed by a more recent meta-review/overview paper *The default network and self-generated thought: component processes, dynamic control, and clinical relevance* by Andrews-Hanna et al. published in the journal *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* (p. 29-52) in 2014. In the 2014 review paper, the researchers explored the regulatory functions behind the activations of the different networks. Explicitly, they analyzed how the brain switches between the task positive network/task control network and the default mode network/default network and ways in which the brain could maintain the DMN de-activated for long periods. Regarding mental health and self-related chatter, Andrews-Hanna et al. states that "processing negative information increases the frequency of negative and retrospective thoughts, and task-unrelated thoughts can also lead to subsequent unhappiness" (Andrews-Hanna et al., 2014, p. 32). The meta/review paper indicated that thinking about the self offsets the information value of self-referential, episodic, memory.

Regarding the recent boom in research on these networks, the abstract of the 2014 review paper reads "Though only a decade has elapsed since the default network (DN) was first defined as a large-scale brain system, recent years have brought great insight into the network's adaptive functions. A growing theme highlights the DN as playing a key role in internally directed or self-generated thought" (Andrews-Hanna et al., 2014, abstract).

As the review suggests, there seems to be clinically significant links to mental health treatment. The review paper concluded by discussing "clinical implications of disruptions to the integrity of the network, and considered disorders when thought content becomes polarized or network interactions become disrupted or imbalanced" (Andrews-Hanna et al., 2014, abstract). In short, it seems that self-generated thoughts may cause mental health disorders and neurodegenerative diseases. Take, for example, this quote from the conclusion:

> "Many disorders including ADHD, schizophrenia, depression, rumination, and OCD have difficulty regulating the occurrence of self-generated thoughts. These impairments often manifest as increased distractibility or elevated levels of mindwandering, as well as hyperactivity of the DN and weaker anticorrelations with networks involved in external attention. By contrast, individuals with improved executive control are able to limit their self-generated thought to nondemanding or unimportant contexts. […] Depressed individuals, particularly those who ruminate, have "sticky thoughts" and

> problems updating the contents of working memory and switching tasks, such that prior goal states exert a stronger influence on on-going mental processes than normal" (Andrews-Hanna et al., 2014, abstract).

While these and other reports seem to form a rapidly developing picture on the relation between the brain and mental states, it is important to keep in mind that the research is still being conducted. In other words, the link between cognitive networks and subjective chatter is (to my mind) telling, relevant, but not conclusive. However, I think it realistic to conclude that they could account for subjective reports of well-being and increased productivity when not "caught in thinking" or when engaged in the world. As we have already seen, this has already been suggested by Heidegger, Sartre and others.

There is a fundamental difference between productive use of reason and compulsive chatter. It is my position that currently, we are experiencing a problematic relationship with the latter, our compulsive self-related thoughts. These vacuous storylines about potential future outcomes, fears, worries, anxieties and dread fill our attentional space, distracting us from being present for our lives, and contributes very little to our functioning and happiness. In short, we have a problem with *compulsive, problematic* self-related thinking.

The 'good news', so to speak, is that these internal narratives which causes so much unhappiness and wastes so much cognitive bandwidth can be reduced, "uninstalled" (to use a computer metaphor) and if persistently investigated, removed completely. As I see it, it is precisely the fact that they can be removed and are marked by alienation which yields them as *inauthentic* (my contention). If they were part of what Sartre has called the pre-given absolute or pre-reflective self-consciousness, and could not be removed by attention to attention, then I would not call them *inauthentic*. However, what is the ontological status of something that disappears when you pay attention to it? Would we call a barn in a field which disappeared when inspected for a real barn? Or for that matter, an authentic barn?

If one is fully present, and not lost in negative self-talk, which is often irrelevant to the current situation, it stands to reason that one can be much more effective. We have all seen people get taken out of the moment or the task at hand and disappear "into their head". As I see it, such distracting thoughts, often in the form of worries and stories do nothing constructive or helpful to the situations we encounter. They create a form of *separation* – of alienation – from the task at hand and our involvement with the world. When, however, we are not lost in our minds, generally we can be much more appropriate, useful and authentic. Tellingly, we usually find it

preferable to be "in the moment" – or engaged in the task rather than the chatter – as opposed to getting lost in ourselves, losing focus, not paying attention, et cetera.

It is my assumption that we do not wish to get taken out of what is going on in the moment, but instead are involuntarily taken out – switched off as it were – by the pull of the latent inauthentic tendencies of our minds, our inauthentic mode of being.

11. *Conclusion*

I hope that the nature and challenge posed by problematic thoughts, and the pursuit of existential self-inquiry via phenomenological traditions as means to reduce them have been, if not proven, then at least indicated as promising avenues of further research. As human beings, we have mental maps of the world which we consult when we engage with the world. Our "hardware" – that is to say our brain – have an utterly astonishing capability to function and adapt to its environment. As a species we have been to the moon, we have produced the music of Mozart, the Mona Lisa, technology to rival the gods of old legends, and not be forgotten, wondered about our place in the world. As far as computer metaphors go, we have great hardware, great "offline" processing capabilities. There are approximately 100 billion neurons and about 50 trillion or so synaptic connections in your body. This staggering number of neurons and the sheer number of synaptic connections (links between neurons) makes the human brain one of the absolute wonders of the universe. The "software" which is currently running on it, however, is another matter.

Regarding the tendency of our time for escapism via smartphones and social media, these may be seen as the "expressions of a generation". However, I do not think this is the case. Rather, it seems to be the *lack* of a particular expression, which worries me. These distractions represent to us little more than means of escapism. As we saw from Wilson et al.'s experiment, people did not like being alone with their thoughts. I think that we should pay real attention to this and its implications, especially in regards to the emerging science on the default mode network and its connection with increasing problematic thoughts. I hope to have at least indicated that the theme of authentic existence represents a means of returning to a less conflicted mode of being by essentially *paying attention to our lives*, as opposed to escaping into digital distractions.

To my mind, the use of digital distractions like TV, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Netflix, YouTube, Tinder and other enhancements and replacements of our social hierarchical standing

all represent a response to the encumbered, alienated and inauthentic state in which we currently live. Would we have this pressing and for some, all-consuming need to be connected 24/7 via replacements of genuine human interaction if we did not feel, at some level, out of touch, scared, angst-filled, alone and, in truth, alienated?

The needs and behaviors we display might indicate some underlying concern, it is hard to prove conclusively. Regardless of whether or not modernity expresses some particularly potent expression of alienation in the form of smartphones, I nevertheless maintain that the attainment of authenticity is of utmost importance, both to the existing individual and for general societal cohesion. Unfortunately, the use of the devices and our general tendency towards attentional distractions only serve to magnify our lacking ability to be at peace with ourselves. In a way, using these devices is very similar to wetting your pants to stay warm, it might make us feel better short term, but the result on a large scale is yet to be felt. The appeal of these devices and our responses to the problems of modernity are understandable however, as they show or suggests that our current state is a deeply flawed and dehumanized one.

In a way it is puzzling, if not outright disconcerting, that the negative chatter in our minds – our self-referential narratives – have at the same time such influence over our well-being and at the same time is largely ignored as a possible problem. It is not inconceivable that in the near future, as the problem of inauthenticity increases, we might find ourselves distracted further by ever more escapes from reality. A negative feedback loop might occur – in a way is occurring – which should concern us a great deal.

List of references and list of Literature

Notes on references:

Throughout the paper I have tried to reference consistently using the following method:

(Author/Article, year of publication, page number)

In the event of an author being cited by more than one work, the year of publication has been included. In the case that only one work of the author was used in the article, the year of publication was omitted.

Further, if translations were used, I have tried to make reference to what English translation was used. In the case of the paragraph containing a reference to the author or the work, or containing a reference previously, only the page number has been used for subsequent reference.

In the case of secondary works, like introductory volumes or Zahavi's research making specific text-reference to other authors (like Husserl or Sartre), these works are included in the format (quoting Author, Work/Year, Page number).

In the few cases where I was not able to obtain the page number, it has been omitted.

Final word count (omitting reference list, abstract, contents, title page and acknowledgements) is 39.910 words.

Books:

Aho, K. (2014). *Existentialism : an introduction*. Cambridge; Polity Press.

Appignanesi, R. (2013) *Existentialism, A graphic guide*. London: Icon Books Ltd.

Berrett, W. (1962) *Irrational man, a study in Existential Philosophy*.2nd edn. New York: Anchor Books.

Buber, M. (1923/1971) *I and Thou*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Cooper, D.E. (1999) *Existentialism : a reconstruction.*2nd edn. Carlton: Blackwell Publishing.

Csikszentmihályi, Mihaly. (1990) *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Harper & Row.

Dreyfus, R. (1991) *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's* Being and Time. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Ferguson, R. (2013) *Life Lessons From Kierkegaard*. London: Macmillan

Heidegger, M. (1927/1962) *Being and Time.* Evanston: Harper & Row.

Kierkegaard, S. (1989) *The Sickness Unto Death*. London: Penguin Group.

Kierkegaard, S. (1843/2006) *Fear and Trembling.* Penguin Books.

Kierkegaard, S. (1843/1992) *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*. Penguin Classics.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1945/1962) *Phenomenology of Perception*. New York: Humanities Press

Nietzsche, F. (1954) *The Portable Nietzsche*. Penguin.

Pascal, B. (1670/1995) *Pensées*. Penguin Classics.

Ricoeur, P. (1990) *Oneself as Another.* University of Chicago Press

Sartre, J. P. (1960) *the transcendence of the ego, an existentialists theory of consciousness*. United States: The Noonday Press.

Sartre, J. P. (1943/2003) *Being and Nothingness*. Routledge.

Wright. J.P. (2010) *Hume's 'A Treatise of Human Nature' (Cambridge Introductions to Key Philosophical Texts)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zahavi, D. (2003) *Husserl's Phenomenology*. Stanford University Press.

Zahavi, D. (2018) *Husserl's Legacy: Phenomenology, Metaphysics, and Transcendental Philosophy.* USA: Oxford University Press.

Articles:

Siewert, Charles, "Consciousness and Intentionality", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/consciousness-intentionality/>.

Gallagher, Shaun and Zahavi, Dan, "Phenomenological Approaches to Self-Consciousness", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*(Summer 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/self-consciousness-phenomenological/>.

Shields, Christopher, "Aristotle", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/aristotle/>.

Smith, David Woodruff, "Phenomenology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/phenomenology/>.

Varga, Somogy and Guignon, Charles, "Authenticity", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/authenticity/>.

Crowell, Steven, "Existentialism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/existentialism/>.

Hofweber, Thomas, "Logic and Ontology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/logic-ontology/>.

Varga, Somogy and Guignon, Charles, "Authenticity", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/authenticity/>.

Siewert, Charles, "Consciousness and Intentionality", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/consciousness-intentionality/>.

Beyer, Christian, "Edmund Husserl", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/husserl/>.

Jacob, Pierre, "Intentionality", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/intentionality/>.

Smith, Joel, "Self-Consciousness", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/self-consciousness/>.

Pellauer, David and Dauenhauer, Bernard, "Paul Ricoeur", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/ricoeur/>.

Harriet Griffey, The Guardian, October 14, 2018. *The lost art of concentration: being distracted in a digital world.* Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/oct/14/the-lost-art-of-concentration-being-distracted-in-a-digital-world (Accessed: 15 July 2019)

"*A default mode of brain function"* by Marcus E. Raichle et al (2001). Available at: https://www.pnas.org/content/98/2/676 (Accessed: 19 August 2019)

"Medial prefrontal cortex and self-referential mental activity: Relation to a default mode of brain function" by Debra A. Gusnard Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC31213/ (Accessed: 17 June, 2019)

"Functional-anatomic fractionation of the brain's default network", by Andrews-Hanna et al. *Neuron* Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2848443/) (Accessed: 4 May, 2019).

Farb, Norman et al "*Attending to the present: mindfulness meditation reveals distinct neural modes of self-reference",* Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience. Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2566754/ (Accessed:12 June, 2019)

Meditation programs for psychological stress and well-being: a systematic review and meta-analysis by Madhav Goyal et al. *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24395196 (Accessed: 17 June, 2019).

"People who meditated were able to decrease mind wandering" Brewer et al. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3250176/ (Accessed 12 June, 2019)

"*Top-Down Regulation of Default Mode Activity in Spatial Visual Attention, Journal of Neuroscience"* (Wen et al. 2013) Available at: https://www.jneurosci.org/content/33/15/6444.abstract (Accessed 13 June, 2019)

"*The default network and self-generated thought: component processes, dynamic control, and clinical relevance*" Andrews-Hanna et al. 2014, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*.

Available at: https://nyaspubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/nyas.12360 (Accessed 12 June, 2019)

"Just think: The challenges of the disengaged mind" Wilson, et al. 2015 *Science* (Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4330241/ (Accessed 12 June, 2019)