WILL AS COMMITMENT AND RESOLVE

An Existential Account of
Creativity, Love, Virtue, and Happiness

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In truth, however, the ultimate source of this book lies much earlier in my biography. Although its terminology reveals a Heideggerian pedigree, the idea expressed by the term "projective motivation" was one long before I read any philosophy. I have hung onto it, perhaps out of a spirit of resistance, through twenty years of studying and teaching a philosophical canon in which few of the greatest authors recognize self-motivational phenomena. In short, I acquired my idea of the will from the literary masterpieces of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, which I read in high school. This book is a testament to their view of the great powers and dangers of the human spirit. I also saw the striving will at work in my parents and grandparents, who in their own ways exhibited great relational strength.

But my greatest debt of all—one that transcends all these others—is to my wife Robin, without whom there would be not only no book but probably no author either. In addition to all her love and support, she has also read most of the manuscripts for grammar and typos. In her career, Robin gives new meaning to the biblical phrase, "Wonderful Counselor." In modifying our two wonderful children, she gave me the true meaning of commitment. I was drawn to Princeton University Press after college by interests in Kantianism, and to the Belkongen Series, but I found Robin there instead. Thank goodness I learned enough from Kierkegaard not to make her mistake! We see the choices we make, and not all of them have been good, but something gave me the grace to get the most important one right.

The Issue

Although it remains popular among educated readers of the general public, enthusiasm for the existentialist approach to personhood has been declining in academic philosophical literature since the late 1970s. In analytic philosophy, metaphysical writings on personal identity over time have disavowed existentialist contributions on the complex temporality of selfhood as ob- fuscation. Likewise, mainstream metaphysical authors have a new semantics for possibility, necessity, and existential properties; as a result, they have difficulty in making sense of the existentialist claim that for persons, "existence precedes essences," unless this is read just as a rather confusing way of saying that we enjoy some sort of libertarian freedom. Few grasp that the existentialist objection to "personal essence" is a rejection of theories such as Meinongian, Leibnizian monads, Kantian noumenal character, and Aristot- ean teleology, all of which the existentialist views as inaccurate forms of determination about human choice and motivation.

Moreover, since the development of contemporary modal logic, debates about the metaphysics of free will have been redefined in a language relative to which older existentialist writings on freedom may seem outdated. Debates about whether moral responsibility for particular actions and omissions requires say some of libertarian freedoms as existentialists commonly held, have also become much more complex since Harry Frankfurt's 1969 pre- sentation of putative counterexamples to the Principle of Alternative Possibilities. Yet these debates have every touch on the crucial question for existentialists: namely, what kind of freedom is required for responsibility for our own personality, character, and overall direction in life? This crucial question is addressed today only indirectly, as part of the theory of autonomy. Among non-Kantians, compatibilist theories of autonomy have gained
reflective theory of awareness without ever specifying that they need to reject
Sartre's rather devastating criticism of such theories. Their approach is thus
an anachronism that can be expected in the analytic world only because its
practitioners are ignorant of a whole tradition of thought that refuted this
approach some fifty years ago. Whether we accept the phenomenological
tradition's entire understanding of consciousness or not, relative to its
insights today's leading introspective theories of sensation must seem
obviously or even trivially mistaken. This would be something of an
embarrassment to contemporary analytic philosophy of mind.
Likewise, psychological theory ought not to discuss existentialism out of
hand as having too voluntaristic a conception of human motivational
powers. For theories of motivation in empirical psychology are influenced
by the history of moral philosophy, in which the dominant debate today is
between a range of neo-Humean positions according to which all motiva-
tion terminates in desires we simply acquire naturally or accidentally, and
neo-Kantian views according to which some motivation ultimately stems
from a choice to follow impersonal rational judgments. These extremes leave
no room for the rich picture of self-motivational capacities that existential-
istic writers explored even if it was never systematically explained. Part of
the goal of this book is to begin this systematic explanation, filling its large
gap in the existential tradition.

Bringing Existentialism Back into Contemporary Debates
Evidently then, a philosopher who hopes to demonstrate the contemporary
relevance of existentialism has her work cut out for him. He needs to de-
velop a conception of personhood that is recognizably existential—or
similar in key ways to the self as described by writers such as Kierkegaard,
Hegel, Nietzsche, and Sartre—but which takes into account the last fifty
years of developments in the many different areas of philosophy that di-
rectly affect our understanding of what it is to be a person. Pursuing this
goal requires work on several different fronts in order to bring ideas from
the existentialist tradition back into contemporary debates. Thus my larger
agenda is to develop a revised existential account of personhood covering
at least the following ten areas:
1. the lived experience of freedom and the development of morally
significance character
2. an account of individuality and freedom compatible with the narrative structure of our identity and our social nature as agents who hold one another morally responsible and whose language in ways involving implicit validity claims of several kinds;
3. the role of the will in shaping the ethos of a person, and the capacities of human motivation;
4. the concepts of autonomy and authenticity, and related interpersonal or reflective aspects of the will;
5. the freedom of moral responsibility for actions, decisions, and characters;
6. the notion of essence, objectionable forms of "essentialism" about individual persons, and in what sense there could be an "essence" of personhood;
7. the relationship between self-consciousness and willing in the structure of the self;
8. the arrow of time, our knowledge of modality, and their relation to libertarian freedom;
9. a deliberative conception of democracy that is appropriate to the existential self;
10. the function of faith in God, or personal relationship with the divine in the development of a self, and the related existential problem of evil.

Of course, this is an ambitious program. But a unified, consistent account that could speak to both contemporary analytic and Continental literature in these ten areas could restore existentialism to the prominence that it deserves by addressing the main metaphysical and moral questions of philosophical anthropology. The result will be a more sophisticated existentialism that can be presented in today's terms as a serious challenge to current dogmas in metaphysics and moral psychology and be defended against the ascendant normativism, Humanism, rationalism, comparison, or pragmatist alternatives. This conception of personhood will in turn provide new and better bases for ethics, the foundations of political philosophy, and perhaps even theology.

With the invaluable help of Anahita Raddi at coeditor, I have made a start on this agenda in *Kierkegaard After Machiavelli*. Essays by several scholars in this collection address areas 1 and 2 in the foregoing list by clarifying Kierkegaard's existentialist conception of personhood in relation to themes in contemporary moral philosophy. My own essay, "Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics," sketches out an existentialist account of our experience of freedom and defends the deep connection between ethical obligation and authentic willing. This essay also goes some way toward explaining the idea that the social and individual dimensions of human experience are interdependent. Although human persons are essentially social beings with nonvoluntary relationships to others, it is also essential to personhood that they develop a volitional relation to others, which is manifested in their "work" on their own motivational character. This interpersonal dimension of personhood is not simply derivative from or reducible to the interpersonal dimensions. Thus the existentialist emphasis on the individuality of human personhood is defended. Human persons are essentially social, but each person also essentially transcends her sociability and can change her acquired character. This does not conflict with the premises that a basis for ethics can be found in our social constitution.

This Book and Subsequent Steps
Will as Commitment and Resolve represents the next and most complex step in renewing the existentialist tradition. Focusing on the most influential historical accounts of motivation, along with some attention to closely related questions in moral theory and ethics, this book lays the groundwork for all the subsequent steps. In particular, without an adequate conception of willing, one cannot get to the root of long-standing dilemmas concerning freedom of the will or understand the freedoms required for the full range of moral responsibility. The idea of willing as a self-motivating process is also required to make sense of personal autonomy, authorship, and various forms of inauthenticity or "bad faith" that have concerned classical existentialists. The content of normative ethics also depends in crucial ways on starting from the right conception of the will.

Of course, the nature of the will and its relationship to human motivation is an enormous topic, and I focus only on those aspects of a theory of will and motivation that will be most important for these later steps. Tables 4 and 5 require focusing directly on autonomy and especially on Frankfurter's claim that persons are distinguished by their capacity to be concerned about and "identify with" or "allocate" their own first-order motives for acting. A full understanding of autonomy and authenticity depends on making sense of this great Frankfurtian insight; but Frankfurter's own approaches to explaining it all fall, because they never adequately distinguish volitional states with agent-authority from ordinary desires, which do not come with agent-authority built in. Frankfurter's phenomenological investigation of how we adopt and pursue reflective goals concerning our own motivational character sheds light on the existentialist picture of willfulness, but only the existential tradition has the resources to make sense of Frankfurter's notion of volitional "identification," and his closely related notion of volitional "carrying." I will argue that when we take a stand for or against particular dispositional desires, and emotions as possible motives for acting, this can best be explained in terms of the notion of projective motivation developed in the present book. So Will as Commitment and Resolve will, among other things, a prequel to my next book on volitional identification and autonomy.
anthropology and epistemology. In other words, objections A and B themselves reveal some transcendental conditions of our experience that provide useful information for philosophical anthropology in their own right (for example, that we are not so situated that we cannot even realize that we are situated, and so on).

Objection C poses different problems, but for the most part, the difficulty to which it refers becomes serious only in the philosophy of science and the philosophy of physics in particular. In moral philosophy and philosophical anthropology we never get theories that clearly save all the most relevant and reliable postulates and so we never get ones that do so equally well. The problem is more one of a phrasal judgment between incomplete accounts with different and still imperfect virtues. There is no solution for this other than containing the debate for indefinitely many further rounds. Thus qualified, the method I follow can still bear valuable fruit if it is done well.
Introduction

How far from both muscular heroism and from the soulfully tragic spirit of unselfishness does unceasingly add its little offering to the sponge cake at a Pfaffenklause is the plain, simple fact that a man has given himself completely to something he finds worth living for.  

I. The Heroic Will

Like many of key terms in philosophy, the word "will" is used in many different ways, and it has a complex etymology (connected to wele in Old English and uelus in Latin). In his attempt to bring this term back into psychotherapy, the psychologist Lewis Mumford lists several prominent senses of "will":

It is the mental agency that transforms awareness and knowledge into action, it is the bridge between desire and act, it is the mental state that precedes action (Arnett). It is the mental "organ of the future"—just as memory is the organ of the past (Arnold). It is the power of spontaneously beginning a series of successive things (Kant). It is the seat of volition, the "responsible mover" within (Ferber). It is the "decisive factor in translating equilibrium into a process of change . . . an act occurring between insight and action which is experienced as effort or determination" (Whistle). . . . It is a force composed of both power and desire. . . . To this psychological construct, we assign the label, "will," and to its function, "willing."

It is clear that the different theories, Yukon cases here are no offering explanations of the same item in our experience, and that this why any philosophical analysis of willing must first fix the basic sense(s) or concept(s) that it hopes to explain. Otherwise we will be trying to combine or decide