

Kurt Vonnegut, Martin Heidegger (*Being and Time*), and Søren Kierkegaard

"To the as-yet-unborn, to all innocent wisps of undifferentiated nothingness: Watch out for life. I have caught life. I have come down with life. I was a wisp of undifferentiated nothingness, and then a little peephole opened quite suddenly. Light and sound poured in. Voices began to describe me and my surroundings. Nothing they said could be appealed. They said I was a boy named Rudolph Waltz, and that was that. They said the year was 1932, and that was that. They said I was in Midland City, Ohio, and that was that. They never shut up. Year after year they piled detail upon detail. They do it still. You know what they say now? They say the year is 1982, and that I am fifty years old. Blah blah blah..." ~ Kurt Vonnegut, in "Deadeye Dick"

"Because Dasein is in each case essentially its own possibility, it can, in its very Being, 'choose' itself and win itself; it can also lose itself and never win itself; or only 'seem' to do so. But only in so far as it is essentially something which can be authentic--that is, something of its own--can it have lost itself and not yet won itself." [Being and Time, 68]

"Losing itself in the publicness and the idle talk of the "they," [Dasein] fails to hear its own Self in listening to the they-self. If Dasein is to be able to get brought back from this lostness of failing to hear itself, and if this is to be done through itself, then it must first be able to find itself--to find itself as something which has failed to hear itself, and which fails to hear in that it listens away to the "they." This listening-away must [be] broken . . . [by a call which] arouses another kind of hearing ; in other words, the possibility of another kind of hearing, which, in relationship to the hearing that is lost, has a character in every way opposite. [315-316]

"The call is from afar unto afar. It reaches him who wants to be brought back." [316]

"And to what is one called when one is thus appealed to? To one's own Self." [317]

"But how are we to determine what is said in the talk that belongs to this kind of discourse? What does the conscience call to him to whom it appeals? Taken strictly, nothing. The call asserts nothing, gives no information about world-events, has nothing to tell. Least of all does it try to set going a 'soliloquy' in the Self to which it has appealed. 'Nothing gets called to this Self, but it has been summoned to itself--that is, to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. The tendency of the call is not such as to put up for 'trial' the Self to which the appeal is made; but it calls Dasein forth (and 'forward') into its ownmost possibilities, as a summons to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self. [318]

"Hearing constitutes the primary and authentic way in which Dasein is open for its ownmost potentiality-for-Being--as in hearing the voice of the friend whom every Dasein carries with it." [206]

Heidegger was influenced by Kierkegaard:

When around one everything has become silent, solemn as a clear, starlit night, when the soul comes to be alone in the whole world, then before one there appears, not an extraordinary human being, but the eternal power itself, then the heavens seem to open, and the I chooses itself or, more correctly, receives itself. Then the soul has seen the highest, which no mortal eye can see and which can never be forgotten; then the personality receives the accolade of knighthood that ennoble it for an eternity. He does not become someone other than he was before, but he becomes himself. The consciousness integrates, and he is himself. Just as an heir, even if he were heir to the treasures of the whole world, does not possess them before he has come of age, so the richest personality is nothing before he has chosen himself, for the greatness is not to be this or that but to be oneself . . . (Either /Or, II, 177).