

## Chapter 1: What is the Question of Being?

The question with which we are concerned, which we have inherited from Heidegger, is the question of Being. There are many further things which can in turn be asked *of* this question, such as: why we should ask it, whether it can be answered, and even what an answer to it would look like. However, these further questions, important as they are, can only be answered on the basis of a proper formulation of the main question itself. Indeed, this question can only be *properly* answered after we have *properly* understood its significance, which is to say only on the basis of a thorough formulation. Providing such a formulation is thus a matter of great philosophical importance. However, if we are to live up to this task, then we must first examine and assess Heidegger's own attempts to formulate the question. It is only by doing this that we will get a grasp on the question, and only by getting a grasp on it that we might seek to provide a more adequate formulation of it than Heidegger's own.

Any examination of Heidegger's attempts to formulate the question of Being must begin with a study of *Being and Time*. This is because it is in this text that Heidegger first announces his attempt to reawaken the question of the meaning of Being, and, as such, all subsequent attempts at formulation both by Heidegger himself and by others are directly sensitive to it. How our own attempt at formulation is situated within this history of the renewal of the question of Being is thus determined first and foremost by its relation to this text. This chapter will thus focus upon the question as it is presented in *Being and Time* and those texts that immediately surround it. However, it will point to the ways that Heidegger's account of the question changes in his subsequent work, which will be discussed in more detail in the chapters that follow.

### **1. Being and Beings**

To begin with, we need to roughly delimit what it is that Heidegger takes himself to be referring to in using the word 'Being' (*das Sein*), and to lay out the various relationships between it and other important terms. Most important among these is the relationship between 'Being' and 'beings' (*das Seiende*), which can also be translated as 'entities', or simply 'what exists'.<sup>1</sup> Heidegger has a very loose conception of what counts as an entity –

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, the latter translation is strictly more accurate, given that 'das Seiende' is singular, rather than plural.

chairs, animals, planets, sonnets, numbers even, all are entities in some sense. Indeed, anything that we can think or talk about is a entity of some kind. Putting the breadth of this notion of ‘beings’ to one side, Heidegger initially defines what he means when he talks about ‘Being’ in terms of it: “When [B]eing is asked for, it involves inquiring into the basic character of the entity, what defines an entity as entity. What defines the entity as entity is *its [B]eing*.”<sup>2</sup> Or, alternatively: “In the question which we are to work out, *what is asked about* is Being – that which determines entities as entities, that on the basis of which entities are already understood, however we may discuss them.”<sup>3</sup> To paraphrase these remarks, beings count *as* beings insofar as they possess Being. However, this statement requires a certain amount of clarification.

First of all, Heidegger distinguishes between the Being of a *particular* being<sup>4</sup> and the Being of beings in *general*.<sup>5</sup> He also talks about *modes*, *kinds* or *ways* of Being (*Seinsarten* or *Seinsweisen*)<sup>6</sup>, which are restricted to particular kinds of beings. This means that entities such as hammers and chisels may have the same mode of Being, while plants, animals and numbers *are* in different ways. This gives us three levels: the Being that belongs to *each* given entity, the mode of Being it shares with *some* other entities, and Being as such, which it shares with *all* entities whatsoever.

However, we must be careful not to treat Being as a *genus* that all entities belong to. Heidegger is very explicit on this point: “Being, as the basic theme of philosophy, is no class or genus of entities; yet it pertains to every entity. Its ‘universality’ is to be sought higher up. Being and the structure of Being lie beyond every entity and every possible character which an entity may possess.”<sup>7</sup> What this means is that we cannot treat Being as if it were a *kind* to which all beings happen to belong, analogous to ‘dog’, ‘tree’, or ‘electron’, or even a *property* which all beings happen to possess, analogous to ‘redness’, ‘conductivity’, or

<sup>2</sup> *HCT*, p. 144.

<sup>3</sup> *B&T*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>4</sup> As far as I am aware, Heidegger never explicitly addresses this distinction, but he does repeatedly talk about both the Being of beings and the Being of particular beings. For a brief example of the latter, see his discussion of the Being of a school building in *Introduction to Metaphysics* (pp. 34-35).

<sup>5</sup> In his early work, Heidegger uses the expression ‘Being’ (*das Sein*) interchangeably with ‘the Being of beings’ (*das Sein des Seienden*) and ‘Being in general/Being as such’ (*das Sein überhaupt*). However, he later comes to oppose Being as such, or Being in itself (*das Sein im selbst*) to the Being of beings. At one point he even renames the former *Beyng* (*das Seyn*) to contrast it with the latter (which remains ‘*Sein*’). We will not go through the significance of these terminological shifts here, it will suffice to point out that we cannot always take for granted the constancy of some of these terms in Heidegger’s work. We will discuss these issues further in chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>6</sup> Heidegger uses the expressions ‘Seinsweise’ (usually translated as *way* of Being) and ‘Seinsart’ (usually translated as *mode* or *kind* of Being) interchangeably for the most part (cf., the lexicon to *BPP*, p. 367).

<sup>7</sup> *B&T*, p. 62.

‘mass’. This is because belonging to kinds and possessing properties is part of what defines beings as beings. To treat Being as a kind, property, or some set of properties that all entities have in common is thus to overlook precisely *what it is* for them to fall into kinds and possess properties at all, and thus to overlook Being proper. To think of Being in this way is to treat it as what Heidegger will later call *beingness* (*Seiendheit*).<sup>8</sup>

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger shows how this misunderstanding, when developed into the claim that Being is the highest genus, leads to two widespread contemporary assumptions about Being: that the concept of Being is empty, and that Being is indefinable.<sup>9</sup> He takes it that these assumptions are exemplified by Hegel’s explicit classification of Being as the ‘indeterminate immediate’, which is so empty as to be identical with Nothing. In denying that Being is the highest genus, he rejects the basis for the claim that the concept of Being has no content. Nonetheless, in denying that it is a genus at all, he accepts that it is not amenable to the ordinary process of definition through genus and species. It should be noted that Heidegger does not think that one cannot treat Being as beingness without adopting these assumptions. Indeed, he takes it that the metaphysical tradition has adopted a series of different non-empty conceptions of beingness across its history, although his specific account of this history and its importance changes throughout his work. It is simply the case that at this point he holds that the conflation of Being and beingness underlies a historical trajectory which culminates in the contemporary perspective, as exemplified by Hegel.<sup>10</sup> The claim that Being has consistently been understood in terms of beingness is one of Heidegger’s most persistent criticisms of the metaphysical tradition.<sup>11</sup>

We now understand that Being is not to be understood as anything like a property of beings, in virtue of the fact that it is that on the basis of which beings have anything like

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<sup>8</sup> Although Heidegger discusses beingness in several places, the best discussion of it is found in the fourth volume of Heidegger’s Nietzsche lectures (*Nietzsche: Volumes 3 and 4*, p. 156-157).

<sup>9</sup> *B&T*, pp. 22-23. Dreyfus points out that in one of his own personal copies of *Being and Time*, Heidegger wrote ‘beingness’ in the margin next to these passages, thus indicating that even though he had not yet coined the term, his thoughts about it are continuous with these earlier considerations.

<sup>10</sup> Both Heidegger’s account of the assumptions that characterise the contemporary perspective and his account of Hegel’s place within the history of metaphysics change in his later work. He comes to interpret Hegel as understanding beingness in terms of “Will – as absolute knowledge”, which is merely one stage in the history of metaphysics leading up to the end of metaphysics in Nietzsche, and the contemporary perspective of “Enframing” (*The End of Philosophy*, p. 66). We’ll discuss Heidegger’s relation to Hegel in more detail in chapter 4, section 3, part 4.

<sup>11</sup> Heidegger doesn’t directly address the issue of metaphysics in *B&T* in any detail, and his account of metaphysics and the metaphysical tradition does change across his work. His most detailed early treatment of the issue is found in *FCM*. His mature conception of metaphysics is best presented in *OCM*. We will discuss Heidegger’s account of metaphysics, its relation to the question of Being and the way it changes in more detail in chapters 3 and 4.

properties. However, we need to square this fact with the three levelled account of Being given above. The best way to understand this is to introduce some further concepts that Heidegger uses more heavily in the works that closely follow *Being and Time*, which deal with various *aspects* of an entity's Being: *what-being* (*Was-sein*), *being-so* (*Sosein*), *that-being* (*Dass-sein*), and *being-true* (*Wahr-sein*).<sup>12</sup> What-being and that-being roughly correspond to the classical notions of *essence* and *existence*, respectively, governing *what* an entity is and the fact *that* it is. If the what-being of an entity incorporates its essential properties, then the entity's being-so extends beyond these to include *all* of its properties, even those that are *accidental*. Being-so is that aspect of Being in which the possession of properties as such consists, and thus it cannot itself be a property.<sup>13</sup> This is what underlies the fact that none of the other aspects of Being, nor Being as such, can be understood as properties of beings, not even essential ones. Being-true is a more difficult concept to explain, as it is linked to Heidegger's idiosyncratic ideas about truth. We'll discuss these in detail in the third chapter. In addition to these, Heidegger also sometimes talks about *how-being* (*Wie-sein*)<sup>14</sup> in place of that-being, to refer to an entity's mode of Being. It is the case *that there are* stones, animals, and numbers, but *how they are* is different in each case.

We can thus see the outline of a notion of Being which is neither empty nor a property, albeit one that requires a great deal more elaboration. We can also see how Heidegger's distinction between the Being of a particular being and the Being of beings in general works on this basis. The Being of beings provides the universal structure of what-being and being-so as distinct from the particular what-being and being-so of any given being, whereas the Being of a particular being incorporates these particular aspects. The Being of a tree incorporates both those features which constitute it *as* a tree (e.g., its root system, its branch structure, its photo-synthetic processes, etc.) and those features which are accidental (e.g., its height, the number of its leaves, the distribution of its branches, etc.), and although it may or may not share some of these features with other beings, it at the very least shares the basic structure of having such features – Being as such.

<sup>12</sup> *FCM*, p. 348. The same list can be found, more or less, in Heidegger's analysis of the copula in *BPP* (p. 202). This is discussed in Section 3, part ii.

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted here that Heidegger tends to talk about 'properties' only in relation to what he will call occurrent entities, and he conceives of the being-so of other kinds of entities (paradigmatically available entities) in different ways. This is a more narrow use of the word 'property' than we are using here, which is simply meant to distinguish between the way that the characteristics of entities have been conceived in the tradition from the way Heidegger views the characteristics of other kinds of entities. Precisely what occurrent entities are, and what this difference consists in is explained in chapter 2.

<sup>14</sup> *BPP*, pp. 204-205.

We can also make some sense of the idea of modes of Being on this basis. The difference between beings that belong to different modes of Being is not analogous to the differences between beings that belong to different species of the same genus, such as the difference between dogs and cats (which are both species of mammals). They are not distinguished by the possession of different properties. Rather, it is differences in the way the aspects of Being (what-being, being-so, that-being, etc.) are articulated which distinguish between modes. This means that what constitutes a property between different modes of Being can be quite different.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, as we will see later on, the ordinary way that we understand the relation between what-being and that-being, the classical account of essence and existence, does not hold in the case of human Being (*Dasein*). This is a very rough explanation of the difference between modes of Being, but it does point to the possibility of differences between beings which are more than differences in the properties they possess. As such, it is adequate for our purposes.

We can now highlight Heidegger's second persistent criticism of the metaphysical tradition. He takes it that not only does the tradition think Being as beingness, and thus in terms of the *properties* of beings, but that it thinks Being in terms of *beings themselves*. It thinks Being in terms of a *highest being* which either functions as the exemplary being, in relation to which all other beings must be understood, as the cause of the existence of all beings, or both. The most classic example of this is obviously the role of God in both Aristotelian and Scholastic metaphysics, which is both the ultimate cause of all things and that being in relation to which the Being of all other beings must be understood (as *ens increatum* to *ens creatum*, respectively). Taken together, these two features of traditional metaphysics – thinking Being in terms of beingness and the highest being – constitute it as what Heidegger calls *onto-theology*.<sup>16</sup>

This allows us to introduce another concept of Heidegger's which is present within *Being and Time*, albeit without the name he comes to give it – the *ontological difference*.<sup>17</sup> This is the difference between Being and beings. The most primitive statement of this

<sup>15</sup> This is evident in the threefold distinction between beings with the character of *Dasein*, equipment, whose mode of Being is *availability*, and beings whose mode of Being is *occurrence*. *Dasein*'s being-so is articulated in terms of its possibilities for action, equipment's being-so is articulated in terms of the possibilities for action it offers to *Dasein*, and occurrent entities' being-so is articulated in terms of properties more classically understood, which are both actual and independent of *Dasein*. This will be discussed in chapter 2.

<sup>16</sup> Heidegger's most direct treatment of this is to be found in *OCM*. We will further discuss the significance of this conception of metaphysics in chapter 4.

<sup>17</sup> *BPP*, p. 17; part II.

difference is Heidegger's claim that "The Being of entities 'is' not itself an entity."<sup>18</sup> There are a number of different ways in which this difference can be interpreted. At the very least, it names the fact that the Being of beings in general is not *itself* an entity, and that the Being of a particular being is not itself an entity. We will call this *weak* ontological difference. A good example of a position that is excluded by this interpretation is Spinoza's metaphysics, which takes Being to be *a* being, namely, God or substance.<sup>19</sup> We will call *strong* ontological difference the interpretation which also holds that Being cannot be understood in terms of *particular* beings. A good example of a position that is excluded by this interpretation is Leibniz's metaphysics, which understands the Being of every being (or monad) in terms of a special being, namely, God.<sup>20</sup> We will then call *hyper*-ontological difference the interpretation which adds to the strong interpretation the claim that Being cannot be understood in terms of *properties* of beings, and thus can't be understood as beingness. Although the way Heidegger describes the ontological difference across his work is sometimes ambiguous as to which interpretation he endorses, it is clear from his criticisms of metaphysics as onto-theology that he endorses the strongest form of the principle.<sup>21</sup>

Leaving aside the question of whether all of the metaphysical tradition can be fit within this schema, and thus the accuracy of Heidegger's account of the history of philosophy, we can distil the central message of Heidegger's opposition to the tradition: Being must not be understood in any of the ways we understand beings, either as a being, or as a property of beings, because it is the very basis of such understanding. For Heidegger, we must endeavour to think Being on its own terms – a task which is as difficult as it is essential. The only way in which to perform this difficult task is to pose it explicitly as a question. Heidegger recognised this fact, and devoted most of his work to the attempt to do so, initially with the aim of *reorienting* metaphysics, but ultimately with the aim of *overcoming* it. We will examine this change of direction in subsequent chapters, but we must first address Heidegger's initial

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<sup>18</sup> *B&T*, p. 26.

<sup>19</sup> There are a number of interpreters of Spinoza who would disagree with this claim, as many have retroactively interpreted Spinoza's distinction between substance and modes as encompassing the distinction between Being and beings (REFERENCE). However, this interpretation cannot hold up to scrutiny of the initial definitions provided in the *Ethics*, which clearly distinguish between substance and modes as kinds of *things* that *exist* in different ways, namely, through themselves, or through other things (*Ethics*, 22). This makes substance a being in a very minimal sense, but it is nonetheless sufficient to distinguish it from Heidegger's understanding of Being, which is explicitly *not* an existent.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. G.W. Leibniz, *Monadology*.

<sup>21</sup> Heidegger's earlier statements of the principle (cf. *BPP*, p. 17, part II; *FCM*, 22) tend to be weaker than his later interpretations (cf. *CP*, §266; *OCM*), but this should not be seen as a major shift in position so much as the concept of ontological difference coming into its own.

attempt to formulate the question. Having cleared up some of the preliminary issues, we will now turn to the way this plays out in *Being and Time*.

## **2. The Question of the Structure of Questioning**

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger begins his attempt to formulate the question of Being by laying down a condition necessary for this formulation. This is the requirement that, in order to properly formulate the question of the meaning of Being, we must first lay out the structure of questioning in general, so as to reveal the special status of this question in relation to other questions.<sup>22</sup> This supplements the requirement (put forward later) that we must have *some* such understanding of the structure of questioning in order to formulate *any* question, as opposed to entering into it “just casually”.<sup>23</sup> In effect, this amounts to taking up *the question of the structure of questioning* as a condition of taking up the question of the meaning of Being. As we will show, that this question is taken up, and the way it is taken up, will go on to provide the structure of the inquiry laid out in *Being and Time*. It is important to note that Heidegger does not here demand a complete answer to this question prior to formulating the question of the meaning of Being. Instead, he provides a preliminary account of the basic structure of questioning on the basis of which the formulation proceeds. However, the inquiry into the meaning of Being thus formulated dovetails with the continuation of the inquiry into the structure of questioning. The significance of this will be examined in the course of detailing Heidegger’s preliminary account of questioning and its consequences.

Heidegger initially defines questioning as “a cognizant seeking for an entity both with regard to the fact that it is and with regard to its Being as it is.”<sup>24</sup> This means that questioning is always *about* or *of* something, and that its questioning is concerned both with its that-being and being-so. Heidegger then specifies this structure further, positing several fundamental features of questioning:-

- 1) A question always involves *that which is asked about*, or what we will call its *object*.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *B&T*, p. 24-25.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>25</sup> What must be emphasised is that the use of ‘object’ here is entirely assimilated to its use in the phrase ‘the object of a question’, and does not yet imply any of the connotations associated with its technical use in either Kantian transcendental philosophy, Husserlian phenomenology, or philosophical logic.

- 2) A question always involves *that which is interrogated* in this asking.
- 3) A question always involves *that which is to be found out* by this asking.
- 4) A question always involves *that which asks the question*, the questioning being, or what we will call the *inquirer*.
- 5) A question always involves some *prior understanding* of the object on the part of the inquirer, in order to guide the inquiry.

From these preliminary claims about the structure of questioning Heidegger derives several conclusions which provide the basis of his inquiry into the meaning of Being.

Heidegger first builds on the above claims by arguing that questioning belongs to the Being of the inquirer. This implies that the question of the structure of questioning must become the question of the Being of this inquirer. Thus, it is by proceeding with an inquiry into the Being of the inquirer that Heidegger will extend the preliminary account of questioning he has just given into a complete answer to the question of the structure of questioning. The formulation of the question will thus proceed by means of this new inquiry. Interestingly, Heidegger does not take such an inquiry as a condition of formulating all questions, for which he takes his preliminary account of the structure of questioning to be adequate<sup>26</sup>. The second implication that Heidegger draws is that *what must be interrogated* in the inquiry into the meaning of Being are *beings* in general. Unfortunately, this insight leaves us with no idea where to start the inquiry, as it seems to posit that all beings are equal in the eyes of the inquirer. Given this problem, Heidegger asks whether there is a particular being which has some priority in relation to the question, such that it alone might function as what is interrogated. Heidegger goes on to show that the inquirer itself possesses such a priority, and that, as such, the inquiry into the meaning of Being must begin with an inquiry into the Being of the inquirer. It is in this way that the question of the structure of questioning dovetails with the question of the meaning of Being<sup>27</sup>. How exactly Heidegger demonstrates this priority of the inquirer, and thus the confluence of these questions in the question of the Being of the inquirer, will be examined below.

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<sup>26</sup> *B&T*, p. 24-25.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.



## i) Phenomenology and Discourse

To explain this priority it will be helpful to skip forward in the text somewhat and first look at Heidegger's understanding of the method to be deployed in the inquiry, namely, *phenomenology*. Although Heidegger inherits this method from his teacher Husserl, he does not introduce it by way of an exegesis of Husserl's work. Instead he breaks down the word 'phenomenology' into the terms 'phenomenon' and 'logos' and then proceeds to uncover the original Greek meanings of the terms, and in doing so to differentiate them from the various ways in which they have been interpreted in the philosophical tradition. In doing this he clarifies what he means by 'phenomenology'. We shall rehearse his analysis briefly, in order that we can pick out the relevant points.

Heidegger distinguishes four distinct senses of 'phenomenon': "that which shows itself"<sup>28</sup> (or what we will call *manifestation*), *seeming*, *appearance*, and the Kantian understanding of 'phenomenon' as *mere appearance*. The first sense of 'phenomenon' is the manifestation of something *as* something. This understanding of phenomena is the advance of Husserlian phenomenology over the crude sense datum accounts of perception provided by empiricism (which are taken up by Kant). Husserl, following Brentano, claimed that we are not conscious of sense data, out of which we might construct objects, but rather that we are always already conscious of objects, and moreover that we are conscious of these objects *as* being a certain way. When I stroll through the park and encounter a tree, it is manifest *as a tree*. This object-directedness of consciousness is named *intentionality*. On the other hand, we also have encounters in which what a thing *seems to be* is other than it really is, e.g. what seems to be an elm is really an elder. This is the second sense of phenomenon as seeming. There can also be experiences in which what is encountered presents something else indirectly. This kind of phenomenon, which Heidegger calls an appearance, is that which shows itself in something else (rather than in itself), such as a disease which reveals its presence through a symptom, rather than being directly present. Lastly, the Kantian sense of phenomenon is understood as a mere appearance, in that what it presents (the *noumenon*) can never be encountered (i.e., it can never show itself other than through appearances).

Heidegger's important claim is that the latter three senses of the word 'phenomenon': seeming, appearance, and mere appearance, are parasitic upon manifestation. Something

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

cannot seem to be other than it is without being encountered *as* something it is not. Similarly, something must be encountered directly in order that it can indirectly point beyond itself, and the same holds of a mere appearance in which what is pointed to is itself unencounterable. Thus, seeming, appearance and even mere appearance are dependent upon manifestation. This notion of manifestation becomes the proper “*formal* conception of “phenomenon””<sup>29</sup> when we do not restrict it to the manifestation of beings as *kinds* of beings, but also allow it to cover the manifestation of other aspects of the Being of these beings, e.g., when we do not make a distinction between the manifestation of the tree as tree and its manifestation as green, tall, or any of its other characteristics. Heidegger claims that this formal sense provides the ordinary sense of the word ‘phenomenon’ when it is restricted to sensuous intuition.<sup>30</sup>

However, this formal sense is still not the sense of ‘phenomenon’ deployed in the word ‘phenomenology’. Rather, Heidegger characterises the phenomena which phenomenology deals with as what show themselves *within* all (formal) phenomena, but show themselves as prior to them, as the very conditions of their manifestation. The example which Heidegger provides of such phenomena are the Kantian forms of intuition (space and time), which show themselves in every manifestation, despite being covered over by the specific content of this manifestation. Heidegger characterises this kind of showing as *unthematic*, not only to indicate how what is shown is covered over by manifestation, but also the possibility of uncovering it, i.e., of it being *thematically* revealed, or *thematized*. Heidegger interprets this sense of ‘phenomenon’ as that of the original Greek word, taking it to mean “*that which shows itself in itself*”.<sup>31</sup> Heidegger also identifies the totality of such phenomenological ‘phenomena’ with the structure of Being itself. It is this move which ultimately allows him to identify phenomenology and ontology. This identification will become important later.<sup>32</sup>

Turning to Heidegger’s analysis of ‘logos’, he initially interprets it as ‘discourse’, but he takes this to be an incomplete specification of the meaning of the term, because discourse itself is understood in many ways. This has led to the rendering of ‘logos’ variously as

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>30</sup> It is important to note that Husserl had argued that there are non-sensuous forms of intuition, such as the intuition of mathematical objects, and Heidegger seems to follow Husserl on this point. The broad character of Husserl’s notion of intuition and its application to mathematics is explained well by Jaakko Hintikka in ‘The Phenomenological Dimension’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl*, pp. 78-105, §V-VI.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>32</sup> See chapter 2, section 4.

“‘reason’, ‘judgment’, ‘concept’, ‘definition’, ‘ground’, or ‘relationship’”.<sup>33</sup> The most important of these interpretations is that of ‘logos’ as judgment, positing, or assertion. This is because, since Aristotle, philosophy has characteristically understood the other variations (reason, concept, definition, etc.) in terms of some theory of judgment. Heidegger’s claim is that the proper sense of ‘logos’ as discourse is not only distinct from judgment, but that it is a condition of judgment, and thus that judgment and the other interpretations of ‘logos’ must be understood in terms of it. Heidegger claims that this proper sense is the original Greek sense of the word, which he translates as “[making] manifest what one is ‘talking about’ in one’s discourse”<sup>34</sup>, or as *letting* something be seen. This places his interpretation of ‘logos’ very close to the ordinary sense of ‘phenomenon’ he has just defined. They are nonetheless distinct, albeit closely related.

Discourse is the activity through which a phenomenon is *allowed* to show itself. Importantly, Heidegger thinks that discourse occurs in various forms, including, but not limited to: “assenting or refusing,” “demanding or warning,” “pronouncing, consulting, or interceding”<sup>35</sup> and requesting<sup>36</sup>. All of these forms of discourse let something be seen, but they do so indirectly in the course of doing something else. For instance, requesting lets the requested thing be seen, but only in order that it can be given. However, *apophantic* discourse makes what is talked about manifest directly, by pointing it out. It is as such the form of discourse which Heidegger is specifically concerned with here. The final point to make is that Heidegger conceives of the apophantic mode of discourse as *assertion*.<sup>37</sup> This should not be taken to mean that we can only let something be seen *as* something by asserting that it *is* something. We can talk about something so that it is brought to light *as* something, but, importantly, this need not be the same as asserting that this thing *is* something. This is the first point at which Heidegger introduces the elements of his reworking of the notion of truth as *aletheia* or *disclosedness*.

We will not discuss this reworking in great detail here<sup>38</sup>, as doing it justice would involve straying much further into the text than we wish to for the moment. What needs to be

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>37</sup> For all intents and purposes assertion can be treated as the act of expressing a judgment, and judgment as the internalisation of assertion. The tradition tends to give primacy to judgment, and treat assertion as derivative, whereas Heidegger takes the opposite tack. Which way is correct is not especially important here however.

<sup>38</sup> See chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of Heidegger’s account of truth.

understood is that Heidegger, following Husserl and in contrast to Kant, does not take experience to have the structure of judgment (e.g., my encountering the tree as a tree is not a matter of my judging that it is a tree). Judgments are the minimal unit that can be taken to be either true or false, that can be either affirmed or denied. This kind of truth, usually understood in terms of correspondence (or agreement with their object<sup>39</sup>), is only possible on the basis of the prior encountering of phenomena, in which the manifestation of something as something functions as the basis for making a judgment (what Husserl would call *evidence*<sup>40</sup>). This account applies quite well to the somewhat pedestrian examples of perceptual judgment, but it becomes a more complicated matter when we consider how it is that manifestation would underpin the truth (or falsity) of claims indirectly inferred from observation, or, even more importantly, claims about the phenomenological ‘phenomena’ that underlie all ordinary experience.

This is where Heidegger’s interpretation of discourse comes in. His point is that our talk about things can play the role of *eliciting* the kinds of manifestation which underlie our affirmation or denial of particular assertions, and that, importantly, this talk is not always the same as making those assertions. What this means is that our talk about things can open up a space for genuine *discovery*, and that although this discovery is not always a *perceptual* experience it is nonetheless a genuine encounter, a *showing* of something as something. This means that the discourse surrounding a particular scientific theory does not just take place on the basis of disclosures which are prior to or independent of the discourse itself, but that the very process of discussion can “let something be seen”<sup>41</sup> in such a way that it feeds back into discourse itself (by, for instance, grounding further claims). As such, for Heidegger, inference holds no special position in discourse. In fact, he barely mentions it in *Being and Time* at all. The way in which inferential or reason deploying discourse proceeds to ground its assertions is merely one type of elicitation among others. This fact will become very important in later chapters.<sup>42</sup>

Heidegger brings together these interpretations of ‘phenomenon’ and ‘logos’ to provide the sense of what he means by ‘phenomenology’: “[letting] that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself”.<sup>43</sup> What this means is

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<sup>39</sup> *B&T*, p. 56.

<sup>40</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, §5

<sup>41</sup> *B&T*, p. 56.

<sup>42</sup> See chapter 4.

<sup>43</sup> *B&T*, p. 58.

that phenomenology is the discourse through which what shows itself in all manifestation (but is covered over) is allowed to show itself (or is uncovered). We can also characterise this in the terms given above as the *thematization* of the unthematized content belonging to all ordinary experience. For Heidegger, this differentiates phenomenology from all other discourses, because it has no specific subject matter. This is to say that it does not concern itself with a particular domain of beings (e.g. the physical, the biological, the historical, etc.), but rather with all beings, and how they manifest as such *qua* beings. We can as such see Heidegger's motivation for equating phenomenology with ontology (the discourse upon, or science of Being), because, in taking as its object what is covered over in every manifestation of a being, he takes it that phenomenology concerns itself with the Being of beings in general. Phenomenology is thus the discourse of ontology, and in opposition to this all other disciplines (including the sciences) are *ontic* discourses. This distinction between the ontological and the ontic amounts to two different ways of understanding beings, in terms of the Being of beings in general, or in terms of differences between kinds of beings, respectively.

## ii) The Priority and Nature of Dasein

Having clarified Heidegger's understanding of 'phenomenon' we can now explain his initial account of the Being of the inquirer, the being which, in marked contrast to Husserl's 'consciousness', he dubs *Dasein*. On this basis, we can lay out Heidegger's argument for the priority of this being as that which must be interrogated in the inquiry into the meaning of Being. Reiterating what we laid out above, Heidegger has argued that the possibility of questioning belongs to the very Being of the inquirer, and it follows from this that *Dasein*'s Being should be initially understood in terms of the preliminary account of the structure of questioning Heidegger has already provided. The most important aspect of this account is the prior understanding of the object required to ask any question. This means that in order to ask about any given being, *Dasein* must have some prior understanding of the Being of that being. Although it appears only after this insight is fully established, it is helpful to appeal to Heidegger's analysis of phenomena to understand this. For Heidegger, in each case, this prior understanding of the Being of a being is just that provided by an encounter with it, i.e.,

through its manifestation as something.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, this same grasp of a being's Being is the condition of any kind of comportment toward it, be it questioning or otherwise (e.g., desiring it). However, a questioning comportment also anticipates a further manifestation in response to it, i.e., an encounter or discovery which answers it (or forms the basis for the articulation of an answer in the form of a judgment).

Heidegger argues that in order for Dasein to have some understanding of the Being of any being it comports itself towards, it must have some understanding of the Being of beings in general. This understanding of Being is not a theory about Being, or an *ontology*, but is rather a condition of developing any ontology whatsoever. Heidegger thus calls it the *pre-ontological understanding of Being*.<sup>45</sup> It is important to note here that there are two different kinds of ontology that Heidegger is concerned with, the *regional ontology* (or the development of basic concepts) underlying the ontic sciences, which deals with the mode of Being of a particular domain of beings (e.g., the physical, the social, the mathematical, etc.), and the *fundamental ontology* of his own project which deals with the Being of all beings.<sup>46</sup> The relation between these two types of ontology is one of grounding, insofar as fundamental ontology is supposed to ground the practice of regional ontology by providing a concept of Being in general. More will be said about this later, but for now it is important to note that the pre-ontological understanding of Being is a necessary condition of both. However, whereas in regional ontology the pre-ontological understanding functions much as it does as a condition

<sup>44</sup> This prior understanding of the Being of a being is later articulated more clearly as the *essence* of the being (c.f. *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, ch. 2). However, it is important to point out that this is a very phenomenological conception of essence, because although it might be opposed to the notion of *accidents*, it is not opposed to the notion of *appearance* or *seeming*. For Heidegger, the essence is not what lies behind the being's manifestation, but rather is the core part of that manifestation itself. Although not articulated in terms of essence, Heidegger's thoughts on this are present in his discussion of the *as-structure* of understanding in the existential analytic. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 2.

<sup>45</sup> *B&T*, p. 35.

<sup>46</sup> The project of fundamental ontology is sometimes read as identical with the inquiry into the Being of Dasein. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger seems to deny this, explicitly stating that: "The analytic of Dasein... is to prepare the way for the problematic of fundamental ontology – the question of the meaning of Being in general." (*B&T*, p. 227) However, in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, he states: "We therefore call the preparatory ontological analytic of the Dasein *fundamental ontology*... It can only be preparatory because it aims to establish the foundation for a radical ontology." (*BPP*, p. 224) It thus appears that what Heidegger means by 'fundamental ontology' shifts between these two works. This confusion is exacerbated by the fact that, despite Heidegger's retaining the question of Being as his problematic after *Being and Time*, he explicitly distances himself from the term 'fundamental ontology', and does this exactly as he distances himself from the idea that Being must be approached through the preparatory analytic of Dasein's Being. From this one would be tempted to conclude that fundamental ontology is not the analytic of Dasein, but rather the name of the methodological approach to the question of Being which takes its starting point in Dasein, which is the projected project of *Being and Time* as a whole. We will return to some of these issues later (in chapters 3 and 4), but for now we must make a decision as to how to use the term 'fundamental ontology'. For the moment, I will deploy the term in the original usage indicated in *Being and Time*, namely, as the project of grounding regional ontology through attempting to provide a concept of Being in general.

of comportment in general (albeit as grasping the mode of Being of a whole domain of beings), in fundamental ontology it provides the prior understanding of the object required to explicitly question Being *as such*. It is important to remember here that Heidegger strongly denies that Being is itself *a* being. This means that although Being is still the *object* of the question, and thus that there must be a prior understanding of it, it does not have the character of the prior understanding of an entity. This reveals the special status that this question has among questions, in that not only is it not a comportment towards a being, but also that the only prior understanding required to ask it is that understanding required to ask questions in general. However, this does imply that the *object* of a question need not always be a *being*.

Heidegger's aim is to establish the priority of Dasein in relation to the question on the basis of this pre-ontological understanding. In virtue of this understanding, Heidegger takes Dasein to be "ontically distinctive in that it *is* ontological."<sup>47</sup> This means that the kind of being that Dasein *is* is differentiated from other kinds of beings through having a relation to Being. This relation consists both in its pre-ontological understanding of Being, and in the possibility of questioning Being that this understanding provides. As Heidegger says, Dasein as inquirer "gets its essential character from what is inquired about – namely, Being"<sup>48</sup>. This is the basis of what Heidegger calls the *ontico-ontological priority* of Dasein.<sup>49</sup> The very fact that all ontology is only possible as an activity of Dasein, i.e., that it is a possibility belonging to Dasein's Being, makes Dasein the distinctive being which should be interrogated in the inquiry into the meaning of Being. However, Heidegger has not properly demonstrated that this pre-ontological understanding is an essential feature of Dasein's Being. The ontico-ontological priority of Dasein can only be established by showing that this understanding belongs to Dasein's mode of Being.

Dasein's Being has so far been understood in terms of its possibility of questioning in general, and then, through its possibility for questioning beings with regard to their Being, in terms of the understanding of Being in general that this requires. But, because we must now inquire into the Being of Dasein, and *we ourselves are Dasein*, this possibility of questioning beings with regard to their Being must be divided into Dasein's possibility of questioning itself and its possibility of questioning beings other than itself. Heidegger uses this twofold structure of questioning as it belongs to the Being of Dasein to introduce a twofold distinction

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<sup>47</sup> *B&T*, p. 32.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

in Being itself: between *existent* beings and *extant* beings.<sup>50</sup> This distinction elaborates the difference between Dasein and other beings opened up by Dasein's exclusive relation to Being. Moreover, it is a difference in mode of Being, such that there must be the possibility of a regional ontology of the mode of Being that Dasein exhibits.

Only beings of the character of Dasein *exist* in Heidegger's sense of the word.<sup>51</sup> Existent beings are those that can question themselves, and whose very Being is fundamentally structured by this possibility of questioning themselves. What this means is that the possibilities of existent beings are understood in terms of their questioning relation to these very possibilities. Dasein's possibilities are its ways of being (or existing), and as such they are possible answers to questions about itself and how it is. In turn, Dasein can only answer such questions by existing. It thus answers a question by being one way rather than another – by realising one of its possibilities, or, by making a choice (even withholding choice is itself a possibility of Dasein, and thus itself a choice). Even when it does actualise a possibility, this actuality is still understood as a possible way to continue actualising or to abandon. As Heidegger puts it: "Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence – in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself."<sup>52</sup>

However, this means that the choices Dasein makes do not define *what it is*, as it can always choose to be another way. Rather, Dasein's what-being is characterised by its *existence (Existenz)*, or the fact that it is related to its own Being in this way. By contrast, extant beings simply *are what they are*. This difference can also be understood two further ways. First, it can be understood in terms of the relation between possibility and actuality. Whereas *what* extant things are is a matter of actuality, Dasein *is* nothing other than its possibilities for Being.<sup>53</sup> Secondly, the difference between the existent and the extant can be understood as the difference between the 'who' and the 'what', because although Dasein does not determine *what it is* through choosing, it does *individuate* itself as *who it is*.<sup>54</sup> We can now

<sup>50</sup> It is important to note that the word '*vorhanden*' is translated in various ways: as 'present-at-hand', 'extant' and 'occurrent'. However, whereas later in *Being and Time* Heidegger distinguishes between occurrent and available (*zuhanden*) entities (see chapter 2), he initially uses the term to indicate all entities that are not Dasein. This sharp distinction between Dasein and non-Dasein is drawn explicitly in the first chapter (*B&T*, p. 71). As such, we use 'extant' for this earlier more general use, and 'occurrent' for the more technical use developed later.

<sup>51</sup> Heidegger's notion of *Existenz* is not to be confused with the classical notion of existence, or the notion of that-being (*Dass-sein*) correlative to it.

<sup>52</sup> *B&T*, p. 33.

<sup>53</sup> In the analytic of Dasein, Heidegger thus inverts the classic Aristotelian notion of the priority of actuality over possibility. Dasein just is its possibilities, and even the possibilities it actualises (through choosing them) are understood as possible ways it could continue to be.

<sup>54</sup> *B&T*, p. 71.



see more clearly what we noted in the last section – that the difference in mode of Being between existent and extant entities is at least in part a matter of how their what-being and being-so is articulated.

All of this amounts to the fact that existence is constituted by a distinctive kind of self-relation. Unlike other entities, Dasein is *concerned* with its own possibilities. Given that Dasein just is its possibilities, this means that Dasein is “distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it.”<sup>55</sup> Heidegger calls this the *ontic priority* of Dasein. However, this concern with its own Being also means that Dasein must have some understanding of its own *mode* of Being. The fact at Dasein is concerned with the particular possibilities presented to it implies that it must have some grasp of the general structure of these possibilities and its relation to them. Therefore, an understanding of existence is a constitutive feature of existence itself. Heidegger calls this the *ontological priority* of Dasein. Now, Heidegger argues that this understanding of existence must presuppose some understanding of Being *as such*. Moreover, he argues that this understanding of Being cannot simply be restricted to existence, but must extend to the Being of extant beings. This is because “being in a world is something that belongs essentially”<sup>56</sup> to Dasein. What this means is that Dasein’s possibilities essentially involve ways of comporting itself toward beings other than itself, such as questioning.<sup>57</sup> Dasein thus has a pre-ontological understanding of Being which incorporates an understanding of the modes of Being of both existent and extant beings. In demonstrating this, Heidegger has shown the ontico-ontological priority of Dasein, and thus also that Dasein is the being which is to be interrogated in the inquiry into the meaning of Being.<sup>58</sup>

Moving on, Heidegger applies the distinction between the ontological and the ontic to the distinction between the existent and the extant. This combination leads to a distinction between the *existential* and the *existentiell* structures of the existent Dasein’s Being<sup>59</sup>. The former existential structures are the ontological aspects of the Being of existent Dasein, whereas the existentiell structures are the ontic aspects. Dasein’s various choices or

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>57</sup> This point isn’t really justified in the introduction, but it does become clear in the subsequent analysis of the existential structure of Dasein. See chapter 2 for a more in depth discussion of this.

<sup>58</sup> It is interesting to note that the three different priorities that Dasein displays correspond to the three levelled account of Being provided earlier. Dasein is concerned with its own *particular* Being (ontic priority), it has an understanding of its *mode* of Being (ontological priority), and it has an understanding of Being *in general* (ontico-ontological priority).

<sup>59</sup> *B&T*, p. 33.

possibilities are thus understood as existentiell modes of its Being. Also, in opposition to the existential, the ontological aspects of extant beings are understood, following the tradition from Aristotle to Kant, as *categories*.<sup>60</sup> Thus, Heidegger can then specify that the inquiry into the meaning of Being must proceed via an *existential analytic of Dasein*.<sup>61</sup> This means an inquiry into the structures of existence *qua* existence, which is necessary because it is these structures which constitute Dasein's pre-ontological understanding of the meaning of Being. This existential analytic is a kind of *regional ontology*, because it is a description of the mode of Being belonging to a certain domain of beings, namely, human Dasein.<sup>62</sup> However, Dasein's ontico-ontological priority means that this domain is not simply one among others. All other regions are domains of *extant* beings, whereas there can only be one domain of *existent* beings, and the regional ontology of this domain – the existential analytic – grounds the regional ontology of all other domains (including, as we shall see, itself), precisely through being the necessary preliminary to fundamental ontology. Moreover, just as fundamental ontology in general is made possible by Dasein's pre-ontological understanding of Being in general, so the existential analytic is made possible by Dasein's understanding of itself *qua* existent.

### iii) The Direction of *Being and Time*

We will conclude this rehearsal of Heidegger's initial attempt to formulate the question by briefly sketching the direction in which it leads. Heidegger identifies that the resulting inquiry (the inquiry into the meaning of Being via the Being of Dasein) takes the form of a *hermeneutic circle*. This is opposed to a vicious circle, which, as Heidegger points out, the structure of the inquiry can be easily confused for.<sup>63</sup> This confusion is generated by the fact that we are trying to determine the Being of all beings on the basis of first determining the mode of Being belonging to a specific domain of beings, while the proper understanding of

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 70-71.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>62</sup> This regional ontology of Dasein, as well as playing the role of preliminary to *fundamental ontology*, was also meant to play the role of grounding the *geisteswissenschaften* (which could loosely be translated as the human sciences). This aspect of the project is made more explicit in its earlier version, *History of the Concept of Time* (pp. 1-7). This is a goal that Heidegger inherited from Dilthey and Count Yorck, along with a conviction that the *geisteswissenschaften* are fundamentally distinct from the natural sciences. This is indicated in *Being and Time* (§77), and Theodore Kisiel has done admirable work further explicating this influence on the early Heidegger in his book *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*.

<sup>63</sup> *B&T*, pp. 27-28.

the latter seems to require a proper understanding of the former. However, Heidegger maintains that rather than being engaged in a process of deducing the former from the latter, which would entail vicious circularity and make the inquiry impossible, we are engaged in a hermeneutic process of allowing our provisional understanding of one to illuminate the other, and vice versa, thus progressively enhancing our understanding of each through a process of mutual revision.<sup>64</sup> As such, the existential analytic is only a preliminary account, which proceeds by way of our pre-ontological understanding of Being, and which must ultimately be revised on the basis of the account of Being it leads us to.<sup>65</sup> The analytic is founded upon the basic insight that Dasein's Being distinguishes itself as *Being-in-the-world*. We won't go into what this means in detail here<sup>66</sup>, but it is important to note that, on the basis of this insight, Heidegger posits a second hermeneutic circle which is purely internal to the existential analytic itself. This is due to the fact that Being-in-the-world is a unitary phenomenon. As such, its individual parts (Being-in, world, and the who of Dasein) can only be understood in relation to their place within the whole structure, meaning that any attempt to elucidate these parts must be continually revised in light of their relations to one another as they appear.

As we have shown, the existential analytic of Dasein performs two complementary functions. The first of these is the elaboration of the structure of questioning as a possibility belonging to the Being of Dasein. This is not something which takes place after the formulation of the question of the meaning of Being, but rather is the continuation of this formulation. As we have seen, Heidegger claimed that the question could only be formulated by bringing out its special status in relation to other questions. Although this special status was provisionally indicated in relation to the preliminary understanding of questioning Heidegger laid out in his introduction, it can only be fully elaborated when the structure of questioning is understood completely. Thus, the complete formulation of the question of the meaning of Being is its delineation as an existentiell possibility of Dasein's Being, grounded in the existential structures which ground questioning in general. The second of these is the

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<sup>64</sup> See chapter 2, section 1, part *ii* for a more detailed discussion of Heidegger's account of hermeneutic understanding.

<sup>65</sup> Heidegger makes this point explicitly in the second half of the introduction to *Being and Time* (p. 38). It is possible to read this statement as referring to the provisional status of Division I, and its repetition in Division II. However, the original projection of Division III includes as its third part the 'Thematic analysis of Dasein, or renewed repetition of the preparatory analysis of Dasein' (Thomas Sheehan, "'Time and Being' 1925-27", p. 188, in *Thinking about Being*).

<sup>66</sup> See chapter 2.

beginning of the inquiry into the meaning of Being itself via interrogating that being which has priority in relation to the question, in virtue of its Being being structured in terms of its relation to Being in general. However, the aspects of Dasein which provide this relation are precisely just this existentiell possibility of asking the question of Being and the existential structures supplying the pre-ontological understanding of Being in which it is grounded. The two functions of the existential analytic coincide perfectly, and it is thus the case that for Heidegger the formulation of the question of the meaning of Being does not take place before the question is asked, as if it were separate from it, but is properly the beginning of asking the question itself.

Division I culminates in an interpretation of Dasein's Being as *care*. Heidegger attempts to give a new and very complex meaning to this word, which we cannot analyse without recapitulating the rest of the existential analytic that we have skipped over. However, this interpretation of Dasein as care is not a *primordial* interpretation.<sup>67</sup> This is because it does not grasp the Being of Dasein as a unified whole. Heidegger's important claim is that the only way to consider Dasein in such a way is in terms of its *being-towards-death*, which underlies its individuating self-relation and as such provides the unity of its existence. However, this being-towards-death can only be understood in terms of temporality, and as such the analysis needs to be recapitulated, so as to reinterpret Dasein's existential structures in these terms, thus effectuating the hermeneutic circle internal to the analytic. This analysis of Dasein in terms of what Heidegger calls its *ecstatic temporality* (Division II) was then supposed to lay the ground for the inquiry into Being in general beyond the Being of Dasein, but the published version of the book ends before this is achieved. Although the existential analytic it contains provides a variety of additional resources for formulating the question of Being, and Heidegger hints repeatedly at the important role that time will play in the corresponding inquiry, it falls short of fulfilling either of its functions. However, there are several works which cover some of the ground originally projected to be tackled in the unpublished sections of the book.<sup>68</sup>

Heidegger's original intention was to demonstrate that temporality is the condition of the possibility of Dasein's pre-ontological understanding of Being, and on this basis to secure time as the *horizon* for the interpretation of the meaning of Being. The resulting interpretation

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<sup>67</sup> *B&T*, pp. 274-278.

<sup>68</sup> Most important among these are *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* and *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*.

would then locate the meaning of Being in the structure of *primordial temporality* (*Temporalität*), and settle many of the problems of classical ontology in temporal terms. *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* goes some way toward doing this<sup>69</sup>, and as such provides the closest thing to the complete formulation of the question, and the beginning of the fundamental ontological inquiry itself, that Heidegger originally intended. Regardless, Heidegger's work proceeds scarcely any further along the path it outlines. The promise of an answer to the question of the meaning of Being interpreted in terms of time was never fulfilled, at least not in the way initially imagined.<sup>70</sup>

### **3. Unanswered Questions**

Before moving beyond *Being and Time* to address the way that Heidegger tries to complete the formulation of the question he begins there, and the various changes that his approach to the question subsequently goes through, it is important to address an issue that the preliminary formulation is rather unclear about, namely, what Heidegger means by 'meaning' in his preliminary formulation of the question of the *meaning* of Being. We can break this down into three interrelated issues: what it is to ask the question of the meaning of Being as opposed to the more obvious question 'What is Being?', whether there must be some understanding of the nature of meaning as a condition of formulating the question correlative to that of the understanding of the structure of questioning, and what precisely it is to interpret the meaning of Being on this basis. Heidegger says several things about the first issue, albeit without making it entirely clear what his position is, he is strangely silent on the second, despite actually providing an in depth account of the nature of meaning in the existential analytic itself, and he is also unclear on the third, despite also providing a general account of interpretation in the existential analytic. If we are to have any hope of assessing the effectiveness of Heidegger's initial attempt to formulate the question, then we must first deal with these considerations.

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<sup>69</sup> *BPP*, part II. See chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of this.

<sup>70</sup> Heidegger's later work does not abandon this insight about the essential relation between Being and time, but it develops it in a way very different from his earlier approach. This is best evidenced by the symposium *Time and Being*, which shares the title of the projected Division III of Part I of *Being and Time* that was never published. However, this must be understood in the context of the shift in Heidegger's understanding of the question, which is discussed in chapters 3 and 4.

### i) The Question of Meaning

The first issue that concerns us is why Heidegger asks after the *meaning* of Being. On the face of it, such a question seems opposed to that regarding Being as it is *in itself, in truth, or in essence*. Given this, it is important to understand why Heidegger asks the question of the meaning of Being rather than the question “What is Being?”. Of course, the obvious answer to this is that the problem Heidegger diagnoses, and proposes to solve at the beginning of *Being and Time*, is that we do not know what this expression ‘Being’ means, not that we do not know what that which the expression refers to – Being – *is*. However, this is not an entirely satisfactory response. Importantly, it tells us nothing about the relation between these questions, such as whether the question of the meaning of Being is a necessary precursor to asking what Being is, or whether it precludes any such question.

Furthermore, Heidegger’s approach to the question as a question of meaning seems to escape the ordinary logic of such questions. For instance, although Heidegger raises the problem by asking after the meaning of the expression ‘Being’, wreathed in quotation marks, he quickly disquotes the word, and his usage in the rest of the work suggests that he is talking about its referent – Being – directly.<sup>71</sup> More problematically though, as we have already noted, Heidegger explicitly interprets the question of the meaning of Being as taking Being itself as its object, rather than an expression, a meaning, or some other purely intentional object. When taken together with the fact that Heidegger for the most part disquotes ‘Being’, this would seem to indicate that Heidegger is really concerned with what Being *is*, rather than what ‘Being’ *means*. It seems like the only way to get a grip on the significance of the fact that the question is a question of meaning is to understand the relation between these two kinds of question: “What is *x*?” and “What does ‘*x*’ mean?”, or what we might call questions of *essence* and questions of *meaning*, respectively.<sup>72</sup>

Now, as we’ve already noted, Heidegger does provide his own theory of meaning within the existential analytic. It would thus seem to be a sensible suggestion that we tackle this theory first, and then give an account of the significance of the question as a question of meaning on its basis. However, this approach is undesirable for a number of reasons. First

<sup>71</sup> This is an interpretative problem that others have come up against, such as Herman Philipse in his book *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Being* (p. 32), and Ernst Tugendhat in *Self-Consciousness and Self-Determination* (pp. 147-150).

<sup>72</sup> It is important to note that we aren’t proposing an account of what constitutes *essence* here. By essence we simply mean *whatness*, or *quiddity*, and this is simply to be understood in terms of the structure of “What is...?” questions, rather than the other way around.

and foremost, doing so would prevent us from providing a genuine answer to the second question we posed above, namely, whether we require some understanding of meaning in order to formulate the question (analogous to that of questioning), insofar as it would concede that the question only makes sense in relation to Heidegger's completed theory of meaning. Secondly, although we are indeed concerned with Heidegger's formulation of the question here, our aims are not strictly exegetical. We are attempting to get a grip on the question that will let us assess Heidegger's approach to it, and it is thus important to separate out the structural features of the question from other aspects of Heidegger's thought wherever possible. Finally, leaping straight in to a discussion of Heidegger's theory of meaning would obscure any reasons why the question of Being must be a question of meaning that are independent of the specific way Heidegger conceives the nature of meaning.

Given this, we will initially consider the question of Being in relation to the ordinary logic of questions of meaning and essence. Ultimately, we will need to supplement this with an account of Heidegger's theory of meaning, but in taking this approach the various issues will be laid out more clearly. Moreover, in attacking the problem this way, we will remain true to the original quandary through which Heidegger motivates his project, namely, that there is some familiar sense of the word 'meaning' in which we do not know what the word 'Being' means. It is all too easy to lose sight of this problem if we simply defer to the fact that Heidegger has his own, idiosyncratic notion of meaning. However, there are two difficulties confronting this approach. On the one hand, our analysis of the question should no more be dependent on some alternative theory of meaning than it should be on Heidegger's account. On the other, we must be careful not to make any claims that are incompatible with Heidegger's account of meaning, lest we present the question as something wholly other than what Heidegger has in mind. We will thus try to restrict ourselves to claims about the way these different kinds of question are *used*, rather than trying to give an account of the nature of meaning itself.<sup>73</sup>

The first thing to get clear about is that when we are talking about questions of meaning, we are talking about questions which ask after the meaning of an expression (e.g., 'dog', 'red' or 'Being'). We are thus unconcerned with questions about what complete sentences mean, be they individual sentences or sets of them (e.g., 'What does "The cat sat on

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<sup>73</sup> This does not mean that we will refrain from using technical vocabulary, such as logical and grammatical terms. These are necessary to describe the subtle features of our use of questions of meaning, but they need not imply anything about what meaning *is*.

the mat” *mean*?”, or ‘What does Joyce *mean* in the first paragraph of *Ulysses*?’). We are also unconcerned with a variety of other questions which are putatively about ‘meaning’, such as questions about the underlying intent or purpose of some action (e.g., ‘What did he *mean* by doing that?’), or the wider significance and consequences of some fact or state of affairs (e.g., ‘What does the selection of a new chancellor *mean* for the university?’).

We can also exclude questions about the meaning of an expression that are relative to a given speaker (or group), such as “What does Hegel *mean* by ‘Spirit’?”, because neither does Heidegger offer any suggestion as to whose use of the expression ‘Being’ he is interested in, nor would it make any sense for him to do so, given the above discussion of his attempts to formulate the question. Now, when we talk about the meaning of an expression there is a group of speakers to whom the question is implicitly related, namely, the speakers of the language that the expression is part of (e.g., “What does ‘dog’ mean in English?”). This implicit reference is of course necessary to disambiguate cases in which the same word means different things in different languages. However, this kind of relativity is different to that of the previous kind of question, insofar as we are not interested in what any given member of this group of speakers takes the expression to mean, but rather what they *should* take it to mean. Questions which are not relative to a particular speaker or group thus ask after the *ideal* or *proper* meaning of the expression.

The *prima facie* difference between questions of meaning and questions of essence is that the former demands less than the latter. If we ask “What does ‘mitochondria’ mean?” we will generally settle for a short explanation, something which is good enough to let us develop a grasp of what is talked about (e.g., ‘Mitochondria are a part of animal cells’). On the other hand, it seems that if we already have such a grasp, we may still ask ‘What *are* mitochondria?’, and that in this case we are asking for something more, such as a detailed elaboration of the current theories surrounding the nature and origin of mitochondria. Now, the problem with this intuition is that the grasp we require of an expression can be more or less refined, often depending on the technicality of the discourse in which it is used (e.g., we might need to know *which* part of the cell is a mitochondria, in order to keep up with a presentation on cell structure). However, it seems as if, if there was a dispute over the real nature of mitochondria (e.g., over the way they function in relation to other parts of the cell), then asking ‘What does ‘mitochondria’ mean?’ should *at most* get us to the point where we can understand the dispute, and the answer should not settle it. In these cases, it seems like



the dispute about what mitochondria *are* is distinct from a dispute about what ‘mitochondria’ *means*.

Now there are those that hold that there is in fact no distinction here, not because we have any authority over what things are, but rather because things have authority over what we mean. Such *semantic externalists* effectively collapse questions of meaning into questions of essence (e.g., what ‘mitochondria’ *means* just is what mitochondria *are*).<sup>74</sup> I won’t argue for or against this view here, as to do so would be to advocate precisely the kind of theory of meaning we are trying to avoid. Nonetheless, I think it is unimportant, because even if there are questions of meaning distinct from questions of essence, the question of Being cannot be one of them. We must now endeavour to demonstrate this.

To show this it is helpful to understand how the two kinds of question can overlap. The first way is in what we might call *casual* questions of essence. These are questions of the form ‘What is x?’ that are used in essentially the same way as questions of meaning. This is to say that they are used simply to get a grip on the use of an expression, rather than to push past this to more substantive issues where potential disagreements lurk. For example, if I have never heard the word turbulence before, I might ask ‘What is turbulence?’ in place of ‘What does ‘turbulence’ mean?’, and be quite willing to accept an answer which stops short of discussions of fluid mechanics. There is nothing strictly wrong with such casual questions, but it is important to note that they do not indicate a proper structural overlap between questions of essence and questions of meaning, as much as they indicate that there is a blurry line between the levels of understanding each kind of question seeks. On the other hand, there is a serious overlap in the case of terms with stipulated definitions. For example, it seems as if there can be no difference between the answer to the question ‘What is a bachelor?’ and ‘What does ‘bachelor’ mean?’ insofar as we accept that a bachelor is nothing more than an unmarried man. This is most definitely a more structural overlap between the two kind of question.

Here we run into the traditional problems surrounding the analytic/synthetic distinction. This is the idea that there are some claims that are true in virtue of their meaning (e.g., ‘All bachelors are unmarried’) and some claims whose truth is independent of their meaning (e.g., ‘Mitochondrial DNA is always inherited from the mother’), these claims

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<sup>74</sup> Saul Kripke and Hilary Putnam are the most famous semantic externalists, although there are differences between their positions. Robert Brandom also holds to a variant of semantic externalism, although it is quite radically different from both Kripke and Putnam’s positions.

being analytic and synthetic, respectively. Given the fact that the debate over Quine's famous critique of the distinction has still not yet settled, and that we still wish to refrain from advocating any particular theoretical account of meaning, we will not endeavour to take a stance on whether such a distinction can be drawn. However, we can see that these issues are present in our discussion of the difference between questions of meaning and questions of essence. It seems that the questions pull apart precisely insofar as the expression can be used to express true claims that are in excess of the true claims which constitute answers to the question of what the expression means (putatively *synthetic* truths), and they converge in those cases where there is no excess (where there are only putatively *analytic* ones).

The reason that the questions converge in the case of defined terms is that the authority underlying the term seems to be something that in some very loose sense 'we' have contributed. In some sense, *we* have defined bachelors as unmarried men, and, insofar as that definition is held firm, there is nothing more about what bachelors *are* that can be uncovered. On the other hand, regardless of how we have begun using the word 'mythochondria' to refer to mythochondria (whether through an originary act of naming or through a provisional definition), our continued experiments and the debates surrounding them may uncover what mythochondria *are* in excess of any grasp we have of them in using the term 'mythochondria' properly. In this latter case, mythochondria themselves are given some authority over what we should say about them, in a way that bachelors are not.

If, *contra* semantic externalism, questions of meaning can be given some independence from questions of essence, it is precisely insofar as there is some sense in which the proper meaning they seek is not determined by the things themselves. This means that if questions of meaning are to be distinct from questions of essence, that they must in some way appeal to an authority other than that of the things themselves. This appeal is indicated by the implicit reference that questions of meaning make to the community of language speakers. However, Heidegger does not relativise the question of the meaning of Being in any way. He does indeed take it that all Dasein have a pre-ontological understanding of Being, which falls short of a proper understanding of Being, but all Dasein do not thereby constitute a linguistic community that uses the same word for Being. Moreover, even if we could read this pre-ontological understanding as analogous to a linguistic understanding of an expression, Heidegger does not present the question *simply* as a matter of making it explicit, but rather as a matter of trying to develop this preliminary understanding into a proper

understanding of the thing in itself (a genuine *concept* of Being). As such, if we can separate questions of meaning from questions of essence in terms of some limit beyond which the former will not push, then the question of the meaning of Being cannot be an ordinary question of meaning, insofar as the fact that it takes Being itself as its object could always force it past such a limit.

Thus, either there is no substantive difference between questions of meaning and questions of essence, or there is a difference, but it is not one that can support an interpretation of the question of Being as a question of meaning. Given this, and the fact that Heidegger's own use of language is often ambiguous, it might seem reasonable to interpret Heidegger as simply asking the question "What is Being?", albeit in a slightly confused manner. However, in the introduction to *Being and Time*, Heidegger implicitly differentiates his own question from the question "What is 'Being'?"<sup>75</sup> This textual evidence should not be abandoned, because it provides a good reason *why* we cannot ask what Being is. The reason is that in asking that question "we keep within an understanding of the 'is', though we are unable to fix conceptionally what that 'is' signifies."<sup>76</sup> Essentially, what this means is that asking what Being *is* already presupposes some understanding of Being, as expressed here as the copula 'is'. Of course, there are already two other senses in which an understanding of Being is presupposed in asking this question: firstly, the sense in which any questioning comportment requires some understanding of Being; and secondly, the sense in which any question requires some understanding of its object, the object in this case being Being itself. However, this new sense is special, because the very form of the question is sensitive to the answer to be provided.

It might be objected to this that our pre-ontological grasp of the 'is' seems good enough for other claims we make, and so should be good enough for claims about Being. However, Being is manifestly an unusual case, and it is by no means obvious whether the 'is' functions in the same way in relation to it as it does with other things. Whether this is the case or not is thus to be determined by inquiring into Being, and it is for this reason that the question has a peculiarly reflexive structure. Although this is not technically a problem for a complete answer to the question (because it would fully specify both what Being *is* and thus also what the 'is' here signifies), it is very problematic for any partial answer. Given that answers do not spring fully formed from the ether, but are the culmination of processes of

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<sup>75</sup> *B&T*, p. 25.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

inquiry that proceed via such partial answers, this makes a genuine inquiry into ‘what Being is’ impossible in virtue of its own form<sup>77</sup>.

We are thus left with an apparent paradox: the question of Being cannot be a question of meaning in any *ordinary* sense, nor can it be a disguised question of essence, and these are the only *apparent* options. If this was the case, then Heidegger’s whole project, and our own attempt to rekindle it, would be doomed from the start. However, if we turn to some of the sources motivating Heidegger’s taking up of the question of Being, we will find further resources to understand in what sense the question of Being is a question of meaning.

## ii) The Origins of the Question

Heidegger famously stated that his interest in the question of the meaning of Being came about through his introduction to Brentano’s book *On the Many Senses of Being in Aristotle*.<sup>78</sup> This book opened his eyes to the problem of the unity of the manifold ways in which ‘Being’ is said by Aristotle. However, whereas Brentano stands firmly in the tradition which reads Aristotle as binding the various senses of ‘Being’ together by means of the primary category of *substance*, Heidegger rejects this interpretation, and sees in Aristotle the beginnings of something far greater: “This sentence, [beings are said in many ways], is a constant refrain in Aristotle. But it is not just a formula. Rather, in this short sentence Aristotle formulates the wholly fundamental and new position that he worked out in philosophy in relation to all of his predecessors, including Plato; not in the sense of a system but in the sense of a task.”<sup>79</sup> Heidegger takes it that Aristotle’s positing of a manifold of senses of Being is not simply the analysis of the various contingently related senses of a homonym, but rather that this manifold expression “implies a certain pervasive oneness of the understood significations”.<sup>80</sup> To provide some further background, Heidegger follows Brentano in interpreting Aristotle as dividing the saying of ‘Being’ into four distinct senses: potential and actual being, being as being-true, accidental being, and the being of the categories. This fourfold division is further

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<sup>77</sup> It is evident from the text that Heidegger’s concern with this reflexivity stays constant, because in talking about being directly (saying that Being ‘is’ this way or that way), he places quotation marks around the ‘is’ to stress the problematic character of such expressions. For example: “Being ‘is’ only in the understanding of those entities to whose Being something like an understanding of Being belongs.” (*B&T*, p. 228).

<sup>78</sup> In both ‘My Way to Phenomenology’, published in *On Time and Being*, and his letter to William Richardson published as the preface to Richardson’s *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*.

<sup>79</sup> *Aristotle’s Metaphysics* *Θ* 1-3, p. 10.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

complicated by the tenfold multiplicity of the categories, substance being the primary category of which the other nine (quantity, quality, relation, place, time, action, affection, possession, and position) are attributes.

So, Heidegger acknowledges that, for Aristotle, substance plays the role of unifying the multiplicity of the categories, but denies that it unifies the fourfold multiplicity. He also denies that the fourfold is not unified at all, as if the various senses of 'Being' were entirely unrelated, and fell under the same word by accident. To justify this latter point he takes up Aristotle's claim that there is a unity of analogy between the four senses, and tries to elaborate what such a unity could mean.<sup>81</sup> He does this by taking the word 'healthy' as his example, and looking at several different ways it is used: as describing a state of an organism (e.g., 'being a healthy person'), as describing something that indicates health (e.g., 'having a healthy complexion'), and as describing something which promotes health (e.g., 'going for a walk is healthy'). These different senses of healthy are certainly not unrelated (as are for instance the 'bank' of a river and a 'bank' one can deposit money in), yet they are not unified by a single genus, of which they would be species. Rather, the latter two senses are related via the first and primary sense of the word. It is this kind of interrelation of senses through a "sustaining and guiding basic meaning"<sup>82</sup>, which characterises the unity of analogy.

Although Heidegger takes Aristotle to conceive of the unity of the fourfold sense of 'Being' in this way, he does not take Aristotle to have actually posited a primary sense of 'Being' (not even the being of the categories, itself unified by substance) let alone to have uncovered the structure linking the various senses via this primary sense.<sup>83</sup> It is important to

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<sup>81</sup> Philipse attempts to provide an analysis of the relation between Heidegger's question of Being and the Aristotelian problematic in the second chapter of his book. Here he points out correctly that there is a confusion between analogy proper and the phenomenon of *paronymy*, and that Aristotle himself confuses the issue at at least one point (pp. 89-93). However, in the tradition following Aristotle this unity has come to be discussed under the title of the *analogia entis*, and Heidegger retains this practice. As such, we will follow both the tradition and Heidegger himself in referring to it as a unity of analogy. For an even more detailed discussion of the various ways the same word can be taken to mean different things and the relation of this to the Heideggerian problematic, see Kris McDaniel, 'Ways of Being' (*Metametaphysics*, pp. 290-319). However, I do not agree with McDaniel's conclusions about Heidegger's project, and will address them below.

<sup>82</sup> *Aristotle's Metaphysics*  $\Theta$  1-3, p. 33.

<sup>83</sup> Here Heidegger is in disagreement not only with Brentano but also with much of subsequent Aristotle scholarship. For instance, Philipse (pp. 87-98) constructs an interpretation of Aristotle at odds with Heidegger on precisely this point, although it is arguable that he doesn't seem to recognise how these differences undermine his own reading of Heidegger's relation to Aristotle. It should also be noted that Heidegger's reading of Aristotle on this particular point seems to shift, and that he at times characterises Aristotle as providing a direct, albeit inadequate, answer to the question as part of the metaphysical tradition. Regardless, we needn't take Heidegger's interpretation to be correct in order to recognise how his particular reading of Aristotle shaped his concern with the question of Being.

note that locating the primary sense of ‘Being’ is not the same as unveiling the underlying structural unity of the manifold of senses, even though it is a necessary part of it.<sup>84</sup> Essentially, Heidegger sees in Aristotle’s declaration of the manifold senses of ‘Being’ the original posing of the question of the meaning of Being, understood here as the question concerning the structural unity underlying this manifold. It is in this sense that Aristotle has set up a *task* rather than a system. Yet, after Aristotle this task was forgotten, and the unity of analogy ceased to indicate the promise of an underlying structure, and came simply to indicate an *aporia* – an insurmountable difference between the various senses of ‘Being’.<sup>85</sup>

Despite the fact that Heidegger finds much inspiration in the work of Aristotle, it is clear that he does not take up the question of the meaning of Being by attempting to unify the manifold of senses of ‘Being’ that Aristotle presents. Much can be said about Heidegger’s inversion of Aristotle’s privileging of actuality over potentiality, or indeed of his attempts to locate many of the themes that will come to make up *Being and Time* in his early work on Aristotle’s<sup>86</sup>, but none of this amounts to taking up the problem exactly as he finds it in Aristotle. Nonetheless, that Heidegger does not take over verbatim Aristotle’s own account of the manifold senses of ‘Being’ does not mean that he does not accept that there is such a manifold, nor that the task of the question of the meaning of Being is the uncovering of its underlying unity. Indeed, although Heidegger never lays out a definitive list of the manifold senses of ‘Being’, there is another indication that he pursued a unifying agenda. This can be found in his opposition to the neo-Kantian division of actuality, passed down from Lotze, through Windelbrand, Rickert and Lask (these latter three forming the major part of the Baden school of neo-Kantianism), by whom he was influenced significantly in his early philosophical development.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> It is on precisely this point that Philipse (p. 6) falls into confusion. He equates the task of unifying the manifold of senses of ‘Being’ with the task of finding a primary sense. It is on this basis that he outright rejects the idea that the question of the meaning of Being can be interpreted in these Aristotelian terms, due to the fact that Heidegger nowhere sets up his inquiry as pursuing such a fundamental sense. We will discuss this in more detail below.

<sup>85</sup> *Aristotle’s Metaphysics* *Θ 1-3*, p. 28. Heidegger also shows that this *aporia* did not only cover over the question of Being, but was effectively used by Christian theology to sustain the separation between man and God, in the scholastic doctrine of the equivocity of Being (*Ibid.*, p. 38). On this account, God and his creations are not beings in the same sense, but only analogously, and all other predicates that can be said of God and his creations are split in the same way (e.g., God is not wise in the sense that a man can be wise, but only analogously). This kind of analogy doesn’t set us up to determine the underlying relation between the different senses of these predicates, but is instead used to make the unknowability of God compatible with claims about his existence, perfection, goodness and the like.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*; ‘Being-there and Being-true in Aristotle’ in *Becoming Heidegger* ed. Theodore Kisiel; *LQT*, Part I.

<sup>87</sup> A very good account of Heidegger’s relation to these thinkers, specifically with regard to the problem of

Lotze initially divided actuality into four kinds: the being of things, the happening of events, the obtaining of relations, and the validity of sentences.<sup>88</sup> Following Lotze, this fourfold distinction was abandoned, but the distinction between Being and validity (*Sein* and *Geltung*) was retained as the defining feature of the so-called value philosophy of the neo-Kantians.<sup>89</sup> The fundamental upshot of this distinction is the severing of the relation between being and being-true, as truths are no longer understood to ‘be’ (as in “**p** is true” or “**p** is the case”), but rather to ‘hold’ (“**p** holds”). Despite being brought up in this philosophical climate, and undoubtedly being influenced by it<sup>90</sup>, Heidegger rejects this division in both its forms. Heidegger specifically takes issue with the emptiness of this concept of *actuality*, which, as a stand in for Being proper, does nothing to unite the various things under consideration. More importantly, however, Heidegger rejects the separation of being-true from Being that the concept of validity engenders. This is significant, because a proper analysis of the concept of truth plays an absolutely central role in his inquiry into the meaning of Being, both in *Being and Time* and the work that leads up to it<sup>91</sup>, and even more explicitly in the work that comes after, wherein it becomes the starting point for the inquiry into Being.<sup>92</sup> We will examine the role of truth in Heidegger’s philosophy in more detail in later chapters.<sup>93</sup>

For now, it is very tempting to read Heidegger as attempting to uncover the unifying structure underlying the various senses of ‘Being’, by means of an inquiry into being-true as

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truth, can be found in Daniel Dahlstrom’s book *Heidegger’s Concept of Truth*, and a treatment more based on the concept of meaning can be found in Steven Galt Crowell’s *Husserl, Heidegger and the Space of Meaning*. The brief remarks on Heidegger’s relation to neo-Kantianism here are based primarily on a reading of these works and on Heidegger’s own comments of the philosophy of value in his early lectures, published in *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, and *Logic: The Question of Truth*.

<sup>88</sup> *LQT*, p. 58.

<sup>89</sup> It is important to note that the standard translation of the neo-Kantian concept of *Geltung* as validity does not imply much of what modern logic means by validity, namely, the truth preserving character of inferences. This kind of validity is simply one kind of correctness, whereas the neo-Kantian notions of validity and value are meant to be associated with the act of *evaluation* in general, meaning that they indicate correctness *per se*. Most contemporary discussion of these issues would instead use the concept of *normativity*, and it is interesting to note that this term (or a suitable German analog) is indeed deployed by Heidegger in his discussion of value philosophy (*TDP*, pp. 28-29, and 112).

<sup>90</sup> Heidegger was a student of Rickert. However, it has been argued that Heidegger owes even more to Lask’s thought, particularly in his early *Habilitationsschrift*, but also in the development of his thought up to and including *Being and Time* (Galt Crowell, ch. 3; Kisiel, ‘Why students of Heidegger must read Emil Lask’, in *Heidegger’s Way of Thought*).

<sup>91</sup> Cf. *B&T*, p. 228; § 44; *LQT* part II.

<sup>92</sup> ‘On the Essence of Truth’ indicates this crucial turning point in his philosophy, but the best account of how the question of the essence of truth plays this fundamental role leading up to his second major work, *Contributions to Philosophy*, can be found in *Basic Questions of Philosophy*.

<sup>93</sup> See chapter 3.

the primary sense which relates the others.<sup>94</sup> This becomes an even more attractive interpretation if we turn to Heidegger's early paper 'Being-there and Being-true in Aristotle', in which he attempts to reinterpret the significance of being-true in Aristotle in a way which leads to many of the structures put forward in his later existential analytic of Dasein, particularly those dealing with assertion, idle talk, and truth as disclosedness. Moreover, he also tries to give an account of how, despite this apparently advanced understanding of truth, Aristotle is led toward an erroneous understanding of Being as *presence* on its very basis. This latter fact underscores Heidegger's concern with the importance of the relation between being-true and the unifying problematic that Aristotle initiated. This is about as close as Heidegger comes to taking up the problem in Aristotle's own terms.<sup>95</sup>

Nonetheless, as we have already pointed out, Heidegger does not pursue this problem in Aristotle's own terms, nor does he provide anything like a definitive analysis of what he takes the various senses of 'Being' to be in distinction to Aristotle, from which his inquiry is meant to proceed. However, despite the lack of a definitive account, Heidegger does at different points talk about different senses of 'Being'. The closest Heidegger comes to discussing this in *Being and Time* is in the introduction:-

But there are many things which we designate as 'being' [*seiend*"], and we do so in various senses. Everything we talk about, everything we have in view, everything towards which we comport ourselves in any way, is being; what we are is being, and so is how we are. Being [*Sein*] lies in the fact that something is [*Dass-sein*], and in its Being as it is [*Sosein*]; in Reality; in presence-at-hand; in subsistence; in validity; in Dasein; in the 'there is'.<sup>96</sup>

Of course, Heidegger here is providing a breakdown of different senses of both 'Being' (*Sein*) and 'being' (*seiend*), and, as we have already noted, these two terms should not be confused. Given the context of this passage, neither the elucidation of the manifold sense of 'Being' nor of 'being' can be taken to provide a programmatic statement of the structure of the project. As such, they do not provide anything like an explicit reworking of the Aristotelian problem.

<sup>94</sup> This is a suggestion also made by William Vallicella in his paper 'Heidegger's Reduction of Being to Truth', *The New Scholasticism* 59 (1985), pp. 156-76.

<sup>95</sup> It is important to note that this paper was written prior to the publication of *Being and Time* in 1925, whereas the lectures on Aristotle from which we have taken Heidegger's interpretation of the problem of the manifold senses of 'Being' is after *Being and Time* in 1931. However, I do not feel that this detracts in any significant way from the point being made.

<sup>96</sup> *B&T*, p. 26, german terms added.



Moreover, the multiple forms of Being that Heidegger addresses (that-being, being-so, Reality, presence-at-hand, subsistence, validity, Dasein, and the ‘there is’) are a mix of both what were earlier called *aspects* (e.g., that-being) and *modes* (e.g., subsistence) of Being. However, that Heidegger mentions these in the course of addressing the different ways in which we talk of beings indicates that these are different ways of talking about the Being of these beings, or different ways in which ‘Being’ is said.

In addition to these scant remarks in *Being and Time*, there are more in depth discussions of aspects of Being in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* and *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. It is in these texts that Heidegger comes to focus on the aspects of Being we outlined in the first section: what-being, being-so, that-being, and being-true.<sup>97</sup> Although some of these concepts were in play earlier (that-being and being-so), as we can see from the above quote from *Being and Time*, the four of them are tackled together in these later works. The reason for this is found in *Basic Problems*, where he traces them from the four characteristic uses of the copula (‘is’):-

1. The “is”, or its [B]eing, equals whatness, essentia.
2. The “is” equals existence, existentia.
3. The “is” equals truth, or as it is also called today, validity.
4. Being is a function of combination and thus an index of predication.<sup>98</sup>

From these four different senses in which the copula can be used (e.g., ‘man *is* the rational animal’, ‘God *is*’, ‘It *is* the case that snow is white’, ‘earth *is* the third planet from the sun’) Heidegger draws the different senses of ‘Being’ listed above (what-being, that-being, being-true, and being-so, respectively). He takes the fact that the copula is ambiguous between these different senses not to be a defect, but rather to be “an expression of the *intrinsically manifold structure of the [B]eing of a being* – and consequently of the overall understanding of [B]eing.”<sup>99</sup> It should be noted that at this point he talks of how-being (*Wie-sein*) in place of that-being (*Dass-sein*), and being-something (*Etwas-sein*) in place of being-so (*Sosein*). He settles on the latter terms in *Fundamental Concepts*, where he explicitly equates all talk about beings with talk about one of these four aspects of Being.<sup>100</sup> It should also be noted that

<sup>97</sup> They are also briefly mentioned together in *KPM* (pp. 154-155).

<sup>98</sup> *BPP*, p. 202.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>100</sup> *FCM*, p. 348.

Heidegger's interest in the 'there is', mentioned in *Being and Time* is not present here, although it will resurface quite dramatically later in his work.<sup>101</sup> For the moment, the fact that each of these works presents Being as intrinsically manifold, and yet, in attempting to carry on the project of *Being and Time*, tries to locate the source of this manifold in something deeper (primordial temporality in *Basic Problems* and Dasein's world-forming in *Fundamental Concepts*), gives us the best evidence that the question driving them has its roots in the Aristotelian problem.<sup>102</sup>

There are alternative ways of conceiving Heidegger's relation to Aristotle. For instance, Herman Philipse proposes that the manifold senses of 'Being' which Heidegger is attempting to unify are the variety of ways in which 'Being' is said of the various regions or domains of beings (i.e., the various *modes* of Being). This proposal effectively equates the problem of unifying the different senses of 'Being' with the problem of developing a concept of Being *in general* that is adequate to ground the practice of regional ontology. This is a very tempting way of conceiving Heidegger's relation to Aristotle, because, although Heidegger does not explicitly subscribe to the Aristotelian problem of unification in *Being and Time* (for instance, by providing his own manifold of senses that must be unified), he does explicitly raise the problem of grounding regional ontology in a concept of Being in general.

However, if we understood the question in this way, we would effectively be treating Being as the common *genus* of which these modes were *species*, and the process of unification as a matter of abstraction from the *particular* regions of beings to Being in *general*. Approaching the question this way amounts to asking the question 'What are beings?' much as we would ask the question 'What are trees?', wherein we aim to find some *essence* common to trees as a whole.<sup>103</sup> We might call this *the question of the essence of beings*, as opposed to the question of the meaning of Being. This is most definitely not Heidegger's approach, given what we have already said regarding his denial that Being is

<sup>101</sup> See chapter 3, part 4.

<sup>102</sup> There is a further list of senses of 'Being' in Heidegger's essay 'On the Essence of Ground' (p. 133): "the idea of [B]eing in general (what-being, how-being, something, nothing and nothingness)." Although this list introduces some additional senses not considered in the above analyses, it is a passing reference and isn't significantly elaborated anywhere. Heidegger does discuss the notion of Nothing further in 'What is Metaphysics?' and *Introduction to Metaphysics*, but it isn't addressed specifically in these terms. We will discuss this further in chapter 4. In addition, there is a quite different set of senses of Being laid out in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, organised in terms of the traditional oppositions Being has been placed in to various other concepts: Being as opposed to *becoming*, Being as opposed to *seeming*, Being as opposed to *thinking*, and Being as opposed to *the ought* (p. 98). These are somewhat different from the list of senses derived from the copula, but they should be seen as replacing this set, but rather as a complementary part of the problem of the meaning of Being.

<sup>103</sup> *Nietzsche: Volumes 3 and 4*, pp. 156-157.

genus and his rejection of the tradition's conflation of Being with beingness.

There is a similar, though more subtle, reading of Heidegger's revival of the Aristotelian question provided by Kris McDaniel, which avoids this problem.<sup>104</sup> McDaniel also holds that the goal of Heidegger's question of the meaning of Being is to unify the different senses of 'Being', but he understands this unification in a slightly different way from Philipse. Although he also takes the different senses of 'Being' to correspond to different modes of Being (or 'ways of being', as he prefers to say), what differentiates him from Philipse is that he takes the process of unifying these different ways not to be a matter of *abstraction*, but rather a matter of *construction*.

This is cashed out in terms of the notion of *quantifier variance*.<sup>105</sup> We won't explain this in too much detail, but the basic idea is that the domain of objects which a given quantifier term (e.g., 'for all...' or 'there is some...') ranges over can vary depending on the meaning ascribed to it. These meanings can thus be more or less restrictive, for instance, allowing us to quantify over just physical objects, just numbers, both, or even more things. Rather than taking the general concept of Being to be a genus of which all beings are instances (i.e., a kind of predicate), McDaniel takes it to indicate the *properly unrestricted* quantifier, or that which allows us to quantify over all beings. However, this does not mean that McDaniel thinks that the notion of Being is entirely without content, or rather, that it is equivalent to the purely formal or *completely unrestricted* interpretation of the quantifier.<sup>106</sup> Instead, McDaniel thinks that the domain of the proper quantifier – all and only things that have Being – is pieced together out of the domains of restricted quantifiers. This process of constructing the concept of Being is a difficult one because not all restricted quantifiers are appropriate, only those which “*carve nature at the joints*”<sup>107</sup>, or those that indicate genuine modes of Being, are suitable.<sup>108</sup> Essentially, on this account, *to be* in general is just to be in one of the mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive modes of Being, and asking the question of the meaning of Being is just a matter of determining what these ways are and how they fit together.

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<sup>104</sup> See fn 78.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Eli Hirsh, 'Ontology and Alternative Languages', in *Metametaphysics*, pp. 231-259.

<sup>106</sup> The distinction between *proper* and *improper* unrestricted quantification will be discussed further in chapter 4, section 3, part *iii*.

<sup>107</sup> McDaniel, p. 305.

<sup>108</sup> To put this in more technical terms, McDaniel is looking for the highest level predicates that are both *natural* and *sortal*. Both what it is for a predicate to count as natural (cf., Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, pp. 59-69) and what is for a predicate to count as a sortal (cf. David Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance Renewed*, pp. 22) are still controversial within analytic metaphysics and philosophy of logic. We'll discuss

Although this interpretation avoids reading the question in an abstractive way, it has its own problem. This consists in the fact that the constructive reading eliminates the hermeneutic circle between the existential analytic of Dasein and the account of Being in general. If the general notion of Being is merely to be stitched together out of the particular modes of Being, then there is no reason for this process to demand the reinterpretation of one the ways of being (existence) on its basis. Given that this circle is clearly present in Heidegger's account, this cannot be the approach he has in mind. It is thus the case that neither an abstractive nor a constructive reading of the unification is viable.

However, there is a deeper problem with both of these interpretations. Although the project of *unifying* the various modes of Being by *grounding* them in a concept of Being in general is central to Heidegger's formulation of the question of Being, it cannot be the only dimension of the question. Although modes of Being are ways in which 'Being' is said, namely, of the beings belonging to different regions, not all ways of saying 'Being' are *modes* of Being. This is demonstrated by our earlier discussion of *aspects* of Being. Neither the senses of 'Being' Aristotle was concerned with (e.g., potential and actual being), nor the aspects of Being Heidegger identifies (e.g., being-so) can be limited to a given region of beings, but must be applicable to all beings. This means that, despite Heidegger's concern with grounding the practice of regional ontology in fundamental ontology, the question cannot simply be understood as a matter of unifying this multiplicity of modes without obscuring the very issues that Aristotle was concerned with.

We can thus distinguish two different unities that Heidegger brings together in his initial formulation of the question of Being: the unity of the various *aspects* of Being that belong to all beings, and the unity of the various *modes* of Being that belong to the different regions of beings. This is not a distinction that Heidegger himself draws, but it is always implicit within his early work. As we noted earlier, the list of senses from *Being and Time* makes no distinction between aspect and mode, despite indicating a concern with both. As we have seen, his concern with the unity of modes is the more prominent at this point, under the guise of fundamental ontology. However, his concern with the unity of aspects and the distinction between them becomes steadily more explicit between *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, and *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*.<sup>109</sup> Importantly, although Heidegger does not distinguish between aspects and

<sup>109</sup> The former two texts explicitly pose the problem of the unity of modes, but don't explicitly oppose it to a unity of aspects, despite articulating specific questions regarding the relations between them. For instance,

modes in drawing a line between his formulation of the question and its origin in Aristotle, we can see that it is the problem of the unity of aspects that most closely resembles the Aristotelian problematic. Regardless, it is clear that Heidegger takes the question of Being to be concerned with the underlying structure through which both aspects and modes are unified.

### iii) Senses, Aspects and Meaning

Returning to the paradox posed earlier, our interpretation of the question in terms of the Aristotelian problem of the manifold senses of 'Being' can provide us with some insight. If the question seeks to uncover the underlying structure which unifies the various senses of 'Being', then it can be an inquiry regarding the meaning of expressions, and yet, because the structure through which these terms are interrelated is not determined by us, it can also genuinely be concerned with this structure as that of Being in itself. However, it might be objected to this that what we have called *aspects* and *modes*, although they indeed correspond to ways in which 'Being' may be said, are not treated as *meanings* when we are engaged in uncovering their unifying structure, but, rather, that they are treated as the real underlying phenomena to which the expressions refer. If this is the case then it would seem that our interpretation of the question could be reworked to avoid talk of meaning entirely.

There are two responses to this objection. Firstly, any such reworking would still be subject to the same reflexivity that undermines any attempt to directly ask "What is Being?". This is because any attempt to unify the various senses of 'Being' by appealing to established claims about these 'phenomena' (e.g., "that-being is...") would have to appeal to at least one of the senses (what-being) which it is meant to clarify. Secondly, the phenomenological conception of meaning that Heidegger inherits from Husserl holds that the meaning of expressions is fundamentally dependent upon the structures governing the primordial experience of meaning, and this holds even for expressions referring to various aspects and modes of Being (which Husserl would have classed as *categories*<sup>110</sup>). As such, Heidegger is concerned with these different senses not insofar as their meaning is tied to various

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in *MFL* (pp. 151-152), Heidegger explicitly identifies the unity of modes as one aspect of the question, while dividing his concern with aspects between the "problem of *the basic articulation of [B]eing*" (what-being and that-being) and "the problem of *the veridical character of [B]eing*" (truth). These latter problems are explicitly combined in *FCM*, in his concern with the unity of the four aspects of Being discussed earlier.

<sup>110</sup> *Ideas I*, p. 20.

contingent words that we use in ordinary discourse and philosophical speculation, but insofar as it is locatable within the various existential structures that constitute Dasein's pre-ontological understanding of Being. It is this fact which secures the connection between aspects of Being and senses of 'Being'. However, properly understanding this latter point requires an examination the account of meaning Heidegger develops within the existential analytic. We have thus reached the point at which we can no longer isolate Heidegger's preliminary formulation of the question from his own theory of meaning.

We have still yet to resolve the three issues laid out earlier: what it is to ask the question of the *meaning* of Being as opposed to the that of the *essence* of Being, what kind of understanding of the *nature* of meaning we require to formulate the question, and what precisely the *interpretation* of the meaning of Being consists in. We now have a better idea of what we are looking for, but, as we indicated earlier, we must look for it within the account of meaning Heidegger provides in the existential analytic. However, Heidegger's notion of meaning is not easily isolatable from the various existential structures among which it is situated. Heidegger conceives of existence as consisting in the unitary structure of Being-in-the-world, each element of which cannot be apart from the others, and *a fortiori* cannot even be understood properly in isolation from the others. As we have already noted, this strong interdependence of the existential structures gives the analytic its characteristic hermeneutic circularity. It would of course be unwise of us to recapitulate the whole of the existential analytic in order to clarify Heidegger's conception of meaning, but we cannot avoid laying out in brief the basic existential structures with which it is intertwined.<sup>111</sup> Among these the notions of *understanding* and *truth* in particular bear a very close relationship to meaning, and we must take great care to situate meaning in relation to them. However, both of these notions have additional importance, for various reasons.

Understanding has additional importance because Heidegger has made the pre-ontological *understanding* of Being an essential constitutive element of any questioning of Being. Moreover, the possession of pre-ontological understanding is what provides Dasein with its ontico-ontological priority, and as such makes the existential analytic of Dasein the first step in the inquiry into Being. However, precisely what such pre-ontological understanding is can only be made clear in relation to the phenomena of understanding as

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<sup>111</sup> We will for the most part restrict ourselves to explicating Division I of *Being and Time*, and although we will mention the temporal structures discussed in detail in Division II, we will not elaborate upon them in any detail.

such. A proper grasp of Heidegger's existential conception of understanding is thus essential if we are to properly assess this crucial feature of his account of the question of Being. In addition, Heidegger's concept of interpretation is an integral part of the the account of understanding, and a proper analysis of this is essential if we are to understand the sense in which answering the question of the meaning of Being is a matter of interpretation, and how this is related to the idea of the unification of the different senses in which 'Being' is said.

Truth, on the other hand, is important in two ways. First, we have already proposed an account of Heidegger's initial approach to the question which locates truth as one of the senses of 'Being' that the question is itself concerned with unifying. Moreover, we have suggested that truth plays the role of the primary sense which guides the inquiry into the unity of the others. Secondly, as we have also noted, the notion of truth takes on additional importance in the work following *Being and Time*. On the one hand, the inquiry into the essence of truth comes to play a central role in the inquiry into Being. On the other, Heidegger famously reorients the question of Being during the 1930's, precisely changing its concern from the *meaning* of Being to the *truth* of Being.<sup>112</sup> As such, a proper analysis of Heidegger's account of truth will help us to better understand both Heidegger's initial approach to the question and how it changes.

The following two chapters will take up the task of expounding these various notions and answering the questions related to them.

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<sup>112</sup> Cf. *CP*, *BQP*, 'Letter on Humanism'; Even later on he renounces this shift, at least insofar as he takes the phrase 'the truth of Being' to be misleading, in that this truth cannot be identified in any way with the phenomenon of truth as *correctness*, but only with the more primordial phenomenon of truth as *aletheia* or unconcealment ('The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking', pp. 446-448).