Mineness and the Practical First-Person

Heidegger’s non-substantive account of subjectivity—coupled with his characterization of our everyday way of being as a lostness in the anonymity and averageness of the public realm—leads us to wonder whether there really is a Heideggerian “self” at all. Despite the tendency to read Heidegger—especially his later writings—as advocating some version of such a position, Heidegger recognizes that there is a sense in which there is nothing “less dubious than the givenness of the I” (BT 115/109). His deep concern is not to show that there is no I but to show that its very obviousness promotes its misunderstanding. The primary form that such a misunderstanding takes, as we have seen, is the view that the self can be understood in isolation from the worldly context of meaning in which it is immersed. In contrast, Heidegger argues that to be a self is to be open to the world and dependent on its meaning frameworks. Despite the importance of this reorientation, however, we cannot allow it to obscure the fundamental individuation and self-presence that also characterizes Dasein. As Heidegger notes, the very notion of the I contains an indication of the solitude of the self; it suggests that “an I is always this being, and not others” (BT 114/108).

The purpose of this chapter is to examine what the individuated, first-personal quality of Dasein looks like; in other words, how we can capture the traditional sense of selfhood as a kind of singular condition characterized by self-awareness. What can such first-personal selfhood look like on Heidegger’s account, considering his insistence that our everyday way of being does not consist of a distinct subjective “inner” realm that exists in isolation from an objective “outer” realm, but is defined, rather, by an intentional directedness that transcends sharp subject/object boundaries and finds shape for this intentionality in the world? The question of import, then, is what differentiates my first-person way of being from yours, if this being is not to be understood as isolated in some self-enclosed substantive subjectivity à la Descartes? What makes it mine and how do I have “access” to such a unique being?

Though Dasein’s individuation will not be fully explicable prior to a discussion of authenticity, here our purpose is to demonstrate the
manner in which Dasein is given to itself in an everyday way through the first-person *mineness* that characterizes all of its lived experiences. In what follows below, I will argue that this basic self-givenness cannot be characterized as a conceptual self-grasping but only as a kind of pre-reflective practical self-presence. On Heidegger’s account, the manner in which the self is present to itself is not primarily in terms of explicit self-knowledge or deliberate self-representation. Rather, the self is always and most fundamentally present to itself as *care* for its own being. It is this committed, caring “mineness” that constitutes first-person presence to self; a self-presence that is inherent in every intentional act that one undertakes, regardless of how steeped in averageness. Understanding this mode of self-presence will allow us to recognize how Heidegger can accommodate our sense that something like a self must remain—despite Dasein’s worldly averageness and its tendency to fall into inauthenticity. As we will see, a practical notion of the first-person differs from much of the current literature on this issue, which tends to champion some variety of a representational model of self-awareness—in which the first-person is a type of “I think” or “I reflect” that accompanies all of one’s actions.

Epistemic Self-Awareness

Sydney Shoemaker—a philosopher who has done a great deal of work on the problem of the first-person—argues in “First-Person Access” and elsewhere that in asking about the nature of the first-person, we are investigating “the mind’s epistemic access to itself . . . the view that each of us has a logically ‘privileged access’ to his or her mental states, and that it is of the essence of the mind that this should be so.” On this approach, self-awareness is taken to be a type of higher-order attitude or comportment that each of us takes toward our own thoughts or activities. Though Shoemaker recognizes that the notion of privileged access has been undermined not only by the Freudian subconscious but also by research showing how much of the mind’s activity is inaccessible to conscious inspection, he argues, nevertheless, that a weaker privileged access thesis can be supported, requiring that one need only claim (1) that such states are “necessarily ‘self-intimating’: that it belongs to their very nature that having them leads to the belief, and knowledge, that one has them,” and (2) that a person has a “‘special authority’ about what such states he or she has.”

Though the first claim regarding privileged access taps into the sense that the first-person involves the self’s immediacy to itself, this for-
mulation is nevertheless problematic: my everyday experience of self certainly does not seem to involve any “belief” or “knowledge” that I am experiencing my own thoughts; their nature is precisely one whereby such descriptions are ridiculous—there is never any doubt that my thoughts are my own and thus do not “lead to the belief” that they are my own.

The second point—that the first-person involves a particular type of authority—was taken by Descartes to champion a conception of the mind as completely transparent to itself, as well as a corresponding infallibility of the self-knowledge that this transparency would allow. According to Shoemaker, however, complete transparency and infallibility are not necessarily claims that such a position must advocate. Viewing first-person access as involving a particular type of authority is at a minimum “the claim that it is in some sense necessary that our beliefs about our mental states of these kinds be for the most part correct, and that a person’s belief that she has such a state creates a presumption that she has it, in a sense in which it is not true that someone’s having a belief that some other person has such a state creates a presumption that the other person does indeed have the state.” Such a claim nevertheless seems to commit one to the view that self-awareness involves true beliefs about having particular mental states, beliefs that one does not know to be true when applied to the mental states of others. On this picture, then, first-person self-awareness is a condition in which I know more about what is true of me than others do.

Such an epistemological orientation is representative of “higher-order” theories in general, which tend to characterize self-awareness as a type of upper level of representation that takes a non-self-aware experience as its object and thereby grants it its first-person feel. Thus Peter Carruthers claims in Phenomenal Consciousness: A Naturalistic Theory that “it is just such a manner of focusing which confers on our experiences the dimension of subjectivity, and so which renders them for the first time fully phenomenally conscious.” Like Shoemaker’s claims above, then, the debate is cast in terms of the self’s epistemic access to itself, an access that is itself supposed to bring with it the “what it is like” quality of first-person self-givenness. One’s mental states are conscious, such views hold, only insofar as they are represented in the correct way by other mental states or attitudes that take them as their object. Thus one can notice the tendency—inspired by Locke—to hold that self-awareness is essentially a kind of object-awareness simply turned “inward” toward the states, beliefs, or propositions bearing the relevant internal content. Accordingly, self-awareness is characterized as a particular kind of epistemic privilege; one is granted access by one’s “internal perception” to objects (propositions, mentalese, etc.) that are in principle no different than the
way I perceive external objects. I am aware of my “self” insofar as I am aware of the mental contents that are available for grasping in roughly the same manner that other objects are grasped. Insofar as one is aware of these mental-objects, one is self-aware.

In response to such approaches, phenomenologists have argued that basing first-personal self-givenness on object awareness fails to recognize the distinctive quality of the first-person. The problem, they argue, is that such approaches do not start at a sufficiently basic level—namely, at the condition of being present to oneself prior to the explicit grasping of distinct ideas or mental states. Starting at too high a level of representational thought creates the false sense that self-awareness is just object awareness turned inward—thereby obscuring the fact that object awareness itself contains the difficult problem of how I am present to myself as aware while I am engaged in any act of object-awareness (whether “internal” or “external”). The problem with such approaches, in other words, is the fact that they result in an infinite regress. If experience A is first-personally available because it is represented in a particular way by experience B, from whence does experience B obtain its ability to grant A its first-personal quality? Must it too be the object of some type of higher-order monitoring? If not, how can we account for the higher-order “I” that is itself doing the reflecting or perceiving?

Indeed, even if regress were not an issue, speaking this way seems to misrepresent the immediacy or transparency that is the essence of self-awareness. After all, explicit self-representations are quite rare and seem to be founded upon a more primordial self-presence. In recognition of this difference, Lynne Rudder Baker distinguishes between what she calls “weak” and “strong” first-person phenomena. The former refers to the condition of being a subject of perspectival experience at all, while the latter demands that one possess a concept of self and the ability to self-designate using “I.” Thus Baker’s account seems to acknowledge what many others do not: namely, that explicit self-grasping or self-designation requires a more basic self-givenness according to which all of my experiences are given as mine. As Zahavi puts it: “The very mastery of the first-person pronoun presupposes possession of self-conscious thoughts . . . linguistic self-reference articulates self-awareness, it doesn’t bring it about.” Even in the face of such a realization, however, Baker continues to count only the strong first-person phenomena as genuine self-awareness, a philosophical tendency that Heidegger rightly criticizes:

We must first of all see this one thing clearly: the Dasein, as existing, is there for itself, even when the ego does not expressly direct itself to itself in the manner of its own peculiar turning around and turning
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back, which in phenomenology is called inner perception as contrasted with outer. The self is there for the Dasein itself without reflection and without inner perception, before all reflection. Reflection, in the sense of turning back, is only a mode of self-apprehension, but not the mode of primary self-disclosure. (BPP 159)

Self-awareness is not primarily self-representation—some kind of Locke-inspired self-as-object experience. Rather, primordial first-person self-presence is intrinsic to the “mineness” of all of my experiences. I am typically aware of myself through the mode of givenness of my experiences, not because of an explicit awareness of my experiences. Thus Heidegger argues that all of our experiences are self-disclosive and the possibility of explicit self-representation arises out of a more basic self-presence characteristic of Dasein’s transcendence itself. Despite the fact that it is possible to engage in explicit self-reflection or self-representation, then, such objectifying modes of consciousness must be recognized as derivative of a more immediate presence to self: “The Dasein does not need a special kind of observation, nor does it need to conduct a sort of espionage on the ego in order to have the self; rather, as the Dasein gives itself over immediately and passionately to the world itself, its own self is reflected to it from things” (BPP 159). For Heidegger such thematizing knowing is always secondary to the way in which we generally live—in an unthematic tacit self-understanding present in the first-personal mode of givenness of all our experiences. Thus we cannot take our cues for understanding self-presence from a theoretical stance in which an autonomous epistemic subject observes an object (such as a belief or a proposition) laid out for its inspection. Though such stances are possible for Dasein, they are derivative of our everyday way of being in the world. Rather than modeling our understanding of first-personal self-presence to self on some type of abstract reflection, then, we must start with this primary self-disclosure and base any analyses of abstract reflection upon it.

By looking to Heidegger’s account of intentionality, we will find that Dasein’s basic self-givenness cannot be understood as something other than Dasein’s intentional transcendence toward the world. Rather, Dasein is present to itself in and through its intentional comportments toward that which it is not. This will become evident once we have examined the three features of intentionality that account for Dasein’s base-level selfhood. It is in terms of these features that we can understand how the self is characterized by first-person self-presence despite its intentional immersion in the world and its fundamentally social self-understandings. These features can be termed (1) directedness, (2) normativity, and (3) mattering.
Intentional Directedness

In *The Zollikon Seminars* Heidegger makes the Husserl-style claim that “intentionality means: Each consciousness is consciousness of something. It is directed toward something” (*ZS* 226). Elsewhere he exhorts us to recognize that “Dasein’s comportments have an intentional character and . . . on the basis of this intentionality the subject already stands in relation to things that it itself is not” (*BPP* 155). Though many contemporary discussions of intentionality speak of it in terms of discrete instances of directedness toward this or that thing, for Heidegger what is of primary concern is not the particular intentional act or thought, but the underlying relationality or transcendence that makes this directedness toward things possible.\(^\text{12}\) As we have seen in chapter 1, the directedness of specific intentional acts is, for Heidegger, rooted in Dasein’s way of being as an openness to or transcending toward the world. Dasein exists in such a way that it is never confined to some inner sphere, but is in its very essence directed toward things, engaged in particular relations with them, intentionally oriented to them. Understood as such, we are reminded how this first feature of intentionality undermines sharp divides between self and world: human beings exist as a relationality, not as some subjective thing-self occasionally bumping up against some objective thing-world.

But how does this “relating itself to” also include a kind of self-givenness? As we have already noted in chapter 1, Dasein’s transcending, intentional being is defined not only by immersion in the world, but also by a particular kind of self-disclosure. In *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* he will examine this notion further:

To intentionality belongs, not only a self-directing-toward and not only an understanding of the being of the being toward which it is directed, but also the associated unveiling of the self which is comporting itself here. Intentional self-direction-toward is not simply an act-ray issuing from an ego-center, which would have to be related back to the ego only afterward, in such a way that in a second act this ego would turn back to the first one (the first self-directing-toward). Rather, the co-disclosure of the self belongs to intentionality. (*BPP* 158)

It is clear from such statements that Heidegger is rejecting characterizations of the self-relation as a type of self-as-object for self-as-subject approach—which, as we saw, was a difficulty with higher-order theories of self-awareness. Rather, “the self which the Dasein is, is there somehow in and along with all intentional comportments” (*BPP* 158), and is not
“added on” through another intentional comportment. Dasein is fundamentally characterized by an intentional orientation to the world and this orientation itself involves a kind of presence to self—a co-disclosure of self—underlying all of its comportments.

Intentional Normativity

But in what way am I “there along with” all of my immersed engagements, if this cannot be understood as higher-order observation? Accounting for the nature of this kind of intentional self-presence requires us to consider the second feature of Heideggerian intentionality: the fact that Dasein’s world-directedness involves some type of responsiveness to the norms determining the success or failure of its comportments. It is this norm-responsiveness, I will argue, that characterizes Dasein’s non-epistemic self-givenness. Clarifying this inherently normative nature of first-person intentionality will bring us into dialogue with thinkers such as John Searle and Hubert Dreyfus, whose exchange on this point will provide us with an important context for understanding what Heidegger can contribute to this issue.

The normative dimension of intentionality is clearly articulated in Galen Strawson’s article “Real Intentionality,” where he argues that intentionality entails an “aboutness” or “taking as” that introduces the possibility of mis-recognition.\(^\text{13}\) In Heidegger, the normativity of intentional actions is evident in the fact that they are subjected to the social categories of meaning and use that determine whether these actions succeed in the activities toward which they are directed. Thus in Being and Time Heidegger claims that “when we take care of things, we are subordinate to the in-order-to constitutive for the actual useful thing in our association with it” (BT 69/65). We are subordinate to it insofar as worldly things have a specific “for which”: their meanings as the type of things that they are involve established conditions for successfully “taking them as” what they are—conditions to which our intentional activities are responsive.\(^\text{14}\)

As we discussed in chapter 1, this responsiveness is evident in the condition that Heidegger termed distantiality—wherein Dasein seeks to meet the norms of averageness by submitting its behavior to the accepted standards of normalcy. Recall that Dasein’s way of being qua “primary meaning” promotes the establishment and maintenance of worldly or “secondarily” meaningful ways in which its being-in-the-world can be fulfilled: “Factual life develops ever new possibilities of meaningfulness in which it can bestir itself and can in that way be assured of its own ‘mean-
ing’ (PIA 80). Such assurance comes in the form of normative constraints on its worldly self-understandings; Dasein subordinates itself to the norms of success and failure embedded in worldly practices, thereby providing a means for understanding how well it is succeeding in living up to the burden of having itself to be. As we can see, this second feature of intentionality—its subordination and responsiveness to conditions of success and failure—reinforces the worldliness of Heidegger’s view of intentionality insofar as these conditions are primarily public and shared.

What remains to be determined, however, is the manner in which the self is co-disclosed in and through this worldly norm-responsiveness. In order to answer this, we will turn first to John Searle and Hubert Dreyfus’s efforts to determine what type of self-presence defines intentionality. As we will come to see, though both accounts describe important characteristics of intentionality, their disagreement is ultimately rooted in the need for a more basic existential account of intentional agency. By first pointing up the weaknesses in their accounts, we will be better able to recognize just what Heidegger’s view can provide in this regard.

In Jerome Wakefield and Hubert Dreyfus’s article entitled “Intentionality and the Phenomenality of Action,” the authors demand an account of human action that can accommodate the first-person phenomenological features of acting—what it feels like to be acting—that allow us to differentiate bodily movements caused by reasons into those that are actions and those that are not. According to Wakefield and Dreyfus, John Searle’s notion of an “intention in action”—which they take to be “a representation of the goal of one’s action that both causes the action and is directly experienced as causing the action”—is meant to account for these features. However, since there appear to be bodily movements that should count as actions but are nevertheless without “the constant accompaniment of representational states which specify what the action is aimed at accomplishing,” they argue that Searle’s account fails.

According to Wakefield and Dreyfus, activities of “mindless coping,” such as brushing one’s teeth or driving to work, are actions in which no representation of the goal of the action shapes the action or persists throughout the acting. During such activities one is nevertheless responsive in some way to the situation in which one finds oneself, and one’s response “may be ‘aimed’ in a functional sense at achieving some larger purpose.” This non-representational “bodily” awareness accounts for the phenomenological distinction between voluntary and non-voluntary action, they argue, without requiring that all voluntary, self-aware action involve an “ongoing representation” of its purpose in order to regulate that activity. The authors thus distinguish between actions guided by representations of intentions and actions guided by
the non-representational “tendency to return to a gestalt equilibrium”—a tendency that does not require that we are “explicitly aware of what we are trying to do.”

In response to such criticisms, Searle has argued that Wakefield and Dreyfus’s descriptions of what is supposed to be the absence of intention-in-action is precisely an example of what intention-in-action is for him. In other words, because they speak of “a sense of deformation from and return to an optimal form or gestalt of the body-world relationship,” they are already invoking intentionality as “deformation” and “optimality” imply conditions of satisfaction that these actions have failed or succeeded at meeting. On Searle’s account, both “are forms of Intentionality in the sense that they can succeed or fail. They have conditions of satisfaction.” According to Searle, then, a conscious experience of acting is an experience of action that “involves a consciousness of the conditions of satisfaction of that experience.” Wakefield and Dreyfus seem to agree with this account insofar as the optimality of one’s response to the situation demands some type of awareness of one’s success or failure—or at least improvement and its lack—in responding to the situation in which one finds oneself. As Dreyfus claims, however, “in absorbed coping, the agent’s body is led to move so as to reduce a sense of deviation from a satisfactory gestalt without the agent knowing what that satisfactory gestalt will be like in advance of achieving it.”

The difficulty, then, becomes one of articulating the sense in which these conditions of satisfaction—and the experience of one’s own efforts to meet them—are present to the actor while she is acting. How am I present to myself as striving to be a certain way? Searle has already been forced to admit that certain types of action are intentional—responsive to conditions of satisfaction—without having to be explicitly before the mind as a representation of what that satisfaction would be like. He has granted, Dreyfus claims, “that in absorbed coping the agent need not have a representation of the end-state in order to be drawn toward it, and that the agent may find out what the final equilibrium feels like only when he gets there.” Nevertheless, Searle argues that activities of absorbed coping—while non-representationally intentional—only receive their intentionality—their directedness and their conditions of satisfaction—from an overarching representational intentionality. The “mindless” activities that fall under this umbrella intentionality are rooted in background capacities that do not themselves rely on the specific representation of satisfaction conditions. Such actions are instead “governed by the Intentionality of the flow, even though there is not, and need not be, any explicit representation of the intentional movement.”

But why does Searle feel compelled to insist upon this umbrella
representational intentionality, faced with what Dreyfus takes to be a perfectly adequate account of “body-intentionality” style responsiveness to conditions of improvement or deterioration? In contrast to Dreyfus’s emphasis on such mindless coping, Searle is motivated to argue that background capacities only function when they are “activated by genuine Intentional contents” out of the necessity of designating what would count as an “improvement” or “easing” of tension.27 For Searle, what counts as improvement must be determined on some level by an explicit articulation of what something is meant to be improving in terms of. The difficulty with Dreyfus’s account is precisely his failure to elaborate on the basis of the normativity inherent in any talk of the improvement or appropriateness of one’s actions. He thereby makes his account of “mindless” intentional action equally applicable to amoeba and to plants—or, for that matter, to those tightrope balancing toys that respond to changes in the environment “in order” to return to a certain gestalt equilibrium.28 In other words, stripped of all sense of purposive self-presence, Dreyfus’s account no longer strikes us as being about intentionality.

Dreyfus himself seems to recognize this danger at points, insofar as he fluctuates in his opinion about the relationship between absorbed coping and explicitly intentional action. On the one hand he claims that absorbed coping requires that “the bodily movements that make up an action must, indeed, be initiated by an intention in action with success conditions,”29 but on the other he claims that generally no representational intentionality is required: “Normally, absorbed coping does not need to be initiated by an intention in action, and so is more basic than intentional action.”30 Despite such conflicting claims, however, it seems that ultimately Dreyfus is committed to the latter claim, that “in general, when intentional action occurs, it is only possible on the background of ongoing absorbed coping . . . [which] is the background condition of the possibility of all forms of comportment.”31 For Dreyfus, then, an unthematic, mindless/bodily basic sense of appropriateness underlies all explicit articulations of success conditions—including those of representational consciousness and social institutions. We need not have any explicit awareness of what will count as appropriateness in order for our activities to be intentional.

If this is the case, however, it becomes very difficult to retain any meaningful sense of the word “intentionality” when it encompasses both human action and the equilibrium movements of inanimate objects. Unless we want to say that even the balancing statue’s movements are intentional actions—since its “body” is seeking equilibrium despite not having this equilibrium representationally present as a goal—there must be some middle path between Searle’s overly cognitive and Dreyfus’s overly “mindless” account of the manner in which the directedness and normativity of intentional acts are present to the actor while she acts.
This middle way is what Heidegger’s account provides. Like Dreyfus, Heidegger does not believe an explicit representation of one’s goal is necessary for one’s actions to be intentional, but like Searle, Heidegger will attempt to offer a more thorough account of the intentional directedness underlying all human action and the manner in which we seek to express this directedness than Dreyfus’s claim that the body seeks equilibrium. To fill this role, Heidegger’s position must be seen as a fundamental shift from an epistemic to a pragmatic sense of first-person self-presence. What counts as success or “appropriateness equilibrium” is present to the agent not as a type of knowledge or lack of knowledge. Rather, the first-person presence of these success conditions must instead be understood in terms of the manner in which they matter to the agent’s very existence.

Intentional Mattersing

This point brings us to the third feature of Heideggerian intentionality. In *The Zollikon Seminars* Heidegger claims that “one does not have representations, but one represents” (ZS 226)—a statement that is definitive for his understanding of selfhood as a particular manner of intentional agency, not as an inner arena with a privileged type of self-viewing. So too must such a shift be applied to the intentionality debate: seeking equilibrium and striving to meet represented success conditions both presuppose a manner of practical self-presence rooted in the fact that I care about their fulfillment; I am never indifferent to my intentional actions but am deeply invested in their success. Thus even when I am “mindlessly” driving home, such an action is infused with an intentional directedness—not because my body is seeking equilibrium or because I am consciously representing the successful goal of reaching home—but because I care about safely reaching home. My “mindlessness” thus nevertheless includes a type of pre-thematic awareness of the import of this success for my existence, an awareness that is expressed in my failure to run red lights or pull into oncoming traffic. It is in this sense that Heidegger can claim that all intentionality is experiential, not as a knowing of success conditions, but as a living them in terms of what they will mean for my life if I meet them:32

If the Dasein projects itself upon a possibility and understands itself in that possibility, this understanding, this becoming manifest of the self, is not a self-contemplation in the sense that the ego would become the object of some cognition or other; rather, the projection is the way in
which I *am* the possibility; it is the way in which I exist freely. The essential core of understanding as projection is the Dasein’s understanding itself existentially in it. Since projection unveils without making what is unveiled as such into an object of contemplation, there is present in all understanding an *insight* of the Dasein into itself. (*BPP* 277)

Heidegger recognizes that intentionality is not simply the directedness toward the world and the standards by which this directionality is measured—rather, on the most basic level, it is a *caring* about succeeding in measuring up that is present in every intentional act that one undertakes. Intentionality demands that meeting those conditions *matters* to the agent and thereby gives Dasein a way of “understanding itself existentially in it.” Dasein is co-disclosed in its striving to be something—a successful driver, teacher, parent, washer of dishes—because it has committed itself; because it understands the striving as a reflection of who it will be. Thus Heidegger’s characterization of intentionality avoids both the overly conceptual Searlean reading—in which acting intentionally must involve an *explicit* awareness of the goal or the satisfaction conditions that it establishes—and Dreyfus’s overly self-less understanding of intentionality, which lacks any sense of agency’s *mineness.* Rather, on the most basic level Dasein’s sustained caring for who it will be—the manner in which its various activities reflect it back to itself—is basic to self-awareness. All of my actions are grounded in the implicit awareness that whether I succeed or fail matters to me and reveals something about who I am. 33

For Heidegger, this investment in all of my actions and understandings is rooted in the fact that everything I do falls under my overarching responsibility for who I am. Each specific intentional action is encompassed by my intention to succeed at my own existence: “It is not the case that this being just simply is; instead, so far as it is, it is occupied with its own capacity to be . . . The Dasein exists; that is to say, it is for the sake of its own capacity to be” (*BPP* 170). All explicit representational intentions to succeed and all implicit bodily intentions to improve are rooted in this fundamental directedness or purposiveness. As Heidegger notes in a lecture course from 1921 to 1922, “caring always exists in a determinate or indeterminate, secure or wavering, *direction.* Life finds direction, takes up a direction, grows into a direction, gives to itself or lives in a direction, and even if the direction is lost to sight, it nevertheless remains present” (*PIA* 70–71). Indeed, for Heidegger this overarching intentional investment in the things that I do just is the self that is present in all of my comportments. There is no “self-object” to be grasped in introspection because the self is not a thing but a mode of existing that
can only be experienced in and through the existing itself. Thus Heidegger’s emphasis is on the responsibility of self-having—the fact that my way of being is normatively structured in terms of maintaining or losing, succeeding or failing at being this self that I have to be.

And furthermore, this being that we ourselves are and that exists for the sake of its own self is, as this being, in each case mine. The Dasein is not only, like every being in general, identical with itself in a formal-ontological sense—every thing is identical with itself—and it is also not merely, in distinction from a natural thing, conscious of this selfsameness. Instead, the Dasein has a peculiar selfsameness with itself in the sense of selfhood. It is in such a way that it is in a certain way its own, it has itself, and only on that account can it lose itself. (BPP 170)

For Heidegger, to exist as a self—as an I or a you—is to exist in light of a concern for what it means to be this self, a concern rooted in the fact that I am not guaranteed success and must therefore strive to achieve it. I care about this being who I am because I may fail at being it, and it is in terms of this concern that the normative conditions constraining my specific intentional acts are present to me as such.

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Heidegger recognizes that such a reconception of selfhood is contrary to our everyday understandings of the self, however, when he notes that “if the self is conceived ‘only’ as a way of being of this being, then it seems tantamount to volatizing the true ‘core’ of Dasein” (BT 117/110). In other words, reconceiving the self not as an inner arena or substance that “knows” the norms that constrain it but as a directedness that lives them in a self-aware yet non-representational way is foreign to the philosophical tradition. Nevertheless, he argues that “such fears are nourished by the incorrect preconception that the being in question really has, after all, the kind of being of something objectively present, even if one avoids attributing to it the massive element of a corporeal thing” (BT 117/110). On the contrary, the “substance” of human existing is one’s way of being as a “having to be”—as a commitment to one’s existence and the standards that allow one to judge one’s success in meeting this responsibility. This mattering that makes all my experiences be experienced as mine is what Heidegger designates Jemeinigkeit, or “mineness”:
The being which this being is concerned about in its being is always my own. Thus, Da-sein is never to be understood ontologically as a case and instance of a genus of beings as objectively present. To something objectively present its being is a matter of “indifference,” more precisely, it “is” in such a way that its being can neither be indifferent nor non-indifferent to it. In accordance with the character of always-being-my-own-being [Jemeinigkeit], when we speak of Da-sein, we must always use the personal pronoun along with whatever we say: “I am,” “You are.” (BT 42/40)

To characterize the caring self as simply “accompanying” all of its actions and understandings imports a substantive account of the self and thereby distorts its nature. Actions and understandings only have the structure that they do insofar as they are always already infused with the normative weight that is the essence of selfhood.

This understanding of the first-person—as being initially and for the most part not an indifferent self-observation but a care for the self that manifests itself in the things that matter to it and in its struggle to meet the standards to which it is committed—finds resonance in Richard Moran’s Authority and Estrangement, in which he launches a sustained attack on attempts to model “self-consciousness on the theoretical awareness of objects.” For Moran the first-person nature of a belief or intention does not reside in the relation that I have to this intention, but to a quality or character of the intention itself. This quality is the role that it plays in my life as a whole: “The special features of first-person awareness cannot be understood by thinking of it purely in terms of epistemic access (whether quasi-perceptual or not) to a special realm to which only one person has entry. Rather, we must think of it in terms of the special responsibilities the person has in virtue of the mental life in question being his own.” The fact that my beliefs and actions are invested with the weight of their role in determining who I am to be is what gives them their particularly first-person feel, thereby accounting for the “authority” of the first person to which Shoemaker alluded. This authority is not an epistemic one, however, but an existential one. I am not only in a position to avow that they are mine, but I experience them as being a statement—in the eyes of self and world—of what kind of person I am. As Moran puts it, “If it were simply a special immediate theoretical relation I have to this belief, then there would be no reason in principle why another person could not bear this same relation to my belief.” Because my beliefs and intentions express who I am, however, they are fundamentally characterized by mineness. For Heidegger, then, self-awareness must be understood as a way of living—not knowing or observing—one’s self-
ness. Indeed, as Kisiel notes, Heidegger was inspired by Dilthey in this regard, since he believed that “every psychic experience bears within itself a knowledge of its own worth for the whole of the psychic individual.”

It is important to note, however, that such responsibility for who one is to be is generally not explicitly acknowledged by the actor while she acts—the self-responsibility of existing comes explicitly to light only in the condition that Heidegger calls authenticity. Because Heidegger distinguishes between authentic and inauthentic selfhood in this manner—whereby the latter is understood as a fallen forgetfulness of self in the anonymity and averageness of das Man, and the former is a radical individuation accomplished through Angst, being-toward-death, and conscience—most Heidegger interpreters tend to focus solely on the explicit self-presence that characterizes authenticity. I am in agreement insofar as the mineness of existence—the fact that each of us is entrusted with the responsibility of her existing—rests upon the same existential structures underlying the possibility of authenticity. If we are to provide an account of our everyday sense of first-personal selfhood, however, we cannot turn to limit cases such as Angst—which reveals this existential care structure to us but thereby makes it impossible to simply live through it. Though this everyday, first-personal self-presence depends on the structures uncovered in Division Two of Being and Time, then—structures to which we will be returning in chapter 7—their authentic, explicit self-grasping is not a necessary prerequisite for an individuated self-presence within everydayness. Rather, these existential structures and their affiliated self-presence simply manifest themselves in an unthematized way in my everyday intentional orientation to the things that matter to me. The manner in which this existential care structure is present in and through everydayness lies in Dasein’s commitment and responsiveness to norms—in the fact that meeting them matters to it. “‘I’ means the being that is concerned about the being of the being which it is” (BT 322/296)—and this concern accompanies and shapes even Dasein’s inauthentic modes of being-in-the-world. Though it is possible to achieve a heightened form of explicit self-grasping in which these structures are recognized and owned as such, their activity in Dasein’s everyday way of being is no less prevalent for the absence of such explicitness.

The Worldliness of the Self

It is for these reasons that Heidegger claims that the everyday self understands itself from the world; it “initially finds ‘itself’ in what it does,
needs, expects, has charge of, in the things at hand which it initially takes care of in the surrounding world” (BT 119/112). But Heidegger does not mean that I understand myself from just anything that happens to be lying around—I understand myself, rather, from those things with which I am concerned. “When we take care of things, we are subordinate to the in-order-to constitutive for the actual useful thing in our association with it” (BT 69/65). I understand myself from the world by successfully subordinating myself to the norms of success inherent in the meaning of things and practices. Thus “the self that is reflected to us from things is not ‘in’ the things in the sense that it would be extant among them as a portion of them or in them as an appendage or a layer deposited on them” (BPP 161). Such an interpretation belies a false, substantive understanding of how we encounter things—we encounter things not as meaningless “stuff” but as part of our projects, as an “equipmental contexture” that need not be explicitly recognized or thought as such in order for it to orient us: “‘Unthought’ means that it is not thematically apprehended for deliberate thinking about things; instead, in circumspection, we find our bearings in regard to them” (BPP 163). To find one’s bearings is to have access to the markers and measures by which to orient oneself. It is to have one’s “directedness” find signs that one is heading in the right direction. In this case, the directedness under consideration is the intentionality that characterizes our way of being. We understand ourselves from the world because the world grants us standards by which to judge whether we are succeeding or failing at existing—whether we’ve gotten our bearings straight, so to speak.

The same reference to the world’s normativity is inherent in the language Heidegger uses to characterize encounters with the other Da-sein who reflect me back to myself: I measure my success against them in terms of social standards of success. As we already noted in chapter 1, this is what Heidegger terms distantiality: “There is constant care as to the way one differs from them” (BT 126/118). What characterizes this arena of social normativity is that it maintains itself in this typicality of “what is proper, what is allowed and what is not. Of what is granted success and what is not” (BT 127/119). This common project of subsuming ourselves to the measures of what counts as success is what led Heidegger to claim that in my everyday way of being I am in a sense not myself. As the above discussion has shown, however, this must not be read as a sort of absence of self; it must rather be understood in terms of a distinction between the care for self that motivates putting oneself up for measure and committing oneself to the norms that our activities embody, versus the source of the measures that allow us to understand ourselves. Though the latter is always public, worldly and “self-less”—the former is what makes one a
self present to itself as such. Though there is clearly an important difference between an everydayness in which I simply use the ready-made standards and interpretations that I find in the public sphere and an authentic conscience in which I seek norms rooted only in my own self-responsibility, the care operating in and through these modes of being is the same. The mineness of care differentiates me from the anonymity of public meaning, despite the fact that in our everyday way of being the norms of behavior through which this care is expressed are the same for all of us.

It is this necessary feature of intentionality that both Dreyfus and Searle miss: that regardless of whether I am responsive to standards of appropriateness or explicitly trying to meet standards of success, I must be present in the striving as a care for or commitment to being appropriate or successful. Dreyfus’s resistance to Searle’s attempt to abstract from indexical feelings of appropriateness in a particular context to formal social rules is likely rooted in this sense that intentionality is profoundly personal in this regard. Where Dreyfus’s account fails, however, is in neglecting to account for what type of normative responsiveness is operative such that absorbed coping can be differentiated from the intentionless equilibrium-seeking that defines even certain types of objects. Though we do, in a sense, move to reduce bodily senses of deviation without knowing what a satisfactory condition will be like in advance, it is an essential feature of our intentional way of being that we seek and establish worldly standards that will answer what a satisfactory condition will be like and submit ourselves to them. Though these “right answers” may not be codifiable in propositional form, they nevertheless fall under the overarching intentionality of a creature whose care for its own being drives it to seek equilibrium and measure the success of this seeking against public standards of success. Unlike Searle’s account, then—in which the directionality of the particular “mindless” activities must come from a propositional representation of some specific goal—Heidegger’s account allows us to recognize that normative conditions of satisfaction may be present to human action as an unthematic manifestation of care. And unlike Dreyfus’s account—in which this mindless coping is given no directionality other than a vague sense of “appropriateness”—Heidegger articulates a clear sense of what grounds all manner of satisfaction conditions; Dasein’s overarching need to orient itself in the world according to clear norms of what will count as successful existing. It is in light of this overriding intentional directedness that Heidegger can make room for our sense of the self as first-personal: as being radically and always present to self as one’s own, while nevertheless claiming that this selfhood is fundamentally worldly.
Heidegger’s account of first-personal self-presence as a normative intentional directedness grounded in care has a further advantage over other accounts of self-awareness: it can better account for the transition from everyday modes of experience to the standpoint of philosophical reflection. Accounting for this possibility is necessary if one wishes to claim that preconceptual, pre-linguistic experience is the fundamental mode of self-consciousness. As Dan Zahavi puts it, “the task is not simply to find examples of nonconceptual forms of self-awareness, but also to explain how these forms can give rise to fully fledged conceptual types of self-awareness, thereby making the latter comprehensible.” Heidegger’s shift of focus to the care-laden life of the self has implications not only for how we theorize selfhood but for the origins of the method by which we can engage in this kind of thinking at all.

As we have already seen, the early Heidegger was committed to phenomenological methodology—a method focused on first-person lived experience rooted in the recognition that any talk of appearing—that is, of phenomena—includes an essential reference to the lived experience of the one for whom things appear. By rethinking the being of the experiencer, however, Heidegger can account for methodological requirements overlooked by Husserl himself. While Husserl tended to equate first-personally grounded self-responsibility with apodicticity, Heidegger recognized this to be an inappropriate standard of assessment considering the nature of Dasein’s factual existence. By examining the nature of Dasein’s existing—and not simply assuming an epistemic model, as Husserl did—Heidegger can show not only that Dasein’s finitude and temporal dispersion make apodicticity virtually impossible to achieve, he can also show how Dasein’s fundamental self-responsibility grounds the possibility of first-person Evidenz. Husserl’s focus on the epistemic self prevented him from recognizing the existential motivation for Dasein’s move from everyday self-grasping to the explicit self-understanding necessary for philosophy itself. Despite the fact that Heidegger’s ontic/ontological distinction mirrors Husserl’s account of the transition from the naturalistic attitude to the transcendental standpoint, then, Heidegger develops Husserl’s account by examining the nature of the being capable of this kind of move. Heidegger’s existential reformulation of the self is essential for understanding the possibility and the necessity of engaging in philosophy at all, since it reveals that thematizing self-questioning can only arise as the result of a kind of breakdown within the smooth engagement of everyday life—a break that prompts one to adopt the transcendental perspective through which philosophy is possible. Thus Hei-
degger develops Husserl’s account by emphasizing (1) how the meaning of Dasein’s existence matters to it, (2) the fact that Dasein is responsive to norms capable of being made explicit, and (3) the manner in which failures or breakdowns in Dasein’s smooth coping provoke a shift to a reflective stance in which the meaning of its undertakings is explicitly considered. As Crowell puts it, phenomenology is “a radicalization of a tendency inherent in a truthful life”; its purpose is not to say something new, but to bring to light the structures that are always already operative on a pre-theoretical level. This is the meaning of Heidegger’s claim that “the ontic distinction of Da-sein lies in the fact that it is ontological” (BT 12/10). Namely, the fact that our being is at issue for us means that we are not simply responsive to normatively structured contexts but are capable of standing back from them to consider them for what they are. Philosophical self-grasping is only possible because we are always already intentionally oriented toward the normatively governed world and we care about how well we are measuring up to it. This existence matters to me, and it is for this reason that I can be present to myself both pre-theoretically and philosophically.