

# Death as Guide to Life

Levinas' critique on Heidegger's notion of Being-toward-death examined

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## Abstract

In this thesis I examine Levinas' critique on Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death from the perspective of Heidegger. I claim that Levinas' critique on Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death is unjustified. My main argument for this claim is that their philosophical purposes are different from each other: Heidegger's aim was an ontological investigation of the relation of death to existence while Levinas aim was a phenomenology of the death of the other from an ethical perspective. Because Levinas' philosophical purpose is so different from Heidegger's, Levinas does not oppose Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death. Other arguments for my claim resulted from Levinas' points of critique and involve that Levinas did not understand Heidegger's argument properly, that Levinas actually agrees with Heidegger but uses different terminology and that Levinas has a different opinion rather than a counter argument. I finally argue that the two notions are rather able to co-exist next to each other and complement each other on some points, rather than exclude each other.

## Introduction

This thesis aims at answering the question: "what is the meaning of human mortality to life?". This is a question that has interested me in the last couple of years. Previously, I had been hardly confronted with death or illness in my life. I knew about it, but it did not play a conscious role in my mind. But in the last couple of years this changed when people close to me got ill or died. All of a sudden, I got confronted with human mortality. I became very much aware of the mortality of others but not so much of myself. This changed something positive in me in the sense that I realized the importance of people close to me and to be there for them, but the consciousness of human mortality also put a heavy burden on me. This realization has put people close to me in a different perspective.

I would like to investigate this question through the ideas of Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas. Heidegger was one of the first philosophers to centralize death which has resulted in his notion of *Sein zum Tode* (being-toward-death). Levinas has critically reacted to Heidegger's notion of death and came up with a new interpretation of death. This opposition has only been reviewed from the perspective of Levinas in favor of Levinas' position (Cohen, 2006) but not from the perspective of Heidegger. In this thesis, I will therefore take the perspective of Heidegger and will argue that Levinas' critique is unjustified.

In the first chapter, I will start with an overview of Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death from his work *Being and Time* (1996). The notion of being-toward-death is worked out in the second part of his work which encompasses "Time". In his analysis of *Dasein*, Heidegger discovers the fundamental role of the temporality of existence. Time stretches towards an indefinite future limited by death. Our way of being is finite. The awareness of mortality is an essential part of *Dasein*. Those who engage themselves with the awareness of their mortality live an authentic life, according to Heidegger. Out of care for one's own existence, aiming at the ending future and interpreting from that future one's past, man shapes his life with its possibilities.

In the second chapter, I will analyze Levinas' critique on Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death through the most relevant works including *Totality and Infinity* (1979) and *God, Death, and Time* (2000). Levinas emphasizes the death of the other person. For Levinas, the human subject achieves its true humanity when one is occupied with the death of the other instead of with one's own death. Caring for the other's mortality before one's own morality, is for Levinas the very height of a person's humanity. It shows the morally best version of a human being. Levinas considers death itself as something that transcends our understanding which causes that death

cannot lead to a better understanding of the self or human subjectivity. In facing up with death, one therefore faces up with the impossibility of a future instead of a possible future.

Heidegger's and Levinas' positions on death are rather different from each other. Because of this, I would like to critically review the opposing views of Heidegger and Levinas on death. Cohen (2006, p. 25) has claimed that Levinas "radically contests the entire edifice of ontology of Heidegger". Thus, that Levinas would undermine Heidegger's philosophical approach. I would like to find out whether this claim is right: whether Levinas "radically contests" Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death and opposes Heidegger or whether they show some similarities; whether Levinas' critique on Heidegger is justified and whether it actually applies to Heidegger. These questions will be answered in the third chapter. I will answer these questions on the basis of Levinas' points of critique from the perspective of Heidegger's being-toward-death.

In the fourth chapter, I will question whether the two notions of death can be placed next to each other and whether the two accounts are able to complement each other with certain points. I would like to conclude my thesis with my findings: a complete and thorough analysis of Heidegger's and Levinas' account of death, whether Levinas' critique is justified and an answer to my research question "what is the meaning of human mortality to life?".

# Chapter 1: Theory Heidegger

## Introduction

In order to start with Heidegger's theory of being-toward-death, the contextual background of his theory must be explained, for the theory of being-toward-death to be understood. The theory of being-toward-death is written within the context of *Being and Time (Sein und Zeit)*, Heidegger's magnum opus which was published in 1927. In this book Heidegger investigates 'the question of being'. The human being is already a being that asks but the 'question of being' is, according to Heidegger, the most fundamental question one can ask. This question has been overlooked and forgotten to be asked in the past. This has caused human being to forget its own being whereby the meaning of being got lost.

The human being is the only being that is able to understand its own being. Because the human being has an understanding of its own being, it is ontically closest to being but ontologically furthest away. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger therefore gives an analysis of the human way of being, which Heidegger calls *Dasein* (which cannot be translated correctly into English; therefore, it will remain in German). To investigate the question of being, Heidegger combines different philosophical methods: phenomenology, ontology and metaphysics. *Being and Time* consists of two parts: the first part of the book entails the subject of 'Being' and the second part consists of the subject of 'Time'. The theory of being-toward-death is incorporated in the second part of the book.

Heidegger analyses many different aspects that are essential to *Dasein*. Because not all of them are relevant in relation to my research, I will mention a few of them. One of the aspects of *Dasein* is that it is always a being in a certain mood (being sad, cheerful, anxious, excited etc.) and is therefore never neutral. The dimension of time is also of great influence on *Dasein*. *Dasein* is conscious of the temporality of its being; that it has a beginning and an ending. *Dasein* is open to its historicity (past, present and future) in which everyone has a past which one can remember. Another aspect of *Dasein* is that *Dasein* is 'thrown' into a world which already exists. For example, *Dasein* gets thrown into language and into culture to which it has to adjust itself to. *Dasein* is also 'thrown' into being, as which it exists until it does not anymore. One does not have a choice whether one would like to exist or not, it is 'thrown' into existence. One therefore needs to relate to one's existence. However, there are many possibilities of existence, which *Dasein* has to figure out.

Another important aspect of *Dasein* is that *Dasein* is always surrounded by the world which involves other people among other things. *Dasein* cannot be thought without the world which surrounds it. Therefore, being-in-the-world is an essential part of *Dasein*. Because *Dasein* is a being-in-the-world, it gets pulled into everydayness in which being gets distracted with daily business. In this daily business, *Dasein* gets influenced by the 'idle talk' of 'the they' which involves the public opinion. Due to the influence of 'the they', *Dasein* is not open to its own possibilities of being causing it to live inauthentically [*uneigentlich*]. Because of the 'they' *Dasein* does not need to think about its own death but goes up into the 'immortal' because the 'idle talk' has the structure of immortality; it will always remain. In order to do justice to its own being, *Dasein* needs to live authentically, which involves being confronted with its own mortality. This critique has resulted in Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death, which I will explain more fully below.

## Being-toward-Death

Heidegger arrives at his notion of being-toward-death step by step. Being-toward-death follows from Heidegger's research to the question of the meaning of being through an ontological

inquiry. Heidegger has concluded in the first division of his book that the being of Dasein is contained in care (§45, p. 231). Existence was defined as anticipation; Dasein is concerned in its being about its being, which is a potentiality-of-being (§45, p. 231). Heidegger aims at reaching an authentic potentiality-of-being (§45, p. 233). His analysis thus far has led to the inauthentic potentiality-of-being, which is the everydayness of being which takes place between its beginning and its end. However, to be able to understand Dasein as a whole, everydayness is not enough because it does not contain the whole of being. Heidegger wonders how being can be regarded in its whole when being is defined as a potentiality-of-being. Everyday inauthentic being does not suffice, according to Heidegger (§45, p. 233). It is therefore important to search for the being of Dasein in its possible authenticity and wholeness. Heidegger is thus searching for Dasein as a whole which means that the end of being should be incorporated, which is death (§45, p. 234).

Characteristic of Dasein is care, which consists of “being ahead of itself”, which means that being is concerned with its potentialities (§46, p. 236). Being is thus concerned with the existence of itself and its possibilities. It thinks that there is always something *outstanding* that has not been realized yet but has the potentiality of becoming realized in its being. The essence of Dasein thus lies in the unfinished qualities Dasein has. But defining being as a potentiality-of-being also means that there is a lack of wholeness of Dasein, there is always a potentiality that can be realized. Dasein will therefore never attain its “wholeness”. When Dasein attains its wholeness, it is not a being anymore, a being is therefore also not able to experience wholeness as a being (§46, p. 236). Dasein reaches its wholeness in death but at the same time loses its being, causing Dasein not to be able to consciously experience or understand its wholeness (§47, p. 237).

However, Dasein is able to experience the death of others because Dasein is in its essence also a being-with-others. When someone else dies, one is able to experience the transition of Dasein into a no-longer-Dasein (§47, p. 238). The no-longer-Dasein was only-just-present; something at which can still be projected the idea of life. It is viewed as something not living which has lost its life. It has left our ‘world’ but is still in our world through those who surround him and are still with him. The loss of someone that has died is only experienced by those who are still alive (§47, p. 239). However, we do not experience the dying itself in the sense that we experience it ourselves but experience it in the sense that we are present and can see it. Because Heidegger’s investigation is about being itself, Heidegger is interested in the ontological meaning of the dying of the person who dies and not in the death of others. The dying of others is thus not useful to the investigation of the meaning of being. Death is something that is essentially my own, nobody else can die for you or experience death for you (§47, p. 240). Death is thus something very individual and must be ontologically studied as such.

In order to give an ontological interpretation of death, the concepts of wholeness and end must be further set out by their specific realms (§48, p. 242). It must be shown how the concept of “ending” constitutes to being whole of the existing being. Dasein consists of a lack of wholeness until the end, which is death. This lack of wholeness belongs to Dasein when it refers to something outstanding because outstanding means something that belongs to a being but what is still lacking. It is about a possible being which is not-yet, one has to become or be what is not-yet (§48, p. 243). Part of Dasein is thus that it is already not-yet, as long as it is (§48, p. 244). Ending does not mean to fulfill oneself because being is also able to end in unfulfillment. Death must therefore be grasped in a different sense than fulfilling oneself. Ending at first means ‘stopping’ which can mean change into absence of objective presence or to be objectively present when the end comes. The first refers to disappearance and the latter refers to ‘finishedness’ which are neither modes of ending that characterize death appropriately, according to Heidegger (§48, p. 245). Because Dasein is already not-yet as long as it is, it is also already its end. Therefore, Dasein

is a being toward the end of its being. However, what ending means in relation to existence and being, has not yet become clear (§48, p. 246).

The end, as the most extreme not-yet, is something which Dasein relates itself to (§50, p. 250). Therefore, the end or death is immanent to Dasein. However, immanence can be applied to a lot of things and is thus not distinctive for death. Dasein has to take death as a potentiality of being upon itself. Thus, with death, Dasein stands for its “ownmost” potentiality-of-being. It is immanent to itself. Death totally belongs to being itself, other relations are dissolved in it and it is unavoidable as a possibility of being. Therefore, death is one’s “ownmost, nonrelational, and insuperable possibility” (§50, p. 250). Dasein is thrown into this possibility from the moment when it starts existing (§50, p. 251). Dasein does not need to have any theoretical or explicit knowledge of being a being-toward-death because this reveals itself in anxiety. This is not a fear of one’s demise but a fundamental attunement or mood of Dasein. According to Heidegger, the fact that many beings initially are not aware or do not know about death, proves that Dasein flees away from death.

Dasein’s interpretation of death is mostly depended on everydayness (§51, p. 252). Everydayness is constituted by ‘the they’, which expresses itself in ‘idle talk’. The idle talk thus influences the way the everyday Dasein understands its being-toward-death. In public life, death is known as something that regularly occurs (§51, p. 253). Someone known dies but also a lot of unknown people die daily. Due to its regularity, death is something familiar and therefore unnoticed. The talk that exists around death is that death is something that occurs at the end of life, but it is not something to worry about in the present. Death is something indeterminate that is not yet present to Dasein and therefore not a threat. When ‘the they’ talks about death, it is understood as “one dies”, which is to say that I am not the one to die because “one dies” does not refer to someone specific. Dying is something which is mine, but which has turned into a public event that concerns ‘the they’. The ownmost being-toward-death is thus covered up by the idle talk of ‘the they’. Thinking about death is also seen as a sign of insecurity or fear which ‘the they’ does not permit (§51, p. 254). It does not permit Dasein to feel anxious about death. Anxiety is considered to be a weakness by ‘the they’; one should be indifferently calm about the fact that one dies. This indifference estranges Dasein from its ownmost nonrelational potentiality-of-being. The everyday being-toward-death is therefore a flight from death which covers up its own being-toward-death.

In everyday talk about “one dies”, one does not doubt or deny that one dies (§52, p. 255). One is certain that one dies. To be certain means to hold something for true (§52, p. 256). But this is an inappropriate certainty according to Heidegger because everyday Dasein covers its being-toward-death and therefore actually lives in “untruth”. To be certain of death means to be certain of its ownmost, nonrelational and insuperable potentiality-of-being, instead of relying on ‘the they’ who tell you that it is certain that death comes (§52, p. 257). Dasein has the illusion that it is certain of its own death. However, Dasein is not unconditionally certain of death. Its certainty is based on empirical certainty, which is not enough according to Heidegger. One must have apodictical certainty, certainty that is based on theoretical knowledge. Dasein cannot become certain of death as it is through empirical certainty (§52, p. 258). One is aware of the certainty of death but is not really certain about it. By saying that death comes but not right away, ‘the they’ denies that death is certain. In this way ‘the they’ covers over something which belongs to death, which is that death is possible at every moment. Because of this, Dasein evades the indefiniteness of death. However, it does show that Dasein is always already toward death, even though it flees away from it because this fleeing follows from coming to grips with its own death (§52, p. 259). The everyday being-toward-death is nonetheless inauthentic but has the possibility of authenticity in it.

Dasein will mostly be an inauthentic being-toward-death (§53, p. 260). Heidegger investigates how an authentic being-toward-death is possible. It has become clear that in order for Dasein to be an authentic being-toward-death, it should relate itself to it. Dasein should not flee from death or cover it over. As stated earlier, Dasein is a being toward a possibility, which is normally trying to actualize possibilities (§53, p. 261). Death, however, cannot have the character of an actualization or of taking care. Death is not something possible in the sense that it is objectively present or at hand. It is a possibility of being. Being-toward-death should therefore not be encountered as an actualization or a dwelling on its possibility. But it should remain to be understood as a possibility. Not in the sense of expecting it because expecting has the possibility of looking away from it and turns to the real (§53, p. 262). But in the sense of an anticipation of this possibility. When one is 'coming near' to the end, the possibility of the possible death becomes bigger. One is confronted with the impossibility of the possibility, for death is not something to be actualized and not a mode of being; it is something not real. Being-toward-death is being which is anticipation in itself. Anticipation is the understanding of one's ownmost potentiality-of-being, as a possibility of authentic existence (§53, p. 263). Understanding here does not mean meaning but understanding oneself as being. Through death as one's ownmost possibility-of-being, Dasein is completely concerned with its being. This is therefore a solely individual way of being, it is nonrelational and cannot, for this reason, be understood by 'the they'. Dasein can only be authentic in an individual way.

Death is something that is insuperable. Through anticipation, one does not flee from it but frees itself for it (§53, p. 263). It liberates us from losing ourselves in the endless possibilities but lets us see the possibilities in the light of the insuperable possibility through which they can be chosen authentically. Through anticipation, Dasein can live life authentically and also opens up the possibility of existing as a whole potentiality-of-being. Anticipation also means that Dasein holds death as something certain; a being that is determined by truth. To be able to hold death as true, is in anticipation. One cannot hold death to be true through encounters with death but to encounter it in itself. This is the only evidence for the certainty of death (§53, p. 265). Accepting death as true is a requirement for an authentic existence. What is also characteristic of death is that it is indefinite; one cannot know when. In anticipation, Dasein opens itself up to the constant threat of death. To be able to cope with this constant threat is anxiety (§53, p. 266). This means, being anxious about the nothingness and the potentiality-of-being. Anxiety is an essential part of being-toward-death.

### **Conclusion**

Being-toward-death entails in sum the anticipation of the indefinite, insuperable and certain character of death through which Dasein understands its being authentically and is able to live its potentiality-of-being authentically, anxious and free from illusions. Coming to grips with one's ownmost possibility of death, allows Dasein to exist authentically and truthful.



## Chapter 2: Critique Levinas

### Introduction

In this section, I will introduce some general points about Levinas and his work that are relevant for understanding Levinas' critique on Heidegger. Levinas' aim throughout his work was to develop a first philosophy (Bergo, 2019). Whereas Heidegger claimed that fundamental ontology was the first philosophy, Levinas has claimed that ethics should be understood as the first philosophy. But Levinas did not work out an ethical theory but rather developed a philosophy which took the form of a description and interpretation of the event of encountering another person. A phenomenology of intersubjective responsibility for the Other. Levinas' main work is *Totality and Infinity* (1979) in which Levinas critiques the totalizing thought of philosophy in which ideas are put into a concept which should cover a group of people or a group of things. According to Levinas, there is a breach of Totality: there is always something which falls out of the Totality or beyond Totality. This is what Levinas calls Infinity.

According to Levinas, the Other cannot be grasped, known or be turned into the self; it is something that is completely different. The Other resembles the idea of Infinity. The Other is something which cannot be grasped by the "I". The "I" can know some features of the Other but the "I" cannot know the Other entirely. There is always something that slips away. For example, the "I" cannot know what the Other thinks, whether he is truly honest or what he feels. So, there are lots of things the "I" cannot know about the Other. This idea of the Other resembles the idea of Infinity. The idea of Infinity itself is an idea which you are not able to grasp with your mind. One is not able to think the concept of Infinity because the idea of Infinity is incomprehensible to the mind.

When it comes to the subject of death, Levinas has a rather different perspective on death than Heidegger does (Tangjia, 2008, p. 146; Cohen, 2006, p. 21). It could be that the second World War has influenced Levinas' vision causing him to have put much more emphasis to the discussion of death than Heidegger does (Tangjia, 2008, p. 146). During the second World War Levinas his parents and brothers were killed in Eastern Europe by Nazi collaborators. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that the notion of murder comes forward in Levinas his work.

Although Levinas has not systematically presented his arguments against the Heideggerian conception of death, I managed to distill four main points of critique against Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death through several relevant works. First, Levinas claims that the death of the other is more important than the death that is solely mine, as Heidegger understands death. Second, death cannot be understood according to Levinas, it has a mystery to it and therefore it cannot be associated with nothingness as Heidegger does. Third, the first encounter with death is through suffering and not in anxiety which shows the inescapability of existence and its fatality. Fourth, a human being does not live towards death but lives against death because death remains in the future and transcends being.

### 1. Death of the Other

The first point of critique concerns the death of the other. Heidegger understands death only in relation to Dasein itself, as something that is solely mine. According to Levinas (1999, p. 161), Heidegger has deduced all meaning about death from the attitude of man towards his own death. Death is thus only understood through the question of my relation with my death and not with the death of the other (Levinas, 2000, p. 14). Levinas argues that the death of the other is more important because the experience of the death of the other highly affects me and death is only able to show itself through the other.

Heidegger understands death as a certitude (Levinas, 2000, p. 10). The certitude of death cannot be acquired from the experience of the death of the other, according to Heidegger, but through the anticipation of death that is my own. However, according to Levinas, death cannot be called certain or a certitude. The personal relation with death is based upon the emotional and intellectual reaction to the knowledge of the death of the other. The meaning of death is then derived from the death of the other person and not from myself. The relation to the death of the other, however, does not result in knowledge of the death of the other (Tangjia, 2008, p. 149).

Death is therefore something that can only be experienced by others. The experience of death by the survivors, is what Levinas calls the “without-response” (Derrida, 1999, p. 6). The other, someone that is different from me, expresses himself through the face (Levinas, 2000, p. 11). Expressive movements are what makes someone a living being (Tangjia, 2008, p. 149). When someone dies, the expressive movements disappear. The face has become a masque (Levinas, 2000, p. 12). The face does not respond anymore. The survivors of the person that died therefore experience a “without-response”. Death then expresses itself through the face and stares me in the face (Levinas, 1999, p. 163). The face of the other calls out to me, it requires me. In relation with the face, there exists a direct relation with the death of the other and that the death of the other has priority over your own death and life (Levinas, 1999, p. 164). Being affected by the death of the other is having a relation with his death; a relation with someone who will not respond to me anymore (Levinas, 2000, p. 12). The dying of the other affects my identity as ‘I’ (Levinas, 2000, p. 13).

Death has an ethical notion because the death of the other calls me to my responsibility (Tangjia, 2008, p. 149). The responsibility has been conveyed by the face of the other. The other that has died has expressed himself to me and entrusted to me (Levinas, 2000, p. 12). The responsibility concerns the aloneness of the other. It is my responsibility not to let the other die alone. The face of the other commands me not to let the other die alone otherwise I would risk being an accomplice to the death of the other. This responsibility can express itself in many different ways. Responsibility for the other in dealing with death consists for example of fulfilling someone’s wishes, protecting the honor and dignity of the person that died and to bury him (Tangjia, 2008, p. 150). A responsible way of dealing with the death of the other shows a holy and noble character. The death of the other thus affects me in my responsibility and my identity.

## **2. Nothingness and Death as a Mystery**

The second point of critique concerns that death is undefinable and unknowable. According to Heidegger, death gives us anxiety because of the nothingness that is surrounded by death. However, Levinas claims that we cannot know whether death is nothingness. Death is therefore something that cannot be known.

According to Levinas (1979, p. 232), death is usually interpreted with going into nothingness or into another existence. From the worldly perspective, the one who dies disappears from the empirical world. For the others, death is disappearance (Levinas, 1999, p. 154). Death has an unforeseeable character because it cannot be grasped, and it cannot be related to an exact point in the future (Levinas, 1979, p. 233). This is not because we fail to understand it but because it cannot be understood. Levinas (1999, p. 153) therefore considers death to be “the most unknown of unknowns”. Death is something that cannot be known and is therefore “the nothingness of knowledge”. This does not mean that death is nothingness but rather than one does not know and also cannot know whether it is nothingness. Levinas (1999, p. 156) therefore mentions that “even the famous nothingness people agree about so readily is problematic”.

Because death is unknown, someone is not able to apprehend the moment of death or when death will come (Levinas, 1979, p. 234). This is in contrast with the rest of life which can be recalled or anticipated. I am not able to exercise my power to my death. The relation with the death of the other can also not be understood as knowledge or as an experience (Levinas, 2000, p. 16). We cannot know what death means for the deceased himself, all we know is the feeling of being a survivor and the extreme loneliness that comes with the disappearance of the other person (Levinas, 1999, p. 157). Death is therefore something purely emotional which is not based on previous knowledge but an emotion or movement within the unknown.

Levinas therefore calls death a mystery (1987, p. 75). It is a mystery because it cannot be grasped or anticipated on (1979, p. 77). I am not able to be aware of my death: “the last part of the route will be crossed without me” (Levinas, 1979, p. 235). Death therefore cannot be an object of knowing; it cannot be known or unknown. Death cannot be understood as “the possibility of impossibility”, as Heidegger has defined death (Cohen, 2006, p. 30; Tangjia, 2008, p. 148). Levinas understands death rather the other way around, as the impossibility of the possibility. According to Heidegger, death is a possibility which cannot be surpassed. The possibility only opens itself up by the impossibility. Thus, death opens up possibilities in life and can be ‘comprehended’ for death ultimately leads to the understanding of being (Cohen, 2006, p. 30). Levinas on the other hand thinks that life opens up possibilities for us and not death (Tangjia, 2008, p. 149). Death is the end of all possibilities; it is the impossibility. Death destroys all possibilities (Tangjia, 2008, p. 151). According to Levinas, death is something that lies beyond all human capabilities and possibilities. It is something that cannot be grasped or comprehended.

### **3. Suffering and the Need to Escape**

The third point of critique concerns the moment someone is being confronted with death and the need to escape death. According to Levinas, death does not announce itself through the mood of anxiety as Heidegger understands it, but death announces itself in suffering; a first sense of one’s own mortality (Cohen, 2006, p. 27).

Suffering is not only a disagreeable situation, but it is a situation wherein one can feel stuck (Levinas, 1979, p. 238). In suffering the possibility exists of impossibility: that one is not able to flee from suffering. The physical pain of suffering brings someone closer to death than the anxiety before death, as Heidegger claims (Cohen, 2006, p. 28). Suffering thus makes death more real. Escaping is an important need, according to Levinas (2003, p. 53). Escaping is “the need to transcend the limits of finite being”. Thus, the need to escape our mortality. According to Levinas, we are “chained” to our finitude. Our life is in the end fatal and we know that we are going towards this fatal ending. By escaping, we do not know where we are heading (Levinas, 2003, p. 54). We want to escape the imprisonment of life and get out of oneself (Levinas, 2003, p. 55). Need thus turns towards something other than ourselves (Levinas, 2003, p. 58). However, this need cannot be satisfied. This is what makes us human; the inadequacy of satisfying our need (Levinas, 2003, p. 60). One is thus not able to actually escape its existence, but one has the need to do so. The need to escape should not be regarded as a “lack of being” but rather as a “plenitude of being” (Levinas, 2003, p. 69). Because need cannot be satisfied, it is not aimed at satisfaction or the fulfillment of being but towards a release or escape of being which is the infinite being.

Levinas thus argues that the need to escape our finitude is essentially part of our existence. This argument critiques Heidegger’s argument that it is essential to being that it is mortal and that we should not let ourselves get distracted from it by ‘idle talk’ or ‘the they’. In order to live an ‘authentic’ life, one must not look away from death. While according to Levinas, the human being is deeply motivated to escape its finite condition.

#### **4. Death as Future and as Transcendence**

The fourth point of critique concerns the transcendence of death. According to Levinas (1987, p. 71) death is never now but it is always in the future. While for Heidegger death is also in the future but Dasein is able to anticipate upon death. According to Levinas (1987, p. 72), someone cannot be toward death because death is always future and therefore cannot be aimed at. The human being is not toward death but is before death; life is lived prior to death. Death is inevitable but it is never now. Death can therefore be postponed (Cohen, 2006, p. 33). Levinas (1979, p. 236) therefore understands death not as a being-toward-death but as a “being against death”.

Because death is something which will always remain in the future, death is transcendent (Cohen, 2006, p. 33). It is something that exceeds being which cannot be reached. This transcendence of the oncoming future comes from another person (Cohen, 2006, p. 34). This other person is not someone that can be known but is someone that is completely other who cannot be seen. According to Levinas (1979, p. 234), death comes from the Other because the Other is related to transcendence: “death threatens me from beyond”. Death comes from something unknown and therefore comes from the Other. This alterity of the other comes across as evil or hostile. It is something unknown that frightens me. I am afraid of death not because I am faced with nothingness but because I am faced with something that is against me. According to Levinas, death therefore comes across as murder, it comes with a certain violence which comes from somewhere foreign. My will is being alienated by the Other. Because death comes from the Other, an absolute alterity, death is from an interpersonal order (Levinas, 1979, p. 234).

The human being is thus always in relation with the other, also in death, and therefore always in an ethical relation (Cohen, 2006, p. 34). The relational aspect of death makes death human. These points compose a critique against Heidegger’s notion of being-toward-death because Heidegger considers death to be “ownmost” and “non-relational”. According to Levinas, we do not die in isolation but face to face with the enemy.

#### **Conclusion**

Levinas has criticized several different aspects of Heidegger’s notion of being-toward-death. He has criticized Heidegger’s focus on the death that is essentially my own, relating death to nothingness, that death is non-relational, how and when being is confronted with death, the tendency to flee from death and death as impossibility instead of possibility of life. Levinas has claimed that rather the death of the other is what counts because it makes us responsible and moral human beings. In the next chapter I will investigate whether these points of critique are justified or not.

## Chapter 3: Is Levinas' Critique Justified?

### Introduction

Heidegger's aim with his notion of being-toward-death was to reach an authentic potentiality-of-being (§45, p. 233). He wanted to understand being as a whole, in which death needed to be included. The understanding of everydayness was not enough according to Heidegger (§45, p. 233) because it does not contain a whole but takes place between the beginning and the end. Death is therefore not incorporated in everydayness. To be in an authentic being-toward-death, Dasein must not flee from it but relate itself to it (§53, p. 260). Death is not like every possibility in the sense that it is present or at hand, but death is a possibility of being (§53, p. 261). Being-toward-death is an anticipation which is the understanding of one's ownmost potentiality-of-being (§53, p. 263). Being-toward-death means an understanding of oneself as being which can only be understood individually. Through this anticipation, Dasein has the ability to reflect on its possibilities in the light of the insuperable possibility. Being-toward-death therefore enables Dasein to live authentically.

Heidegger's aim was thus an ontological analysis of Dasein in relation to death. Levinas, however, criticizes Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death from an ethical and phenomenological perspective. Levinas' philosophical topic throughout his works has been a phenomenology of intersubjective responsibility. Levinas' critique on Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death therefore entails a phenomenology of the death of the other. This raises the question whether Levinas' critique on Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death is justified. Does his critique actually oppose Heidegger's notion of being-toward death? Does Heidegger's notion of death and Levinas' understanding of death radically differ? Is it possible to find a certain overlap between these two notions and philosophies of death? What are the differences between Heidegger's and Levinas' understanding of death?

Cohen (2006, p. 25) claims that Levinas proposes "a deeper more insightful phenomenological analysis of death" than Heidegger. According to Cohen (2006, p. 25), Levinas radically contests the entire edifice of ontology of Heidegger by offering an alternative vision of ethics as first philosophy. Cohen thus implies that Levinas' philosophical approach undermines Heidegger's philosophical approach which has led to a better understanding of death. However, Cohen (2006) takes the position in of Levinas which works in favor of Levinas. I will therefore not take the position of Levinas in but of Heidegger. In this chapter I will first investigate whether Levinas actually contests Heidegger's ontology with ethics and whether this opposition is justified. First, I will try to find whether there is an overlap to be found between the two notions of death and if so, what this overlap entails. Then, I will investigate what the differences are between Heidegger's notion and Levinas' notion of death and whether Levinas' critique on Heidegger was justified and if not, why Levinas' critique was not justified.

### Overlap Heidegger and Levinas

It seems like Levinas has a completely different understanding of death than Heidegger does. However, there is an overlap to be found in Levinas' and Heidegger's notion of death which has to do with the death of the other. Levinas criticizes Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death because of Heidegger's focus on death as something that is solely mine. Levinas' (2000, p. 14) critique is that Heidegger is only interested in Dasein or as Levinas calls it, man's own understanding of his death. Levinas (2000, p. 12) argues that the death of the other is more important because of the affect it has on me and that it awakens my responsibility.

However, it is not true that Dasein is only concerned with itself and its own death. For being-with-others is essential to Dasein which is called Mitsein or being-with (§47, p. 237). Mitsein does

not mean every other being but means being with others that are part of your world and therefore part of your existence (§26, p. 118). The other is not encountered as an object, as others that are objectively present in the world, but rather as others that are part of Dasein who do not even need to be objectively present to be part of Dasein (§26, p. 120). The relation to being-with is a relation of concern (§26, p. 121). Nursing a sick body is an example of a relation of concern. This is in line with Levinas' (2000, p. 12) understanding of the responsibility for the other and the death of the other. Being responsible for the other resembles taking care or concern for the other because they involve doing something for someone. However, it does not follow that Heidegger and Levinas would agree with each other on this point. According to Levinas, responsibility for the other is moral and imperative while Heidegger does not state that taking care for the other is a moral responsibility which one must fulfill. So, they both emphasize on helping the other but Levinas takes this much more seriously and as something obligatory which Heidegger does not.

When Dasein is taken over by everydayness, Dasein tends to be indifferent to the concern for others because it takes being-with for granted. However, Dasein holds the possibility in it of authentic care in which Dasein cares for the existence of the other (§26, p. 122). Being with others is thus an essential part of Dasein which cannot be thought of separately from Dasein (§26, p. 123). The understanding of others is part of the understanding of Dasein. This understanding of one's own being makes empathy possible for it is able to project one's own being into another being (§26, p. 124). Dasein could be interpreted as an ethical being because of its ability of caring, concern and empathy, although Heidegger would not define it in those terms. Levinas and Heidegger thus both understand being as an ethical being, but they use different terminology to do so.

Being with others is thus an essential component of Dasein. Dasein should therefore not be understood as solely concerned with its own existence. Dasein is also involved in the freedom of Mitsein in the way it exists in the world. In Levinasians terms it could be interpreted that Heidegger's notion of Dasein does in fact entail ethical relationships with others for it 'takes care' of others and has concern for others. Heidegger also does not reject the experience of the death of the other and does not claim that the death of the other plays no role in Dasein's existence, but the purpose of Heidegger's investigation is about being itself. Heidegger is interested in the ontological meaning of dying to the person itself and not in the dying of others (§47, p. 239). Because of this philosophical purpose Heidegger does not incorporate the experience of the death of the other in his notion of being-toward-death. The experience of the death of the other is not the same as how Dasein understands its own being in relation to its own possibility of dying. Death is something that is essentially my own, nobody else can die for you or experience death for you (§47, p. 240). Death is therefore something very individual and must be ontologically studied as such.

That being-toward-death is something very individual does not mean that the death of the other, someone close to Dasein, is not able to affect Dasein in its own possibilities and understanding of being-toward-death. Because being-with or Mitsein is part of Dasein and its understanding, the death of someone that is part of Mitsein does affect Dasein in its own understanding. When, for example, Dasein's partner dies, Dasein's possibilities for the future are altered. Dasein anticipated to live with someone its entire life but cannot anymore. Dasein's partner could also have been the one that guided Dasein in its own understanding and vision. The death of the other is therefore able to influence Dasein's decisions and possibilities in life. This resembles Levinas' (2000, p. 13) idea that the dying of the other affects my identity as 'I'. One's identity is thus altered by the death of the other which Heidegger would agree on, under the condition that the other who has died was part of Mitsein; someone close to Dasein. The death of the other is also able to draw Dasein's attention to its own possibility of dying because Dasein realizes it is also a being-toward-

death. This awakening can cause Dasein to reflect on its possibilities and to live more authentically because it reviews its possibilities in light of its own death.

Levinas also mentions that the death of the other is an experience with the “without-response” (Derrida, 1999, p. 6). This entails that the other expresses itself through the face but when the other dies, the other loses its expressive movements (Levinas, 2000, p. 12). The face therefore does not respond anymore, making death an experience of “without-response” by the survivors. However, Heidegger also mentions the experience of the death of the other and its transition. According to Heidegger (§47, p. 238), the death of the other is the experience of the transition of Dasein into a no-longer-Dasein. No-longer-Dasein has left our ‘world’ but is still in our world through those who surround no-longer-Dasein. This experience can only be experienced by those who are still alive (§47, p. 239). These two notions of the experience of the death of the other resemble each other in the sense that they both speak of death as a transition of the other which causes Dasein or the other to no longer be an other for it has lost its abilities of life. They also both mention that this experience can only be experienced by those who surround the other and are alive. Again, Heidegger and Levinas have quite similar interpretations but describe them differently.

Although Levinas uses the death of the other as a point of critique towards Heidegger, there actually exists an overlap between Levinas’ notion of death and Heidegger’s notion of death. Both Heidegger and Levinas claim that the experience of the death of the other can affect someone’s life and identity. But due to the philosophical project of Heidegger, being-toward-death is aimed at death which is solely mine. This understanding of being-toward-death does not reject the notion of the death of the other and its influence it can have on Dasein’s being-toward-death; it does not exclude it. The death of the other can influence Dasein’s vision on its own death and even enables Dasein to live more authentically. Levinas’ critique on Heidegger is therefore mostly unjustified and can even be interpreted as an overlap with Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein and being-toward-death.

### **Difference Heidegger and Levinas**

In this next part, I will look into the differences between Heidegger’s notion of being-toward-death and Levinas’ critique on his notion. I will also investigate whether Levinas’ critique on Heidegger is justified. I will do this on the basis of the points of critique which have come forward in the previous chapter. Because the first point of critique has already been covered in the section above about the death of the other, I will start with the second point of critique.

#### *Nothingness and Death as a Mystery*

The second point of critique that I have distilled was that Levinas criticizes Heidegger for relating death to nothingness. Levinas (1999, p. 156) argues that we cannot know anything about death, thus also not that it is nothingness. According to Levinas (2000, p. 16), death has nothing to do with knowledge. Death is therefore a mystery according to Levinas (1987, p. 75).

Levinas attacks Heidegger in this point of critique on something that was not an important or relevant claim in Heidegger’s analysis of being-toward-death. Heidegger’s aim was to come with an ontological account of being and how death creates the possibility of living authentically. His aim was thus not to define what death is but rather how the notion of death influences life. Heidegger also does not strictly define death as nothingness. Heidegger (§53, p. 266) mentions nothingness as follows: “In anxiety, Dasein finds itself *faced* with the nothingness of the possible impossibility of its existence”. Heidegger explains in this sentence that being-toward-death has the character of anxiety because death is associated with nothingness and this association frightens people. It is something that seems impossible which people are unable to think of.

Heidegger thus does not claim that death is nothingness, but that death has the character of nothingness which means that death is something that cannot be understood; it is something vague. So, Heidegger does not claim to know the essence of death or that defining death was the purpose of his investigation. It is rather the opposite: Heidegger does not claim to know what death is but is merely interested in what death means in relation to existence. This makes Levinas' critique irrelevant to Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death. Levinas' critique is even quite similar to Heidegger's understanding of death: that death cannot be known. Heidegger however calls this nothingness and Levinas does not call it anything because according to Levinas (1999, p. 153), labelling death as nothingness is also a means of defining death. This point of critique of Levinas is therefore not justified.

Another point of critique that relates to the previous point is that Levinas argues that death cannot be understood as 'the possibility of impossibility' but rather as the other way around; as the impossibility of the possibility. According to Levinas, life opens up possibilities and not death (Tangjia, 2008, p. 149). Levinas understands death as the end of all possibilities which makes it impossible (Tangjia, 2008, p. 151; Cohen, 2006, p. 30). This critique is not entirely justified. It is not exactly that Heidegger claims that death opens up possibilities in life. It is rather that death can put the possibilities that are already present in life in a different perspective. This perspective is what Heidegger calls 'authentic' because the notion of death is able to make people think what one finds really important in one's own life. The notion of death is thus able to focus one's attention to really reflect on oneself and make a decision about the different possibilities based upon this reflection. Life itself thus already involves a lot of possibilities. What is important is making a decision about which possibilities will fit you. So, it is about making decisions regarding your own life in the perspective that it ends. Death is indeed the end of all possibilities because once one is dead, the possibilities of life have ended. So, Levinas' interpretation of Heidegger's 'possibility of impossibility' is not rightly understood which makes Levinas' critique not justified.

#### *Suffering and the Need to Escape*

Levinas' critique on Heidegger here is two-sided: on the one hand it entails that someone is only confronted with death when someone is suffering and not already in the mood of anxiety and on the other hand that the need to escape the finitude of being is essential to being human instead of inauthentic.

First, the critique that death only really confronts us while suffering and not already in anxiety. Heidegger (§50, p. 250) claims that death is always already part of existence and this comes forward in the mood of anxiety. Dasein does not need to have knowledge of its being-toward-death for death is revealed in anxiety. Heidegger understands with anxiety not feeling at home in the world anymore (Wheeler, 2018). The possibility of a world without me, reveals itself to me which causes Dasein to feel anxious. Dasein is faced with the 'nothing' of the possible impossibility of existence (§53, p. 266). But anxiety is also a mechanism to cope with the constant threat of death. This feeling or mood already belongs to Dasein just as being-toward-death while Levinas' argues that it is only until one suffers, one is really confronted with death.

Heidegger does not explicitly mention suffering in his analysis of being-toward death, but he does mention that when one is 'coming near' to the end, the possibility of the possible death becomes bigger (§53, p. 262). Heidegger implicitly says that when one is 'old' and perhaps also suffering, the possibility of dying becomes more real. This is in line with what Levinas means with suffering; the possibility of death that becomes real for the first time and is perhaps inescapable. However, they do differ here in the moment when one is confronted with death. This critique is difficult to qualify as justified or not because it could be regarded as differing opinions on the moment of confrontation with death. Despite that, I think that Heidegger would argue that



Levinas considers suffering as the first moment of confrontation with death because before that, Dasein has been distracted by 'the they' and thus has not been confronted with its own possibility of dying. When one really suffers, one cannot flee from death anymore. This interpretation would strengthen Heidegger's claim that distraction causes Dasein not to be confronted with its ownmost possibility of being while if Dasein would not be distracted or flee from it, it would be confronted with death sooner. So, it could be the case that Levinas considers suffering as the first moment of confrontation with death because when people are not suffering, they do not pay attention to their own possibility of dying but are rather occupied with the other. Levinas would respond that suffering is the first moment of confrontation with death because of its inescapability which cannot be felt before. However, Heidegger would respond that death is always already insuperable which is part of Dasein and reveals itself through anxiety. Levinas' critique is thus not unjust but rather a different opinion on the moment of confrontation with death which Heidegger would not agree with.

Second, that the need to escape our finitude of being is essential to being human. Heidegger (§51, p. 253) agrees on this point in the sense that Dasein has the tendency to flee from its own death which is due to the idle talk of 'the they'. The idle talk about death does not speak of one's ownmost being-toward-death. Dasein therefore has the tendency to flee from its own death which can be related to Levinas' idea of escaping our finitude. However, according to Heidegger (§52, p. 259), this fleeing away from death shows that Dasein is already towards death and is trying to come to grips with it. According to Heidegger (§52, p. 259), one must face its own possibility of dying because it leads to an authentic life. Again, there are rather some similarities to be found between Heidegger and Levinas. However, Levinas' critique can be regarded as a different opinion on how one should be dealing with death. Levinas regards fleeing or escaping death as essential or authentic human behavior while for Heidegger this is inauthentic behavior.

#### *Death as Future and as Transcendence*

According to Levinas (1987, p. 72), death is something that always remains in the future and someone can therefore not be toward death. Instead, life is before death and being is against death (1979, p. 236). Death threatens me from beyond, from the Other causing man to be in relation with the transcendental other.

Heidegger considers death also as something in the future because death can never be experienced by Dasein itself (§46, p. 236). According to Heidegger (§48, p. 245) Dasein is already its end. The possibility of death already belongs to Dasein from the moment that Dasein has come into existence (§50, p. 251). Dasein is therefore not toward death in the sense that it strives towards death or lives towards death but that the insuperable possibility of death essentially belongs to Dasein and is able to influence Dasein's choices in life. Heidegger does not reject that Dasein's life is before death. This is true according to Heidegger but that does not mean that the possibility of death does not play a role in one's life. Death makes reflection on one's own possibilities in life possible. The result of being-toward-death is rather that one is able to focus on one's life authentically and not that one awaits one's death. So, Heidegger does agree with Levinas that life is before death, but death should be taken into consideration to be able to live authentically, which gives one's life more meaning. Levinas' critique that someone cannot be toward death is not justified because Heidegger does not reject that death is in the future and understands being-toward-death rather as death which is part of Dasein instead of something Dasein aims at.

Levinas (1979, p. 236) also claims that life is against death. Heidegger does mention that death is a constant threat to Dasein once Dasein opens oneself up to one's ownmost possibility of death (§53, p. 266). This notion seems to be similar to Levinas' (1979, p. 234) claim that "death

threatens me from beyond” and death that comes across as murder, with a certain violence from somewhere foreign. Although death threatens Dasein according to Heidegger, this is not a reason to be against death. When Dasein would be against death, Dasein would not be facing its own death but rather push it away or flee from it and therefore live inauthentically, according to Heidegger. So, Heidegger considers death also as a threat to Dasein, but this is no reason to be against death or to flee from death but rather shows that being-toward-death comes with anxiety and that it is not easy to face death. Because it is not easy, many people flee away from it.

This relates to another point critique Levinas has, which is that death is not non-relational as Heidegger puts it but rather relational because death threatens me from the Other causing man to be in relation with the Other and with transcendence (Levinas, 1979, p. 234; Cohen, 2006, p. 34). Levinas thus claims that death is relational because death threatens me from the Other and is therefore from an interpersonal order (1979, p 234). Heidegger means with death being non-relational and ownmost that only Dasein itself is able to relate to its own death and interpret what death means to its own life. Nobody else is able to interpret Dasein’s own death and nobody else is able to die instead of Dasein. If Heidegger would agree with Levinas’ claim that death comes from the Other, this would not reject Heidegger’s claim that death is non-relational. When one is able to relate with transcendence or the Other, this relation would still be experienced by Dasein only. This would not be a general experience which everyone is able to relate to. Death will therefore still be non-relational because only Dasein or someone is able to relate to the Other itself. Death would still be nonrelational in the sense that only you can relate to your own death and not anyone else.

It also seems that Levinas in this critique comes with a kind of ‘definition’ of death. For he proposes that death threatens me from the Other and that death is transcendental. He also characterizes death as murder. This critique undermines Levinas’ critique against Heidegger about referring to death with nothingness because Levinas gives a certain ‘definition’ of death or at least a character which was the same Heidegger did with his characterization of death as nothingness. These two points make Levinas’ critique that death is relational unjustified because being in relation with death that comes from the Other does not make death non-relational in the sense that Heidegger understands non-relational and characterizing death as the Other undermines Levinas’ critique on Heidegger’s account of nothingness.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that Levinas did not radically contests the entire edifice of ontology of Heidegger by offering an alternative vision of ethics as first philosophy as Cohen (2006, p. 25) has claimed but that Levinas’ critique was mostly unjustified for several different reasons. The most important reason has been that Levinas rejects Heidegger’s philosophical purpose of being-toward-death by putting a different philosophical purpose first. This makes Levinas’s critique not an actual critique but rather a different account on death which puts the emphasis on the death of the other. Other points of critique were unjustified because Levinas interpretations of certain parts of being-toward-death were different than Heidegger intended. In other cases, Levinas’ critique could be considered to be a different opinion rather than a critique and that Levinas’ critique was focused on an irrelevant feature of being-toward-death. However, there were some similarities to be found in the case of the death of the other and death as something unknown. These similarities, however, are unintended and a matter of interpretation.

## Chapter 4: Could Levinas and Heidegger be Complementary?

### Introduction

In the previous chapter I have shown that Levinas' critique on Heidegger's notion of death was often unjustified and sometimes showed similarities. The main problem with these two notions of death was that they serve different philosophical purposes, which has made several points of Levinas' critique unjustified. Because they both served different philosophical purposes, I wondered whether the two accounts could complement each other on certain points. I will look into this question in this section, based on the results of the previous chapter.

Before I will look into the question of complementation, I would like to argue that, even though Cohen (2006, p. 25) has claimed that Levinas radically and completely opposes Heidegger's account of death, Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death and Levinas' phenomenology of the death of the other are able to exist next to each other. This is because Heidegger was interested in the question of how to deal with one's ownmost possibility of being which is death while Levinas was interested in the question how to deal with the death of the other. These are two different topics within the subject of death that do not exclude each other. Someone is, for example, able to visualize its own life in the perspective of its own death and act accordingly but someone could also be occupied with the death of a loved one or someone close. Both notions are thus able to play a role at some point in someone's life. This is not to say that they both will play a role in each person's life; it could be the case that either one of them plays a significant role in one's life or neither of them. However, it is not possible for both accounts to play a role in someone's life at the same time because someone cannot be focused on his or her own possibilities in life in the face of their own death and at the same time be focused on the death of the other and being there for someone. The two accounts have different focus points which make that they could not both be dominant at the same time. But because these two notions do not exclude each other and are both able to play a role in people's lives, they are able to co-exist next to each other. That the two accounts are able to exist independent from each other makes that they are able to complement each other's accounts rather than overthrowing each other's accounts.

### Levinas Complementary to Heidegger

Even though Levinas has aimed to criticize and oppose Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death, there are some aspects to be found in Levinas' phenomenology of the death of the other that are able to complement Heidegger's account of being-toward-death. I will give a few arguments how Levinas' phenomenology is able to complement Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death.

Levinas' account is able to complement Heidegger's being-toward-death in the sense that the death of the other is able to influence one's own being-toward-death. The death of a person close to you can alter your vision on your own death and therefore your own life. Heidegger does not explicitly mention that the death of the other is able to affect my own being-toward-death, but only implies that this is possible. This is because Heidegger in previous sections has explained that Dasein is essentially also Mitsein. Others that are part of Dasein's surrounding world are internalized in Dasein. So, others do influence Dasein in its possibilities and its vision on life. The death of the other could therefore play a more explicit role in Heidegger's analysis of being-toward-death in the sense that the death of the other is able to alter one's possibilities and one's perspective on one's ownmost possibility of death.

However, it could also be the case that the death of the other not only puts my own mortality into focus but instead that the death of the other forces me to put myself in service of the other instead of myself. That I must ease the suffering of the other. The death of the other would then

take away the focus on the self and on one's own death and instead completely puts the other into focus. In this case, it is not the actual death of the other but the mortality and suffering of the other that can shift one's attention to the other person. According to Levinas, it would show someone's holy and noble character when someone would put all his energy, attention and time into the other. The death of the other then makes you a better moral human being. The death of the other could thus grasp one's attention to one's ownmost being-toward-death but could also force one's attention and duties for the other. However, in the last case, the death of the other does not result in being-toward-death but rather shows that the forceful element of Levinas' ethics could distract someone from one's own being-toward-death. This addition complements Heidegger's being-toward-death in the sense that it relativizes the self in being-toward-death because the death of the other could force someone to forget the self and completely be there for the other. Following this line of argumentation, a being-toward-death is thus not always able to be a being-toward-death but also has a duty to the other which is enforced by the death of the other.

Levinas's account is also able to complement Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death with his notion of suffering. Heidegger only discusses the mental occupation in relation to one's own death. The physical element does not play a role in Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death. However, one could imagine that suffering from a deadly disease, physical injuries or chronic pain does alter one's possibilities in life and that people who suffer physically are perhaps more occupied with their own death than everyday Dasein is. Take for example sick people who make a 'bucket list' of things they would still want to do before they die. People who are ill are more consciously occupied with what they still want to do in life and attach more value to these activities. The component of death and mortality thus makes people reflect on life and life's possibilities. The physical component also belongs to existence and is an element that cannot be overlooked. Heidegger would not agree with Levinas' argument that suffering is the first confrontation with one's death due to its inescapability, for Heidegger would mention that death is always already inescapable, or insuperable as Heidegger calls it. But Heidegger would agree with the notion of suffering as altering one's being-toward-death because of its ability to raise awareness of someone's own possibility of death. The physical component of suffering is able to influence and 'activate' the mental component of being-toward-death. So, Levinas could complement Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death with the component of physical suffering as an influence on being-toward-death.

Levinas's phenomenology of the death of the other could also complement Heidegger's being-toward-death with Levinas' emphasis on the emotional side of death. Levinas characterizes death as something scary, frightening and evil. Heidegger also mentions that death threatens Dasein and expresses itself in anxiety, but Heidegger focuses more on the rational side of fear while it could be argued that most of the time fear is irrational. However, Heidegger (§53, p. 266) explicitly mentions in a remark that when he refers to anxiety he means "only anxiety and certainly not anxiety as mere emotion". Heidegger is thus against the emotional interpretation of anxiety. Levinas, on the contrary, focuses on the emotional side of death and dying and what it means to experience death of someone. According to Levinas (1999, p. 157) death is something purely emotional. All that we can know about death is the feeling of being a survivor and the extreme loneliness that comes with the disappearance of the other person. Even though Heidegger rejects the emotional side of death and anxiety, emotions play an important role in death and Levinas' account could add this emotional side of death to Heidegger's being-toward-death.

## **Heidegger Complementary to Levinas**

I have found two points on which Heidegger's being-toward-death could complement Levinas' account. However, it was more difficult to come with aspects through which Heidegger would be able to complement Levinas. This is because Levinas rejects ontology as first philosophy and claims that ethics should be considered to be the first philosophy. It is not possible that these accounts would come to an agreement upon this point. It is therefore more difficult for Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death to complement Levinas' account of death.

While Levinas' account of death focuses on the death of the other, Levinas' account does not reject the death that is solely mine. According to Heidegger, death could not only belong to the other but also belongs to oneself. From Heidegger's perspective, Levinas' account of death does not face up with one's own death but rather tries to flee or escape it. Levinas' account of death does not investigate how to deal with one's own death. Levinas argues that the death of the other is more important because it makes someone responsible and moral. However, it does not necessarily follow from this claim that one should pay no attention whatsoever to one's own possibility of dying. Death is something that is essentially non-relational and should therefore be considered from an individualistic perspective. Because there also exists a non-relational aspect to life, it must not be overlooked and ignored. Heidegger could therefore complement Levinas' account of death with the argument that the death of the other does not need to take away all attention from one's own death but the death that is mine could still play a role in one's life. The death that is solely mine cannot involve an ethical notion, in the Levinasian sense, for it is only concerned with one's own interests and not that of the other. However, Heidegger would argue that one should face one's own death which could be interpreted as an 'ethical' claim. The death that is solely mine could therefore complement Levinas' account because facing up to one's own death is ethical from a Heideggerian perspective and cannot be entirely ignored.

Heidegger could also complement Levinas' phenomenology of the death of the other with his notion of authenticity. Levinas only emphasizes on the death of the other and the Other in general. Heidegger would claim that Levinas' phenomenology of the death of the other does not encourage an authentic life because someone's life would be led by the other and on behalf of the other. Someone would thus not decide for himself or herself how he or she wants to live if one were to live according to Levinas' ethics. Authenticity is very important to Heidegger and forms the core of being-toward-death. To live authentically, is not to be led by others and being influenced by the idle talk of 'the they' but to decide for yourself what you want to do in life. Heidegger's notion of authenticity could add to Levinas' phenomenology in the sense that being-toward-death could lead to the same ethical life Levinas advocates by choosing to serve the other. A being-toward-death that reflects on what is important in life could namely decide that helping others and being there for the other, is what he wants in life. Someone would then both live one's life authentically and ethically. However, Levinas would argue that responsibility and morality is awakened by the face of the other, it would thus always follow from the other and not from the self.

## **Conclusion**

There are rather a few points on which Heidegger and Levinas' account of death could complement each other, especially Levinas's account of the death of the other was able to complement Heidegger's being-toward-death. However, due to the difference in philosophical purposes, the two accounts will remain different on several points which are unbridgeable. They are therefore better able to co-exist than to be unified because it still remains that they have a different philosophical approach of investigating death and different topic within the subject of death, which ensures that they cannot be combined into one philosophical account.

## Conclusion

In this conclusion I will summarize what the main results were of my thesis, what the answer is to my main question and I will make recommendations for further research.

I have started my thesis with an account of Heidegger's theory of being-toward-death. Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death has shown an account of death which investigates how death affects existence. The conclusion of Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death has been that death is a possibility of being that only Dasein itself is able to relate to. An understanding of one's own death will result in an authentic life because choices about possibilities of life will be chosen from the perspective of one's own death, which is authentic. Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death has therefore shown how death is able to put one's own life in an authentic perspective.

Levinas has criticized Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death. I have divided his criticism into four main points. The first was that Levinas considers Heidegger's account to be too focused on one's own death while Levinas considers the death of the other to be much more relevant and crucial. The second point of critique was that death cannot be defined as nothingness but is something that cannot be known and is therefore a mystery. The third point of critique was that the first moment of being confronted with one's own death is through suffering and not through anxiety, because suffering has the character of inescapability. The fourth point of critique was that death is relational instead of non-relational because death comes from the Other and is therefore from an interpersonal order.

In the third chapter I have shown that because Heidegger's and Levinas' philosophical projects were rather different from each other, Levinas' critique was most of the time unjustified and therefore did not oppose Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death. Cohen's (2006, p. 25) claim that Levinas "radically contests the entire edifice of ontology of Heidegger" therefore does not withstand. Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death was the result of an ontological investigation of the relation of death with existence while Levinas' philosophical project was a phenomenology of the death of the other from an ethical perspective. Although their philosophical purposes were rather different, I have also shown that Levinas' account on death and Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death sometimes showed similarities. They both include the experience of the death of the other, they both characterize death as something unknown, they both recognize the tendency of being to escape its finitude and they both regard death as threatening. Despite these similarities, their conclusions are often very different from each other.

In the fourth chapter I have shown that Levinas' account on the death of the other and Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death are able to co-exist next to each other and even be complementary to each other on certain points. Levinas' account could be complimentary to Heidegger's account with the death of the other, suffering and with his emotional account of death. Heidegger's account was able to complement Levinas' account with his emphasis on the death that is solely mine and with his notion of authenticity. However, their philosophical accounts will not be able to form one account for there still remain points that are unbridgeable.

My question in this thesis was: what is the meaning of human mortality to life? From the perspective of Heidegger's being-toward-death, the answer to this question is that the meaning of human mortality is that the understanding of one's own death gives guidance to one's own life. Death makes it possible to live one's life authentically. Living one's life authentically is meaningful because one then chooses possibilities that satisfy you, that belong to you and that make you happy. The notion of being-toward-death thus gives guidance to one's life and has a

rather positive influence on one's life. However, Levinas would answer this question rather differently. From a Levinasian perspective, the answer to this question would be that the death of the other is something that gives meaning to one's life. The death of the other is what makes you responsible and being responsible is from the perspective of Levinas a very important value. In responsibility, one is able to show a holy and noble character. The death of the other thus makes that people live their lives ethically and morally in service of the other. Although these two answers are rather different from each other, they both emphasize that death can play a meaningful role in one's life.

With this thesis I have added a different perspective on the debate between Heidegger and Levinas about death. This debate has thus far only been reviewed in the perspective of Levinas and in favor of Levinas. My thesis has added the perspective of Heidegger and a defense of Heidegger. My thesis has also added how Levinas' phenomenology of the death of the other could complement Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death and the other way around. Further research into this debate could focus on a more in-depth account of Levinas' account for I have not been able to review all the literature available by Levinas about death but focused on the most important ones. Further research could also review Heidegger's being-toward-death from the perspective of a different critique. My research question will also remain a question that could be investigated philosophically. Further research into this topic could be done from different perspectives or philosophers.

## Epilogue

In the introduction I have mentioned that the illness and death of the other was what has grasped my attention toward death. It had made me realize that the other is mortal and has made me feel more responsible for the other and being there for someone. This experience corresponds to Levinas' phenomenology of the death of the other and also confirms it. I could therefore relate to Levinas' account more. But this was previous to my investigation and writing my thesis. After writing my thesis, I have developed sympathy for Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death. The notion of being-toward-death at first seemed to have a rather dark and negative notion, but this was only because of its name. After reading into Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death I realized that it is a rather positive account. I started to relate to it more because it takes away the burden of death and rather focuses on life. Although it is called being-toward-death, it is more about life which I found really beautiful. It showed that my own death could also be regarded in a positive sense as a means of guiding your own life. It also showed people's tendency to look away from death or not to think about death. I think that this is very relatable to a lot of people, including me. Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death thus taught me that death can bring focus into one's life and should therefore not solely be connotated with negativity and fear. Levinas' phenomenology of the death of the other remains more relatable to my own experiences but Heidegger's being-toward-death could play a role in my life in the future, perhaps after my graduation. I thus appreciate Heidegger's notion of being-toward-death and think that it is an important account of death that really adds to the understanding of it from an ontological perspective. Because these accounts of death do not reject one another, I have come to understand that death can be investigated from multiple dimensions, perspectives and philosophical purposes.



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