Authenticity unto Death: Heidegger's Being-toward-Death as a contributory framework for Character Education

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Abstract

Martin Heidegger's concept of Being-toward-death offers an additional richness to contemporary character education. One reason is the distinction between the ontic and the ontological, which is discussed in the first section, and remains problematic. Nevertheless, the paper argues that, properly understood, Heidegger's notion of Being-toward-death provides a philosophical foundation for character education that emphasises authenticity, responsibility, and the finitude of human existence. Confronting our inevitable mortality as an ontological condition that individualises and calls *Dasein* to authentic selfhood may offer additional tools to assist educators in cultivating the character necessary for meaningful existence. We will explore: first, how anticipatory resoluteness toward death grounds authentic choice-making; second, how conscience and guilt in Heidegger's framework inform moral education; and third, how the concept of temporality shapes our understanding of character development. These themes are then applied to practical questions in character education, particularly concerning autonomy, responsibility, and the cultivation of an examined life.

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Introduction

Leading a Catholic school with a distinctive mission, the concept of holistic education is axiomatic in all that is undertaken (Catholic Education Service, 2014:2). With a specific remit as a designated *School of Character* (Association for Character Education, 2026), we endeavour further to create an environment where all members of the school community – staff and students alike – recognise their agency for goodness, the efficacy of their voice and the voice of others and benefit from powerful and effective role models, recalling Pope Paul VI comments that "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers it is because they are witnesses" (Paul VI, Pope, 1974).

Character education is capturing the imagination of more and more educators, keen to move beyond knowledge transfer to the possibility of helping bring about real human flourishing in the young. Whilst virtue ethics, particularly Aristotelian approaches, have dominated the field (Arthur, 2003; Kristjánsson, 2015), other philosophical traditions offer untapped resources. Martin Heidegger's existential phenomenology, specifically his concept of Being-toward-death (*Sein-zum-Tode*), articulated in Being and Time (1927), presents a challenging yet rich framework for either reconceptualising character education or enhancing current models.

At first glance, Heidegger is difficult to understand. Add to this his personal involvement with National Socialism and this raises legitimate ethical questions about engaging with his philosophy (Wolin, 1993). Finally, as an atheist (of sorts[1]), his canon of work may appear at

[1] See Mezei, B. (2019) '*The 'Return of Religion' in Martin Heidegger's work: overview and criticism'* where he argues against the use of 'atheist' to describe Heidegger, but rather sees a particular mystical turn.

odds with the ongoing deliberations if, for example, one is leading a school with a religious characte. Nevertheless, as Levinas observed, Heidegger's thought represents 'one of the finest achievements of human philosophy' (Levinas, 1989: 231), and its potential contributions to educational thought merit serious consideration, particularly when carefully distinguished from Heidegger's political choices.

We will argue that rather than prescribing specific virtues or character traits, Heidegger's approach illuminates the existential structures that enable authentic character formation. His philosophy addresses fundamental questions about human existence, such as how one lives authentically, what it means to assume responsibility for one's choices, and how awareness of finitude shapes human possibilities.

The argument proceeds in five stages. First, I address the ontic-ontological distinction in Heidegger’s work, which can be problematic. Second, I explicate Heidegger's concept of Being-toward-death. Third, I explore the relationship between Being-toward-death and authenticity, examining how anticipation of death individuates and calls *Dasein* to genuine selfhood. Fourth, I consider the implications of Heidegger's analysis for key aspects of character education: moral autonomy, responsibility, and the cultivation of self-knowledge. Finally, I address practical and ethical considerations in applying Heideggerian concepts to educational practice.

Heidegger's Ontic-Ontological Distinction and Its Practical Application

Martin Heidegger's distinction between the ontic and the ontological is a core tension at the centre of his seminal work, *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1962). The distinction marks a

fundamental divide in how we approach questions about existence, yet it also raises an intriguing possibility: can insights from Heidegger's ontological investigations inform everyday, practical life? This question matters because Heidegger himself insisted on the primacy of the ontological whilst spending considerable energy describing concrete human experiences. The tension between these two impulses deserves examination.

The Distinction Itself

The ontic concerns particular entities and their properties. When we ask how old a castle is, or what a bridge is made of, we pose ontic questions. These are questions about beings themselves, about what exists and how it exists in specific, measurable ways. Much of our scientific education operates almost entirely at the ontic level, investigating particular phenomena within established frameworks of understanding (Heidegger, 1962).

The ontological is very different, being concerned not with things, but with being itself. What it means to ‘be’ at all. Ontological questions ask what the necessary conditions are that make it possible for beings to show up as meaningful in the first place. In other words, the structures of existence rather than the contents of existence (Dreyfus, 1991).

Herr we encounter the curious work *Dasein*, which Heidegger will use to describe human existence. What makes us different is that we are the entities for whom Being is an issue. We don't simply exist; we question our existence. This makes *Dasein* the site where ontological investigation must begin (Heidegger, 1962). The being who asks 'What does it mean to be?' is already involved in the answer through the very asking.

Why this matters is fundamental for Heidegger. He believes that Western philosophy since Plato has confused the ontic with the ontological (Heidegger, 1962), treating Being as

though it were simply the most general category of beings, the highest abstraction. But Being isn't a being, even an abstract one. It's the conditions, or space, that allows beings to appear as what they are.

The Practical Question

But can we then extract practical guidance – such as thinking about character education - from ontological analysis? The question itself risks category confusion. Heidegger would clearly caution against this. The whole point of the distinction is that these are different kinds of inquiry. (Guignon, 1983). Let us look at how profound the difference is between the ontic and the ontological.

When our students use tools in Design Technology, the tools are most truly themselves when they are used transparently, without theoretical reflection. The hammer hammers best when we're absorbed in hammering rather than staring at the hammer (Heidegger, 1962). The same with learning to drive a car. We drive best when we are not thinking through each thought process necessary, but rather when things seem to ‘flow’. But this is to misinterpret Heidegger – he is not offering practical tips on better hammering, or better driving. He's revealing something about the structure of *Dasein's* involvement with the world, about how meaning emerges through engaged practice rather than detached observation.

So, can Ontology touch practice, or is it just too different a dimension?

In understanding the structures of existence, might this not reorient how we inhabit those structures?

One of Heidegger's many landmark concepts is that of *thrownness* (*Geworfenheit*). As people, we are thrown into existence without choosing our historical moment, cultural context, family structure, faith or non-faith or initial circumstances (Heidegger, 1962). This is not advice about what to do with your thrownness. It's a characterisation of *Dasein's* fundamental condition. But recognising thrownness might affect how we relate to our situation. Does it not immediately challenge the fantasy of radical autonomy and, at the same time, the excuse of pure victimhood? We may not have chosen our starting point, but we are still surely responsible for how we take it forward (Gelven, 1989).

This isn't extracting a rule from ontology. It's more like allowing ontological insight to permeate ontic existence. The understanding doesn't dictate action but enriches the space within which action happens. It changes the background against which choices appear.

Another keyword for Heidegger is *authenticity*. Heidegger contrasts authentic existence with the inauthentic absorption in 'the they' (*das Man*)—the anonymous 'public' that dictates average, standardised ways of being. Authenticity emerges when *Dasein* owns its existence, confronting the fact that life will have an end point and making choices that are truly its own rather than merely following the herd (Heidegger, 1962).

This gets misread as a call to rugged individualism or non-conformity. But Heidegger is not saying 'Be different' or 'Reject society.' Authenticity is not a personality trait or lifestyle choice. It's an ontological mode of existence, a way of relating to one's being (Guignon, 1983). You can live conventionally and authentically, or unconventionally and inauthentically. The question isn't what you choose but whether you choose it as genuinely yours, with full awareness of your mortality and thrownness.

Still, this distinction can matter in practice. It suggests that pursuing authenticity through mere rebellion or difference misses something essential. It points toward a quality of engagement rather than a content of choices.

The Limit and the Gift

We cannot convert ontological insights into ontic instructions without betraying his work. The question 'How should I live?' demands ontic answers—specific guidance about particular situations, particularly for the young minds we serve. Fundamental ontology cannot supply this, and attempting to force it into that role distorts both the philosophy and the life (Carman, 2003). That being said, what ontological investigation offers is clarification of what it means to face that question at all. It doesn't tell us how to choose but reveals what choosing is, what it means for a being like us to be in a position of choosing. This matters because we often operate with confused or superficial understandings of our own existence. We treat ourselves as objects with properties rather than as beings whose being is an issue for us. We seek solutions to existential questions through ontic means—better circumstances, different characteristics, more social media, becoming more popular —and wonder why satisfaction remains elusive. Heidegger's analyses can interrupt this pattern not by providing alternative answers but by transforming the question. They invite a different quality of attention to existence itself. This will not tell you whether to change careers or whom to marry. But it might reveal that you've been asking those questions in a way that obscures what is actually at stake.

The Question of Method

It is important to recognise that Heidegger examines everyday experiences not to generate practical wisdom but to access fundamental structures. So examining tool use, or driving

skills serves are interesting to him to the extent that they are phenomena that, properly interrogated, reveal Being itself (Dreyfus, 1991).

This creates what we might call a methodological double vision. The phenomenologist describes concrete experience, but the description aims at something beyond the concrete. Heidegger moves from the particular to the universal, from the ontic to the ontological, but the movement is not merely a matter of induction. It is more like seeing through the particular to its conditions of possibility.

The question is not whether to apply Heidegger practically, but how to let ontological understanding enrich our human understanding.

Living in the Clearing

Heidegger sometimes uses the metaphor of a clearing (*Lichtung*) in a forest. Being creates a space to allow beings to be. *Dasein* is that clearing, the opening in which things appear as meaningful (Heidegger, 1962). Now this does immediately have a useful implication. It suggests a stance of openness rather than grasping, of letting things be what they are rather than forcibly imposing meanings (Wrathall, 2011). The opening is not something *Dasein* does but something *Dasein* is. This immediately challenges the sovereignty of our human agency to change everything in our life. When facing a difficult decision, we typically see ourselves working through the problem, yet Heidegger's analysis suggests this picture already distorts the situation (Dreyfus, 1991). We are not detached subjects, but beings always already involved with what we are trying to decide about. The options are not objective givens but possibilities that emerge from our projects and concerns.

The Danger of Translation

There has been a lot of playing fast and loose with Heidegger, both as an homage to his insights, but also as an atwempt to ‘distil’ his thinking into ‘practical’ thinking. Much is pretty illegitimate. So, for example, authenticity becomes 'being true to yourself’ and ‘Thrownness becomes 'accepting your circumstances. As for *Being-toward-death,* this becomes 'living with awareness of mortality.'

While these ‘translations’ are not entirely wrong, nor entirely unhelpful, they do miss the point that Heidegger's technical vocabulary exists precisely because ordinary language already embeds the philosophical confusions he is trying to overcome (Carman, 2003). When we translate back into everyday terms, we risk reimporting those confusions.

'Being true to yourself' suggests a pre-existing template or best-version of ourselves, but Heidegger dismisses the fixed self with inherent properties. *Dasein* is not a substance but a way of existing, continually in question, always to be determined through its choices and projections. Authenticity isn't about aligning with a true (model, template, cookie-cutter) self, but about acknowledging that no such self exists prior to the act of owning (Guignon, 1983).

So, What Might Be Possible

Heidegger’s concept of *care* (*Sorge*) exemplifies this possibility. Care, for Heidegger, isn't a feeling or virtue but the basic structure of *Dasein's* being. We are always already ahead of ourselves, projected toward possibilities. We are always already in a world with others and things. We are always already thrown from a past we did not choose (Heidegger, 1962). These three dimensions of projection, involvement, and thrownness, together, comprise care as the unified structure of existence.

It reveals that we're structured as caring beings, and that mattering is built into our existence. We cannot ‘not care’, though we can care inauthentically, losing ourselves in 'the they' – what the world, the herd, the influencers – would have us bow to.

Recognising this structure might shift how we approach various life situations. When someone struggles with apathy or meaninglessness, Heidegger's analysis suggests these are not problems to be solved by finding the right things to care about (Blattner, 2006). They are distortions or occlusions of care itself, the fundamental structure. The question becomes not 'What should I care about?' but 'What prevents care from showing up clearly?'

This reframing does not automatically generate answers, but it may challenge the approach that leads to ‘if only this happened’, ‘if I only had that’, ‘if I only was that’. The movement is not from ontology to practice but from obscured ontology to clarified ontology, which might then allow practice to unfold differently.

The Temporal Dimension

Heidegger's analysis of temporality offers another example of how ontological insight might matter practically without becoming practical advice. He argues that *Dasein's* being is fundamentally temporal—not that we exist in time, but that we are time in a certain sense (Heidegger, 1962). We are always projecting ahead toward possibilities (future), always taking up what we have been (past), always engaged with present circumstances. These aren't three separate moments but dimensions of a unified temporal structure. Authentic existence involves owning this temporality, particularly by confronting the ultimate future that is death (Blattner, 1999) which will be the basis for this paper.

This analysis does not tell us how to manage our time or prioritise tasks. It reveals what it means to be a temporal being *at all*. Yet understanding this might interrupt common confusions. We often treat time as an external container that we fill with activities, something we 'have' or 'don't have.' Heidegger shows that we are our time, that our being consists in temporal stretching between birth and death.

So, can we draw from the ontological to the ontic?

The distinction between ontic and ontological must be respected, and attempting to derive practical rules from fundamental ontology represents a category error that Heidegger spent his career trying to prevent. Yet ontological insight isn't sealed off from existence. Understanding the structures of *Dasein* might not tell us what to do, but it can clarify what it means to be the kind of being that faces such questions. It can expose confusions embedded in conventional frameworks and open space for more authentic engagement (Wrathall, 2011). Ultimately, Heidegger's distinction between ontic and ontological marks a genuine difference that cannot be wished away. Yet the two remain connected through *Dasein* itself—the being whose ontic existence necessarily involves ontological self-understanding. We live ontically, but our living always already includes implicit understandings of what it means to be.

Heidegger's Being-toward-Death: An Existential-Ontological Analysis

Dasein's Being and the Question of Death

Heidegger is interested in Being itself (*das Sein*), as well as human existence—*Dasein*—which serves as the privileged space for this inquiry because only Dasein raises the question of Being. Unlike entities merely present-at-hand (*vorhanden*) or ready-to-hand (*zuhanden*), *Dasein* exists in a relationship with its own Being, constantly understanding and interpreting its existence (Heidegger, 1962, p. 32). This self-interpretative character distinguishes human existence from other modes of being.

Death, for Heidegger, is not a biological event that terminates life but an existential structure constitutive of Dasein's Being. As soon as Dasein exists, it is already 'thrown' into the possibility of death: 'As soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die' (Heidegger, 1962, p. 289). Death is Dasein's 'ownmost' (*eigenst*) possibility—the one possibility that is utterly individualising, non-relational, and certain. Unlike other possibilities that *Dasein* might actualise or abandon, death is the possibility of the impossibility of any further *Dasein* (ibid., p. 294).

Crucially, Being-toward-death is not morbid preoccupation with mortality but an ontological structure of existence. Heidegger writes:

> Dasein does not have an end at which it just stops, but it exists finitely. […] The 'ending' which we have in view when we speak of death, does not signify Dasein's Being-at-an-end [*Zu-Ende-sein*], but a Being-towards-the-end [*Sein zum Ende*] of this entity. Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is. 'As soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die.' *(Heidegger, 1962, p. 289)*

Death, therefore, populates existence *now* because it is the ultimate horizon, not as a future event awaiting Dasein but as a structural feature of its present Being.

Inauthentic and Authentic Being-toward-Death

Heidegger applies his understanding of authenticity and inauthenticity as they apply to being before death. Typically, Dasein avoids engaging with questions of mortality through what Heidegger terms 'tranquillisation' (*Beruhigung*). The 'they' (*das Man*)—the undifferentiated social collective—offers reassuring platitudes: 'One dies, but not right away'. The world, therefore, turns death into a general occurrence, something that happens to 'the they' rather than to me personally (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 296-297).

Such evasion is not mere cowardice but a structural tendency of Dasein's everyday Being-in-the-world. Absorbed in its practical projects and social roles, Dasein flees from the anxiety (*Angst*) that arises when confronted with its 'uncanniest' possibility. This fleeing, however, prevents Dasein from achieving authentic selfhood. As Blattner observes, 'Heidegger's project in Being and Time is to show how Dasein can be itself authentically, rather than merely one of the crowd' (Blattner, 2006, p. 129).

Authentic Being-toward-death, by contrast, involves what Heidegger terms 'anticipation' (*Vorlaufen*). To anticipate death is not to think about it occasionally or plan for one's demise, but to hold oneself resolutely in the understanding of death as one's own most, non-relational, certain, and indefinite possibility. This anticipation does not make Dasein weaker or more despairing; rather, it liberates Dasein from the levelling tyranny of the 'they' and opens genuine possibilities for existence.

> Anticipation reveals to Dasein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself, primarily unsupported by concernful solicitude, but of being itself, rather, in an impassioned freedom towards death—a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the 'they', and which is factical, certain of itself, and anxious. (Heidegger, 1962, p. 311)

Anticipatory Resoluteness and Conscience

Authentic Being-toward-death leads to what Heidegger calls 'anticipatory resoluteness' (*vorlaufende Entschlossenheit*), bringing together the awareness of death with 'resoluteness' (*Entschlossenheit*), Dasein's response to the 'call of conscience' (*Gewissen)* which he sees as an existential phenomenon whereby Dasein calls itself from its lostness in the 'they' back to its authentic potentiality-for-Being (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 312-316).

This call summons *Dasein* to acknowledge its 'guilt' (*Schuld*), which Heidegger understands not morally but as the existential structure of 'Being-the-basis of a nullity' (ibid., p. 329). *Dasein* is 'guilty' because it is thrown into existence without choosing its facticity, and whatever possibilities it actualises require forsaking others. Authentic resoluteness involves accepting this constitutive guilt, as well as recognising one's radical freedom and responsibility.

Anticipatory resoluteness allows Dasein to appropriate its existence authentically, understanding its finite possibilities not as prescribed by social convention but as genuinely its own.

Being-toward-Death and Authenticity: Implications for Selfhood

Individuation and the Ownmost Possibility

With all our ‘group think’ and ‘personal choice’, death remains utterly personal and utterly real. As Heidegger emphasises, 'No one can take the Other's dying away from him' (Heidegger, 1962, p. 284). This radical singularity of death strips away the comforting anonymity of the

'they-self' and confronts *Dasein* with its ownmost Being. So what we 'become' in life – careers, academic credentials, social status and the rest, whilst by no means being important, especially in our role as educators, must not obscure *Dasein's* authentic selfhood. The anticipation of death positively challenges the flakiness of these career and social 'attributions' as ways of defining who we are at a fundamental level. [2]

Mulhall (2005) argues that Heidegger's point is not to denigrate social existence but to reveal that authentic selfhood requires acknowledging one's existence as fundamentally one's responsibility. This recognition is the precondition for authentic choice and genuine character formation.

Freedom, Possibility, and Authentic Choice

In confronting the finite horizon of existence, *Dasein* grasps that its possibilities are not infinite or arbitrary but constitutively limited and thus meaningful. Precious. Authentic freedom emerges precisely from acknowledging limitation. As Dreyfus explains, 'Only when *Dasein* faces finitude can it understand itself as already committed to specific possibilities and so be freed for choosing the life that is its own' (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 314). The anticipation of death reveals that choosing one possibility necessarily forecloses others—not as a regrettable constraint but as the structure of meaningful existence. The meaningfulness of the film director's choice of film shot is a function of what isn't in scope, just as much as what is.

[2] Heidegger's thinking often strikes chords with the Catholic faith he grew up with (see Brencio, F. 2020). Heidegger's authenticity before death is reflected in the words of the prophet, Job: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." (Job 1:21) *New International Version.*

Temporality and the Structure of Care

Heidegger's analysis of Being-toward-death ultimately reveals temporality as the horizon of Being itself. As we saw above, *Dasein's* Being is fundamentally temporal—it exists as having-been (*Gewesenheit),* present-making (*Gegenwärtigen),* and coming-towards-itself (*Zu-kunft*). Authentic temporality, grounded in anticipatory resoluteness, means existing primarily from the future—specifically from the futural possibility of death (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 373-380).

This temporal structure underlies what Heidegger identifies as *Dasein's* fundamental mode of Being: 'care' (Sorge). Care is not an emotional state but the ontological structure encompassing all *Dasein's* ways of relating to itself, others, and the world. Authentic care, informed by Being-toward-death, involves accepting responsibility for one's thrownness, resolutely projecting toward genuine possibilities, and engaging with one's present circumstances in light of this futural-historical understanding.

The temporal structure of care has crucial implications for character education. It suggests that character is not a static possession but is constantly unfolding. Character formation, from this perspective, requires cultivating authentic temporality—recognising one is living *one's life*.

Implications for Character Education

Authenticity as Educational Aim

Courage, honesty, compassion, and other virtues achieve genuine depth when rooted in authentic self-understanding rather than mere social conformity. However, authenticity is not a piece of cognitive 'learning' to be delivered in PSHE or at Tutor time. However, teachers can

assist through, for example, discussing the inevitability of choice, the nature of personal responsibility, the reality of foregoing one good thing to achieve another. And, of course (back to Pope Paul VI), when we do this from our own experience, the impact is that much more significant.

Thomson (2001) argues that Heideggerian education would focus less on transmitting determinate content and more on cultivating the capacity for questioning and self-examination, which also aligns with excellence in pedagogy. When things matter to students, they learn and develop the basis for wisdom, not mere knowledge reception. Further, Heidegger's approach reaffirms the centrality of taking responsibility for one's own decisions. As Vogel argues, 'Authentic Dasein does not evade the concrete ethical demands of its situation but encounters them with full awareness of its freedom and responsibility' (Vogel, 1994, p. 78). Character education informed by Heidegger would thus seek to develop neither mere rule-followers nor unconstrained individualists, but persons capable of assuming genuine responsibility for their moral choices. Surely part of what it is to become wise?

The Examined Life and Self-Knowledge

While self-obsession can be unhealthy, self-examination, from a Heideggerian perspective, means not merely rational scrutiny of beliefs and values but existential confrontation with one's Being-in-the-world. It requires acknowledging one's thrownness, recognising the ways one has drifted into inauthenticity, and projecting toward possibilities authentically owned.

This examination is particularly challenging because it must confront what is most unsettling: one's finitude and the anxiety it provokes. Yet this confrontation is not end but means—not depressingly dwelling on mortality but recognition that finitude structures all human possibility. As Carel observes in her application of Heidegger to medical contexts, 'The explicit

awareness of finitude can paradoxically enrich life by focusing attention on what genuinely matters' (Carel, 2006, p. 129).

Character education might therefore incorporate practices encouraging contemplation of mortality philosophically.. Such practices might help students develop what McGilchrist calls 'the courage to face into reality' rather than fleeing into comfortable illusions (McGilchrist, 2009, p. 174). However, at a pedagogical level, this idea of ‘mattering’ is, surely, the golden thread. What matters to students gets learnt – internalised. How often, as teachers, do we notice how our interactions with students are greatly enhanced when we share something of ourselves? Of our story. When what we see is a function of our *AUTH-orship*, its *AUTH-enticity* is conveyed with *AUTH-ority.*

Critique of Conformity and the They-Self

Heidegger's critique of the 'they' (*das Man*) offers valuable resources for character education in an age of social media, consumerism, and intense peer pressure. The 'they-self' represents the tendency to adopt opinions, values, and behaviours simply because 'one does,' without genuine appropriation or critical reflection. This is particularly acute among adolescents navigating the often binary and weaponised narratives to which they are immediately drawn.

Heidegger’s notion of inauthenticity points to the subtle pressures toward conformity whilst acknowledging that complete independence from social influence is neither possible nor desirable. The goal is not radical autonomy but authentic appropriation—taking up social norms and values in ways that acknowledge one's freedom and responsibility rather than simply drifting along with collective opinion.

This requires cultivating what we might call 'existential literacy'—the capacity to recognise when one is operating in the mode of the 'they' and when one is acting from authentic resolution. Such literacy involves noticing the difference between genuine conviction and mere conformity, between choices made from anticipatory resoluteness and choices made to avoid anxiety or social disapproval.

Practical and Ethical Considerations

Clearly, the approach suggested needs to be age-appropriate, not least as discussions on finitude can be both distressing and obscure to younger people. In addition, some argue that Heidegger's philosophy is fundamentally compromised by his politics, though others maintain that his existential phenomenology can be separated from his political choices, and that Being and Time articulates insights that transcend Heidegger's personal failings (Safranski, 1998).

Nevertheless, educators drawing on Heidegger must remain vigilant against misappropriation of his concepts. Authenticity must not become a licence for narcissistic individualism or rejection of ethical obligation. Being-toward-death must not justify pessimism or nihilistic withdrawal. The call of conscience must not supersede concrete moral demands or become a pretext for self-righteous certainty.

Integration with Other Approaches

Heideggerian insights need not replace other approaches to character education but can complement them. Aristotelian virtue ethics, for instance, provides a rich vocabulary for describing character excellences and practical wisdom for cultivating them. Heidegger's philosophy adds an existential dimension, examining the conditions under which virtue becomes authentically one's own rather than merely socially expected.

Similarly, care ethics' emphasis on relationships and responsibilities toward others complements Heidegger's analysis. Whilst Heidegger is sometimes accused of prioritising individual authenticity over social connection, his concept of *Mitsein* (Being-with-others) acknowledges that authentic existence necessarily involves relationships. Authentic care for others differs from inauthentic solicitude precisely in acknowledging both one's own and others' freedom and finitude (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 157-163).

As indicated above, careful reading of Heidegger's work also allows religious approaches to character education, such as those within my own school, to resonate with Heideggerian themes. Whilst Heidegger's philosophy is resolutely secular[3], his concepts of guilt, conscience, and authentic existence echo theological concerns about sin, grace, and redemption.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that Martin Heidegger's concept of Being-toward-death, despite its philosophical density and his own political journey, offers valuable resources for contemporary character education. His analysis reveals authenticity not as spontaneous self-expression but as achieved through confronting existence's finite, individuating structure. Anticipatory resoluteness—holding oneself in awareness of death as one's ownmost possibility—grounds genuine choice, moral autonomy, and self-knowledge, and contributes to an approach grounded in responsibility rather than victimhood, realism rather than fantasy and in a sense of one's value not dependent on validation in the public square.

These goals do not replace traditional virtues but provide their existential foundation. Courage, honesty, compassion, and practical wisdom achieve depth when rooted in authentic

[3] Though his impact on twentieth century theologians was considerable, see Williams, J. (1971).

self-understanding. Moral principles gain authority not merely from external sources but through personal appropriation in the context of finite, responsible existence.

The practical implementation of these ideas requires careful attention to developmental appropriateness, vigilance against misappropriation, and integration with other educational approaches.

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