Navigating authenticity in the age of the internet a phenomenological exploration of the existential effects of social media

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NAVIGATING AUTHENTICITY IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE EXISTENTIAL
EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

by

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ABSTRACT

Our world is a world of technology, and technology is part of what has made human beings so adept at survival. Yet, the 21st century has seen a new type of technology that is unlike anything ever seen before. This new information technology is known as social media (including such things as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, etc.), and it has the power to influence our very being. However, we are seemingly uncritical and unconcerned about social media in relation to society. This project attempts to analyze social media and its relationship to human beings from an ontological standpoint. I do so by exploring both the ontic and the ontological aspects of social media. In order to do so, I use a method of hermeneutical inquiry and phenomenological exploration. By using the works of several different thinkers, I attempt to get at the essence of the relationship between humans and social media.

First, using the works of Martin Heidegger, I argue that there is an ethical dimension contained within the concept of authenticity. Then, using the works of psychologists, phenomenologists, and cognitive scientists, I show that social media has just as much control over us as we think we have over it. Lastly, I return to Heidegger's work in order to understand what the very essence of social media is, and I then explain what our relationship to social media ought to be in order to live authentically. In doing so, I attempt to explain how we can gain a free relation to social media in order to establish the ways in which it can be most helpful to us.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated in its entirety to the memory of Jacob Wesley Gibbs, without whom I may have given up on Philosophy a long time ago. His friendship meant the world to me, and it is my hope that this work might in some way honor him.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

> The closer we come to the danger, the more brightly do the ways into the saving power begin to shine and the more questioning we become. For questioning is the piety of thought.
>   –Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology"

Asking the right questions is one of the most important ways to gain an understanding of any issue. In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger explains the hermeneutical significance of the question. For him, questioning lies at the root of our very being. Philosophy itself has been shaped by the power of the question, for the question is what allows us to gain understanding. It is important then, as I undertake this project, to always bring questions to the forefront of this project and not leave them lagging behind or lurking in the shadows. This entire project can be seen as a hermeneutical one, in which we will try to gain some understanding of a 21st century phenomenon by asking the right questions. We must never forget to pause to question, and to see where that leads. This is central to the idea of hermeneutics.

Heidegger, in his later essay "The Question Concerning Technology", specifically addresses the question that technology presents to us. He wrote this essay in 1954—a world much different from our own in regards to technology. Heidegger's main concerns in that essay were about natural resources. However, his focus was always with how technology relates to the being of humanity. He could not possibly have envisioned technologies like smart phones, the Internet, and the like. Because of this, his works are not directly applicable to 21st century technologies, but I do believe the groundwork he laid in the questions he asked do anticipate the problems that have arisen from 21st century technologies. For Heidegger, the context within which questions of technology are raised is that of achieving an authentic human existence. Thus

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the central question of this project is to ask: What does it mean to be an authentic human being? I shall take this question a bit further and ask: What does it mean to be an authentic human being, and how does one live that out in the age of the Internet?

Human beings are constantly changing and constantly growing. The entire world is always in flux, and humans have been the most proficient creatures at adapting to their new environment without having to undergo any sort of dramatic physiological change. Human beings have been able to adapt so well because of their ability to make and use technology. Technology has served us well. It has allowed us to make numerous advancements and produce instruments that give us a greater quality of life. It includes things as simple as hammers, knives, and other basic tools. It also includes things as complex as automobiles, satellites, and the Internet. Often times when new technologies arise, they are embraced without much questioning in regards to the possible effects of something potentially so powerful. It is often that we are caught up in them, and what is lost pales in comparison to all of the advancement and gain. At least according to the opinion of the masses and we are led to unreflectively and unquestioningly accept them as an essential part of our lives. We then find ourselves immersed in these new technologies before we understand its or our own being. Questioning these technologies could be dangerous, because it could cause us to reject something we hold dear or to accept something currently abhorrent to us. However, it is by getting close to this danger that we are brought closer to the saving power that Heidegger mentions. It is by questioning that we show courage, or as

Tillich would put it, "The courage to accept the unacceptable, namely oneself."[1] In questioning, we show we are willing to face ourselves and bravely challenge who we are as beings in the world.

The unquestioning attitude, referred to above, often comes back at some point to haunt us. Sometimes, technologies have unforeseen negative results that could have been avoided, but we recognize them too late because of our unquestioning attitude. To illustrate this we can perhaps look at the modern food issue. When things like genetic engineering, food additives, preservatives, hormones, etc., were first used we thought we had solved the world's food problems. Yet, now we are seeing that several of these things cause cancer, diabetes, malnutrition, obesity, and a host of other human diseases that could potentially be worse than starvation. On the other hand, sometimes critics will come along in the same unquestioning attitude and wholly condemn a new technology simply because it doesn't conform to the traditional way of doing things. Perhaps this is best illustrated by Plato's condemnation of the written word because he thought it would be the death of thought. Yet without the written word, ironically we would not have Plato's writings today. This unquestioning attitude can be dangerous, and in this project I will attempt to shed light on our own unquestioning attitude with regards to prominent aspects of social media in the 21st century.

As said above, technology has been a part of human history. It has helped to make life easier and more convenient. New technologies have always done amazing things. The spoken

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[1] Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), xxiv.

word united people and allowed them to work together to form societies and pass on knowledge. The written word allowed messages to be permanently inscribed upon parchment, animal skin, or some other medium. It allowed us to communicate with ease to as many people as possible without having to speak to them face to face or through a messenger. The printing press made it easy to make multiple copies of a written message, which allowed many more to have access to previously unobtainable knowledge. Again now, as we are beginning the 21st century, another new technology, the Internet, has changed the world and the face of knowledge. It has connected us to so much information that was previously difficult to acquire quickly, and it has become the place that we do most of our communication. For example, CBS News puts the most recent count of users on Facebook at 845 million.[2] That's approximately 12% of the world's entire population! And yet, Facebook represents only a small portion of all of the social media that is available to us and widely used today.[3]

The Internet has provided a venue for social media. We are now more connected to each other than we ever have been before. Anyone can instantly be in contact with anyone with just the click of a button (or a few buttons). There is very little separation in digital life. This at first seems like an amazing and great accomplishment, which it certainly is, for it shows how connected we have become as social network users. We might think, "The less separation in a society, the better off we are…right?" However, there may be some room for concern. In fact, Christine Rosen asks a potent question about this very issue. She states, "Perhaps the question

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[2] http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-505250_162-57370133/number-of-active-users-at-facebook-over-the-years/.

[3] At the time I wrote this, Facebook was only a small but significant portion of social media. Yet, I heard a recent NPR news report that said Facebook has taken over most other social networking sites in foreign countries.

we should be asking isn't how closely are we connected, but rather what kinds of communities and friendships are we creating?"[4] Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter are just some amongst legions of social media sites. However, social media is not limited to just these social networking sites, it also includes blogs, texting, online gaming, etc.[5] A large portion of the authors to be discussed in Chapter Two have a recurring theme throughout their works: the theme of depth of existence. We must ask ourselves if we desire to have deep experience.

Social media have already become a part of who we are as a society. We have become caught up in them without questioning the sort of impact these things might have on us. There is something about these new technologies that seems strikingly different in comparison to any other technology that humans have yet created. It seems that these technologies are taking us out of the realm of embodied human experience into a new realm: a realm of hopeless anonymity at times, yet at other times overwhelmingly and disturbingly public. This realm has removed many of the boundaries between authentic human living, and the comfortable retreat of the digital world. It is a realm that often shines when it comes to convenience, but fails when it comes to depth.

At this point I must be clear, it is not my intention to condemn social media as a whole or in part, but simply to gain a greater understanding of its effects on humanity. In doing so I hope to awaken us from our typical unquestioning attitude. I understand that social media can be used for several good purposes. For example, we saw how influential it was in organizing the revolutions that took place in the Middle East in 2012. My purpose rather, is to ask the right

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[4] Christine Rosen, "Virtual Friendship and the New Narcissism." *The New Atlantis*, no. 17 (Summer 2007): 15-31. http://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/virtual-friendship-and-the-new-narcissism (accessed March 13, 2012).

[5] From now on when I refer to social media, it could be any one or several of these examples.

questions in order to come up with an evaluation. It seems to be a repeating theme for humanity that new technologies are embraced unquestioningly. When this happens bad things result that we spend much time and effort trying to rectify. I have seen social media, and I am concerned with how much they have become a part of our lives while adding so little quality of human existence to it. The wrong question is whether or not we should get rid of these technologies. For, as I will argue, using technology is a part of what it is to be human. Andy Clark points to this same idea in his book, *Natural Born Cyborgs.* He states, "We create these supportive environments (technologies), but they create us too. We exist, as the thinking things we are, only thanks to a baffling dance of brains, bodies, and cultural and technological scaffolding."[6] The right questions are: how do we best use these technologies to promote an authentic human experience and add efficiency to our lives without decreasing depth?[7] Clark, who is very much an advocate for technology even worries about this. He says,

> Upgrades, as we all know can be mixed blessings. Every new capacity brings new limits and demands. We may, for example, start to spread ourselves too thin, reconfiguring our work and social worlds in new and not necessarily better ways.[8]

Even Clark realizes that new technologies can often complicate our lives and make them worse and overburdened rather than adding quality to them. It is for these reasons that I would like to understand just how we can use social media authentically and to the benefit of humanity rather than unquestioningly allowing it to decide who we are as human beings.

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[6] Andy Clark, *Natural Born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 11.

[7] I am aware of Adorno's critique of the "sinister nature" of authenticity, which could be problematic to the overarching theme of authenticity throughout this project. However, as I explain below, authenticity is closely related to virtue theory, which could help deflect this critique.

[8] Ibid., 10.

As our existence carried out in the cyber and real world begin to meld, and the boundaries begin to disappear, we are in danger of forgetting why we create these technologies in the first place: to increase the quality of human existence. It seems that our wires could be getting crossed and we are not sure how to sort out the results of how far we've already come. In order to deal with these sorts of problems, we must ask the right questions. First, what does it mean to be an authentic human being, and how does one live that out in the age of the Internet? In order to answer this question we will have to develop some sort of standard by which to judge. We need to understand what it means to be a human being, and what one ought to do to live authentically in relation to others.

The first chapter of this project will help us to discover what it means to be human and will address the question: What does it mean to be an authentic human being? In order to deal with this question we will have to develop some sort of ethic that will deal with existential concepts such as authenticity, existence, freedom, etc. In order to answer this we will look to the works of Martin Heidegger. We will especially focus on his most famous and celebrated work, *Being and Time* along with many important secondary sources in order to make sure we have a clear understanding of the complex Heideggerian ideas. Heidegger's phenomenological ontology provides a strong foundation for understanding how an authentic human being ought to live in relation to others. His works are not known for their ethical dimension, but I will argue that an ethic can be derived if we understand his works clearly.

As we explore Heidegger's works, I believe it can be clearly shown that Heidegger's philosophy implicitly favors one way that Dasein ought to act rather than another. In Chapter One, we will explore the concepts of Authenticity, Care, and Conscience. These concepts will

teach us about how Dasein is in the world, and how Dasein ought to act. After this, we will explore Dasein's being-with-others or Mitsein. This will illustrate how Dasein is never a non-communal being and how Dasein ought to act in community with others. At this point we will have developed what may properly be called an "Ethics of Care." The third part will illustrate why we should be concerned about the authenticity of the other by exploring the concept of care again, but this time in light of the previously explained issues. After this, we will try to show how such an ethic can be practically applied by comparing this to Aristotelian virtue theory, especially his doctrine of the golden mean. Finally, I will try to deal with some possible objections and respond to them before concluding this chapter.

The overall goal of Chapter One will be to give us an idea of what sort of values a society (as well as an individual within that society) ought to promote in order to nurture and allow for authentic human existence. This is very important to answering the question posed above, because without it we have no basis to evaluate the positive and negative effects of social media upon society. This ethic will allow us to navigate social media in such a way as to promote authenticity without wholly condemning it. However, we will still need to consider several other aspects in order to answer the questions I have posed satisfactorily. In order to do this, we will look at the more ontic aspects of human existence.

The second chapter of this project will deal with the more ontic (or scientific) aspects of human existence. Is it true that social media is having a negative effect upon embodied human existence? In order to answer this we must look at the ontic considerations. In this chapter we will explore the works of many different writers. We will first discuss Andy Clark's *Natural Born Cyborgs* in order to understand that technologies are simply a part of who we are as human

beings. This will allow us to understand that the answer is not to throw away the idea of new technology, but rather to evaluate it fairly. From there we will discuss briefly (and basically) how social media and other technologies are affecting the ontic aspects of human existence. In order to understand this we will look at Nicholas Carr's *The Shallows* and Sherry Turkle's *Alone Together*. We shall also explore several other works in order to evaluate the ideas presented by these various authors. This will give us a basic idea of what direction social media could be projecting humanity. We can then understand this question: How much do modern technologies such as social media affect us? This will allow us to take a more informed stance in evaluating questions about social media like: How is it affecting our ability to communicate? Is social media changing society? Lastly, we will look at embodied experience as it relates to human relationships. Does communicating through electronic media change the quality of our relationships? This is a question worth considering and reflecting upon because of our Mitsein as explained in Chapter One. To do this we will need to understand embodied human experience. I will briefly explain embodied experience from the standpoint of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. We shall also discuss one of the only philosophers to discuss Internet technology in regards to embodiment in Hubert Dreyfus' *On the Internet*.

At that point it might be thought that we would have enough information to judge what aspects of social media (or technology in general) are good and bad, but we would not. We would still need more information. Even if it can be scientifically shown that social media is encouraging a lack of depth and authenticity in our human existence or exactly the opposite, we would still need to know why this is or isn't undesirable. Why should we care about this as long as we are happy, busy, content, etc.? Nicholas Carr believes the future to be dim. He states

(quoting Michael Merzenich), "As we multitask online, he says, we are 'training our brains to pay attention to the crap.' The consequences for our intellectual lives may prove 'deadly.'"[9] In order to assess the validity of such a strong claim, we need to question deeper in order to understand the fundamental relationship between human beings and technology. If we can get a deeper understanding of this relationship we should be able to pinpoint exactly what the dangerous parts of social media might be versus the positive aspects. This will be the main question that takes up most of chapter three.

Chapter Three will consist of a return to Heidegger and a shift of focus from the ontic to the ontological. I will specifically analyze his later works, especially "The Question Concerning Technology." This will be in order to understand the difference between modern technology and technologies of the past and will also allow us to understand the basic ontology of the relationship between human beings and technology. We shall also discuss Søren Kierkegaard's *The Present Age*, as well as some other sources. Following this analysis, we will finally have a grasp of exactly how social media is affecting human beings. Even more, we will have a basic understanding of the essence of social media. Once we have wrestled with this question, we will finally be able draw some conclusions.

The last portion of this project will be the Conclusion discussing the entirety of the research done for this project. I will attempt to answer fully the questions posed in the Introduction of the project. It will be shown exactly how human existence is being affected by social media, and that we ought to try to promote using it in such a way to promote authentic human existence. It will be shown that social media are unlike any other technologies that have

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[9] Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 142.

occurred so far, and must be questioned in order to promote authentic human experience. In this conclusion we will discuss why it is important that we ought to be concerned with the depth and quality of our lives. If *I* have asked the right questions, then we will see that it is important that *we* also begin to question these technologies that are a part of our everyday experience. If we do not, we could lose something very precious to what it means to be human for the sake of convenience and comfort. It is this sort of society that Søren Kierkegaard was warning us about in his *The Present Age*. He states quite powerfully:

> In order for leveling really to occur, first it is necessary to bring a phantom into existence, a spirit of leveling, a huge abstraction, an all-embracing something that is nothing, an illusion--the phantom of the public. . . . The public is the real Leveling-Master, rather than the leveler itself, for leveling is done by something, and the public is a huge nothing… The Media is an abstraction which in association with the passionlessness and reflection of the times creates that abstract phantom, the public, which is the actual leveler. . . . More and more individuals will, because of their indolent bloodlessness, aspire to become nothing, in order to become the public, this abstract whole, which forms in this ridiculous manner: the public comes into existence because all its participants become third parties. This lazy mass, which understands nothing and does nothing, this public gallery seeks some distraction, and soon gives itself over to the idea that everything which someone does, or achieves, has been done to provide the public something to gossip about. . . . The public has a dog for its amusement. That dog is the Media. If there is someone better than the public, someone who distinguishes himself, the public sets the dog on him and all the amusement begins. This biting dog tears up his coat-tails, and takes all sort of vulgar liberties with his leg—until the public bores of it all and calls the dog off. That is how the public levels.[10]

We must not allow our lives to become full of meaninglessness in order to relieve our boredom. Instead, we must use social media to enrich our lives as well as those around us. I agree with the quote by William Powers, which says that, "Every life has the potential to be lived deeply."[11]

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[10] Søren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age: On the Death of Rebellion*. trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), 39.
[11] Powers, *Hamlet's Blackberry*, p 13.

And, following Heidegger, I will explain that every life can and should be lived deeply even in the age of the Internet.

CHAPTER 1: ETHICS AND AUTHENTICITY: AN EXPLORATION OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF HEIDEGGER'S EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGY

> When Dasein is resolute, it can become the "conscience" of Others. Only by authentically Being-their-Selves in resoluteness can people authentically be with one another.
> –Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*

Social media is not an easy topic to tackle because of the multiple aspects that tie into the entire topic regarding the ethical, physical, and many other aspects of the issue. In order to do it justice, I must take care to include all of the necessary points to adequately evaluate social media. If it is true that social media is influencing society, then what are we to do about it? How can we go about evaluating something so nebulous as social media? In order to do so we must look to ethics. Coming to a common understanding of ethical principles will allow us to provide evaluation, critique, and praise all where they are needed. This will allow us to see how human beings ought to behave given the circumstances. In the 21st century, ceaseless use of the Internet has become a way of life, and social media has become, for many, a primary means of communication with others.

Is this worth being concerned about? I believe so. In this first chapter I will develop an ethics that expounds on the very idea of how a human being should act in a community. The main concern of this ethics is human authenticity. In order to develop such an existential sort of ethics, we will be turning to the works of Martin Heidegger. Understanding the fundamental human ontology that he developed will help us to understand exactly why it is worth asking the hard questions about social media. By this I mean that understanding what makes one authentic

and why it is valuable will be extremely illuminating to this project, and this shall become clear by the end of this first chapter.

Martin Heidegger is perhaps one of the greatest minds of the twentieth century. *Being and Time* is a fascinating work of phenomenology and ontology that has had a massive impact upon many different areas of philosophy including existentialism, phenomenology, ontology, metaphysics, hermeneutics, philosophy of language, and more. Heidegger remains to this day one of the main philosophers that people look to for understanding about humanity. However, Heidegger is not without his critics. Every defender, fan, or scholar of Heidegger at some point has to come to terms with a tension between Heidegger's philosophy and the life he lived. Claims have been made that Heidegger didn't care about ethics, or that there is no ethics in Heidegger's works. Although the first claim may be true, this chapter is concerned with the second.

Heidegger's works are often said to be solely descriptive, and not at all prescriptive. However, I think this is false and will attempt to show why. Within Heidegger's works (especially *Being and Time*) there are several prescriptive elements. They are often missed because these elements are more or less implicit rather than explicit. This chapter seeks to focus on a few of these implicit prescriptions. In doing so, we should be able to derive an "ethical prescriptive" view for Dasein.[12] The term ethics here is defined loosely. For the sake of this work, "ethics" will simply mean "a normative way in which Dasein ought to act in the world." This sort of normative view does imply a better, but not necessarily a best way because

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[12] Dasein simply means "being-there" which is the fundamental description of every human being wherever they are.

ultimately it is grounded in human finitude. Therefore, it doesn't give us a concrete imperative, but more of a guideline, which will be explained later in this chapter.

As we explore Heidegger's works, I believe it can be clearly shown that Heidegger's philosophy implicitly favors one way that Dasein ought to act rather than another. In this sense, his works are at least weakly prescriptive. First we will explore the concepts of Care, Authenticity, and Conscience. These concepts will teach us about how Dasein is in its being-in-the-world, and how Dasein ought to be. After this, we will explore Dasein's being-with-others or Mitsein. This will illustrate how Dasein is never a non-communal being and how Dasein ought to act in community with others. At this point we will have developed what may properly be called an "Ethics of Care," but feminist philosophers have already taken that name. The ideas presented in this chapter should be taken as distinct from the "Ethics of Care" presented by feminist philosophers. The third part will illustrate why we should care about the other by exploring the concept of care again, but this time in light of the previously explained issues. After this, we will try to show how such an ethic can be practically applied by comparing this to Aristotelian virtue theory, especially his doctrine of the golden mean. Finally, I will try to deal with some possible objections and respond to them before concluding this chapter.

<u>Authenticity, Care, and Conscience</u>

Heidegger's *Being and Time* contains many existential concepts that have to do with the being of Dasein. However, within his fundamental ontology, only three of those main concepts (and those that relate to them) are important for this project. The first of these is Care, and Care

is the fundamental being of Dasein.[13] Dasein is a unique being in that it has concern about its own existence. Heidegger puts it this way, "Dasein is an entity for which, in its Being, that Being is an issue."[14] The problem for Dasein then, is that Being is an issue for it. This means that Dasein is the only being that questions its own Being. To be clearer, Dasein is the only being that at its very core takes issue with its own existence. No other creature, so far as we know, looks at the world and asks why. God surely does not question his own existence or why he exists (assuming this God is omniscient). Rocks, trees, birds, etc., do not question the fact that they exist; they simply just live to survive and don't worry about why. Dasein, on the other hand, takes an issue with its own being and asks, "What does it mean to be?"

How does one get at the question of the meaning of being? By caring. Care, then, is the fundamental mode of being in which Dasein interacts with the world. This fundamental mode of being is pre-ontological. By this, it is meant that it is something so primordial and so fundamental to Dasein that Dasein can't help but care. Heidegger writes, "Care as a primordial structural totality, lies 'before' every factical 'attitude' and 'situation' of Dasein, and it does so existentially *a* priori."[15] Care is simply part of Dasein's being. It could almost be said that care is

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[13] While some may argue argue that Hubert Dreyfus's *Being-in-the-World* (MIT Press, 1991) would offer a radically different reading of some of these main concepts (such as care and Dasein), I would respond that my argument will still work, even given Dreyfus's reading of Heidegger, though there would need to be a retooling of my use of Heideggerian terminology. However, following the Macquarrie and Robinson translation, my reading of Heidegger in this project is consistent with the translation used here. While it might be suggested that I should have reformed care as the care-structure and focused more on this threefold structure (explained below) rather than on the psychological aspect of it, which is emphasized here in this section. Yet, even given this, I feel the argument still holds its coherency given the very nature of the existential dimension of Being explained in *Being and Time*.

[14] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1962), 236.

[15] Ibid, 238.

Dasein's essence. This means that care cannot possibly be separated from the ontology of Dasein. Again, Heidegger makes this clear,

> Care is here seen as that to which Dasein belongs "for its lifetime"…the entity is not released from this source but is held fast, dominated by it through and through as long as this entity is "in the world."[16]

Simply put, care is a primordial urge that aligns our being towards a certain trajectory. It exists before Dasein is even being-in-the-world (*a priori*). Care is the plumb line of our being. It defines the direction that our being is pointed because care is what makes things in the world meaningful to Dasein. It is because Dasein is the only being whose being is an issue for it that everything else in the world gains meaning. All of the existential aspects of Heidegger's ontology are built on the foundation of care. If care were not the fundamental being of Dasein, then nothing would be meaningful to humans, and there would not be a need to consider the question of the meaning of being, even if the world were meaningful itself. Simply put, we would not care about anything, and nothing would have any meaning to us. Heidegger clarifies this point by writing, "The existential condition for the possibility of 'the cares of life' and 'devotedness', must be conceived as care, in a sense which is primordial—that is ontological."[17] Because there is a possibility for "the cares of life," Dasein opens itself up to possibility because of care. Michael Zimmerman explains this very idea in this way, "The Being of Dasein is care: in being open for things, we care for them."[18] This means that because Dasein is open to possibility, everything in the world gains meaning. Everything is given a negative and positive status that allows Dasein to find its way through the world by making choices that prefer one

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[16] Ibid, 243.
[17] Ibid, 244.
[18] Michael E. Zimmerman, *Eclipse of the Self: The Development of Heidegger's Concept of Authenticity* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1982), 65.

possibility over another. The very idea of authenticity vs. inauthenticity gains its coherence because of care.

Care then, involves Dasein's ability both to introspect and project. The first involves a sort of inward transcendence, which is seen even more so in the call of conscience (explained below). The second involves Dasein's being-in-the-world. Dasein projects all of its internal existential-ontological aspects outward in the person that interacts with other entities in the world. This projection is determined by Dasein's mood. It is also determined by the three temporal aspects of Dasein, which are existence (future), facticity (past), and falling (present). Each of these concepts will be discussed throughout this chapter. Michael Zimmerman, in his book *Eclipse of the Self*, explains these three dimensions of care this way:

> These temporal dimensions constitute my openness to beings. The future dimension opens up my possibilities so I can be concerned about how I shall become. The past dimension opens up my fate so I can take care that it unfolds appropriately. The present dimension lets beings be present so I can care for and use them. Temporality automatically structures my openness into a three-dimensional temporal realm in which I can be "care-ful."[19]

We can see from this quote that care "structures our reality" and helps to shape the trajectory of Dasein as it makes its way through life. This three-fold temporality of care corresponds with the three-fold aspect of care that I will explain later on in this paper.

Dasein questions why it exists and what it means to be, and then tries to answer that question in whatever way possible. The very thing that makes Dasein care is its own being-towards-death. Dasein is aware of its own radical finitude. Hatab describes it this way, "We care about the world and our place in it because we are radically finite. Anxiety wrenches us out of

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[19] Ibid, 65.

familiar world-involvement."[20] Dasein knows that one day it will die, and with it so does its own possibility. But Dasein cares about its possibility, its anxiety, its concerns, and its being-in-the-world. All of these are swallowed up by the concept of care, which help to shape the trajectory that defines Dasein's being. When Dasein realizes that it will die, it has to face up to it in some way. However, in this, Dasein can often run into trouble.

Often, Dasein does not want to come to terms with its inevitable death, so it tries to avoid thinking about it. Dasein then falls back into Das Man (or "the they"). Das Man is the crowd, or the comfort of being lost in a sea of people. In Das Man, Dasein relinquishes its ability to be an individual and tries to give up its freedom to choose from possibility. It allows the faceless mass of the crowd to determine what is good for it. Once Dasein has fallen into Das Man it engages in what's known as idle talk. Idle talk is meaningless day-to-day conversation that Dasein busies itself with so it does not have to think about death. This sort of idle talk becomes even easier to engage in in social media more so than in embodied everyday life. However, for now we will leave that alone because this will be discussed further in later chapters.

This type of living for Dasein is what Heidegger terms "inauthenticity." Heidegger does not feel that inauthenticity is a lower form of being or necessarily a bad thing, as he states, "the inauthenticity of Dasein does not signify any 'less' Being or any 'lower' degree of Being."[21] Heidegger is explaining that Dasein often falls into inauthenticity. He goes on to give some examples, "Even in its fullest concretion, Dasein can be characterized by inauthenticity—when

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[20] Lawrence J. Hatab, *Ethics and Finitude: Heideggerian Contributions to Moral Philosophy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2000), 24-25.
[21] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 68.

busy, when excited, when interested, when ready for enjoyment."[22] Although inauthenticity isn't deficient, authenticity is still preferred. Michael Inwood explains the preferential treatment of authenticity this way, "Dasein is sheer possibility, intrinsically naked and homeless…Moreover, existence involves rejecting some possibilities in favor of others."[23] Inwood is explaining that in order to be an authentic being, one must not allow oneself to be overcome by anxiety at the sheer amount of freedom and possibility Dasein has. Rather, one must choose authenticity in order to live out a meaningful existence, rather than to simply allow authenticity to guide you to not make any choices.

Authenticity describes a Dasein that has embraced its own being-towards-death. Authenticity is characterized by taking ownership of how one should live given one's own finitude. Or to put it Charles Guignon's more simple terms, "The ideal of authenticity is a project of becoming the person you are."[24] It is a type of individuation, but it is not simply a shallow "don't do what everyone else is doing." Authenticity is a much richer concept. Instead it involves coming to terms with one's "thrownness" and at the same time embracing one's being-towards-death. Hatab sums up authenticity quite concisely. He writes, "Authenticity involves the self coming to terms with its radical finitude that is usually concealed in its normal involvement with beings."[25] If we try to cover up or ignore our faciticty, thrownness, or being-towards-death then we are being inauthentic. However, before I explain authenticity in depth, we must explore the concept of thrownness, as it will help shed light on authenticity as we go along.

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[22] Ibid., 68.

[23] Michael Inwood, *The Blackwell Philosopher Dictionaries: A Heidegger Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 39.

[24] Charles Guignon, *On Being Authentic* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 3.

[25] Hatab, *Ethics and Finitude*, 25.

Thrownness refers to the fact that human beings are cast into the world completely out of their own control and without their consent or ever having been asked. The situation they find themselves in is in no way under their control. No one asks if we want to exist, we just do. By the time we ever get to question our own existence, we are usually teens or adults. By that time we have already been socialized into a certain way of thinking and believing. All of this background makes us who we are, and that background is what Heidegger calls facticity. Thrownness refers to this facticity. Dasein then, must come to terms with its facticity and not accept it unquestioningly. However, Dasein could return to doing the exact same thing it was doing before it came to terms with its facticity, but could now do it in an authentic way that embraces choice and individuation knowing that it will one day die. Lawrence Hatab puts it this way, "Authenticity can be understood as a tension between received patterns and decision."[26] The communal aspect of authenticity can already start to be seen, and we will get to it in the next section of this paper. Authenticity is something Heidegger clearly prefers, or at least favors. He often refers to authenticity as if it is something we ought to seek, though he never explicitly claims this. The very language he uses I think hints at this sort of idea. Heidegger describes inauthenticity as fallenness, they they, anonymity, concealment, covering up, angst, and obscurity. He gives a more positive connotation towards authenticity. Terms associated with authenticity include unconcealment, disclosedness, existence, freedom, possibility, etc. This sort of positive connotation of authenticity I think at least implies that Heidegger prefers authenticity. However, Heidegger is doing ontology, and can't be too prescriptive in his works. One way in which I think this is illustrated is in the concept of Conscience.

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[26] Ibid., 174.

Conscience is something we must understand if we want to see why we ought to favor authenticity over inauthenticity. Conscience is a sort of "self-transcendence." It is the call that goes out from Dasein in its most primordial state to Dasein that is entrenched in das Man. Heidegger writes, "The call comes *from* me and yet *from beyond and over me*."[27] Dasein is both the one who calls and the one who hears the call, but it is not so simple as one talking to oneself. Rather it is like hearing the voice of God or some similar primordial phenomenon. Michael Inwood refers to it as a Dasein I talking to Dasein II, though both of these are the same Dasein. Dasein simply calls out to the Dasein that is lost in Das Man. Frederick Olafson explains,

> Conscience is, in fact, a kind of counterforce to *Das Man*—a form of pre-ontological self-understanding on the part of each human being that is quite free of the everyday evasions that are so characteristic of that form of selfhood. It is the way in which each of us tells himself what kind of entity he is as a human being. [28]

Olafson makes clear that conscience is the way in which Dasein tries to remind itself what it means to be. This is meant to call Dasein out of Das Man and towards authenticity. Dasein is being called by its own conscience back to its own "essence." As can be seen, there is an implicit prescription that Dasein ought to seek authenticity at all times. Inwood states, "It (Dasein II) calls on Dasein I to consider its own possibilities, rather than the menu offered by the They, and to chose for itself what to do."[29] If Dasein is meant to be an individual, then how does this have any bearing on how Dasein acts in a community? In order to answer this we must look into Heidegger's concept of Mitsein.

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[27] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 320.
[28] Frederick A. Olafson, *Heidegger and the Ground of Ethics A Study of Mitsein* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 46.
[29] Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, 38.

<u>Being-with/Mitsein</u>

Heidegger's works, as said above, are extremely important and influential in the realm of existentialism. However, Heidegger himself wasn't trying to write existentialism, but rather ontology. It is very clear that Heidegger wasn't simply an existentialist because Heidegger himself said otherwise and even rejected the term "existentialist." However, for Heidegger Dasein is always a communal being. This being-with-others is fundamental to Dasein and is termed Mitsein.

Mitsein, which literally means "being-with" is part of Dasein's being-in-the-world. Dasein is never found in solipsism, but always is part of some sort of community. Even when Dasein is alone, community is part of its thrownness and facticity because no human being comes into the world on its own. Being-with is just a primordial property of the world and of Dasein. By this, I mean that Dasein is always united with others in its ability to fall into Das Man, in its being-towards-death, etc. and that in the very structure of the world these things occur. These things that are true for Dasein are true for every Dasein, and in that way they are part of our being-with-others even if we have to face them alone. Hatab calls this "Mortal Equality."[30] However, we must be clear that Mitsein is not like some human spirit or *geist* that unites us all. Mitsein still deals with the individual nature of Dasein while still showing how it is part of community. Because Dasein is always found in community, we must understand how Dasein is to act and interact within this community. Also, we must ask how one is to achieve authenticity while still being part of a community.

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[30] Hatab, *Ethics and Finitude*, 182.

Mitsein has a lot to do with authenticity, because authenticity does not solely pertain to the individual. We can intuitively see this simply because in order for one to become an individual, one must have a community to interact with and individualize oneself. For if there is no community, then there is no facticity, and there would be no way or need to be an individual. This tension exists within the twofold nature of Dasein, in that Dasein's authenticity simultaneously depends upon its being part of a community, while at the same time separating oneself from being enslaved by that community. Hatab puts it this way, "Authenticity, then would refer to the tension between socialization and individuation, and not a break with the social world as such."[31] In other words, authenticity is not simply some individual concept, but neither can it be found within the comfort of society. Authenticity then, is part of living in a community and has much to do with how we respond to society. To understand this we must define the concept of Disclosure.

Disclosure is a part of community and is shared through language. Disclosure is, in a sense, the passing on of knowledge. Disclosure is how we learn how to function in the world and in society. For example, we learn how to drive by others who already drive disclosing the information of how to drive to us. However, disclosure is an open process. It is both something we receive and take part in. At the same time, disclosure must not come to an end. We never "arrive" at perfect knowledge; therefore, disclosure must be an ongoing process. If disclosure stops, it is no longer disclosure and has become "closed-offness." When closed-offness occurs it is a form of dogmatism. It is when we accept what has been told to us as final and without the need to question it. In this sense it is a form of inauthenticity, because we are allowing Das Man

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[31] Ibid., 27.

or "the They" dictate to us how something should be done only because that is the way they do it. Olafson puts it this way, "It is as though the fact that in many situations I do the same thing as other members of my society meant that I must be doing these things simply because they are the done thing."[32] The idea of society is very important to authenticity. Authenticity has to be arrived at by the way we respond to society. By this I mean that authenticity can never be arrived at by isolating oneself from society, for this would be removing oneself from facticity while at the same time ignoring part of care.

From this point it seems we can make at least one hypothesis. If care, as described above, is the fundamental being of Dasein, and Dasein is always being-with-others, then it seems to logically follow that Dasein should fundamentally be a being that shows concern about the being (authenticity) of others. By the being of others I do not mean their safety, or their being alive. This care for a being of others means something more like what kind of person they are becoming, and how we can help them to stand on their own two feet. In this sense it would mean that Dasein should care both about its own authenticity and the authenticity of others. Heidegger himself asks, "Where else does 'care' tend but in the direction of bringing man back to his essence?"[33] For Heidegger, man's essence is in his ek-sistence, which is most simply described as man taking a stand on his own being. This can be derived from ecstatic and existence. So man's essence is to take a stand on his own being, and care leads us back towards this essence, which ultimately leads to authenticity. The question is, why should we care about the authenticity of the other?

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[32] Olafson, *Heidegger and the Ground of Ethics*, 39.
[33] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, trans. and ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1977), 223.

The answer to this question comes down to how we interpret care. For Heidegger, there are ways we ought to exercise care. Joanna Hodge explains, "Heidegger makes it clear that there are better and worse ways of exercising care, on an individual level, which can be extended to insisting that the affirmation of collective Dasein must take place at the level of human beings as a whole, and not at the level of arbitrarily delimited subgroups based on nationality, race, etc."[34] According to Hodge's interpretation, care pertains to the individual, but has a bearing on all of humanity. In this way it destroys relativism or subjectivism, and at the same time avoids ultimate authority (closed off-ness). This is a sort of weak prescription that appeals to all of human experience without setting up strict boundaries. It can be seen as similar to Aristotle's virtue theory, which prescribes building character rather than action alone. This will be discussed in more detail below. So what ought Dasein to do? What does it look like? Olafson might help to clarify this. In a large section of his book, *Heidegger and the Ground of Ethics*[35], he explains that we have to justify the choices we make as Dasein. These choices must also be compatible with a wider form of life (for the good of the community) in order for Mitsein to not be meaningless. If the choices we make are detrimental to both ourselves and to society, then they are obviously contradictory to care and the call of conscience. For Olafson, Mitsein is the very ground of any sort of Heideggerian ethic. He writes, "It is plain that the place of ethics is the locus in the world of the encounter with one another of entities of this kind."[36] Olafson thinks that Mitsein is the ground of ethics because Dasein encounters other beings such as it is, and ought to seek the same "good" for others as it does for itself. Mitsein becomes the ground of ethics because we need to

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[34] Johanna Hodge, *Heidegger and Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 189.
[35] Olafson, *Heideger and the Ground of Ethics*, 53-57.
[36] Ibid., 98.

establish the link in Heidegger's works between the reciprocal nature of disclosure and moral responsibilities of Dasein, such as trust and even authenticity. This sort of reciprocity that is part of disclosure for the unconcealment of truth also can and should be applied to authenticity.

Again we are shown that authenticity and care are fundamental parts of a life lived in community. The way we ought to act towards others includes a certain type of justifying but also what Hatab calls a "letting-be." This letting-be is not a complete detachment from or ignorance of others. Rather it is, "Letting other be in their distinctiveness."[37] What Hatab means by this is allowing other Dasein the freedom to receive and take part in disclosure. An authentic Dasein who cares ought to also try to help other Dasein to respond to the call of conscience in order to seek authenticity on their own, while still being-with-others. From this point I would like to demonstrate why we ought to consider others based on a closer analysis of care.

<u>The Three-fold Aspect of Care</u>

Care, as defined above, was simply that Dasein is a being in which its existence is an issue for it. However, within care Heidegger has three different ideas. These three ideas together make up the main point that is care as defined above. In German, they are three different aspects of the same verb, but in English they can be referred to as care (Sorge), concern (Besorgt,) and solicitude (Fürsorge). Each of the three concepts refers to one of the temporal concepts of care mentioned above. The first refers to a basic or general anxiety towards the world. The second refers to the need for knowledge in order to get things or take care of things. The third refers to a care for others, or actively caring for someone who needs help. It is this aspect of care that I feel has been overlooked, and also this aspect that strengthens my thesis.

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[37] Hatab, *Ethics and Finitude*, 182.

This third type of care is best explained in a lengthy section of Michael Inwood's *A Heidegger Dictionary*. He explains:

> *Fürsorge* is for other people, not equipment. There are two types of *Fürsorge*. Inauthentic, "dominating" *Fürsorge* "immediately relieves the other of care and in its concern puts itself in the other's place, leaps in for him," while authentic, "releasing" *Fürsorge* "attentively leaps ahead of the other, in order from there to give him back care, i.e. himself, his very own Dasein, not take it away."[38]

In this explanation of solicitude we see that an authentic, caring Dasein ought to help to "clear a path" in order to help other Daseins respond to the call of conscience and reach his own authenticity. In fact, Dasein is not only the call of conscience to itself, but also can be the call of conscience to others. Heidegger puts it this way, "When Dasein is resolute, it can become the 'conscience' of others."[39] This means that when Dasein is set on achieving authenticity, part of that involves helping others to reach authenticity without their becoming dependent on you. So the way that Dasein ought to act in relation to other Dasein is not following a rigid set of rules. Rather, it is the openness to the other, and providing a way for them to reach their own authenticity. It is an openness that rests within the limits of facticity and possibility. Hatab describes this by the German phrase *Seinlassen* or "letting-be" in which he says this, "*Seinlassen,* in letting-be there resonates tones of openness, noninterference, recognition, respect, and release." [40] Again, he states, "Authenticity, then, requires letting others be in their distinctiveness."[41] Part of authenticity requires that we help others to reach their own authenticity, part of the way in which we do this is by preparing the way. This is part of the very nature of our

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[38] Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary,* 36.
[39] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 344.
[40] Hatab, *Ethics and Finitude*, 181.
[41] Ibid., 182.

own caring about ourselves, it also means we ought to care about others if we are to be authentic.

Heidegger briefly mentions this same sort of idea:

> Neither does "care" stand primarily and exclusively for an isolated attitude of the "I" towards itself. If one were to construct the expression of "care for oneself" following the analogy of "concern" and "solicitude," this would be a tautology. "Care" cannot stand for some special attitude towards the Self; for the Self has already been characterized ontologically by "being-ahead-of-itself."[42]

I understand this to mean that claiming care is only about oneself is simply absurd. Rather, part of the very nature of care is caring about oneself as well as others. This being-ahead-of-oneself is the future oriented aspect of care. It means a Dasein that has taken a stand on its own being and has achieved authenticity. The trajectory of care has caused Dasein to be one who lives out authenticity and helps others to achieve authenticity on their own. If authenticity becomes the primary aim of care, then the authenticity of others becomes one of the primary concerns of Dasein. Hence, Dasein ought to seek not only its own authenticity, but also the authenticity of others. I think Zimmerman also echoes this idea when he writes:

> To be human means to be concerned about oneself and other beings. Caring takes place in the "here" (the "*Da*" of "*Dasein*") opened up by temporal disclosedness. The more open or authentic I am, the more I am able to care for myself and Others. The stronger my care becomes, the more open I am to myself and Others. The reciprocity between care and disclosedness can be made clear by considering their structural elements.[43]

The structural elements of disclosedness and care have already been discussed above. I also think the reciprocal nature of care and disclosedness have already been sufficiently shown. From this quote we can see that the more authentic one is, the more one will care about others. I think at this point it has been shown that a part of that caring about others entails trying to help them also attain their own authenticity.

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[42] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 237.
[43] Zimmerman, *Eclipse of the Self*, 65.

By this point we may be wondering how an ethic like this could ever be practically applied. In order to do so we must take a look at the similarity between the application of this ethic from Heidegger and the application of virtue theory in Aristotle's works. I think this is the key to understanding a way of applying this ethic to given situations.

Aristotle's ethics, much like the one I have drawn from Heidegger gives us no explicit directions, but rather more of a compass in which to go in the right direction ethically. I feel that Heidegger's works do the same. Much like Aristotle, Heidegger believed that human beings are ontological, and not merely ontic. That is, they are always in a process of becoming, and they never must be understood simply as one thing. This is illustrated in examples of how Dasein falls in and out of authenticity (as mentioned above), and changes throughout its lifetime. Aristotle, in much the same way, believed that no single instant defined a person. Rather, the sum of their whole life is what allowed you to understand whether or not they were virtuous. Virtuous people do virtuous actions, and not the other way around. However, how are we to know what a virtuous action is?

In Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, he explains a concept for understanding what a virtuous act is. This has famously been known as "The Doctrine of the Golden Mean." Simply stated, this concept is trying to show that everything in moderation can be virtuous. For example, if someone were to come across a burning building with children inside they would need courage to save them. However, a lack of courage is a vice called cowardice. On the other hand, too much courage would be foolishness and could cause the death of the children inside as well as the person trying to rescue them. The most virtuous thing one could do in this situation is to find

the golden mean (or just the right amount) of courage needed to save the children in this situation. Perhaps one option would be to call for help. There could be many other options because Aristotle doesn't give us explicit guidelines, but more of a general parameter in order to direct our action. These guidelines also allow us to offer critique when needed.

The ethic that I have developed in this paper, based on authenticity, can be practically applied the same way as the doctrine of the golden mean. For Dasein to understand how to attain authenticity, it must balance its freedom (possibility) with its facticity. If care projects Dasein towards authenticity, its trajectory must always keep a balance between these two in order to remain authentic. For example, for Dasein to go to the extreme of obscurity and isolation would be to ignore its facticity, hence falling back into inauthenticity. It would be ignoring the good of the community that it finds itself in as well, which would be show an ignorance of care and conscience. This would again be inauthentic. On the other hand, if Dasein simply makes itself an anonymous face in the crowd, then it is ignoring its possibility/freedom, and being inauthentic. In order to judge action, one must undertake a phenomenological evaluation (to be explained more in Chapter 3) of a given situation to understand exactly how it affects Dasein, and how Dasein is affecting other Dasein. When we phenomenologically understand a given situation, then we can understand if it is pulling Dasein away from facticity or possibility, and hence is promoting inauthenticity. For Heidegger, I think we could say that authentic people will promote authenticity naturally, just as Aristotle's virtuous person naturally does virtuous acts. It is the goal of every Dasein to get at the question of the meaning of being and to not be defined by ontic concerns of life, but rather ontological concerns.

Possible Objections

I realize that the topic of this chapter is not without some controversy and possible objections. I would like to mention some possible objections here and my responses to them. First, I think many would say that Heidegger's works are not prescriptive, they are meant to be descriptive. In response to this, I say that even if this is true, Heidegger's works leave open the ability to derive some prescriptive elements. That is what this chapter has been about. Those who try to avoid ethics often have it sneak in the back door. Hilary Putnam once said,

> Philosophers have always tried to dismiss the transcendental as nonsense, but it does have an eerie way of reappearing…Because one cannot talk about the transcendent or even deny its existence without paradox.[44]

The same seems to be true of ethics. Philosophy very rarely is solely descriptive; because argument must be made something is always prescribed even if only implicitly. Another thing that I would note is that Heidegger himself may have missed just what the full implications of Dasein, Care, and Mitsein were when combined. Philosophers often miss the full implications of their own works, and scholars will debate about these implications forever. However, good cases can often be made for these implications and should be seriously considered.

Another frequent objection has to do with what happens when Dasein's seeking of authenticity limits another Dasein's authenticity.[45] I have two responses to this; one is simply a practical one. By this I mean that every single ethical system that I can think of runs into this sort of issue at some point. What happens when acting according to your ethical theory leads you to

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[44] Hilary Putnam, Excerpt from "Why There Isn't a Ready-Made World," In *The Longman Standard History of Twentieth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Kolak and Garrett Thomson (New York, NY: Pearson Longman, 2006), 219.

[45] Upon a different reading of Heidegger, one would say this objection is wrongheaded because it assumes that Dasein is an individual (ontic) entity rather than a being.

simultaneously violate your ethical principles? Many people come up with serious ethical dilemmas that are often ridiculous in nature to illustrate how an ethical theory might contradict itself. Yet even after this is illustrated, life goes on and we argue for the same ethical theories even in the face of inherent problems. However, I realize this will not be satisfying to some, and that is why I'd like to consider another response to this objection.

This idea of an ethics based on care is not giving Dasein some definite course of action. A definite course of action would involve closed-offness and therefore lead to inauthenticity. Rather, this is giving Dasein a parameter within which to work. This parameter is within the limits of facticity and freedom, and leads Dasein to help other Dasein's towards authenticity. Navigating these limits, as stated above, requires a phenomenological exploration of the issue being considered for this ethic. However, this authenticity is a helping hand within these parameters, not a rigid set of rules. As explained by Inwood, "Authenticity favours helping others to stand on their own two feet, rather than reducing them to dependency." [46] Being authentic ourselves means we ought to help others towards their own authenticity, or standing on their own two feet. However, in the process of this we could make others "fall" into dependency and inauthenticity. This very problem is part of the nature of Dasein. Michael Zimmerman explains this very point, "Everyday life can move in and out of inauthenticity quite rapidly. Idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity result from falling, our intrinsic tendency towards concealment."[47] Falling in and out of inauthenticity is quite common for Dasein, but it doesn't mean that we ought not to seek authenticity, nor does it mean that we ought not to help others reach authenticity. Rather, it just shows (much like virtue ethics does), that Dasein is always in a state

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[46] Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, 36.
[47] Zimmerman, *Eclipse of the Self*, 57-58.

of becoming. Its very temporality is "Being-ahead-of-itself" which leads Dasein to change constantly. However, we still ought to consider that Dasein should seek authenticity and should prefer to help others stand on their own two feet. What this looks like is not always easy to decipher. Zimmerman emphasizes this very point, but still gives us a way to clearly interpret Heidegger's authenticity. He writes:

> In *Being and Time* he (Heidegger) never specifies what existentiell (personal specific) decisions are appropriate for an individual. Some people have concluded that he means, therefore, that one should "resolve on nothingness," i.e., become a nihilist; but they are wrong. He (Heidegger) insists that the resolute individual is always open to a particular group of possibilities: his own. As authentic, the individual resolves to become open to these possibilities and thus to do what is necessary.[48]

A last possible objection I would like to consider is that Heidegger never cared about ethics. Partially I would answer this objection as I did the one above. Also, although Heidegger's life is scandalous in some regards and unsatisfying in some respects, given the influence of his work it is clear that his philosophy is still of vast importance. Whether he cared about ethics or not is less important than whether or not an ethics can be derived from his work. I hope that Heidegger's lack of concern for ethics would not lead us to dismiss the possible implications of his work.

<center>Summing It Up</center>

Heidegger's ontology is extremely important for understanding what it means to be human. However, it never explicitly tells us how to act. I have clearly demonstrated how Heidegger's works show us how one should act within community, in that we should seek to live out authentic being. Because of care, and our being-with-others (Mitsein) we are led to believe

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[48] Ibid., 61.

that we should care about the being and existence of others. Part of our existence entails our need for receiving and giving disclosure. In this sense, we should be helping others to achieve authenticity by a certain kind of "letting-be." This is what true care entails, and this is also a part of our own authenticity. In order to practically apply this sort of ethics, we must use a phenomenological description of the thing we are considering to explore the limits of facticity and possibility. Applying this is somewhat similar to Aristotle's "Doctrine of the Mean."

If we are to accept this, then we can see that within society there are some important things we are failing to do. Although the more prominent ethical issues (abortion, death penalty, etc.) often take priority, we rarely stop to look at what sort of society we are creating. The works of Heidegger, amplified by others as well as this chapter, could allow us to rethink how one ought to act in a society. We can rethink how we approach social media, entertainment and the arts, etc. All of this could potentially have bearing on many areas of life. Indeed, developing an ethics of how Dasein ought to act towards others is an extremely important task. Yet, we still do not have a phenomenological understanding of the subject we are exploring. In the next chapter we will discuss some of the more ontic aspects of how social media is effecting society. Then, in chapter three we shall discuss the ontological aspects in order to fully understand the phenomena known as social media.

CHAPTER 2: THE ONTIC CONCERNS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

> We are consumed by that which we were nourished by.
> –William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 73" [49]

Our culture is a culture of facts. It seems evident that the scientific conception of the world is what rules the day. We are fascinated with the facts of life and with the constant discoveries being made. There is nothing wrong with the factical obsession of our age, other than that it is a bit imbalanced. By this, I mean that we are obsessed with the quick and easy answers. We want results, and we want them now. Our obsession with facts is simply a reflection of the mindset that we only want the things that will gratify us instantly. This obsession with facts has caused us to often overlook the side of life that includes philosophical reflection. Yet, working out the problems related to social media and human existential depth can't be answered by running tests in a laboratory. Much of the current debate between technophiles and technophobes has taken place solely in the realm of facts. This chapter will be an attempt to explore and critique from the factical (or ontic) viewpoint, but always with the mindset that the factical viewpoint is only one part of the problem, and that there is another aspect (the ontological) that must be explored in Chapter 3.

The first part of this chapter will be an explanation of Heidegger's ontic/ontological distinction. This chapter itself will focus solely on the ontic aspects of our experience with social media. So we must first explore exactly what the distinction between ontic and ontological is. In the second part of this chapter we shall focus on Andy Clark's argument for the value of human/technological hybridity in *Natural Born Cyborgs*. First, I shall attempt to explain and

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[49] This is Sherry Turkle's paraphrase of Shakespeare's Sonnet 73, found in her book, *Alone Together*.

agree with his thesis about humans as natural born scyborgs. However, I will also then attempt to show that his thesis involves only facticity, and therefore leaves us in danger of inauthenticity if we are to accept it. From there, we will move on to explore exactly how social media is affecting us factically using the works of psychologists, sociologists, and cognitive scientists.

In the final part of this chapter we shall explore exactly how this all comes to a head by exploring a part of our factical existence that is extremely important. We shall look to the work of Merleau-Ponty to understand that a large part of our factical existence relies on something even Heidegger ignored (or forgot), that is, our embodied human experience. Here, I shall attempt to explain Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the embodiment idea. Then, it will be shown why telepresence can be both dangerous existentially as well as factically. In this section I will explore concepts of human relationships and the dangers that online relationships expose us to. By the end of this chapter it will be shown that factically, social media is harming us more than we think, and our use of it deserves more critical evaluation by society.

<u>Heidegger and the Ontic/Ontological Distinction</u>

In the previous chapter, we established a "Heideggerian ethic" in an attempt to show why one ought to seek authenticity, as well as how our authenticity itself might affect the larger society. Since Heidegger is the main philosopher that shapes this discussion, we must understand how he relates to this chapter as well as the others. So, before we go any further, an important distinction in Heidegger's fundamental ontology must be made. The distinction is between the ontic and the ontological, which will help us to navigate the next two chapters inform our understanding of the concept of individual (as well as communal) authenticity.

One of the things that made Heidegger so famous was this distinction between the ontic and the ontological. He felt that all prior philosophy had not properly understood ontology (the study of being). Heidegger believed that all former ontology and metaphysics had been the study of *beings* rather than the study of being itself. In pointing out this mishap, he was rejecting most of the entire history of metaphysics back to Plato. Much of Heidegger's work is an attempt to shed light on the question of being, which on his view, philosophical inquiry had ignored for over 2,000 years.

Most simply put, the ontic aspects of ontology have to do with the facts about existence. These can be things as simple as the color of one's hair, or as complex as metaphysical truths about the world we live in. On the other hand, the ontological aspects have to do with something that Heidegger was the first to be concerned with, as expressed through his fundamental question: "What is the meaning of being?" He states:

> Ontological inquiry is indeed more primordial, as over against the ontical inquiry of the positive sciences. But it remains itself naïve and opaque if in its researches into the Being of entities it fails to discuss the meaning of Being in general…The question of Being aims therefore at ascertaining the *a priori* conditions not only for the possibility of the sciences which examine entities as entities of such ans such a type, and, in so doing, already operate with an understanding of Being, but also for the possibility of those ontologies themselves which are prior to the ontical sciences and which provide their foundations.[50]

So, for Heidegger, the main concern of ontology is to gain an understanding of Being itself. Ontic concerns have to do with different sciences (metaphysics, physics, etc.) and are about entities, whereas ontological concerns have to do with the nature of Being upon which those facts about entities are built. Or, as Robert Dostal puts it, "By 'ontical' in this passage Heidegger

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[50] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 31.

means that which is concerned primarily with entities and not with being as such."[51] The correct primary focus for ontology then, is upon *Being itself*, and not upon *beings*.

For Heidegger, the ontological questions are more primordial or fundamental (thus we will make an attempt to deal with them in Chapter 3) than scientific ones. For instance, he says, "Scientific research is not the only manner of Being which this entity (Dasein) can have, nor is it the one which lies closest."[52] Heidegger is not against scientific research or facts in general. However, he is mainly concerned with dealing with the ontological, because this is what gives those facts context and meaning. Yet, Heidegger was very careful about his goal. His goal was to make sure that there was no way to prioritize facts about entities over Being itself. John Caputo explains it this way, "The goal of *Being and Time* was to 'formalize' these factical structures, to give them a formal-ontological conceptualization that would be ontologically neutral to their concrete instantiation."[53] In describing the fundamental being of Dasein, he allowed for a foundation upon which facts about Dasein could gain organization and meaning without being prioritized over Being itself.

For Heidegger, without an idea of Being itself, the facts about beings become useless, or at least somewhat meaningless (or relativized). Thus, the ontic/ontological distinction is important in understanding that scientific facts are not enough when making judgments about Dasein. We must take into account the entirety of its being (both the ontic and ontological concerns). Now that we have seen the clear distinction between ontic and ontological matters, we

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[51] Robert J. Dostal, "Time and Phenomenology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger,* ed. Charles B. Guignon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 152.

[52] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 32.

[53] John Caputo, "Heidegger and Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles B. Guignon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 274.

will move to consider some of the ontic concerns of social media. However, to focus solely on social media itself is not easy from a scientific standpoint. As a recent *Newsweek* article mentions, it is only now that "the first good, peer-reviewed research is emerging."[54] Research is only beginning to emerge, as we are still in the middle of the phenomenon of social media. Nevertheless, I shall do my best to apply some of the newer research about the Internet, and the human/technology relationship to the concerns I have about social media (especially from the ontic standpoint).

Natural Born Cyborgs

The relationship between human beings and technology has always been a playground for the imagination. Science fiction, Japanese anime, and American comic books have fully taken advantage of the possibilities of what a full hybridization of humanity and technology might look like. For example, in *Star Trek* we have the Borg, a soulless and existentially devoid race of biological hardware that captures the deepest ideals (and fears) of a Utilitarian race. I suppose I could go on and on giving examples of the fears that popular imagination brings to life when considering a full hybridization. Technophobia (as suggested above) is inherent within much of pop culture, yet we are often unable to notice that these imaginary things we fear have similar manifestations in our own world. When it comes to our own day-to-day existence outside of the reigns of popular imagination, we often find quite the opposite; a certain technophilia towards the latest and greatest technology and all of the conveniences it brings. I am not sure why this disconnection between how we view our own world and how we view imaginary worlds exists. Yet, this disconnect seems to be part of the unquestioning attitude towards which I would like to

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[54] Tony Dokoupil, "Is the Onslaught Making Us Crazy?," *Newsweek*, July 16, 2012, 26.

draw attention. In doing so, we shall be able to get a grasp of how technology is affecting us from the ontic (or factual) perspective.

I am not sure that our current attitude ought to be that of technophilia or technophobia. I intend to navigate between these two extremes as much as possible while attempting to shed light on thought from both camps. One thing that can be said is that it seems that technology is a part of what it means to be human. It is because of the many technological advances that human beings have been so successful at adapting to new challenges in life. Many have argued against human/technology hybridization, and others have argued in favor of it. Perhaps the most forceful and convincing argument for the value of technology itself, as well its synthesis with human beings, comes from Andy Clark, who is one of the foremost and celebrated cognitive scientists of our day, whose work is at the very forefront of what philosophy and science have to say about our minds. Let us now consider his ideas, their implications, and how we might interpret their implications.

In his book, *Natural Born Cyborgs*, Andy Clark powerfully and clearly demonstrates that human beings are fundamentally united with technology, and that the typical fears of the implications of human/technology hybridization ought to be put to rest. For instance, if you look almost anywhere in human history, you will indeed find that human beings are using technology to be more successful at surviving and thriving. Clark isn't incredibly rife with examples of this claim; instead he is appealing to our own basic knowledge of humanity. However, several others have illustrated this very point in their own works. Nicholas Carr, in his book *The Shallows*, briefly summarizes the history of information technology. He lists things like the written word, books, the printing press, telephones, and now the Internet. All of these technologies have helped

to unite human beings and allow us to more successfully pass on information necessary for agriculture, hunting, building shelter, etc. All of the activities listed in the previous sentence are themselves activities that rely upon manmade technology.

Since using technology itself is so much a part of who we are as human beings, then why ought modern technologies such as cell phones, text messaging, e-mail, etc., be any different? Clark feels that there is a cognitive dissonance between our use of simple technology (forks, axes, plows, water hoses, etc.) and the ambivalence we often feel towards modern technologies. Clark points out, "Human-machine symbiosis, I believe, is simply what comes naturally. It lies on a direct continuum with clothes, cooking, bricklaying, and writing."[55] Clark is stating that he not only believes using/creating technology is part of what it is to be human, but that the eventual intertwining of human beings with technology is inevitable. In fact, this logically falls in line with the use of every other technology. This hybridization is part of a simple understanding of our own human nature. So what does this hybridization mean?

Simply put, for Clark, human/technology hybridization means realizing that our sense of self is not defined by simple biological boundaries. He states:

> We, meaning we human individuals, just *are* these shifting coalitions of tools. We are "soft-selves," continuously open to change and driven to leak through the confines of skin and skull, annexing more and more nonbiological elements as aspects of the machinery of mind itself.[56]

Clark thinks that we ought not define our sense of selves by the flesh and blood of which we are composed. Instead, we ought to define our sense of selves as a relation to everything our body interacts with, as he says, "My sense of my own physical body depends on my experiences of

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[55] Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs*, 174.
[56] Ibid., 137.

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direct control, and these can be extended, via new technologies."[57] If our sense of self is defined by control and not by biological boundaries, then our concerns with human/technology hybridization changing us fundamentally or essentially can be put to rest. As long as we remain in control of these technologies, and they improve our quality of life, then we ought not be so fearful or critical of them. So, for Clark, we must be very cautious about our ambivalence towards technology. He states:

> We are torn, it seems, between two ways of viewing our own relations to the technologies we create and which surround us. One way fears retreat and diminishment, as our scope for choice and control is progressively eroded. The other anticipates expansion and growth, as we find our capacities to achieve our goals and projects amplified and enhanced in new and unexpected ways. Which vision will prove most accurate depends, to some extent, on the technologies themselves, but it depends also—and crucially—upon a sensitive appreciation of our own nature.[58]

So Clark feels that the hybridization is a simple fact, so why should we fight fact? Human/technology symbiosis has allowed us to be extremely successful thus far, and we ought to continue down the path of taking advantage of it.

For Clark, the whole goal of his argument is to quell the fears projected by technophobia. He states, "If our technological worlds are threatening to leak into our minds and selves, some would say, it is time to seal the exits, batten down the hatches, and foil the invading digital enemy. My guiding idea, that we are *natural-born* cyborgs, is of course an attempt to preempt precisely this species of response."[59] I think that Clark is correct to try to quell these fears, and to show that the answer is not to get rid of new technologies that seem invasive to our sense of self. I also think that Clark is correct in his belief that human beings simply are technology users. It is

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[57] Ibid., 142.
[58] Ibid., 175.
[59] Ibid., 139.

what we do, and so getting rid of technology, or specifically in reference to this project social media, is not the answer.

So what problems could we have with technology? Technology seems to be a good thing according to Clark (if we are to accept his argument), and it would be bad to get rid of a good thing. However, I fear that he is too uncritical towards how we ought to evaluate the use of these technologies. Clark seems completely unconcerned with any ethical or existential issues besides that of privacy (to which he devotes the entirety of Chapter 7 of his book). These issues are specifically what I will try to raise in this project. In this next section I shall try to explain the possible negative aspects of the Internet and social media from the factical side.

<center>Plasticity, Pragmatism, and People</center>

Perhaps the best place to start critically analyzing modern technologies like the Internet is the work of Nicholas Carr. Carr, author of the celebrated article, "Is Google Making us Stupid?" is mostly concerned with the relationship of technology and our brains (much like Clark). However, for Carr, the prospects are not as exciting and happy as Clark might argue. Rather, there are some serious concerns about how the Internet is affecting our brains. For this section, we shall focus mostly on his book, *The Shallows,* in order to get a grasp of what the Internet is indeed doing to our brains.

In *The Shallows*, Carr explains an idea known as brain plasticity. That is, the brain's ability to grow and change (and even completely rewire itself) throughout life is known as plasticity. Carr puts it this way, "The brain is not the machine we once thought it to be. Though different regions are associated with different mental functions, the cellular components do not

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form permanent structures or play rigid roles. They're flexible."[60] This is one of the exciting functions of the brain, and one of its fascinating abilities. However, it is this very function that Carr worries about, for he wonders how the Internet is shaping our brains. He first worried about it when he noticed that he no longer had the ability to sit and concentrate, or read a book, or other contemplative activities. Rather, he would obsessively check his phone, his Facebook page, etc. He explains his concern:

> It wasn't just that so many of my habits and routines were changing as I became more accustomed to and dependent on the sites and services of the Net. The very way my brain worked seemed to be changing. It was then that I began worrying about my inability to pay attention to one thing for more than a couple of minutes.[61]

Carr's concern is that we are training our brains to avoid depth. Instead of thinking deeply or patiently working on something, we go for what is easy and efficient.

> Carr is trying to encourage a more critical attitude towards new technologies. He states: Plastic does not mean elastic. Our neural loops don't snap back in to their former state the way a rubber band does; they hold onto their changed state. And nothing says the new state has to be a desirable one. Bad habits can be ingrained in our neurons as easy as good ones.[62]

If we are concerned with what bad habits we might be forming, then we ought to take Carr's challenge seriously. Carr is afraid that we are losing the depth of our thinking, and gaining nothing in return. He even states, "Dozens of studies by psychologists, neurobiologists, educators, and Web designers point to the same conclusion: when we go online, we enter an environment that promotes cursory reading, hurried and distracted thinking, and superficial

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[60] Carr, *The Shallows*, 29.
[61] Ibid., 16.
[62] Ibid., 34.

learning."[63] Carr uses several sources throughout the entirety of his book to illustrate this point over and over again.

The plasticity of the brain also provides hope for Clark's ideal of hybridization. Carr points out, "Thanks to its plasticity, the nervous system 'can take advantage of this compatibility and merge with the electronic media, making a single, larger system.'"[64] Carr is pointing out that the relationship between electronic media (like the Internet) and the brain is one that is mutually effectual. We use technologies like the Net, and at the same time it shapes and changes our brain, awareness, and existence. So the technologies found on the Internet have a large impact on who we are as people. Clark is optimistic about the possibilities, while Carr is doubtful. Carr raises some valid concerns that I think we ought to take seriously. One was mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, that we are "training our brains to pay attention to the crap." We are doing so not just intellectually, but in every area of our lives we are losing depth by training ourselves to only pay attention to the immediate and the given (in the ontic sense).[65]

This mindset of ontic immediacy carries over into our relationships with one another. Thus, social media was born. Carr points out:

> The greatest acceleration (of information) has come recently with the rise of social networks like MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter. These companies are dedicated to providing their millions of members with a never-ending "stream" of "real-time updates," brief messages about, as a Twitter slogan puts it, "what's happening *right now*." By turning intimate messages—once the realm of the letter, the phone call, the whisper—into fodder for a new form of mass media, the social networks have given people a

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[63] Ibid., 116.

[64] Ibid., 213.

[65] I am using immediate and given here not in the phenomenological sense that Husserl might use them, but according to the terminology that Carr employs referring simply to the most convenient and easy things for us to grasp.

compelling new way to socialize and stay in touch. They've also placed a whole new emphasis on immediacy.[66]

Carr is fearful of just how deep the effects of Internet technology, in this case social media, might be upon our humanity. It is interesting to note that he points to the communicable aspects of tangibility such as a letter, phone call, or whisper versus just plain text from an e-mail or text message, though he does realize that social media are just an extension of our desire to regain some sort of closeness in the 21st century. We are obsessed with being connected. Carr states:

> We like to be in touch with friends, family members, and colleagues. We like to feel connected—and we hate to feel disconnected. The Internet doesn't change our intellectual habits against our will. But change them it does.[67]

There is nothing wrong with our desire to keep in touch with those we care about. Community and connection are fundamental to humanity (as pointed out in Chapter 1 in the nature of Mitsein). In fact, in this quotation Carr points out that there is a certain desire to be connected even if it is secondary in quality to real human communication. Sherry Turkle's book, *Alone Together*, deals with this exact issue.

Sherry Turkle attempts to deal with the issues surrounding social media and its effects on society. Turkle is an MIT psychologist who has worked in the field of human/technology interactions for decades. She has published several books about technology, mostly in favor of the possibilities that it brings. However, her latest book is somewhat different for her. She spends the entirety of the book pointing out that she is more concerned and less hopeful about the future because of the technologies coming out that seek to replace human embodied interactions with robotic, artificial ones.

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[66] Ibid., 158.
[67] Ibid., 92.

Turkle fears what she calls "New Pragmatism." This New Pragmatism is the view the world and the relationships found in it are only useful in so far as we can use and control them for our own needs. It is a type of relational solipsism that rejects intersubjectivity. She fears that this feeds into narcissistic tendencies, and is also incredibly harmful to others and us. When we remove the human element from our relationships, we are left only with control, not relationship. She explains: "Networked, we are together, but so lessened are our expectations of each other that we can feel utterly alone. And there is risk that we come to see others as objects to be accessed—and only for the points we find useful, comforting, or amusing."[68] That is, we begin to see others only for their pragmatic use to us, not for their alterity. Hence the world becomes a play place for our own satisfaction.

The entire first half of her book is spent explaining several studies she has done (in fact she interviewed well over 450 people in working on this book over several years) with groups representing a wide variety of age and maturity and how they react to robotic relationships. Overwhelmingly, according to her studies, many people are ok with humans being replaced by robots as long as it removes the possibility of hurt and disappointment.

The second half of her book deals with the ever increasing time we spend with social media, and the ever increasing amount of loneliness that we seem to be experiencing as a culture. For instance, a recent *Newsweek* article speaking about newly emerging research states:

> The current incarnation of the Internet—portable, social, accelerated, and all-pervasive— may be making us not just dumber or lonelier but more depressed and anxious, prone to obsessive compulsive and attention-deficit disorders, even outright psychotic. [69]

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[68] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 154.

[69] Dokoupil, "Is the Onslaught Making Us Crazy?," 26.

The fear here is echoed by much research. Research has shown increased usage of social media correlates heavily with mood disorders, anxiety, depression, and even mania.[70] In fact, the article states that, "The brains of social media addicts scan a lot like the brains of drug and alcohol addicts."[71] This addiction is becoming a way of life. With many users completely tethered to their online lifestyle. There is no chance of escape or rest. All the while we seem to be building a society that is more disconnected than ever and returning to the second half of Turkle's book, she states, "Always on and (now) always with us, we tend the Net, and the Net teaches us to need it."[72] She spends the rest of her book explaining how this has become a way of life, that is, our need for the net and constant connectivity.

For Turkle, as with Carr, the prospects are not so hopeful as she might have once thought. She also rejects the sort of utopian ideal that touts the Net, and social media, as the crowning achievement of technology and democracy. Instead, we have become disconnected and afraid to take chances. She writes: "Once we remove ourselves from the flow of physical, messy, untidy life—and both robotics and networked life do that—we become less willing to get out there and take a chance."[73] This fear of taking chances is a problem for establishing any sort of meaningful relationship that respects someone else in their alterity. She fears that this refusing to take chances has begun to affect our sense of belonging and community.

For Turkle, "Communities are constituted by physical proximity, shared concerns, real consequences, and common responsibilities. Its members help each other in the most practical

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[70] See the above Newsweek article, also referenced from Turkle, Carr, Powers, and other sources and studies that they themselves cite in their respective works. Space and time do not allow me to reference each individual study.
[71] Dokoupil, "Is the Onslaught Making Us Crazy?," 29.
[72] Turkle, *Alone Together*, 154.
[73] Ibid., 154.

ways."[74] Turkle's definition of community fits well with Heidegger's concept of being-with-others explained in Chapter 1. This definition of community requires something more than just the ability to type up words in a text box. It requires real life–the dirty, vulnerable, and authentic existence of everyday life rather than the safety/convenience of hiding behind what William Powers terms "Screens."[75] I realize, along with Turkle, that this skeptical view of social media has become unpopular. She explains, "We have come to a point at which it is near heresy to suggest that MySpace of Facebook or Second Life is not a community."[76] I must agree with her though, and my reasons why will be explained in the third part of this chapter.

Before we get to that, we must explain why Turkle thinks this way. For her, she is sick of hearing that social media and Internet technology is amazing for what it brings us. Social media is amazing in what it is capable of doing, that is a simple fact, but in how it affects us perhaps we ought to withhold our opinion until we obtain more information. Turkle is surprised again and again by how much social media (according to her research) is effecting us negatively, and yet no one else seems to be talking about it. Instead, we only talk about the positive aspects. She states:

> Anxiety is part of the new connectivity. Yet, it is often the missing term when we talk about the revolution in mobile communications. Our habitual narratives about technology begin with respectful disparagement of what came before and move on to idealize the new. So, for example, online reading, with its links and hypertext possibilities, often receives a heroic, triumphalist narrative, while the book is disparaged as "disconnected." That narrative goes something like this: the old reading was linear and exclusionary; the new reading is democratic as every text opens out to linked pages—chains of new ideas. But this of course is only one story, the one technology wants us to tell.[77]

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[74] Ibid., 239.

[75] William Powers, *Hamlet's Blackberry: Building a Good Life in the Digital Age* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010).

[76] Turkle, *Alone Together*, 239.

[77] Ibid., 243.

We must understand that the popular narrative about social media that most of society accepts is not the one that is being shown by much of the new research coming out. We must be wary of erring on the side of technophilia or technophobia. Instead, we must begin to see that there are serious issues to consider when dealing with social media, and at the same time, there are some very good ways it can be put to use. Navigating these is up to us. As Turkle states, "We don't need to reject or disparage technology. We need to put it in its place."[78]

Human beings, it would seem, were not meant to be disconnected from each other in the way that they are today. At least not if we take Heidegger's concept of Mitsein and the research presented so far seriously. Again, Turkle explains:

> The ties we form through the Internet are not, in the end, the ties that bind. But they are the ties that preoccupy. We text each other at family dinners, while we jog, while we drive, as we push our children on swings in the park. We don't want to intrude on each other, so instead we constantly intrude on each other, but not in "real time."[79]

There is nothing wrong with our desire to be connected, it is rather the desire for control and convenience that causes our problems. This desire is what causes our connectivity to be so disconnected. She continues, "We go online because we are busy, but end up spending more time with technology and less with each other. We defend connectivity as a way to be close, even as we effectively hide from each other." [80] We are starved for interaction and meaningful relationships, but we busy ourselves with technologies that get in the way of these meaningful relationships. Hopeless, depressed, and desperate, "At the limit, we will settle for the inanimate,

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[78] Ibid., 294.
[79] Ibid., 280.
[80] Ibid., 281.

if that's what it takes."[81] Ultimately, this leads to the state we are in today. We have all felt the sense of alienation from others as they sit across a table from us suspended somewhere in telepresence on their handheld device. This idea of telepresence is part of the very inauthenticity of social media.

<div align="center">Embodiment or Disembodied Telepresence</div>

Since we are considering the ontic aspects of our existence, that is, the facts about beings, then we ought to discuss briefly one of the main aspects of our factical being-in-the-world. For Merleau-Ponty, this means that we are embodied beings. This is something he felt Heidegger has completely missed in his fundamental ontology. How could one talk about being-in-the-world without mentioning that we experience the world through bodily perceptions? This is why Merleau-Ponty wrote his famous *Phenomenology of Perception*. In this section I will try to briefly explain Merleau-Ponty's concept of embodied existence.

Space will not allow me to elaborate on the entirety of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, but a brief overview of his embodiment idea will suffice for our purposes. As said above, Merleau-Ponty built his phenomenology upon the basic idea that the body is the seat of all experience. Merleau-Ponty's aims were to try to navigate between objective and subjective claims about perception, but in doing so he shed light on the fact that we are embodied beings. As he states, "All knowledge takes its place within the horizons opened up by perception."[82] He is explaining that perception is our way of knowing the world, and this perceiving is done by the body as it moves through the world. Hence our fundamental way of being-in-the-world is that of

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[81] Ibid., 281.
[82] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge Classics, 1962), 241.

an embodied agent. This embodiment is simply a fact of our existence. Or as Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi put it, "It is just an empirical fact that we are indeed embodied, that our perceptions and actions depend on the fact that we have bodies, and that cognition is shaped by our bodily existence."[83] They are quite blunt, but it also seems quite right that our existence in the world is embodied.

Gallagher and Zahavi's thinking falls right in line with Merleau-Ponty. Andy Clark is also right in line with the same tradition. Yet, we must be clear that none of them define the body simply in biological terms. Gallagher and Zahavi state:

> On the contrary, the body is considered a constitutive or transcendental principle, precisely because it is involved in the very possibility of experience. It is deeply implicated in our relation to the world, in our relation to others, and in our self-relation.[84]

Here they are denying any claim that they equate the empirical fact of embodied existence with an idea of the body as an object. The body is not simply an object to be studied phenomenologically, but rather, it is the very seat of interpreting phenomenological experience. So we must not define it merely in objective, biological terms. Or as a Bernard Flynn puts it, "Perception is a behavior effected not by consciousness but by the body, but not by the body as a piece of the physical world, rather by the body as lived, a living body."[85] In fact embodiment can be extended beyond the biological body. It can be extended through technological implants (as Clark argues) or something as simple as a cane. For example, when you are driving your car, you begin to experience the world through the car. You "feel" the bumpiness of the road and the

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[83] Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 131.
[84] Ibid., 135.
[85] Bernard Flynn, "Maurice Merleau-Ponty," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2011), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/merleau-ponty/ (accessed September 9, 2012).

sense of spatiality in reference to your car as well as your biological body. You "sense" the other cars right beyond the metal of your own car, not in reference to your flesh. In this sense, your car becomes an extension of your body and a part of your embodiment just as Merleau-Ponty's example of the blind man's cane or Andy Clark's technological implants. But what does this all have to do with social media?

The idea is that embodiment constitutes our factical existence. Even a definition of embodiment that extends beyond biological boundaries and includes nonbiological substance still conditions our factical existence. Yet, it would seem that social media, as an expression of our self and our existence, doesn't fall within this definition. Rather, it falls into the realm of what Hubert Dreyfus has termed "disembodied telepresence." In order to understand this idea we must take a look at his book, *On the Internet*.

Hubert Dreyfus spends much of his book explaining the possible dangers of the Internet and social media. He takes to task those who think the Net and social media are sources of complete liberation from all human frailty and dissatisfaction. Dreyfus accuses those of this mindset of abandoning embodiment. He defines their terms of embodiment as, "All aspects of our finitude and vulnerability."[86] For Dreyfus, there are some serious issues with the Internet and social media that must be brought to light.

For starters, disembodied telepresence can best be defined as locating one's consciousness in "a world which is both everywhere and nowhere, but it is not where bodies live."[87] This means that telepresence is where we project our consciousness yet deny our factical being-in-the-world. This is how Dreyfus refers to the Net. We remove ourselves from the

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[86] Hubert L. Dreyfus, *On the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 4.
[87] Ibid., 4.

specific contexts of our lives that make us who we are in order to experience a world that responds to our control and the demands we place upon it. Disembodied telepresence is a denial, even a rejection of embodied existence, in favor of one that allows us to be where we want to be (even if it is where our bodies are not). This disembodied telepresence is not solely sitting in front of a computer screen, rather sometimes it manifests itself in other ways that disconnect us from those in our most immediate embodied surroundings. For instance, several people may be in a room together, but might be completely detached from their spatial relationships in favor of text messaging someone on their phone who is across town.[88] Dreyfus attempts to deal with this in his book.

Dreyfus feels that we are moving towards a sterile world that is devoid not only of meaning, but of quality and authenticity. In the above example of those lost in telepresence on their cell phones, Dreyfus mentions, "When we are engaged in such activities, our bodies seem irrelevant and our minds seem to be present wherever our interest takes us."[89] In making our bodies irrelevant, we are not just denying a fact about our existence, but are rejecting the very thing that allows us to make sense of and derive meaning from the world. That is, according to Merleau-Ponty, our body[90] (as the seat of perception) is what allows us to derive meaning from the world, and yet we would rather leave this behind for the safety of the Internet. Dreyfus is concerned that, "No one is trying to look ahead to what, if anything, we will lose if we limit

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[88] This example is solely meant to illustrate disembodied Telepresence. I understand that sometimes it is good that people distance themselves mentally from their immediate surroundings. But it still remains that we must be careful how and why we do this regardless of the way we do it.

[89] Dreyfus, *On the Internet*, 49.

[90] A distinction is also in order here. The body in this use, means solely the body as lived within.

ourselves to disembodied interactions."[91] Although we may not ever reach the point where we are totally disembodied, we are spending more and more time on the Internet. Recent polls have shown that the average teenager spends about 17 hours a week online (excluding e-mail) and another 7 or so hours a week with their phone.[92] And the issue is not just with youth. One of the most steadily growing age group of Facebook users is the over 35 group.[93]

Dreyfus thinks that we are missing essential contact with our world. He quotes a study done by roboticists at UC Berkeley. The study showed that, "A holistic sense of embodied interaction may well be crucial to everyday human encounters."[94] For Dreyfus, what is necessary to gain a "holistic sense" is the copresence of other embodied agents. Merleau-Ponty called this *intercorporiality.* Our ability to gain a grip on the world is crucial to our functioning as embodied agents. Dreyfus remarks, "What is lost, then, in telepresence in general is the possibility of controlling my body's movement to get a better grip on the world. What is also lost, even in interactive video, is a sense of context."[95] In trying to experience the world through telepresence, we lose our grip on what is meaningful and important. We lose the context that we have through tangible things such as body language, facial expression, handwriting, etc. Dreyfus thinks the problem with telepresence is distance. Speaking of the control we have through the Net he explains:

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[91] Ibid., 50.

[92] Jane Weaver, "Teens Tune Out TV, Log On Instead," July 24, 2012, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3078614/ns/technology_and_science-tech_and_gadgets/t/teens-tune-out-tv-log-instead/#.UGHqVqRrOGM (accessed October 1, 2012).

[93] Justin Smith, "Number of US Facebook Users Over 35 Nearly Doubles in Last 60 Days," March 25, 2009, http://www.insidefacebook.com/2009/03/25/number-of-us-facebook-users-over-35-nearly-doubles-in-last-60-days/ (accessed June 5, 2012).

[94] Dreyfus, *On the Internet*, 57.

[95] Ibid., 59.

Even though interactive control and feedback may give us a sense of being directly in touch with the objects we manipulate, it may still leave us with a vague sense that we are not in touch with reality. Something about the distance still undermines our sense of direct presence.[96]

Distance, then, is the main culprit in trying to derive meaning through the telepresence of the Net. We have introduced a medium between ourselves and other embodied agents that is incapable of communicating the meaningful things we desire it to communicate.

So why can't telepresence produce some sort of meaning of its own apart from the need for embodied agents? Dreyfus remarks, "Can telepresence reproduce the sense of being in the situation so that what is learned transfers to the real world? Experienced teachers and phenomenologists agree that the answer is 'no.'"[97] In fact, Dreyfus is incredibly skeptical (in line with Turkle and Carr) that what happens on the Net translates to the real world in any meaningful and valuable way. He thinks so because he feels that the very things that make life meaningful (discussed in Chapter 3) are lost in translation when we move solely into the realm of telepresence. Although Dreyfus's critique is a bit harsh (and maybe a bit hasty), based on the research presented in this chapter we ought to at least take it into consideration. Dreyfus also thinks that we can't derive from the Internet the connectivity we long for. He states, "Whatever hugs do for people, I'm quite sure telehugs won't do. And any act of intimacy mediated by any sort of robot prosthesis would surely be equally grotesque, if not obscene."[98] There is a sense of meaning translated by tangible, embodied actions. telepresence, robotics, and the Internet will never be able to satisfy these basic human needs, and instead are giving us a false sense of satisfaction, much like a drug.

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[96] Ibid., 54.
[97] Ibid., 65.
[98] Ibid., 68.

For Dreyfus, the most important thing for meaningful relationships is trust, which involves risk. He explains:

> So, it seems that to trust someone you have to make yourself vulnerable to him or her and they have to be vulnerable to you. Part of trust is based on the experience that the other does not take advantage of one's vulnerability. You have to be in the same room with someone who could physically hurt or publically humiliate you and observe that they do not do so, in order to trust them and make yourself vulnerable to them in other ways. There is no doubt that telepresence can provide some sense of trust, but it seems to be a much-attenuated sense.[99]

This sense of risk and trust is part of the existential authenticity I explained in the first chapter. It shall also be explained further in the third chapter. What we can take from Dreyfus then, is that telepresence is a denial of part of our fundamental human experience (embodiment). According to this, social media may satisfy some of the needs and desires we have, but it is doing so in a weak and inauthentic way that pales in comparison with copresence of other embodied agents. Thus he states:

> We have now seen that our sense of the reality of things and people and our ability to interact effectively with them depend on the way our body works silently in the background…Its sensitivity to mood opens up our shared social situation and makes people and things matter to us; and its tendency to respond positively to direct engagement with other bodies; underlies our sense of trust and so sustains our interpersonal world. All this our body does so effortlessly, pervasively, and successfully that it is hardly noticed. That is why it is so easy to think that, thanks to Telepresence, we could get along without it, and why it would, in fact, be impossible to do so.[100]

Dreyfus seems to be correct. Those who seek to fight in favor of telepresence (in light of this project through social media) cannot have their cake and eat it too. They must either accept that to prefer telepresence as a means of interaction would mean sacrificing what we know of as authentic human meaning for a lesser form of interaction. Or they must accept that to prefer

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[99] Ibid., 69.
[100] Ibid., 70.

telepresence as a means of interaction would mean to reject risk, trust, and finitude in favor of control. As Dreyfus states, "Someone seeking serious commitments and the lasting meaning they promise could enter the virtual world, but such a seeker would have to resist what is most seductive about the virtual world, viz. the promise of freedom from finitude."[101] The choice is ours, which will we choose?

The Story So Far

We now see that there is a clear distinction in Heidegger between the study of being and the study of beings. This chapter has been concerned with the latter, in the ontic sense. In exploring the ideas of Andy Clark we realized that technology is a necessary part of human existence, and that it would be inauthentic to reject technology. Hence, in order to navigate social media, we must look specifically at how it is factically affecting us. However, to accept technology unquestioningly, would be equally as inauthentic.

In discussing the works of Nicholas Carr and Sherry Turkle (as well as some supplementary pieces), we discovered that there are some serious concerns raised by social media. The Internet is affecting us as much as we affect it, as it rewires our brain plasticity. A future of human beings distracted and lacking depth in their lives is not one that seems desirable. Even worse, the world we have created for ourselves is causing us to withdraw from meaningful and risky relationships. We are rejecting intersubjectivity in favor of convenience and control. We reject the alterity of others in our lives in favor of robotic counterparts.

This has caused us to reject a fundamental part of what it is to be human, that is, our embodied experience of the world (and each other). We saw that according to Merleau-Ponty,

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[101] Ibid., 105.

embodiment is a fact of our existence. We favor disembodied telepresence because of the freedom it brings and the discontent we have with our "real-world lives." Dreyfus has helped to shed light on just how dangerous and unfulfilling telepresence might be.

To reject Clark's thesis would be inauthentic, and yet, to deny our own embodied experience for the sake of control would be just as inauthentic. In order to navigate social media as a part of improving our lives, we must take all of this very seriously.

At this point there are two conclusions we can draw. One is that to get rid of technology would be inauthentic, because it would be denying facticity. Yet, on the other hand, to stop at this point in the project, we would be remaining solely in the realm of facts, and therefore, would be inauthentic as well. If we desire to gain a full understanding of how social media is affecting us, we must understand it from the existential dimension. The third chapter of this project will be an attempt to do so.

CHAPTER 3: THE ONTOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN BEINGS AND TECHNOLOGY

> But talkativeness is afraid of the silence which reveals its emptiness.
> –Søren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age*

Dasein is fundamentally a being in which Being is an issue for it. This is Heidegger's description of the human condition. Thus, he spends the entirety of *Being and Time* exploring the question of Being. We explored this concept, and its relation to authenticity, in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2 we shed light on the ontic/ontological distinction between *beings* and *Being*. After doing so, we were able to shed light on the Internet, social media, and their effects on beings from a factical standpoint. However, the factical (or scientific) viewpoint alone would not be enough to cast any judgment on social media. This is because, along with Heidegger, I don't believe that the fundamental concern lies on the factical level, but rather on the ontological level. George Pattison explains Heidegger's view on science: "Despite the prodigious explanatory and technological success of science, it is, Heidegger believes, an essentially limiting, one-sided, and one-track way of approaching the world."[102] Thus, there is nothing wrong with the scientific account of social media, other than that it leaves us with no explanation of the ontological concerns, and is thus only one-sided. So we must cover the ontological issues of technology to get a fundamental understanding.

So now we will return to the question of Being itself. Yet, we do so in order to understand the question of Being in relation to human beings and technology. So how do we get at the question of Being itself? We do so by the method of questioning itself. We must question exactly what technology is, in order to uncover its relationship to humanity. This is the method

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[102] George Pattison, *The Later Heidegger* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 58.

that Heidegger would have us use. This is why he states that, "Questioning is the piety of thought."[103] For Heidegger thinks that in questioning technology, we can get at the essence not only of technology, but of humanity itself. Thus, he opens his essay, "The Question Concerning Technology" with the statement "Questioning builds a way."[104]

The relationship of human beings and technology is a mystery. Though technology is part of our factical existence (as explained in Chapter 2), we are still left with many questions regarding exactly what the relationship between humans and technology is exactly. We must explore this ambivalent relationship in order to grasp exactly what kind of judgments we can make about social media. Thus, we shall turn back to the works of Martin Heidegger, especially "The Question Concerning Technology." We shall do so in order to fundamentally understand the relationship between human beings and technology from an ontological standpoint. Then, we shall turn our attention specifically to modern technology (specifically social media) and Søren Kierkegaard's *The Present Age* in order to finally have an understanding of the essence of social media.

The Question Concerning Technology

Heidegger's main concern in "The Question Concerning Technology" is to understand the essence of technology in its relation to Being, and to understand the relationship between human beings and technology. Before we move forward I must make two things clear. This first is that Heidegger is not anti-technology, as will be shown throughout this chapter. The second, is that Heidegger rejects the idea that technology is a neutral force to be controlled by human

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[103] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 341.
[104] Ibid., 311.

beings. That is because for Heidegger, "The essence of technology is by no means anything technological."[105] This mysterious statement shall be explained further as we continue on.

For Heidegger, technology's essence is found in two Greek terms: aletheia and poeisis. Each of these terms (from Aristotle) helps to shed light on the essence of technology. The first one we shall discuss poeisis. Poeisis is the Greek term for "making," but it is a making that has an end in sight (or *telos*). Michael Inwood explains how Heidegger got the term from Aristotle: "Aristotle distinguishes *poeisis*, 'making'—which essentially has an end product, from *praxis*, 'action'—which does not."[106] So poeisis is an artistic type of making that has an end product in mind. Heidegger describes this process in relation to technology as a "bringing-forth."[107] Each technology is a bringing-forth of something. But what exactly is brought forth? Heidegger states, "Bringing-forth brings out of concealment into unconcealment."[108] In order to interpret this mysterious phrase we must understand Heidegger's concept of truth, or aletheia.

Aletheia is Heidegger's main concept of truth. It is a fascinating concept that is able to shirk the typical issues of correspondence or coherence theories of truth. So what is aletheia? Aletheia is a term that Aristole used. A Greek Lexicon by F.E. Peters explains, "Aristotle's theory of truth and falsity rests on the assumption that truth is not in things, nor in our knowledge of simple substances, but in the judgment."[109] Heidegger's use of aletheia, though based on Aristotle, departs from him. Heidegger used the word aletheia because of what it described for him. Pattison explains the etymology of aletheia:

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[105] Ibid., 311.
[106] Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, 168.
[107] Thus from this point on bringing-forth will refer to poeisis.
[108] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, p317.
[109] F.E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon* (New York: New York University Press, 1967), 17.

Aletheia, a term composed, he (Heidegger) claims, of the privative prefix "a-" (as in "a-political" or "a-moral") and a form of the verbal stem – *lath* – "to be concealed". The "original" meaning of "truth," then, is "being unconcealed." This revision of the concept of truth plays a crucial role at many points in the later Heidegger, being sometimes linked to the image of a clearing into which the wanderer emerges from out of the twilight of a forest path.[110]

So Heidegger's concept of truth is unconcealment. This means that truth is something dynamic and not static. Or, to put it more clearly, truth isn't something that we discover as it sits there waiting for us. Rather, it is like digging a hole to find a treasure chest. In unconcealing the treasure chest, you simultaneously cover up some other aspect of the world. Thus, all truth is both a revealing and a covering. For Heidegger, truth is something we experience in a phenomenological way. That is, it brings itself to light (the etymology of *phenomenon*), or is unconcealed. Technology, then, is a bringing-forth into unconcealment. But what does this mean?

Technology brings forth into unconcealment its own question, which is the question of its own essence. Heidegger asks, "What has the essence of technology to do with revealing? The answer: everything. For every bringing-forth is grounded in revealing."[111] Yet, there is a strange relationship here because the essence of technology is to bring-forth unconcealment, and the thing that is unconcealed is its own essence. So technology allows us to see the truth, by unconcealing its own essence when it is brought forth. Heidegger elaborates further:

Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing. If we give heed to this, then another whole realm for the essence of technology will open itself up to us. It is the realm of revealing, i.e., of truth.[112]

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110 Pattison, *The Later Heidegger*, 49.
111 Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 318.
112 Ibid., 318.

Heidegger believes fully that technology opens up a way to the truth of being, and of essence. Though it does bring forth unconcealment of its own essence, it also brings forth unconcealment about Being itself.

So we can see that the essence of technology is about something more than technology itself. The essence of technology is about how truth and Being are revealed to us by our understanding of technology. Thus we can clearly see why Heidegger had remarked that the essence of technology is nothing technological. We can also see that Heidegger was not some romantic anti-technological Luddite. Instead, he thought technology could bring us forth "into a clearing" so to speak, in which we could clearly contemplate the question of Being. However, Heidegger did have his reservations about modern technology. That is because for Heidegger, the essence of modern technology is different than the essence of technology itself. Something new had arisen in modern technology. We shall explore this in the next section of this chapter.

<center>The Difference of Modern Technology</center>

In "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger moves from technology to something he believes is something new. That is, he begins to explain a new phenomenon known as modern technology. Heidegger's view on modern technology is not different from his view on technology in general. At least in that he is not against modern technology in some reactionary sense. His work is neither an attack on technology nor on modern technology. His question is about what technology uncovers and obscures. So then, how do we distinguish modern technology from technology? After all, modern technology must be a form of technology. In order to understand how to distinguish the two, we must understand the essence of modern technology. That is because Heidegger feels that there is an *essential* difference between

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technology and what is known as modern technology. So we must explore the essence of modern

technology.

The first thing we must understand about modern technology is that it is also both a

bringing-forth and unconcealment. If we do not understand this fundamental similarity, we are in

danger of entirely missing the essence of modern technology. Heidegger explains, "What is

modern technology? It too is a revealing. Only when we allow our attention to rest on this

fundamental characteristic does that which is new in modern technology show itself to us."[113] So

in understanding that it is a revealing (or bringing-forth into unconcealment) we are opening up a

clearing in order to understand modern technology. However, this revealing is not the same as

technology itself. Rather, "The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging."[114] So

we are given the idea that modern technology is a challenging. But what does this mean?

The challenging that Heidegger speaks of is a challenging of nature, or more specifically

the essence of nature. It is an obsessive drive for control. Thus examples of modern technology

are things like the hydroelectric power plant. For:

> The hydroelectric plant is not built into the Rhine River as was the old wooden bridge
> that joined bank with bank for hundreds of years. Rather, the river is dammed up into the
> power plant. What the river is now, namely, a water-power supplier, derives from the
> essence of the power station.[115]

The river's essence is transformed into something that modern technology controls for its own

usage. In this case, the hydroelectric plant transforms the river. Yet it is not the transforming of

nature that Heidegger worries about, but rather what modern technology reveals about the

current "historical epoch." Heidegger believed that modern technology was shifting us into a

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[113] Ibid., 320.
[114] Ibid., 320.
[115] Ibid., 321.

new age, or "epoch," in which all things become subservient to the needs of modern technology. That is, the world becomes a "standing reserve" at the whims of the use of modern technology. Yet, in this case there is no goal in mind. Instead there is only efficiency for efficiency's sake. As Dreyfus puts it, "The goal of technology Heidegger then tells us, is the more and more flexible and efficient ordering of resources, not as objects to satisfy our desires, but simply for the sake of ordering,"[116] In fact, under this modern technological epoch, the entire subject/object distinction is destroyed. As Heidegger explains, "Seen in terms of the standing-reserve, the machine is completely nonautonomous, for it has its standing only on the basis of the ordering of the orderable."[117]

Heidegger believed that the problem was not that objects were being taken advantage of (or instrumentalized) by subjects. Instead, the issue was that both objects and subjects become the standing reserve at the challenging of modern technology. As he states, "Whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands over as object."[118] Each object is in danger of the standing reserve, but so are subjects. Heidegger clarifies the difference between modern technology and previous technological epochs. He states (speaking about previous epochs),

> The thinker only responded to what addressed itself to him. Only to the extent that man for his part is already challenged to exploit the energies of nature can this revealing that orders happen. If man is challenged, ordered, to do this, then does not man himself belong even more originally within the standing-reserve.[119]

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[116] Hubert L. Dreyfus and Charles Spinosa, "Highway Bridges and Feasts: Heidegger and Borgmann on How to Affirm Technology," in *Heidegger Reexamined: Art, Poetry, and Technology*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall (New York: Routledge, 2002), 177.

[117] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 323.

[118] Ibid., 322.

[119] Ibid., 323.

So even man himself, because of his relationship to nature and technology, is in danger of falling prey to the challenging and ordering. Thus, in understanding the challenging that modern technology offers, we are able to grasp its essence. The essence of modern technology is enframing. But what is this enframing?

Heidegger's definition of enframing is an extremely confusing one. He defines it this way:

> Enframing means the gathering together of the setting-upon that sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the actual, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve. Enframing means the way of revealing that holds sway in the essence of modern technology and that is itself nothing technological.[120]

Such a confusing definition must be worked through in order for us to get a clear understanding of enframing. Perhaps by turning to George Pattison's definition we can get a slightly more clear understanding. Pattison states, "Enframing is the dominant mode of unconcealment, i.e., of representing the world."[121] He is saying that enframing limits the range of considered allowable experience. Enframing limits the possibility of the world, because it rewrites how the world is to be perceived. That is, the world is seen only as a standing-reserve in relation to modern technology. We begin to see the world (and each other) differently because of enframing. Things are viewed only in relation to how they serve a world transformed by technological efficiency. The main value is ordering, Thus enframing as the essence of modern technology fundamentally distinguishes it from previous technological epochs. Yet Heidegger is still clear about his purpose. He explains:

> We are questioning concerning technology in order to bring to light our relationship to its essence. The essence of modern technology shows itself in what we call enframing. But

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[120] Ibid., 325.
[121] Pattison, *The Later Heidegger*, 56.

simply to point to this is still to answer the question concerning technology, if to answer means to respond, in the sense of correspond, to the essence of what is being asked about.[122]

So Heidegger's purpose is not simply to draw our attention to enframing and to respond by getting rid of modern technology. In fact, that would be impossible, because, "Everywhere we remained unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it."[123] This technological epoch has already happened, we are in the midst of it. We could not possibly get rid of it. Instead, since we are challenged by modern technology:

> As the one who is challenged forth in this way, man stands within the essential realm of enframing. He can never take up a relationship to it only subsequently. Thus the question as to how we are to arrive at a relationship to the essence of technology, asked in this way, always comes too late.[124]

It is too late to ask the question of how to stop enframing, because we are already caught up in it. Rather, Heidegger is setting us up to be aware of the real danger, but also with that the saving power. He explains:

> But never too late comes the question as to whether we actually experience ourselves as the ones whose activities everywhere, public and private, are challenged forth by enframing. Above all, never too late comes the question as to whether we actually admit ourselves into that wherein enframing itself essentially unfolds.[125]

So the real question is how are we supposed to respond to this enframing. Heidegger's question concerning technology in this sense mirrors the purpose of this project. That is, how do we move forward in the midst of something we are already caught up in?

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[122] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 328.
[123] Ibid., 311.
[124] Ibid., 329.
[125] Ibid., 329.

Before we move to the next section, we must shed light on what Heidegger thinks is both the apocalyptic and soteriological aspect of modern technology. When I say apocalyptic, it is not that Heidegger thought that we would destroy ourselves and the world through nuclear war or something (though he may have thought that a possibility). Rather, Heidegger thought that there was an inherent danger in exploring the essence of modern technology. The danger is that, "In whatever way the destining of revealing may hold sway, the unconcealment in which everything that is shows itself at any given time harbors the danger that man may misconstrue the unconcealed and misinterpret it."[126] So the danger lies in man misinterpreting the essence of modern technology, or simply put, if we think that we can solve the problems raised by technology by further technological means. For every action of trying to fix the situation is itself grounded in the enframing of technological thought.

This obsession with control and mastery is part of the enframing that technology thrusts upon us. Thus in desiring to fix and control the problems caused by technology, we give up our freedom. Heidegger explains:

> This danger attests itself to us in two ways. As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, then he comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall, that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve. Meanwhile, man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself and postures as lord of the earth. In this way the illusion comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct.[127]

In this case, man would think he could fix any problem that comes before him by means that he creates. The ironic thing is that the problem is that very mindset which was created by the enframing of technology. Man himself becomes a victim of the enframing of modern technology

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[126] Ibid., 331.
[127] Ibid., 332.

and enframes the world and other people in the same way. So technology itself can neither be the problem nor the solution. As Heidegger makes clear, "What is dangerous is not technology. Technology is not demonic; but its essence is mysterious. The essence of technology, as a destining of revealing, is the danger." [128] So we must understand further the essence of technology to understand the danger.

Heidegger also makes clear another danger that we could fall into. That is in transfixing ourselves upon the successes of technology. Heidegger warns, "Instead of merely gaping at the technological. So long as we represent technology as an instrument, we remain transfixed in the will to master it." [129] This is again falling prey to the enframing of modern technology. As Pattison puts it, "The danger, for Heidegger, is that under the spell of enframing, dazzled by the success of technology, we simply forget to ask the question of Being." [130] This is a danger for Heidegger, because his whole purpose is to gain a free relation to technology. This is the saving power for Heidegger. Correct thinking and understanding of the essence of technology are the saving power for Heidegger.

So there is hope, even in the epoch of modern technology, even in the midst of enframing. Though we are caught up in modern technology, by understanding its essence, and not misinterpreting it, we are able to gain a free relationship to it. This opens up a profound clearing for our understanding of ourselves, of Being, and of technology. Dreyfus explains the significance this way:

> Once one recognizes the technological understanding of being for what it is, one gains a free relation to it. We neither push forward technological efficiency as our only goal nor

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[128] Ibid., 333.
[129] Ibid., 337.
[130] Pattison, *The Later Heidegger*, 75.

always resist it. If we are free of the technological imperative we can, in each case, discuss the pros and cons.[131]

Dreyfus is explaining that this free relation to technology opens up a clearing in which we can discuss the pros and cons of technology in a completely unconcealed and unobscured way. However, if we assume that human power alone can make the necessary changes, this saving power could become obscured and withdraw from us. Heidegger states, "Human activity can never directly counter this danger. Human achievement alone can never banish it. But human reflection can ponder the fact that all saving power must be of a higher essence than what is endangered, though at the same time kindred to it."[132] So the answer to the danger presented by modern technology will not come by simply acting or willing.

Instead, it will come once we have opened up the clearing given by unconcealment. We must first gain understanding by questioning. We can only do this by getting closer to the danger by understanding the essence of each modern technology for what it is. Thus Heidegger ends his essay with the mysterious statement, "The closer we get to the danger, the more brightly do the ways into the saving power begin to shine and the more questioning we become. For questioning is the piety of thought."[133] Thus, our hope lies in gaining a free relationship to technology, and then determining how we ought to act based on what we discover. This is the saving power.

The Present Age

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[131] Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Heidegger on Gaining a Free Relation to Technology," in *Heidegger Reexamined: Art, Poetry, and Technology*, ed. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 169.
[132] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 339.
[133] Ibid., 341.

How does all of this relate to social media? This is the main question concerning modern technology that I have tried to ask throughout this project. We have already explored the factical aspects of social media in Chapter 2. In doing so we made a case for why social media might need to be reconsidered. However, in this chapter, we have attempted to get at something more primordial. That is, we have shown what the essence of modern technology is. Thus, in this section we must attempt to understand what the essence of social media is. In doing so, we should be able to gain a free relationship to social media in order to understand exactly what might be the course of action in regards to social media.

We have already done some of the work in exploring the essence of social media. In Chapter 2 we discussed exactly what it is that social media does to us. However, we must look at what the ontological concerns surrounding social media are in order to get a full grasp of its essence. In order to do so, we shall turn to Kierkegaard's *The Present Age*. Doing so may seem strange, as Kierkegaard wrote this piece about 150 years before modern electronic social media even existed. However, the ideas that Kierkegaard presented in this work apply directly to social media, as they did to the public nature of mass media of his day. In exploring his work, we should be able to shed light on the essence of modern social media. I believe this shall become clear as we work through it.

In *The Present Age*, Kierkegaard describes a world much like our own. This age, which he called, "An age of understanding and reflection,"[134] describes an age that had lost all of its passion and ability to act in meaningful ways. That is, everyone had given up their desire to do great things, instead favoring an endless commentary and criticism upon every issue as

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[134] Kierkegaard, *The Present Age*, 3.

knowledge was spread to everyone. Kierkegaard contrasts a revolutionary and active age with his own, saying, "A revolutionary age is an age of action; ours is the age of advertisement and publicity. Nothing ever happens but there is immediate publicity everywhere."[135] The problem with the age of reflection is that, "It hinders and stifles all action; it levels."[136] That is, it mocks all attempts at action because of its own inability to perform any meaningful action.

When reading these words, one can see a striking similarity between the critique he offers of his age and our own. We can see how Kierkegaard might make similar statements about an age of blogging, status updates, and tweets. We can see how Kierkegaard might rail just as strongly against an age in which friends have become a list of distant avatars waiting to be clicked upon and social activism is simply posting something up on various social media sites. He would rail against the endless publicity that removes action and risk from the equation. This publicity of mass media creates "the public," which is an anonymous mass of opinion, criticism, and commentary that refuses to act. It refuses to act because the individual is afraid to look stupid, and afraid to be ostracized or make the wrong choices. For everything one does becomes public. He defines the public as "consisting of unreal individuals who never are and never can be united in an actual situation or organization—and yet are held together as a whole."[137] Thus, public opinion and expression becomes more important than what is true or meaningful. Kierkegaard states in an illustration about the public that they are sick with:

> The most dangerous, if also the most respectable, of all diseases: to admire in public what is considered unimportant in private—since everything is made into a joke. And so,

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[135] Ibid., 6.
[136] Ibid., 23.
[137] Ibid., 34.

stimulated by a gush of admiration, they are all comfortably agreed that they might as well admire themselves.[138]

Thus, the public falls in love with its own cleverness, completely unaware of the meaninglessness of its constant reflection, chatter, and commentary. He continues:

> No one is any longer carried away by the desire to perform great things, no one is precipitated by evil into atrocious sins, and so there is nothing for either the good or the bad to talk about, and yet for that very reason people gossip all the more, since ambiguity is tremendously stimulating and much more verbose than rejoicing over goodness or repentance over evil.[139]

Simply put, Kierkegaard thinks we prefer the vapidity of endless ambiguous chatter rather than real actions (whether they be good or evil). We relish in the safety of the ability to publicize our opinions without any risk to ourselves.

Kierkegaard continues to describe what the mass media does to relationships. For Kierkegaard, it destroys relationships because it removes risk. We hide behind the safety of the public. He states:

> The admirer and the object of admiration stand like two polite equals, and observe each other. A subject no longer freely honours his king or is angered in his ambition. To be a subject has come to mean something quite different; it means to be a third party. The subject ceases to have a position within the relationship; he has no direct relation to the king but simply become an observer and deliberately works out the problem; i.e. the relation of a subject to his king.[140]

Kierkegaard is here using the example of the king/subject to show that no longer does one actually participate in a relationship. Rather, he stands outside of the relationship as an observer and manipulates things so that they go according to plan, rather than dealing with the risk of a real relationship (i.e., hatred of the king or love of the king and the danger each might bring).

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138 Ibid., 9.
139 Ibid., 15.
140 Ibid.,16.

Kierkegaard describes this sort of relationship as "not only ambiguously expressed, it is almost meaningless."[141] This is because this sort of relationship removes many of the aspects that we consider as giving relationships meaning (namely: risk, unpredictability, the alterity of the other, etc.). Yet according to the opinion of the age of reflection, they had reached a new age of understanding, connection, and democratization (much like our own).

This understanding of the present age is the very ludicrousness of its own view. As Kierkegaard states, "The public is the fairy story of an age of understanding, which in imagination makes the individual into something even greater than a king above his people."[142] According to the public, publicity is a great thing for it makes each person into a mass of opinions that can steamroll kingdoms and all other authorities. It doesn't matter who is right or wrong, it only matters who has the most exposure. Kierkegaard explains, "Now everyone can have an opinion; but they have to band together numerically in order to have one. Twenty-five signatures makes the most frightful stupidity into an opinion, and the considered opinion of a first-class mind is only a paradox."[143] Thus, opinions no longer serve any purpose other than for the sake of publicity. Yet, what is the cost of this? Kierkegaard thinks that the cost is that no one will feel the need or desire to act and do great things.

Kierkegaard illustrates this exact idea in stating how everyone publicly cries for change and someone to do something, while no one does anything. He says,

> There is no good calling upon a Holger Danske or a Martin Luther; their time is over and at bottom is only the individual's laziness which makes a man long to have them back, a

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[141] Ibid., 18.
[142] Ibid., 37.
[143] Ibid., 55.

worldly impatience which prefers to buy something cheap, second-hand, rather than to buy the highest of all things very dear and first-hand.[144]

Kierkegaard is attempting to call out each individual from the public. If individuals (as individuals) take it upon themselves to experience first-hand meaningful action and informed opinion (which is risky) they will gain something precious. Yet, many would rather stay in the safety (and effortlessness) of the public and live meaninglessly. Thus he laments the blindness of the public:

> More and more individuals, owing to their bloodless indolence, will aspire to be nothing at all—in order to become the public: that abstract whole formed in the most ludicrous way, by all participants becoming a third party (an onlooker). This indolent mass which understands nothing and does nothing itself, this gallery, is on the look-out for distraction and soon abandons itself to the idea that everything that anyone does is done in order to give it (the public) something to gossip about. That indolent mass sits with its legs crossed, wearing an air of superiority, and anyone who tries to work, whether king, official, school-teacher or the better type of journalist, the poet or the artist, has to struggle to drag the public along with it, while the public thinks in its own superior way that it is the horse.[145]

Each person will be caught up in the public, which was the state of Kierkegaard's age. An age of reflection, lacking passion and meaning was the age that Kierkegaard railed against. Rather than being an individual who embraces meaningful things, instead, each person will seek to be caught up in the safety of the public. Unfortunately, the public removes all meaning from life as it levels relationships (by removing risk), and levels thought (by forcing control of opinions). Thus we are ready to make the connection to social media in order to understand its essence.

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[144] Ibid., 31.
[145] Ibid., 38.

The Essence of Social Media

At this point we have a grounding in order to understand the ontological nature of social media. That is, with the combined works of Heidegger and Kierkegaard (as well as the research from Chapter 2) we can finally analyze the essence of social media. For starters, we know that social media is a form of modern technology. We can see this because of its similarity to the mass media talked about by Kierkegaard. Mass media's challenging and enframing took place in the form of publicity for publicity's sake. Social media is also a challenging and enframing. Its sense of enframing is connection for connection's sake. These connections are mostly unimportant and serve no purpose, what Christine Rosen refers to as "mostly congeries of weak ties."[146]

Social media then, is a challenging, in the sense of it challenges our very humanity. It factically challenges our embodiment, our brain function, and our very relationship to it. It turns us into connection addicts, without satisfying our connective needs. Ontologically, it challenges the very essence of what makes our lives and relationships meaningful existentially. Instead, it forces us to be subject to its own essence. We see this in two main themes that are the essence of social media. The first is performance and the second is control.

Performance is part of the enframing of social media that we are caught up in. We are part of a society that forces us to be connected at all times. If you are not on one of the various social media sites (and do not often check them) you are considered strange or behind the times. Yet, not only are you expected to be connected, you are also expected to perform according to the standards. I do not mean the standards of society, but the standards built into the very essence

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[146] Rosen, *Virtual Friendship and the New Narcissism*

of social media. Social media expects us to create untrue selves. Ones that are always on stage, always public, and always connected. Selves that always have to look good in ways that we do not, that always must say entertaining things when we are sometimes boring, etc. Yet, rarely do we see anything but narcissism, passionless reflection, publicity, and cynicism.

We perform tasks on social media not for the good they do, but for the good they make us feel. For instance, say a husband tells his wife happy birthday through a social media site. He is not telling her, for he could easily do this in person, through a phone call, or some other less public means. Rather, he is telling the online world for the sense of his own satisfaction. He wants the world to know he is a good husband, or that he loves his wife, or some other aspect about himself. So his connection with his wife was indirect, and somewhat selfish and half-hearted. We see this sort of mindset in everything on social media sites. We try to get the most comments, the most likes, or the most attention by any means necessary. We only post the things about our lives that make us look the best, and leave out the other parts that we don't want people to know. What is the problem with this? The problem is that it makes it impossible to have any depth of connection when you remove the risks associated with life. Jonathan Franzen illustrates this sort of person:

> If you consider this in human terms, and you imagine a person defined by a desperation to be liked, what do you see? You see a person without integrity, without a center. In more pathological cases, you see a narcissist—a person who can't tolerate the tarnishing of his or her self-image that not being liked represents, and who therefore either withdraws from human contact or goes to extreme, integrity-sacrificing lengths to be likable. If you dedicate your existence to being likable, however, and if you adopt whatever cool persona is necessary to make it happen, it suggests that you've despaired of being loved for who you really are.[147]

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[147] Jonathan Franzen, "Liking Is for Cowards. Go for What Hurts," *New York Times* (May 28, 2011), http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/29/opinion/29franzen.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (accessed September 5, 2012).

Franzen illustrates clearly the sort of person who goes to any extreme to be liked, even to sacrificing any sense of who they authentically are. This drive is the same drive that Kierkegaard pointed to. That is, the drive to be caught up in the public rather than have to stand on our own. We are not comfortable with this so we seek to control ourselves and others through social media.

The second part of the enframing of social media is control. Above we saw how Heidegger believed that control is part of modern technology. Jonathan Franzen puts it this way:

> The telos of techne, is to replace a natural world that's indifferent to our wishes—a world of hurricanes and hardships and breakable hearts, a world of resistance—with a world so responsive to our wishes as to be, effectively, a mere extension of the self.[148]

Franzen is correct in assuming that we seek to control a world that isn't responsive to our whims and desires. Social media serves this function exactly in our world of relationships. Real-world relationships take intimacy and risk. These two things are impossible through electronic mediums. Much like Kierkegaard's public, social media allows us to keep everything right where we want it. We can start and stop conversations at will. We can post only the pictures that make us look good. We can keep each and every person at arms length, never allowing them to know who we really are. Why would we do such a thing? We do so because it is comfortable and easy, because it allows us to build a world that responds to our every whim and fancy, even if this world is completely devoid of reality and meaning.

The danger in this is that if we become too comfortable with this, our real-world friendships will suffer. As we spend more and more time online, we will spend less and less time

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[148] Ibid., 2.

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in contact with people in a risky, embodied, and vulnerable way. The sort of friendship we have through social media is a lower-quality type of friendship. As Rosen argues:

> Friendship in these virtual spaces is thoroughly different from real-world friendship. In its traditional sense, friendship is a relationship which, broadly speaking, involves the sharing of mutual interests, reciprocity, trust, and the revelation of intimate details over time and within the specific social (and cultural) contexts. Because friendship depends on mutual revelations that are concealed from the rest of the world, it can only flourish within the bounds of privacy; the idea of public friendship is an oxymoron.[149]

I think Rosen makes a clear case. That is, that the publicity of friendship on social media sites undermines some of the very foundational aspects of friendship. When we relate to people online, we often see them as playthings. People we can comment on, tell jokes to, argue with, look at their pictures, etc. Yet, what we don't often see is someone we want to have a good and close friendship with. This obsession with a world that we can control is inauthentic, absurd, and I would even say selfish. I think Franzen makes a good point when he states:

> The fundamental fact about all of us is that we're alive for a while but will die before long. This fact is the real root cause of all our anger and pain and despair. And you can either run from this fact or, by way of love, you can embrace it. When you stay in your room and rage or sneer or shrug your shoulders, as I did for many years, the world and its problems are impossibly daunting. But when you go out and put yourself in real relation to real people, or even just real animals, there's a very real danger that you might love some of them.[150]

The choice is up to us. Do we want a world obsessed with performance and control? Do we want to remove risk, trust, and therefore meaning from our relationships? I don't think any of us really do. I think we are all seeking connection; it is the very lure of social media. The problem is that social media doesn't do what we hope it will. Instead, it cheapens our lives instead of enriching them.

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[149] Rosen, "Virtual Friendship and the New Narcissism."
[150] Franzen, "Liking if for Cowards, Go for What Hurts," 5.

Status Update

We have spent this chapter exploring the ontological aspects of social media. We have seen how Heidegger's works allow us to understand the essence not only of technology, but also of modern technology. We have seen how Kierkegaard's criticisms of his age apply very much to our own age, and that mass media's essence helps us to understand the essence of social media. We have seen that the essence of social media comes in two forms: performance and control. Yet, we can also see that these two things are extremely harmful to one who wants to live a meaningful and deep life. Thus, we finally have a clear picture of the entirety of social media. I shall use the remaining space to conclude how we might best use social media in light of everything we have explored so far.

CONCLUSION: RELEARNING TO MAKE MISTAKES AND LIVE AUTHENTICALLY

At the beginning of this project, I proposed the question that I sought to explore. It is, "What does it mean to be an authentic human being, and how does one live that out in the age of the Internet?" I am convinced that we can now answer this question. What then, can we conclude from all I have shown so far? At this point, our questioning has led us to understand that there are some very bad aspects and uses of social media. Yet, there are also several good aspects and uses of social media. I shall start by explaining this good, as it was not often referenced in this project.

There are several good aspects of social media, which is another reason why we ought not throw it away. I have not discussed these good aspects because for the most part, we are already familiar with them. For instance, one great aspect of social media is the ability for communication. It is an amazingly fast, organized, and simple way to communicate with large groups of people or single individuals. It allows old friends to stay in touch across long distances for relatively no cost. It also allows for great movements of freedom such as all of the Middle Eastern revolutions of a few years ago organized through social media. Another good aspect of social media is expression. Social media allows us to express our thoughts, our very personalities, and ourselves in an unbounded way. Even more so, it allows those who have anxiety about society a means to "test the waters" of public expression in a relatively riskless way. Social media is even a good way to remain entertained from time to time (while waiting for a bus, while in a noisy concert hall waiting for a band to start, etc.). According to the above

explanations, social media seems like a good thing. So why did I seemingly come down so hard on it?

The reason I criticized social media harshly at times is because of the unquestioning attitude I spoke of in the introduction to this project. We are already aware of the good aspects of social media. However, we have not begun to question how we ought to use it. As seen in Chapter 2 and 3, diving into social media unquestioningly can have dire results. It effects us both on the ontic and ontological levels very deeply, as I have shown, and thus, we ought to be more concerned and questioning as we try to understand this phenomenon that we are already caught up in.

First, we saw in Chapter 1 that our very authenticity is something that affects the greater community we are a part of, so we ought to be concerned with how social media affects our authenticity. In Chapter 2, we saw that to get rid of social media would be inauthentic, but we also saw that there are some serious concerns in how it is affecting our brains, bodies, psyches, and status as embodied agents. Finally, in Chapter 3 we discovered that the very essence of social media lies in performance and control. Since we are already users of social media, we are enframed within this essence at any time we set out to use social media. Thus, it is only by being aware of all of these things and by continuing to question social media that we can gain a free relationship to it. Are we using social media as a means of communication, expression, or for entertainment? According to these uses, it would seem that no harm is done. However, we must understand that these things can easily become overrun by performance and control, and thus we become inauthentic. If social media continues to become such an overwhelming force in society, the possible results are worrisome . Yet, if we gain a free relation to it by remaining critical, then

we can become free users of the technology known as social media. I think where we ought to go from here is best summed up by Tony Dokoupil:

> All of us, since the relationship with Internet began, have tended to accept it as is, without much conscious thought about how we want it to be or what we want to avoid. Those days of complacency should end. The Internet is still ours to shape. Our minds are in the balance.[151]

The same applies to social media, and yet so much more than our minds are in the balance. The very depth of our existential experience of the world and each other hangs in the balance.

For many of the authors cited, what we need are real communities, not online ones. These are communities in which we learn to love deeper, make mistakes, and be ourselves authentically rather than the ones offered by social media and the Internet community. It is when we learn to love others and ourselves in the midst of this, and find this sort of community, that life becomes extremely rewarding. However, social media is subverting these sorts of communities and asserting its own type of community as we have seen from everything presented above. How are we to understand and evaluate this? I leave you with the question: Why do we unquestioningly accept and spend so much of our time on something that adds so little benefit to our lives? Only when we have answered this question for ourselves, can we begin to live authentically in relation to each other in the midst of the phenomenon that we are currently caught up in known as social media.

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[151] Dokoupil, "Is the Onslaught Making Us Crazy?," 30.

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