

The polyethism of care:
notes on *The Second Mountain*¹

“Care is the basic mode of the being of existence.”²

“The most disparate forms of being *happen* to man.”³

Life manifests the “widespread but not common (except in a few groups)” phenomenon of true sex change, “where an organism functions during one breeding season or episode as one sex, and as the other sex during another.”⁴ Changeover from functioning as one sex to functioning as the other is within such an organism’s reaction norm: “the set of phenotypes that can be produced by an individual genotype that is exposed to different environmental conditions.”⁵

West-Eberhard uses ‘phenotype’ to mean “all traits of an organism other than its genome. . . . the enzyme products of genes are part of the phenotype, as are behaviors, metabolic pathways, morphologies, nervous tics, remembered phone numbers, and spots on the lung following the flu. That is, the phenotype can be adaptive or pathological, permanent or temporary, typical or atypical of a species.”⁶

The rubric ‘alternative phenotypes’ subsumes “alternatives of all kinds, whether in behavior, morphology, physiology, or life history, whether reversible or irreversibly determined, and whether regulated primarily by genotypic or environmental factors.” In contrast to irreversible polyphenisms “*Reversible alternatives* are those where more than one alternative can be expressed by a single individual, as in the winter and summer plumages of some birds, the shade and sun leaves of some plants, and many behavioral alternatives. Behavioral alternatives are sometimes called *polyethisms*.”⁷

An earwig mother exhibits polyethism in treating her brood. Under normal conditions she carefully tends her eggs by turning and licking them (her saliva may contain antibiotics; nobody knows). If the nest happens to get disturbed she eats them. If the nest remains undisturbed

¹ David Brooks, *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life* (Random House 2019). Brooks taught the book-in-progress as a course at the Jackson Institute for Global Affairs, Yale University. *Id.* 314.

² Martin Heidegger, *Logic: The Question of Truth* (tr. Thomas Sheehan 2010) 185. *Sorge ist der Grundmodus von Sein des Daseins*.

³ José Ortega y Gasset, *History as a System and Other Essays Toward a Philosophy of History* (tr. Helene Weyl, William C. Atkinson 1961) 214. *Las formas más dispares del ser pasan por el hombre*.

⁴ David Policansky, “Sex Change in Plants and Animals,” 13 *Ann. Rev. Ecol. Syst.* 471; 486, 472 (1982).

⁵ Carl D. Schlichting and Massimo Pigliucci, *Phenotypic Evolution: A Reaction Norm Perspective* (1998) 51.

⁶ Mary Jane West-Eberhard, *Developmental Plasticity and Evolution* (2003) 31.

⁷ *Id.* 378.

and the wiglings hatch, they will stay in the nest while the earwig mother exhausts herself in repeatedly traveling from the nest to gather food and bring it back to the newborn. When they are robust enough they leave the nest to make their own way in the world. Sometimes it happens that a laggard will not depart the nest for an independent life. Whereupon its starving mother eats it. The changeover in behavioral alternatives is from nourishing the offspring to consuming them; anthropomorphizing now, from other-regarding to self-regarding.⁸

In his lectures for the winter semester of 1925 Heidegger taught that “regarding being-with-others in the basic comportment [*Grundverhalten*] of being concerned-for, we have to make a fundamental distinction.” Here goes:

“Concern-for [*Fürsorge*] can be carried out in a way that virtually takes away the other’s care. In concern-for him I put myself in his place: I step in for him, which entails that he give himself up, step back, and accept ready-made the concern I show him, thereby completely freeing himself from his care. In the kind of being concerned-for where care ‘steps in,’ the person on the receiving end becomes dependent and dominated, even though the domination may be entirely unspoken and not experienced. We characterize this first kind of being concerned-for as one that ‘steps in’ and takes the place of the other—takes away and dominates [*stellvertretend-abnehmende und beherrschende*].”

The character ‘Phil’ in *The Big Kahuna* describes an instance of this phenomenon: “Because as soon as you lay your hands on a conversation to steer it, it’s not a conversation anymore. It’s a pitch, and you’re not a human being. You’re a marketing rep.”⁹

Heidegger then proceeds to the other side of the distinction:

“By contrast there is a second kind of being-with-the-other that does not step into his place (his situation and project [*Situation und Aufgabe*]) and take it away, but instead carefully steps ahead of him, not so as to take away his care—which is himself, his very existence—but to give it back to him. Such concern-for does not dominate but liberates.”¹⁰

Sorge, care, “is the term for the being of *Dasein* pure and simple. It has the formal structure, an entity for which, intimately involved in its being-in-the-world, this very being is at issue.” Care,

⁸ Thus for iteroparous species of earwigs. For a semelparous species it’s the other way around: the nymphs eat their mother alive; “the ultimate Head Start program.” James T. Costa, *The Other Insect Societies* (2006) 63.

⁹ Dir. John Swanbeck 1999. Such is the case “whether you’re selling Jesus or Buddha or civil rights or how to make money in real estate with no money down.”

¹⁰ *Logic: The Question of Truth* 187. Heidegger felt the distinction important enough to remark it in *Being and Time* at § 26. Brooks recounts how in his situation and project “Some Christians crudely sought to woo me over as a sort of win for their team, and they were a destructive force;” whereas Anne Snyder “never led me. She never intervened or tried to direct the process. . . . And this is a crucial lesson for anybody in the middle of any sort of intellectual or spiritual journey: Don’t try to lead or influence. Let them be led by that which is summoning them.” *Second Mountain* 236, 239.

the basic mode of being of human existence, “is always a *being about* something, specifically such that Dasein in concern, in every performance, in every provision and production of something in particular, is at the same time concerned for its Dasein.”¹¹

Harry Frankfurt makes the point in plain words: “we are creatures to whom things matter;” “It is a salient characteristic of human beings, one which affects our lives in deep and innumerable ways, that we care about what we are.”¹² We care about what we are through caring about what we care about, the issue for human being; what we’re ‘out for.’

“This being out for its own being,” Heidegger continues, “which is at issue for it, always takes place already in *being involved in* something, from a being-always-already-in-the-world-involved-in. . . . The structure of ‘being out for something’ . . . brings with it the phenomenon of not yet having something which I am out for. This phenomenon of not yet having something which I am out for is called *being in want* [*das Darben oder die Darbung*]. It is not merely a pure and simple objective not-having of something that I am out for. It is what first constitutes being-in-want, lack, need [*die Darbung, das Entbehren, das Bedürfen*].”¹³ The basic structure of care is lack-in-being; in the term from *Being and Time*, *Schuldigsein*.

As announced by its title *The Second Mountain* draws on the author’s personal experience and from the accounts of many others to describe two comportment-alternatives of being-with, a di-ethism of *Mitsein*. Brooks uses the two-mountain metaphor “to render in narrative form two different ethos by which people can live—a life lived for self and a life lived as a gift for others.”¹⁴ “If the first mountain is about acquisition, the second mountain is about contribution. If the first mountain is elitist—moving up—the second mountain is egalitarian—planting yourself amid those who need, and walking arm in arm with them. . . . On the first mountain you tend to be ambitious, strategic, and independent. On the second mountain you tend to be relational, intimate, and relentless.”¹⁵ “People on the first mountain have lives that are mobile and lightly attached. People on the second mountain are deeply rooted and deeply committed.”¹⁶

Adam Smith represented this di-ethism by imagining each pole as pure demotype,¹⁷ a population manifesting only one alternative of the pair. Starting from the proposition that human beings “can subsist only in society” Smith goes on:

“All the members of human society stand in need of each others assistance, and are likewise exposed to mutual injuries. Where the necessary assistance is

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena* (tr. Theodore Kisiel 1985) 294, 295.

¹² Harry G. Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About: Philosophical Essays* (1988) 80, 103.

¹³ *History of the Concept of Time* 295.

¹⁴ *Second Mountain* xviii.

¹⁵ *Id.* xvi.

¹⁶ *Id.* xviii.

¹⁷ On the concept of demotype see Theunis Piersma and Jan A. van Gils, *The Flexible Phenotype: A Body-Centred Integration of Ecology, Physiology, and Behaviour* (2011) 4-5.

reciprocally afforded from love, from gratitude, from friendship, and esteem, the society flourishes and is happy. All the different members of it are bound together by the agreeable bands of love and affection, and are, as it were, drawn to one common centre of mutual good offices.

“But though the necessary assistance should not be afforded from such generous and disinterested motives, though among the different members of society there should be no mutual love and affection, the society, though less happy and agreeable, will not necessarily be dissolved. Society may subsist among different men, as among different merchants, from a sense of its utility, without any mutual love or affection; and though no man in it should owe any obligation, or be bound in gratitude to any other, it may still be upheld by a mercenary exchange of good offices according to an agreed valuation.”¹⁸

Tönnies quotes Smith’s later remark in *The Wealth of Nations* that in the second kind of society “everyone is a merchant.” Tönnies has an apothegm for the di-ethism at issue: “In *Gemeinschaft* they stay together in spite of everything that separates them; in *Gesellschaft* they remain separated in spite of everything that unites them.” He continues,

“Nothing happens in *Gesellschaft* that is more important for the individual’s wider group than it is for himself. On the contrary, everyone is out for himself alone and living in a state of tension against everyone else. [T. was a Hobbes scholar.] The various spheres of power and activity are sharply demarcated, so that everyone resists contact with others and excludes them from his own spheres, regarding such overtures as hostile. Such a *negative* attitude is the normal and basic way in which these power-conscious people relate to one another, and it is characteristic of *Gesellschaft* at any given moment in time. Nobody wants to do anything for anyone else, nobody wants to yield or give anything unless he gets something in return that he regards as at least an *equal* trade-off. Indeed it is essential that it should be more desirable to him than

¹⁸ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) II.iii.3.1-3.2. For a modern public policy of ‘no obligation’ see *City of Midland v. O’Byrant*, 18 S.W.3d 209, 216 (Tex. 2000): “In holding that there is no duty of good faith and fair dealing in the employment context, we perceive no distinction between government and private employers, inasmuch as both types of employers are subject to applicable laws, regulations, and contractual agreements. Nor do we see any meaningful basis to distinguish between employment at-will and employment governed by an express agreement. A court-created duty of good faith and fair dealing would completely alter the nature of the at-will employment relationship, which generally can be terminated by either party for any reason or no reason at all, and we accordingly decline to change the at-will nature of employment in Texas.” Doctrinally anyway the moral ecology of employment in Texas is purely transactional, non-relational, labor-for-cash. MacNeil suggested it is useful “to think of transactional and relational characteristics as creating a spectrum ranging from such extremes as the highly transactional horse selling epitome [the ‘spot-sale’] to the highly relational nuclear family or commune.” Ian R. MacNeil, “Restatement (Second) of Contracts and Presentation,” 60 *Virginia L. Rev.* 589, 596 (1974). Brooks observes that “The hyper-individualist sees society as a collection of individuals who contract with one another. The relationalist sees society as a web of connections that in many ways precedes choice.” *Second Mountain* 300. The two poles of the di-ethism are so to speak oppositely gendered. See Deirdre McCloskey, *Crossing: A Memoir* (1999) on one mode of changeover from *io, io* to *noi, noi*.

whatever he has already, for only by getting something that seems better can he be persuaded to give up something good.”¹⁹

Mary Douglas reports the efforts of certain populations to sustain the prevalence of one alternative ethos by suppressing the other; in other words to keep the demotype pure:

“In many parts of West Africa today [1966], the individual is held to have a complex personality whose component parts act like separate persons. One part of the personality speaks the life-course of the individual before he is born. After birth, if the individual strives for success in a sphere which has been spoken against, his efforts will always be in vain. A diviner can diagnose this spoken destiny as cause of his failures and can then exorcise his prenatal choice. The nature of his pre-destined failure which a man has to take account of varies from one West African society to another. Among the Tallensi in the Ghana hinterland the conscious personality is thought to be amiable and uncompetitive. His unconscious element which spoke his destiny before birth is liable to be diagnosed as over-aggressive and rivalrous, and so makes him a misfit in a system of controlled statuses. By contrast the Ijo of the Niger Delta, whose social organisation is fluid and competitive, take the conscious component of the self to be full of aggression, desire to compete and to excel. In this case it is the unconscious self which may be pre-destined to failure because it chose obscurity and peace. Divination can discover the discrepancy of aims within the person, and ritual can put it right.”²⁰

Sapolsky discusses the di-ethism of “collectivist versus individualist cultures.”²¹ Collectivist cultures “are about harmony, interdependence, conformity, and having the needs of the group guiding behavior, whereas individualist cultures are about autonomy, personal achievement, uniqueness, and the needs and rights of the individual.” In individualist cultures,

“people more frequently seek uniqueness and personal accomplishment, use first-person singular pronouns more often, define themselves in terms that are personal (‘I’m a contractor’) rather than relational (‘I’m a parent’), attribute their successes to intrinsic attributes (‘I’m really good at X’) rather than to situational ones (‘I was in the right place at the right time’). . . . Motivation and satisfaction are gained from self- rather than group-derived effort (reflecting the extent to which American individualism is about noncooperation, rather than nonconformity). Competitive drive is about getting ahead of everyone else.”

In contrast, people from collectivist cultures

¹⁹ Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society* [*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* 1887] (tr. Jose Harris and Margaret Hollis 2001) 52.

²⁰ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966) 84.

²¹ The prospect of a tri-ethism arises in Brooks’s assertion that “relationalism is a middle way between hyper-individualism and collectivism.” *Second Mountain* 301.

“show more social comprehension; some reports suggest that they are better at Theory of Mind tasks, more accurate in understanding someone else’s perspective—with ‘perspective’ ranging from the other person’s abstract thoughts to how objects appear from where she is sitting. There is more blame of the group when someone violates a norm due to peer pressure, and a greater tendency to give situational explanations for behavior.²² Competitive drive is about not falling behind everyone else.”²³

Adding that “Naturally, these cultural differences have biological correlates” which Sapolsky proceeds to describe.

Now according to Brooks

“When a whole society is built around self-preoccupation, its members become separated from one another, divided and alienated. And that is what has happened to us [Americans, and “modern society” in general]. We are down in the valley. The rot we see in our politics is caused by a rot in our moral and cultural foundations—in the way we relate to one another, in the way we see ourselves as separable from one another, in the individualistic values that have become the water in which we swim.”²⁴

The rot is manifested by, among other things, “a shocking rise of mental illness, suicide, and distrust” leading to a fall in life expectancy from ‘deaths of despair.’ In view of such a grossly hopeless and deteriorating situation Brooks advises that “we as people and as a society have to find our second mountain.”²⁵ This requires “a shift in culture—a shift in values and philosophy, a renegotiation of the structure of power in our society. It’s about shifting from one mode of thinking toward another. It’s about finding an ethos that puts commitment making at the center of things.”²⁶

Brooks arrived at this position in large part from his firsthand experience of ‘the valley,’ his trope for a grossly hopeless and deteriorating situation, one “of bewilderment or suffering” in his phrase.²⁷ Brooks’s description of himself in the valley resembles Larry’s description of Phil in *The Big Kahuna*. Phil is either divorced or not yet officially “but don’t quote me ‘cause I don’t

²² Cf. Brooks on the soul: “Because you have this moral piece in you, you are judged for being the kind of person you are, for the thoughts you think and the actions you take.” *Second Mountain* 46. The ‘fundamental attribution error’ is endemic to this individualist conception of self. That the f.a.e. is less prevalent in collectivist cultures suggests we might understand it better as specific to an ethos rather than as a generic cognitive error. On the f.a.e. see Richard Nisbett and Lee Ross, *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgment* (1980).

²³ *Behave* 273-274.

²⁴ *Second Mountain* xxii.

²⁵ “Escape to a different milieu (via facultative change, or genetic ‘bet hedging’), even with imperfect adaptation, can be more advantageous than improved adaptation to a grossly hopeless or deteriorating situation.” Mary Jane West-Eberhard, “Alternative adaptations, speciation, and phylogeny (A Review),” 83 *Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci. USA* 1388, 1389 (1986).

²⁶ *Second Mountain* xxii-xxiii.

²⁷ *Id.* xii.

really know.” His longtime friend and fellow salesman Larry opines that in getting divorced Phil is “making a choice to gain something. His freedom, I guess.” To the callow and puzzled Bob, who tut-tuts “it’s a shame he has to get divorced” because “it seems like an awful lot to give up,” Larry responds, “Sometimes, Bob, you gotta chew your leg off to get out of life’s traps.” (Escape to a different milieu via facultative change, etc.) Larry adds that

“Phil’s gone through a lot of changes in the last couple of years, and I don’t just mean the divorce. He used to be a . . . I don’t know. One day he’d be riding the clouds, the world was a beautiful place, and he was just happy to be in it, and the next day, you wouldn’t even know you were talking to the same person. It was like somebody let the air out of him. You got the impression that at any moment he could pull out a gun and shoot himself. And even then he was real personable. He just . . . I got the feeling that something inside of him had kind of collapsed.”

What inside him collapsed? Bernard Williams articulates a concept of ‘categorical desire’:

“it is possible to imagine a person rationally contemplating suicide, in the face of some predicted evil, and if he decides to go on in life, then he is propelled forward into it by some desire (however general or inchoate) which cannot operate conditionally on his being alive, since it settles the question of whether he is going to be alive. Such a desire we may call a categorical desire. Most people have many categorical desires, which do not depend on the assumption of the person’s existence, since they serve to prevent that assumption’s being questioned, or to answer the question if it is raised. Thus one’s pattern of interests, desires and projects not only provide the reason for an interest in what happens within the horizon of one’s future, but also constitute the conditions of there being such a future at all.”²⁸

Williams notes that categorical desires “do not have to be even very evident to consciousness, let alone grand or large; one good testimony to one’s existence having a point is that the question of its point does not arise, and the propelling concerns may be of a relatively everyday kind such as certainly provide the grounds of many sorts of happiness.”²⁹

Yet – a large yet – “unless I am propelled forward by the conatus of desire, project and interest it is unclear why I should go on at all.”

Additionally, “A man may have, for a lot of his life or even just some part of it, a *ground* project or set of projects which are closely related to his existence and which to a significant degree give a meaning to his life.”³⁰ If such a project or nexus of projects were frustrated or lost in any

²⁸ Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (1981) 11.

²⁹ *Id.* 12.

³⁰ *Ibid.* Ground projects manifest polyethism: “Ground projects do not have to be selfish, in the sense that they are just concerned with things for the agent. Nor do they have to be self-centred, in the sense that the creative projects of a Romantic artist could be considered self-centred (where it has to be *him*, but not *for* him). They may

of various ways, “he may feel in those circumstances that he might as well have died;” for “it would be the loss of all or most of them that would remove meaning.”³¹

What seems to have collapsed in Phil, as in Brooks, was *sein warum*, his why.

Brooks calls this ‘the telos crisis’:

“A telos crisis is defined by the fact that people in it don’t know what their purpose is. When this happens, they become fragile. Nietzsche says that he who has a ‘why’ to live for can endure any ‘how.’ If you know what your purpose is, you can handle the setbacks. But when you don’t know what your purpose is, any setback can lead to total collapse.”³²

Nietzsche returns to this consideration again and again. In the 1870 sketch for *The Birth of Tragedy* he wrote,

“The Greeks knew the terror and the horror of existence but they covered it, in order to live: a cross hidden under roses to use Goethe’s symbol. . . . To see one’s existence, simply as it is, in a glorifying mirror and to guard oneself with this mirror against the Medusa—that was the genius-like strategy of the Hellenic ‘will’ in order to be able to live at all. How else could this people so infinitely sensitive, so splendidly talented in *suffering*, endure existence, if *that existence* had not been revealed to them in their gods, surrounded with a higher glory? The same impulse which calls art into being as the complement and consummation of existence, seducing one to a continuation of life, was also the cause of the Olympian world of beauty, of rest, of enjoyment.”³³

Eighteen years later Nietzsche distills it all to “Truth is ugly. We have art lest we perish of the truth.”³⁴ The next year he went mad.

The impulse (*Treib*) which calls (*ruft*), seducing one to go on living (*zum Weiterleben verführende*), turns up in *Genealogy of Morality* as life itself, conning us ever onward: “With the aid of such inventions [gods and daemons], life then played the trick which it has always known how to play, of justifying itself, justifying its ‘evil.’”³⁵ *Der Ruf*, ‘the call,’ was for Nietzsche another of life’s devices, one more of nature’s tricks, *Kunststücke*.

certainly be altruistic, and in a very evident sense moral, projects; thus he may be working for reform, or justice, or general improvement.” *Id.* 13.

³¹ *Id.* 12, 13.

³² *Second Mountain* 30. Nietzsche wrote *fast jedem wie*; “almost any how.” *Hat man sein warum? des Lebens, so verträgt man sich fast mit jedem wie? Twilight of the Idols*.

³³ “The Dionysian Worldview,” 13 *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 81, 85 (1997) trans. Claudia Crawford.

³⁴ *Die Wahrheit ist häßlich: wir haben die Kunst, damit wir nicht an der Wahrheit zu Grunde gehn*.

³⁵ *On the Genealogy of Morality* (ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, tr. Carol Diethe 1994) Second essay, § 7; p. 48. *Mit Hülfe solcher Erfindungen nämlich verstand sich damals das Leben auf das Kunststück, auf das es sich immer verstanden hat, sich selbst zu rechtfertigen, sein „Übel“ zu rechtfertigen*.

Hirschman, too, notes “an important truth: the quintessential deception to which humans are subject is that of the hopes they themselves fabricate.” The consequent dynamic of desire, disappointment, and melioration in surplus-producing-and-consuming societies evolves a certain kind of world which Hirschman tries to explicate, a world “in which men think they want one thing and then upon getting it, find out to their dismay that they don’t want it nearly as much as they thought or don’t want it at all and that something else, of which they were hardly aware, is what they really want.” This dynamic yields an oscillating social di-ethism of “shifting involvements” between private life and public affairs.³⁶

Hirschman’s analysis can be formalized in terms of Herrnstein’s matching law, which states that, “at equilibrium, an individual’s behavior is distributed over alternatives in the choice set so as to equalize the reinforcement returns per unit of behavior invested, measured in time, effort, or any other dimension of behavior [e.g. *Fürsorge*] constrained to a finite total [a budget]. Any systematic deviation from equality in reinforcement per unit of behavior invested is destabilizing, driving behavior toward an equilibrium in which the deviation is absent.”³⁷ If alternatives A and B are rates of private-oriented and public-oriented comportments, respectively, then the matching law says that at equilibrium the ratio of A to B will match the ratio of their respective rates of obtained reinforcements, R_A and R_B . So that $\frac{A}{B} = \frac{R_A}{R_B}$, which, put in the form of ‘bang per buck,’ is the same as $\frac{R_A}{A} = \frac{R_B}{B}$. As the local rate of reinforcement – return per unit of comportment invested – to A diminishes, that is, as comportment A is experienced (and this may take some time) as yielding a disappointing rate of return, as unfulfilling, as throwing good *Fürsorge* after bad, the situation becomes $\frac{R_A}{A} < \frac{R_B}{B}$. The matching law says that behavior (comportment) will shift in the direction of the now-relatively-higher local rate of reinforcement, R_B , to move the situation back to equality of the two ratios, equilibrium. The person will increase her B-comportment. One way of seeing the imbalance is to note that A-reinforcement (private satisfaction) has become more costly than B-reinforcement (public fulfillment), in that more A (private-oriented comportment) must be expended to get one unit of A-reinforcement than B (public-oriented comportment) to get one unit of B-reinforcement.

We might name one effect of this dynamic ‘the Schopenhauer dither’ after his description of it: “For we strive tirelessly from desire to desire, and while every satisfaction attained, however much it promised, yet does not satisfy us, but usually soon stands before us as a humiliating error, we still do not see that we are drawing water with the vessel of the Danaids, but hurry on to ever new desires.”³⁸ In other words we ever seek to expand the choice set. *Accord* Ortega:

³⁶ Albert O. Hirschman, *Shifting Involvements: Private Interest and Public Action* (1982) 13, 21.

³⁷ Richard J. Herrnstein, *The Matching Law: Papers in Psychology and Economics* (ed. Howard Rachlin and David I. Laibson 1997) 254-255. “Beyond the dynamics of this competition itself, no one is in charge.” *Id.* 292.

³⁸ Turns out he’s paraphrasing Lucretius, whom he then quotes directly: *Sed, dum abest quod avemus, id exsuperare videtur/ Caetera; post aliud, quum contigit illud, avemus;/ Et sitis aequa tenet vitae semper hiantes.*

“Man invents for himself a program of life, a static form of being, that gives a satisfactory answer to the difficulties posed for him by circumstance. He essays this form of life, attempts to realize this imaginary character he has resolved to be. He embarks on the essay full of illusions and prosecutes the experiment with thoroughness. This means that he comes to *believe* deeply that this character [*ese personaje*] is his real being [*su verdadero ser*]. But meanwhile the experience has made apparent the shortcomings and limitations of the said form of life [*ese programa vital*]. It does not solve all the difficulties, and it creates new ones of its own. When first seen it was full face, with the light shining on it: hence the illusions, the enthusiasm, the delights believed in store. With the back view its inadequacy is straightway revealed. Man thinks out another program of life. But this second program is drawn up in the light, not only of circumstance, but also of the first. One aims at avoiding in the new project the drawbacks of the old. In the second, therefore, the first is still active; it is preserved in order to be avoided. Inexorably man shrinks from being what he was. On the second project of being [*proyecto de ser*], the second thorough experiment, there follows a third, forged in the light of the second and the first, and so on. Man ‘goes on being’ and ‘unbeing’ – living. [*El hombre »va siendo« y »des-siendo« – viviendo.*]”³⁹

In terms of the concept we started with, these disparate forms of being which happen to individuals (and groups) are the polyethism characteristic of human being. Both Brooks and Heidegger hold out the prospect of *mokṣa*, release from bondage to this delusory, labile ‘fleeing.’⁴⁰

Accordingly Brooks devotes Part II of *The Second Mountain* to the phenomenology of Vocation.⁴¹ The notion of vocation is familiar enough; as Frankfurt says, “The suggestion that a person may be in some sense liberated through acceding to a power which is not subject to his immediate voluntary control is among the most ancient and persistent themes of our moral and religious tradition. It must surely reflect some quite fundamental structural feature of our lives.”⁴² In a Nietzschean telling the prospect of liberation is the image reflected by the

Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Presentation, Vol. One* (tr. Richard E. Aquila w/coll. David Carus 2008) 373.

³⁹ *History as a System* 215-216.

⁴⁰ Brooks urges *karmayoga* – the practice of good works through commitments and relationships – whereas Heidegger turns us toward *jñānayoga* – the way of knowledge.

⁴¹ Without citing authority Brooks asserts that “The Greek word for ‘beauty’ was *kalon*, which is related to the word for ‘call.’ Beauty incites a desire to explore something and live with it.” *Second Mountain* 96. Despite its Platonic charm this folk etymology is not well-founded. Contemporary scholars say *καλέω* is descended from Indo-European **klh₂-* ‘call.’ Whereas for *καλός* “?”: “No good etymology exists, or the etymology is unknown.” Robert Beekes w/asst. Lucien van Beek, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek* (2010) Vol. I, 623; 626-627; ix.

⁴² *The Importance of What We Care About* 89. Not a few Baby Boomers first encountered this most ancient and persistent theme through a cartoon character named Bongo, ‘The Wonder Bear,’ whose story is told in a Disney movie of 1947 entitled *Fun and Fancy Free*. Bongo is a young circus bear, an expert at juggling while riding a unicycle and performing other feats of skill; a crowd favorite. But after the show is over his keepers always toss

tradition's glorifying mirror; whereas a veridical mirror would reflect the fundamental structural feature to be our need for myths of liberation.⁴³

For Brooks the fundamental structural feature of our lives is the soul. "I do not ask you to believe in God or not believe in God," he writes, "But I do ask you to believe that you have a soul." The soul – without shape, size, weight, or color – is "some piece of your consciousness;" and "this essence inside of you," "this moral piece in you," "is the seedbed of your moral consciousness and your ethical sense." "Mostly, what the soul does is yearn."⁴⁴

Brooks does not say explicitly whether this alleged soul is generic or bespoke; whether there dwells one selfsame soul (*ātman*, *sākṣin*) in all of us – as Advaita Vedānta teaches – or whether each soul is unique – as the Abrahamic faiths tell it. Because Brooks discusses only the latter and makes plain his adherence to that tradition he must mean by 'soul' the individualized variety. Moreover one can hardly characterize *sākṣin*, 'the disinterested witness,' as 'yearning.'⁴⁵

Brooks notes that a standard metaphor for the (Abrahamic) soul's yearning is 'thirst.'⁴⁶ Anne Snyder suggested to him that this thirst gives rise in the religious consciousness "to a willingness to surrender to a truth that is outside yourself. . . . an external reality that demands one's loyalties and lays out a specific bounded path."⁴⁷

For Heidegger – anyway the Heidegger of *Being and Time* – the call of conscience, *der Ruf des Gewissens*, does not issue from a truth outside oneself nor does it specify a path one is bound to follow. "*Da-sein* calls itself in conscience."⁴⁸ "*Conscience reveals itself as the call of care: the caller is Da-sein . . . The one summoned is also Da-sein.*"⁴⁹ "And to what is one summoned? To

him back into his cage in the circus train. As the train pulls out Bongo gazes sadly through the cage bars at the passing scene. The narrator (Dinah Shore) explains, "His thoughts would wander to an imaginary life far removed from the circus." *Unheimlich* voiceover: "Bongo, Bongo, Bongooo." Narrator: "Some half-forgotten instinct kept calling. [*der Ruf*] For you see, Bongo is a prisoner." A scene later in the countryside, "The call of the wild kept ringing in his ears." Once more the eerie voiceover. "He couldn't ignore it any longer." Bongo looks out of his cage onto a vista of forested mountains and rolling hills. Narrator, excitedly: "He had to answer the call of the great open spaces." Bongo ferociously rattles the bars of his cage as he watches his imaginary self frolic [*die gerüstete Freude*] over the passing hills, the voiceover all the while summoning, "Come on out Bongo." As Bongo dashes madly about his cell the narrator frets, "He was cracking up. He was losing his grip." (*kopflös*, the mode in which cartoon bears experience their correlate of *Angst*) At last Bongo breaks the lock on his cage (*Entschlossenheit*) and rides away on his unicycle; freeing himself up for (*Sichüberliefern*) adventure (wilderness), trouble (Lumpjaw), and love (Lulubelle). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3W5OYXN6O4> ; beginning at 7:07.

⁴³ For an argument that such a need is a fundamental structural feature of our lives see Leszek Kołakowski, *The Presence of Myth* (tr. Adam Czerniawski 1989).

⁴⁴ *Second Mountain* 46, 47.

⁴⁵ Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (1969) on *ātman* 48-65; Bina Gupta, *The Disinterested Witness: A Fragment of Advaita Vedānta Phenomenology* (1998) *ātman* = *sākṣin* p. 19.

⁴⁶ Zen mechanic pointing socket wrench: "There's your trouble, dude, *ṭṛṣṇā*."

⁴⁷ *Second Mountain* 248, 237.

⁴⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (tr. Joan Stambaugh 1996) 254.

⁴⁹ *Id.* 256.

one's own self [*Auf das eigene Selbst*]."⁵⁰ "The call of conscience has the character of *summoning* Da-sein to its ownmost potentiality-of-being-a-self [*sein eigenstes Selbstseinkönnen*], by summoning it to its ownmost quality of being a lack [*eigensten Schuldigsein*]."⁵¹ Conscience, *das Gewissen*, is a "primordial phenomenon of Da-sein;" the analysis of which is "prior to any psychological description," just as it "lies outside any biological 'explanation,'" and "is no less distant from a theological exegesis of conscience;"⁵² non-psychic, non-organic, non-theistic. "To the call of conscience there corresponds a possible hearing."⁵³ Understanding the summons reveals itself as *wanting to have a conscience [Gewissenhabenvollen]*. But in this phenomenon lies that existentiell choosing of the choice of being-a-self [*Wählen der Wahl eines Selbstseins*] which we are looking for and which we call resoluteness [*Entschlossenheit*] in accordance with its existential structure."⁵⁴

For Heidegger every human being is both personally ex-sistent and structurally ex-sistent.⁵⁵ "The distinction," Sheehan writes,

"between ex-sistence as personal and ex-sistence as structural is supremely important. The first refers to any one of us living ahead in a range of concrete possibilities, whereas the second refers to our very essence as possibility. . . . The distinction between ex-sistence as personal/existentiel and ex-sistence as structural/existential (which, unfortunately, Heidegger tends to blur) comes into its own in Heidegger's discussion of 'decision' or 'resolve' (*Entschluss*) in *Being and Time* §62. My ex-sistence is always mine alone, and this fact entails that the responsibility for choosing how I am to live rests exclusively with me and with no one else. I have a choice: I can either embrace my dynamic and mortal structure as ex-sistence, along with all that it entails, or I can flee it. When (personal) ex-sistence embraces its (structural) ex-sistence, Heidegger says, one is 'authentic,' the self-responsible author of his or her own finite life. When ex-sistence flees its ex-sistence, it is 'inauthentic,' insofar as it refuses to fully understand and embrace itself and 'become what it already is.'"⁵⁶

Such is Heidegger's fundamental di-ethism: the *ethos* of living inauthentically versus authentically.⁵⁷ But just as there is inauthentic polyethism in the manifold ways of fleeing, there is also authentic polyethism in the manifold ways of living authentically; because 'not

⁵⁰ *Id.* 252.

⁵¹ *Id.* 249.

⁵² *Id.* 248-249.

⁵³ Dasein is constituted as 'Hearer of the Word' in Karl Rahner's neo-scholastic interpretation.

⁵⁴ *Being and Time* 249. The consensus seems to be that as translation for *Entschlossenheit* 'resoluteness' misleads insofar as it suggests the grim doggedness of a police detective. Stambaugh glosses the literal meaning 'unlockedhood' in her note: "the emphasis being on freed and open *for* something." Using a similar image Brooks writes, "People in the valley have been broken open." *Second Mountain* xii.

⁵⁵ Rather as in Vedānta every human being is both *jīva* (mortal person) and *ātman* (the one eternal existence-consciousness). Not saying that H. believed structural ex-sistence to be either conscious or eternal.

⁵⁶ Thomas Sheehan, *Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift* (2015) 136, 138-139.

⁵⁷ 'Authentic' in Vedānta's terms: *jīvanmukta*, i.e. *in vivo mokṣa*.

Heidegger, not nobody' can tell **you how** to live authentically. So Sheehan: "We may gloss Heidegger's protreptic to become what we already are—to personally embrace and become our essence—with Augustine's *vivere moriendo*, 'to live mortally,' **whatever that might happen to mean in each individual's life.**"⁵⁸ Bold emphasis mine.

Brooks describes the di-ethism, analogous to authentic/inauthentic, resulting from the experience of the valley. For *some* people the experience of the valley "is the making of them." Through the experience they find in themselves "a fundamental ability to care, a yearning to transcend the self and care for others. And when they have encountered this yearning, they are ready to become a whole person." They are "made larger by suffering."⁵⁹ Evidently they respond to *der Ruf des Gewissens*, the yearning of the soul, summoning them *auf das eigene Selbst*. These people thereby achieve "moral joy," "permanent joy."⁶⁰

Others, however, "shrivel in the face of this kind of suffering. They seem to get more afraid and more resentful. They shrink away from their inner depths in fear. Their lives become smaller and lonelier." These are quite unappealing specimens: "We all know old people who nurse eternal grievances. They don't get the respect they deserve. They live their lives as an endless tantrum about some wrong done to them long ago."⁶¹

What is responsible for these losers being losers? That is, for being the kind of person they are, for the thoughts they think and the actions they take in the face of this kind of suffering. The ensouled wretches themselves, according to Brooks.

Despite the differences in their conceptions of it Brooks and Heidegger both find an essence of human being which is unconditioned; a value, Williams says, which "has to be what ultimately matters."⁶² The soul "is the piece of you that is of infinite value and dignity," Brooks tells us.⁶³ In conjunction with his soul-belief Brooks cites with approval Kant's exaltation of "the moral law within me." "Our very essence as possibility," the structural *eigene Selbst, Seinkönnen*, is who we fundamentally are in Heidegger's view. I.e., Brooks and Heidegger both are Kantian in the sense Williams describes, namely that "The capacity for moral [respectively, authentically opened-up] agency is supposedly present to any rational agent whatsoever, to anyone for whom the question can even present itself. The successful moral [authentic] life, removed from considerations of birth, lucky upbringing, or indeed of the incomprehensible Grace of a

⁵⁸ *Id.* 156.

⁵⁹ *Second Mountain* xiii.

⁶⁰ *Id.* xxix, xxxi.

⁶¹ *Id.* xiii. Precise example in the bilious mother-in-law of *Loveless* (*Нелюбовь*, dir. Andrei Zvyagintsev 2017).

⁶² *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* 195.

⁶³ *Second Mountain* 46.

non-Pelagian God, is presented as a career open not merely to the talents, but to a talent which all rational creatures necessarily possess in the same degree.”⁶⁴

“The ultimate justice which the Kantian outlook so compellingly demands . . . requires not merely that *something I am* should be beyond luck, but that *what I most fundamentally am* should be so.”⁶⁵ The ideal of morality, ‘a moral life,’ like the ideal of authenticity, is a value “that transcends luck. It must therefore lie beyond any empirical determination.”⁶⁶ Hence the universal endowment of soul with the moral law and of structural ex-sistence with *Gewissen*. “It must lie not only in trying rather than succeeding, since success depends partly on luck, but in a kind of trying that lies beyond the level at which the capacity to try can itself be a matter of luck.”⁶⁷ It cannot be a matter of luck that one’s soul yearns in the requisite measure and in the right direction, or that the call calls to one who has the capacity to understand and to respond; these must lie beyond luck.

Yet – last yet – Williams counterclaims that “the dispositions of morality [the yearning of the soul, the calling of the call], however far back they are placed in the direction of motive and intention, are as ‘conditioned’ as anything else.” The bitter truth (Williams takes it to be both) is that “morality is subject, after all, to constitutive luck.”⁶⁸

On this alternative view some are shriveled and others enlarged for the same reason that within a crew of coalminers Grumpy is grumpy and Happy happy – a non-negligible matter of luck, constitutive and incident; for “the idea of a value that lies beyond all luck is an illusion.”⁶⁹

And moral, respectively ontological luck manifests as does every kind of luck – there is really nothing that can defeat the conatus of desire, project and interest, the yearning of the soul, or the call of conscience, the way I look at it, except what happens.⁷⁰

DCW 7/03/2019

⁶⁴ *Moral Luck* 21. “The soul is the piece of your consciousness that has moral worth and bears moral responsibility. . . . because you have a soul, you are morally responsible for what you do or don’t do. Because you have this essence inside of you . . . your actions are either praiseworthy or blameworthy.” *Second Mountain* 46.

⁶⁵ *Id.* 38.

⁶⁶ *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* 195.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Moral Luck* 21.

⁶⁹ *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* 196.

⁷⁰ “Well, you understand Unser Fritz is betting one hundred thousand dollars against a thousand dollars that Cara Mia will run in the money, and personally I consider this wager a very sound business proposition indeed, and so does everybody else, for all it amounts to is finding a thousand dollars in the street. There is really nothing that can make Cara Mia run out of the money, the way I look at it, except what happens to her, and what happens is she steps in a hole fifty yards from the finish when she is on top by ten and breezing, and down she goes all spread out, and of course the other three horses run on past her to the wire, and all this is quite a disaster to many members of the public, including Unser Fritz.” Damon Runyon, “All Horse Players Die Broke” (1937).