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Preparing to Receive: On the Revolutionary Questioning of Being and Time

Joshua Livingstone, *The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor: Dr. Helen Fielding, *The University of Western Ontario*

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Abstract

From the question of the meaning of being to the question concerning technology, the theme of questioning runs through the whole of Martin Heidegger's work and plays a key role in the development of his thought. Despite its importance, however, it is a theme that has largely been left unexplored. This thesis is intended as the beginning of a corrective to a long overdue examination of Heideggerian questioning. I give a close, inner-textual analysis of questioning as it appears in *Being and Time*. By following Heidegger's explicit commentary on and implicit use of questioning, I demonstrate that the question of being [*die Seinsfrage*] is not a one-time occurrence but a continuous process of opening up to genuinely new and original possibilities of being. Such questioning takes the form of a *preparing to receive and be received* by being. I "conclude" that Heidegger's questioning is carried out in the service of a radical ontological revolution.

Keywords

Questioning, Martin Heidegger, Continental Philosophy, Phenomenology

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Introduction

Way and weighing

Stile and saying

On a single walk are found.

Go bear without halt

Question and default

On your single pathway bound.¹

What follows is an extended engagement with the question: what is *Being and Time*? The aim of this engagement is to give an interpretation of Martin Heidegger's text as a fundamentally creative work of questioning, one that is dedicated to radical freedom. It will be argued that by "working out" the question of the meaning of being, Heidegger is preparing for an ontological revolution, not in any mean or military sense, but in the manner of a meditative transformation—*a preparing to receive and be received*. I reach this "conclusion" by way of a reflection on the theme of questioning both as it appears in and pertains to the task of *Being and Time*.

The motivation behind this reading is twofold. For one, I hope to fill an unfortunate gap in Heidegger scholarship. To my knowledge, there has never been published an extended consideration of the theme of questioning in Heidegger's work. This absence is particularly concerning when one considers the extent of questioning's role in nearly all of Heidegger's texts.

¹ Martin Heidegger, "The Thinker as Poet (*Aus dear Erfahrungdes Denkens*)" *Martin Heidegger: Poetry, Language, Thought*, 3.

For two, I hope to confront a tendency in Heidegger scholarship to reduce his philosophic contributions to a set of definitive statements. This tendency, which is most apparent in the transcendentalist reading of *Being and Time*, covers over and hides the radicality of Heidegger's ambitions. Rather than see his work as revolutionary, the transcendentalist places it into the category of disinterested philosophy. As John Caputo argues, "[*Being and Time*] puts Heidegger in the position of standing back from the fray in order to isolate the functional element that organizes, sustains, and nourishes any projection of Being."² Considered in this way, Heidegger's efforts to bring about a genuinely new beginning (what he will later call "another beginning"³) are eclipsed.

I aim to show that the fundamental assumption underlying and (mis)informing the transcendental narrative is a simple one; i.e. that questions necessarily precede answers, that questions only arise when an answer is lacking, and that questions only exist as a striving for answers. Resisting this assumption, I argue that *Being and Time* marks the opening of a questioning and not its ending. Read in this way, the text should not be considered a collection of answers but rather a careful documentation of Heidegger's meditative preparations for embarking on a questioning way. He does not offer definitive statements about the nature of reality or of human being, instead he offers a sketch of his attempts to enact a questioning that will lead to an ontological transformation.

I begin with a close examination of the opening lines of the text, the preamble placed before the introduction, as a way to prepare a receptivity for what follows. Heidegger presents *Being and Time* as a quest to work out [*Ausarbeitung*] the question of the meaning of being [*die*

² John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger*, 15.

³ See: Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*.

Seinsfrage]. In an effort to understand what this quest entails and how it will be carried out, I explore the context in which Heidegger situates his task. Focusing on what might be called the double-forgetfulness of our time, the forgetting of both being and the question concerning being, it will be shown that Heidegger's project of working out the *Seinsfrage* is an attempt to bring the question out from the oblivion of forgetfulness. Reflecting on the existential nature of this forgetfulness, I argue that it is not conditioned upon an absence of meaning, but an obscuring fullness. The implication being that we, as readers and interpreters, must withhold our assumptions about the nature of questioning in order to fully appreciate what Heidegger is trying to do. In particular, I suggest that common conceptual dynamic between questions and answers be bracketed.

From here, the second chapter reconsiders what it means to question being. I begin by exploring the implications of Heidegger's brief but poignant discussion in §2 regarding the tripartite "formal structure" of questioning in general [*die Fragestellung*]. I argue that Heidegger's illustration of questioning as an active, temporal movement is intended to draw a link between the act of questioning and questioner carrying out this act; i.e. *Dasein*. Next, I consider Heidegger's comments on the character of questioning as a disclosive restrained-seeking. I show how questioning occurs via a hearkening that opens up to the issue at hand by actively withholding assumption. Questioning, for Heidegger, lets beings be. From this account of questioning in general, I move on to consider the uniqueness of the *Seinsfrage* in an effort to set it apart from other questions. In so doing, I explore what Heidegger calls the "priority" [*Vorrang*] of the question, and the creative possibilities that this priority brings with it. What will be argued, is that the preeminent position of the *Seinsfrage* situates it discursively in such a way

that it has the capacity to prepare for a radical ontological transformation, of not just ourselves but our world.

The third and final chapter will explore *how* the question of being is to be worked out via an existential analysis of Dasein. It is here that I will engage most closely with the transcendental interpretation of *Being and Time*. Examining the way by which a reversal of the question-answer dynamic affects how we understand the nature of the existential analysis, I argue that the structure of ecstatic temporality should not be read as a definitive account of what Jeff Malpas calls “place” (as ground).⁴ Instead, I argue that it ought to be read as the phenomenological unraveling of our current understanding of being. Rather than take the “conclusion” of the analysis as a definitive transcendental topology or as the basis for a critique of the tradition, I hold that Heidegger’s ecstatic account of Dasein is but a launching point. His decisive aim is to manifest the question out from the horizon of temporality, and thereby open a path that will lead (leap) away from it.

What is given here is limited to what is most fundamental to questioning and strives to avoid being sidetracked by extensive exposition. At times it may seem that the discussion remains too shallow and that the depth of Heidegger’s thought is not fully elaborated upon. This is almost certainly true. That said, my intention is not to provide the final or conclusive word on *Being and Time*, but to correct a misleading tendency in contemporary scholarship. At no point do I dismiss any thinker’s views outright, nor do I wish to claim absolute authority on the subject. I want only to instigate thoughtful dialogue and questioning. Whether I have done this successfully will be up to the reader to decide.

⁴ Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology*, 8.

Ultimately, what I hope to contribute to Heidegger scholarship is a deepened appreciation for the preparatory nature of Heidegger's work and the "provisional" character of his claims. Heidegger is a philosopher concerned with questions, not answers. His contributions to philosophy do not stand as conclusive statements about reality, given in the form of enclosed doctrine, but serve as meditations intended to foster and promote radically creative thinking. As he writes in his essay *The Question Concerning Technology*, "Questioning builds a way. We would be advised, therefore, above all to pay heed to the way, and not fix our attention on isolated sentences and topics. The way is one of thinking."⁵ This way of questioning is not limited to a single text or period in Heidegger's career, but is central to his entire *Gesamtausgabe*. Because the nature of this task necessitates close reading, attention to language, and a consistent resistance to assumption, this thesis is unable to explore the issue beyond the confines of *Being and Time*. That said, what is presented here can be used as a foothold for further investigation into Heidegger's earlier and later writings. In many ways, *Being and Time* is an orienting text, one that grounds our approach to his other writings by providing context from which to understand and evaluate them. It is my hope that this thesis will serve a similar purpose.

⁵ Martin Heidegger, "Question Concerning Technology" *Basic Writings*, 311.

Chapter I: Out of Oblivion

Being and Time opens with the declaration that, “the aim of the following treatise is to work out [*Ausarbeitung*] the question of the meaning of ‘being’ [‘*Sein*’] and to do so concretely.”⁶ This question, which Heidegger will often refer to simply as ‘the being question’ [*die Seinsfrage*], stands as the centerpiece of the entire work and its asking is the goal to which the text strives. In order to begin making sense of what “working out” this question entails, this first chapter will engage in a close reading of the opening lines of the text.

I start by speculating on the nature of forgetfulness, as the background condition on which Heidegger situates his project. After which, I will problematize the assumption that Heidegger’s ultimate goal is to provide a conclusive answer to the *Seinsfrage*. It will be argued that this assumption is, in fact, the result of our forgetfulness and must be put into question. I argue that Heidegger is attempting to challenge a common interpretation of the question-answer dynamic as a sequential, unidirectional movement that endeavors to go from absence to fullness, ignorance to knowledge, or problem to solution. It will be shown that the task of “working out” the question of the meaning of being is not necessarily to strive after an answer but to bring the question out from an always already implicit and dis-closive answer, that is, to manifest it. This will ultimately prepare us for the next chapter, wherein we will analyze Heidegger’s reflections on the nature of questioning and the distinctiveness of the *Seinsfrage* in an attempt to better understand the project of *Being and Time*.

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, xxix.

A Perplexing Orientation

Let us begin the way Heidegger begins, with the short single-paragraph preamble placed before the introduction. The entirety of this statement reads as follows:

“For manifestly you have long been aware of what you mean when you use the expression ‘being’ [*seiend*]. We, however, who used to think we understood it, have now become perplexed.” [Plato, *Sophist*, 244a]

Do we in our time have an answer to the question of what we really mean by the word ‘being’ [*seiend*]? Not at all. So it is fitting that we should raise anew the question of the meaning of being [*Sein*]. But are we nowadays even perplexed at our inability to understand the expression ‘being’ [*Sein*]? Not at all. So first of all we must reawaken an understanding for the meaning of this question. The aim of the following treatise is to work out the question of the meaning of “*being*” [*Sein*] and to do so concretely. The provisional aim is the interpretation of *time* as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of being.⁷

It is all too easy to gloss over these opening lines. For one, the points made here are both brief and direct. They represent Heidegger at his most concise. As a result, they can be read through quickly and absentmindedly brushed off. For two, despite their succinctness, what is said here is not immediately palpable. Heidegger’s claims are puzzling to say the least. After all, what does he mean that we do not understand being, nor the question concerning it? What does it mean to “reawaken” such an understanding? And, how does time fit into all of this? Heidegger does not attempt to explain himself here, nor does he provide much help for those of us looking to comprehend the depth of these claims. Thus, readers may find themselves eagerly jumping past the preamble in order to find an easier access point, something familiar and clear.

⁷ Ibid, xxix.

Fleeing this perplexity and rushing past the opening statement, however, would be a detrimental start to any reading. Not only because Heidegger offers a number of important hints as to the nature and direction of the work, hints that must be attended to, but also because the preamble is meant to orient us. That is, to prepare the reader for what comes after. If we have not been properly oriented, how can we be sure that we will receive the full import of the ideas contained within the text? Now, we might think that our confusion at what Heidegger says here is either a failure of our comprehension or a fault of Heidegger's communication, but this confusion is precisely the orientation that Heidegger hopes to foster. If we are to properly engage with the *Seinsfrage*, we cannot begin from a position of confident self-assurance. As Lee Braver suggests: "Heidegger wants us to pause and fully realize our profound perplexity before this question."⁸ The reason for this will become apparent as we work through the text. For now, let us in the spirit of fostering perplexity ruminate on the claims made here and their implications. Let us do so with attentiveness and an *open receptiveness* for what is to come.

For-getting the *Seinsfrage*

Before we engage the content of the opening statement, we ought to take a moment to acknowledge the author's restrained tone. Reading through the preamble, we get the sense that Heidegger is not writing a manifesto, nor does he seem to be setting up to dictate some revealed doctrine of Truth. For one, he is careful to emphasize that his conclusion is only "provisional." For two, the only decisive claims he makes here (both of which are marked by a definitive "not at all") have to do with a failure of understanding that he is not explicitly exempting himself

⁸ Lee Braver, *Heidegger*, 10.

from. What Heidegger seems to be preparing us for is less a sermon and more a meditation. He looks to raise a question rather than answer one. The opening is an invitation to join him in questioning.

With this in mind, then, let us then consider the two most striking pronouncements Heidegger makes regarding the context in which his project is situated; namely, that, (1) we no longer understand the meaning of word “being,” and that (2) we are not even perplexed by this lack of understanding; how should we interpret these claims? In the manner of a Socratic double-ignorance, it seems Heidegger is arguing that we suffer from what might be called a double-forgetfulness. Not only have we forgotten what it means to be, but we have also forgotten *that* we have forgotten. As a result, we have become oblivious to the issue of being. Undoubtedly, this is a strange proposition to make. How can Heidegger say the question has been forgotten while at the same time be talking about it? What exactly has been forgotten? If speaking the words does not constitute an act of posing of the question, nor even guarantee remembrance of it, what does? What is the nature of this forgetfulness?

It is common to think of forgetfulness as a personal issue; i.e. as the failure of our mental capacity to recall past memories. We say that we have forgotten something when we are unable to bring it forward from our subconscious bank of memories to the forefront of our conscious awareness. Forgetfulness, under such a view, is an inaccessibility. Whether this inaccessibility is caused by the erasure of a memory, a missing memory, or is the result of a blocked, damaged or weakened cognitive capacity to access a still intact memory, the outcome is the same; namely, there is an absence. What we seek to recall or recollect is no longer available, no longer *there*. We might think, therefore, that the situation Heidegger is describing concerns the absence of the

meaning of being; i.e. that the meaning, which was once accessible for recollection, is no longer available.

Is this what Heidegger means by forgetfulness? Is our current condition indicative of an absence? When reading any of Heidegger's works, it is always important to be wary of psychological or subjective interpretations. His doctoral thesis on Duns Scotus, for example, was written as a critique of psychologism; i.e. the idea that psychological interpretations of human being can be considered fundamental, and provide the ultimate ground of things like logic, metaphysics, epistemology, etc. By the time he gets around to writing *Being and Time* this sentiment has not diminished but deepened. The phenomenological account of Dasein contained therein, is a deliberate attempt to dig beneath and get behind traditional accounts of ultimate grounds in order to expose a more fundamental, *existential* ground. In many ways, *Being and Time* is a critique of the Cartesian tradition and an attempt to move away from the primacy of the subject (be it psychological or a rational). Broadly speaking, Heidegger wants to escape the trappings of metaphysical presupposition in order to focus on human existence as such. This means that he is not concerned with the particular judgements and conclusions of the various sciences (including metaphysics) but is instead focused on their prejudicial foundations. Heidegger insists that the existential analytic of Dasein, which comprises the majority of the text, "is *prior* to any psychology, anthropology, and especially biology."⁹ We must, therefore, not think of our forgetfulness in the terms employed by these realms of discourse. What Heidegger is getting at is not a psychological problem resulting from some kind of trauma, nor is it a subjective problem resulting from a decayed imaginative faculty, nor is it a problem of the brain,

⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44.

something to do with the hippocampus or neural transmissions. For Heidegger, forgetfulness is an existential issue.

What is more, a psychological or subjective approach to this issue of forgetfulness would be ill equipped to deal with the magnitude of the problem. For, as Heidegger implies, the issue is not an individual one, but a condition of “our time” [*wir heute*]. If the meaning of being has been lost to the age in which we live, it does little good to think in terms of personal memory banks and individual cognitive capacity (as if we all at one point or another understood the meaning of being only to, one by one or all at once, lose access to it). The meaning of being has been lost to our historical moment in time. Having been born into this era, we have been thrown into this condition of forgetfulness. If, therefore, our forgetfulness is an existential and epochal condition, how might we conceptualize the “absence” of understanding (both of being and the question)?¹⁰

Firstly, we ought to clarify what is meant by existence. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger essentially equates existence with human being, what he calls Dasein.¹¹ To help avoid misinterpretation, English translations of the text often leave the word untranslated. That said, injecting a German word into an English text can itself be a source of confusion and lead to misunderstanding. It is best, therefore, to straight away establish a clear definition of the term

¹⁰ The relationship between existence and history is too large of a topic to get into here. What ought to be said about it, however, is that existence provides the foundation for the possibility of history. In Division II of *Being and Time*, Heidegger explains that, “existence existentially grounds historiography as a science down to the most inconspicuous, ‘mechanical’ procedures.” (374). Thus, when considering the historical aspect of forgetfulness, we must be careful how we interpret the development. We must not lose sight of the ultimately existential character of the issue. Historical timelines tend to rely upon an understanding of the human being, of time, and thereby also on an understanding of being itself.

¹¹ The nature of Dasein’s relationship with the human being is one of contention in Heidegger scholarship. Whether or not the human being and Dasein are one and the same entity is a topic of discussion and not a settled issue. That said, general consensus has it that being Dasein is identical with being human. For the sake of this thesis, I shall not engage this debate but take the liberty of joining the majority.

and to keep that definition close as we move forward. When translated into English, Dasein is typically rendered in one of two ways:

(1) By breaking the word into its constitutive parts (*Da* meaning ‘there’ or ‘here,’ and *Sein* meaning ‘being’) it can be presented as ‘being-there’ or ‘being-here.’ This is the most common translation and is intended to convey a sense of locality. To be Dasein is not just to be, but to be *there* in the world. Heidegger will use the expression being-in-the-world [*In-der-Welt-sein*] to capture the sense of Dasein’s inner worldly situatedness. He makes clear, however, that to be *in* the world is not anything like being spatially “in” some kind of a container. For him, to be in-the-world is not to take up a position in an already existent space but is tantamount to the initial and sustaining opening up of that space as the “there” (what Heidegger will later call “clearing” [*Lichtung*]). As Heidegger explains, “by its very nature Dasein brings its there along with it. If it lacks it’s there, it is not only factually not, but is in no sense, the being [*Seiende*] which is essentially Dasein. *Dasein is its disclosedness.*”¹² As the being that is being-there, Dasein is the ontological condition of possibility of there being a world at all. Its disclosive character situates it prior to, and embeds it within, any ontic situation. Michael Inwood puts it plainly stating that “Dasein brings the whole world along with it.”¹³ This will be immensely important to keep in mind as we move forward.

(2) Another, less common, translation of Heidegger’s *Dasein* is one that renders it simply as “existence.” This translation matches nicely with Heidegger’s claim that, “the ‘essence’ [*Wesen*] of Dasein lies in its existence [*Existenz*].”¹⁴ That said, this translation can also be misleading. We must be careful to avoid the otherwise broad implications of the word. We often

¹² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 129.

¹³ Michael Inwood, *Heidegger*, 18.

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 41

think of existence in terms of bare-existence: i.e. the brute actuality of things that underlies and grounds their appearance—existence as objective reality. We say that the room we are in exists, that the tree outside the window exists, that the Taj Mahal exists. To exist in the sense Heidegger intends, however, is more akin to an awareness of being than to the state of being ‘actual.’¹⁵ Dasein exists, because it is aware of the fact that things *are*. Rooms, trees, and the Taj Mahal, on the other hand lack such an awareness and therefore do not exist. For Heidegger, existence [*Existenz*] must be understood in terms of disclosure, of opening up and being privy to the beings of the world, itself included. To bolster this sense of existence, he relates the German *Existenz* to the Greek *ékstasis* [ἐκστασις] where *ék* means “out” and *stasis* means “to stand.” From this perspective, it can be said that to exist is to stand out into the world, among the beings of the world. Thus, we ought not think of Dasein’s existence in metaphysical terms, as the actual, or objective reality underlying its appearance in-the-world, but as a disclosive coming to be. Together with the sense of Dasein as “being-there,” the notion of Dasein as “Existenz” gives it a reflexive character. Dasein both opens the world and steps out into it.

If, therefore, forgetfulness is an existential issue, then it is an issue concerning Dasein’s disclosive inner-worldly standing. This fact alone, however tells us very little about the nature of our forgetfulness. The issue is still very abstract. What is it about this existential out-standing that has helped to bring about our current condition?

¹⁵ Note: I use the word awareness here in order to help differentiate brute existence from *existenz*. This awareness, however, is not the awareness of a subjectivity that is conscious, but the disclosive sense of a seeing, or being privy to beings as what they are, in truth. Interestingly, the English word “aware” comes to us from the Old English “*gewær*” which, when broken into its constitutive parts (“*ge-*” and “*wær*”) can be translated as “the process of truth(ing).”

Heidegger elaborates on the nature of Dasein, arguing that “*understanding of being [Seinsverständnis] is itself a determination of the being of Dasein.*”¹⁶ For Heidegger, our disclosive relationship with the beings of the world (in the sense of a coming to be, an outstanding) is made possible by an understanding of being [*Seinsverständnis*], which is the basic condition of possibility of existence. Beings always come to be *as* what they *are*.

This understanding relationship to being finds its most clear expression in our use of language. Every sentence we write or utter aloud includes some sort of reference to being, either in the use of an explicit copula or an implicit one. When we say things like “where *are* my keys?” or “the restaurant on the corner *is* excellent” we presuppose the meaning of the “is” and the “are.” Even when we leave out the copula it is still covertly there. Giving a directive like “turn off the light” presumes that there *is* a light to turn off and what the light *is*. As William J. Richardson puts it:

Even before posing the question [of being], man has some comprehension of Being. No matter how dark or obscure Being itself may be to him, still in his most casual discourse with other beings, they are sufficiently open to him that he may experience that they are, concern himself about what they are, sc. their Being.¹⁷

To be clear, this presumption of being is present even outside of our use of language. When I climb the stairs to my apartment, for example, I assume that the stairs *are* there, that they *are* stairs, and that they will continue to *be* there with every step I take. It is not just when writing or speaking that an understanding of being is present. All of our activities, questioning included, are carried out by way of this presumptive understanding of, and reliance on, being.

¹⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 11.

¹⁷ William J. Richardson. *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, 33.

Now, we must be careful to avoid thinking about this understanding in any kind of cognitive or conscious sense. What Heidegger tries to make clear throughout the text, is that this understanding (as existential) is fundamentally disclosive. It brings things into being, and is not something projected onto an already disclosed being. Ultimately, this means that our forgetfulness, as a form of existence, is also predicated upon a disclosive understanding of being. The question, therefore, is: how so?

For Heidegger, the disclosure of existence does not necessitate nor ensure authentic being. In fact, disclosure most often occurs inauthentically, meaning that the revealing of existence is also a concealing. For Heidegger, the obvious is often obfuscating; that is, despite the clarity with which beings are presented, what is most proper or true to their being can be covered over by their very being. When we take something to be obvious, we tend to pay no heed to it, our attention is largely directed elsewhere. As we get caught up in our everyday engagements with the various beings in the world, we tend to lose sight of the simple fact *that they are* in the first place. The ontological is eclipsed by the ontic, or as Heidegger puts it: “what is ontically nearest and familiar is ontologically the farthest, unrecognized and constantly overlooked in its ontological significance.”¹⁸ We forget being by perpetually presupposing it. Put in worldly and historical terms, the presuppositions regarding being that inform and make possible the meaningful appearance of things that we, today, all live by are hidden by the appearances of these things themselves. Understood in this way, the “absence” of the meaning of being is not a lack of meaning, but the result of an obscuring fullness.

¹⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 43.

We might, therefore, follow Richard Polt and think of our forgetfulness as a for-get-fulness (forgetting as a getting-before).¹⁹ From this perspective, we have for-gotten the meaning of being and the *Seinsfrage* because we presume to know what they *are*. Our understanding of the meaning of being *and* our understanding of the *Seinsfrage* are both obscured by the same presumptive inattentiveness. This is perhaps what Heidegger is trying to indicate when he tells us that we are not even “perplexed at our inability to understand the expression ‘being.’” We are not perplexed because of the dis-closive way we as Dasein exist in the world. Like a fish that is not perplexed about his emergence in water, we are not perplexed by our emergence in being. As Polt explains:

Things in general are simply available and present. *We take them for granted*: we do not recognize them either as something taken or as something granted. In ordinary experience we rely on beings, use them, and refer to them, without reflecting on the fact that they are accessible in the first place. Just as we automatically expect the ground to support us when we take a step, we count on the subsistence of the whole of beings in our every act. [...] we take the whole for granted as reliable and thus *for-get* it.²⁰

In taking being for granted, we also take for granted what it means to ask about it. What Heidegger wants us to take away from this, therefore, is a profound appreciation for the fact that we do not know what we think we know. He wants us to allow ourselves to become perplexed so that we might properly attend to both being and the question concerning it. Again, we must be careful not to interpret this inattentiveness as an individual phenomenon. It is not the case that every single person in the world is inattentive to being because of a rampant failure of some

¹⁹ Richard Polt, *The Emergency of Being: On Heidegger's 'Contributions to Philosophy,'* Location 683.

²⁰ *Ibid.* Location 671-683.

cognitive capacity to attend to things. For Heidegger, this is an existential problem and as such is one that find expression in our shared world.²¹

Returning to the preamble, we find Heidegger claiming that we must “reawaken” [*zu wecken*] an understanding for the meaning of the *Seinsfrage*. Metaphorically, this suggests that our forgetfulness is akin to being asleep. It gives the image of a dormant or unconscious understanding; an understanding that is *there* but has become concealed. If this is indeed the case, then to “reawaken” an understanding for the meaning of the *Seinsfrage* is not to make a new discovery, nor to create a new understanding, but to activate a latent possibility, to bring it out of oblivion into the immediacy of the there.

It is important to always keep in mind that, while Heidegger’s use of language in *Being and Time* is deliberate and systematic, it is also colloquial. He is not only attempting to construct a new lexicon of technical terms capable of addressing a wide array of phenomenological experiences and events, he is also attempting to deepen our appreciation for the poetic richness of everyday language. Many of the words that he uses are familiar to the average speaker. They are words used in everyday discourse, typically without a second thought (i.e. “Dasein”). By implementing them in somewhat unconventional ways and by highlighting their historical and etymological connotations, Heidegger wants to show that by being attentive to the language we use every day we can be deepen our understanding of our existential situation. As readers, we would do well pay close attention to the full sense and significance of each word, even those words that would seem ordinary and uninteresting.

²¹ See: Heidegger’s comments on *Dasein-with* [*Mitdasein*] in Chapter Four of the *Being and Time*.

With this in mind, let us consider his use of reawakening: “*zu wecken*.” In German, *wecken* essentially means ‘to waken’ or ‘to awaken,’ and in this sense the English is not far off. It means to rouse from sleep or to cease sleeping; it is to move from the dormant to the active. *Zu*, on the other hand, can mean a number of things. Most significant of its meanings is the sense it evokes of heading ‘to’ or ‘being towards.’ Much like the English preposition ‘to,’ *Zu* indicates movement, both spatial (in the sense of moving toward something) and temporal (in the sense of moving forward in time, futurally). For example, “*Ich fahre zu einem Freund von mir*” translates as “I am going *to* see a friend at his place.” A person making this statement would not, at the moment, be there with the friend, but is *on the way* there.

In Joan Stambaugh’s translation “*zu wecken*” is rendered as “reawaken.” This implies repetition and return. Without questioning the importance of such a connotation, it must be acknowledged that *zu wecken* also implies that this return involves some form of movement, of being-toward something. We might, therefore, think of Heidegger’s intention to reawaken an understanding for the question of being as a journey towards the wakeful activity of such questioning. An awakened understanding for the meaning of the *Seinsfrage* is not “here” but *there*, not now but then. From this we might surmise that to be in the position of forgetfulness is to have wandered away from our understanding of the question. The temporal aspect of the being-toward of *zu*, alongside the epochal character of our forgetfulness, seems to suggest that we have historically moved away from an understanding of the *Seinsfrage*.

Interestingly, *zu* can also be used as an adverb to mean ‘closed’ or ‘locked.’ The phrase “*das Geschäft war zu*,” for example means “the shop was closed,” while “*die Tür ist zu*” means “the door is locked.” In the case of *zu wecken*, the connotation would be that our wakefulness is closed or locked. Together with the sense of forgetfulness as a dormant understanding, the

notion of a locked understanding is perhaps also important here. From this perspective, our forgetfulness is conditioned, not only on a distance, but also a closure. For Heidegger, we have been closed off from an awakened understanding of being and its question. Our existential condition is such that being and its question have been dis-closed to us in an inauthentic manner, hiding their true being.²² To reawaken our understanding, in a process of remembrance, is not only to set out on a journey towards wakefulness, but also to unlock and open-up the more authentic understanding hiding behind itself. Rather than see the absence of understanding as a nothingness, therefore, we might better see it as a closure, and the result of a blockage or impasse.

Here, we find ourselves in a real predicament. How can we reawaken an understanding for the meaning of this question when we are not in control of the way the question itself is disclosed to us? What path must we follow in order to awaken our understanding and properly pose the *Seinsfrage*? Setting aside the question of proper procedure for now, letting it ruminate in the background as we move forward, let us now consider what this for-get-fullness means in the context of questioning being.

Questioning Dynamics

Ostensibly, to pose any question is a simple and straightforward procedure. We simply utter it aloud or to ourselves and *voilà*, mission accomplished. Of course, finding answers to our questions might be difficult, but raising them should not require any strenuous effort. The idea

²² Truth in this context must not be understood in terms of correspondence, but as the process of being's coming to be. For a more in-depth discussion of Heidegger's view of truth see his lecture course entitled, *The Essence of Truth: On Plato's Cave Allegory and Theaetetus*.

that we need to “reawaken” an understanding of the question seems to problematize an otherwise simple task. Considering the sense of forgetfulness that has emerged in our discussion, however, it is perhaps the case that this obvious sense of questioning is part of the problem. If so, how should we think about questioning?

Implicit in the common way of thinking about questions is a sense that questions only come to be in and as a striving after answers. Questions represent a desire for answers. We might say that questioning is an act of being-toward-answer (to imitate a Heideggerian neologism). This question-answer dynamic is sequential, unidirectional, and is not reversible. Indeed, why would anyone raise a question if they already had an answer? In the same way that it makes little sense to eat with a full stomach, it makes little sense to question when an answer is already present.

This assumption regarding the question-answer dynamic is not only prevalent in the common, everyday world of the average person, it can also be found in the work of the most advanced analytic philosophers. Dutch logicians Jeroen Groenendijk and Martin Stokhof, for example, argue that questioning can be understood as a kind of input-output interaction, wherein a questioner aims to acquire information from an interlocutor. For Groenendijk and Stokhof, “these interactions constitute a discourse which explicitly aims at information exchange.”²³ Questions under this view are requests, and answers are requests-fulfilled. Questions, therefore, come logically prior to answers. In a similar vein, John Searle argues that questioning is an illocutionary speech act characterized as a request for information.²⁴

²³ Jeroen Groenendijk and Martin Stokhof, “Studies on the Semantics of Questions and the Pragmatics of Answers” PhD Thesis. Universiteit van Amsterdam. 1984.

²⁴ John Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*.

This way of conceptualizing the activity of questioning, in terms of information exchange, puts questions into the service of answers. We pose (questions) only to ex-pose (answers). In their servitude, questions exist only to destroy themselves. Tasked with acquiring information, the question is an opening onto a path of self-destruction. For once the desired information has been acquired, and the question answered, there is no longer any need to send out the request. The exchange has been carried out and the market closed. In this way, questioning is understood as a self-destructive movement.

Under the auspices of this assumption, Heidegger's project of "working out" the *Seinsfrage* is interpreted as an attempt to open the question in order to then close it. The forgetfulness of the question is only incidental to the forgetfulness of being, which is the real problem. As Richard Capobianco argues, "Heidegger's original and sustaining concern is with Being."²⁵ *Being and Time*, then, is interpreted as a work of ontology (albeit a unique form of ontology). Its focus is on being. What is sought is a conclusive statement about being. The question is only useful as a throughway to acquiring an answer.

This is not an uncommon interpretation of Heidegger's project. If we extend the earlier cited quote by Lee Braver, for example, we see that he prefaces himself claiming that, "before answering the question can even be a possibility, Heidegger wants us to pause and fully realize our profound perplexity before the question."²⁶ *Before answering* the question. In this view, the question inaugurates a striving after an answer and is only fulfilled when one is discovered. The issue of reawakening does not involve rethinking questioning in general, but rethinks the path to

²⁵ Richard Capobianco, *Heidegger's Way of Being*, 18.

²⁶ Lee Braver, *Heidegger*, 9.

an answer. It is a careful consideration of the unique aspects of the *Seinsfrage* that make it difficult to ex-pose.

Braver is certainly not alone in this. Hannah Arendt, for example, argues that Heidegger's account of ecstatic temporality (as provided in Division Two of *Being and Time*) constitutes a "provisional and inherently unintelligible answer [to the question of the meaning of being]."²⁷ According to Arendt, *Being and Time* is not preparatory to posing the *Seinsfrage*, but constitutes an example of its being posed *and* answered. For her, the text is an attempt to rescue the concept of being from Kantian destruction, that is, "to reestablish an ontology."²⁸

Jeff Malpas (a proponent of the transcendental interpretation of Heidegger's work), too, claims that the *Seinsfrage*, "is answered by looking to an analysis of the structure of the mode of being of a particular being—the being for whom being is itself in question and to which Heidegger gives the name (at least in this work) *Dasein*."²⁹ For Malpas, the topographical account of *Dasein* given via the existential analysis is Heidegger's "answer" to the *Seinsfrage*. While it does not arrive in the form of "being is X" it is an answer in the sense that it grounds all possible "answers." The question, for him, is posed without difficulty at the beginning of the text.

Similarly, William J. Richardson argues that Heidegger's purpose with *Being and Time* is "to lay the groundwork for metaphysics."³⁰ The existential analysis, he argues, is an attempt to establish the conditions of possibility of any and all thinking about being. And so, while metaphysics has always been the product of a finite perspective, its underlying conditions have

²⁷ Hannah Arendt, "What is Existential Philosophy?" *Essays in Understanding*, 176.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 176.

²⁹ Jeff Malpas, "Heidegger's Topology of Being" *Transcendental Heidegger*, Kindle Loc. 1893.

³⁰ William J. Richardson, *Heidegger: From Phenomenology to Thought*, 103.

remained the same. For Richardson, to work out the *Seinsfrage*, “is to discern phenomenologically this finite comprehension of Being and reveal its ultimate sense.”³¹ This “ultimate sense” amounts to an answering of the *Seinsfrage*.

To interpret the project of *Being and Time* in this way is to situate it within a long tradition of attempting to answer the question—what does it mean to be? In so doing, however, the question inevitably arises: why do we need to reawaken an understanding for the question? Have we not been raising it for centuries? Certainly, there are plenty of philosophers, both past and present, working on metaphysical and ontological questions concerning being. There have been and continue to be countless books published purporting to provide answers to these questions. Plato, for example, argues that being is *Idea*, the purest of which is the idea of the good [ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα], Aristotle gives it manifold meanings, Plotinus argues that it is one, Spinoza calls it substance [*substantia*], Leibniz splits it into monads, Descartes divides it into immaterial [*res cogitans*] and physical substance [*res extensia*], Schopenhauer calls it will and representation [*Wille und Vorstellung*], Hegel calls it the absolute [*das Absolute*], and Nietzsche calls it the will to power [*Wille zur Macht*]. What would a Heideggerian ontology have to offer that others failed to deliver?

To explain why these efforts are inadequate and misguided, proponents of the ontological reading of *Being and Time* (a reading which claims Heidegger’s efforts are directed towards the exposure of an answering) often refer to Heidegger’s account of the ontological difference: i.e. the notion that “the being of being ‘is’ itself not a being.”³² The difference, as it is presented in *Being and Time*, seems to function as a way of problematizing the tradition. Heidegger is arguing

³¹ Ibid, 103.

³² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 5.

that being [*das Sein*], as such and in general, cannot be understood in terms of any one being [*das Seiende*]. *That* something is, is not reducible to *what* something is. Anytime a claim is made about being, in the form of “being is *X*”, being is presupposed, pushed back via the copula, and thereby evades our efforts of determination. And so, when metaphysicians try to conceptualize being in order to present some ultimate statement about it, their accounts are inevitably reductive and fall short of the goal. To make this mistake is to fail to recognize that being is the condition of all possibility and is thereby relentlessly prior to any claims made about it. Reading the ontological difference in this way, the question of the meaning of being is presented as the “problem of being.”³³ And, as with any problem (question), it is just waiting to be solved (answered).

Indeed, understanding Heidegger’s project in this way is not uncommon. The narrative is well-worn. While it is an undoubtedly fair route to take, and one that has led and continues to lead to many fruitful readings, it does not seem to fully appreciate the depth of our forgetfulness. If we want to take seriously Heidegger’s claim that we need to reawaken an understanding for the meaning of the *Seinsfrage*, then we must also be skeptical of the assumption that its aim is to search for an answer. We must take seriously the prospect that our assumptions about questioning cover over a more genuine understanding of what questioning *is* and thereby contribute to our state of double for-get-fullness.

We may wonder, though, what exactly is at stake here. In short, it is not only the integrity of our engagement with *Being and Time*, that is at risk, but also our engagement with Heidegger’s entire *Gesamtausgabe*. For many readers and commentators, *Being and Time* is

³³ William J. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, 28.

Heidegger's magnum opus. As such, it often orients our readings of the rest of his works. It is not only the first text that many read, but, considered as the centerpiece of his lifelong project, it is thought to gravitationally unite his disparate work on the themes of art and technology, language and history. The scope of the ontological reading's influence, therefore, is not limited to *Being and Time*, but creeps into our interpretations of Heidegger's earlier and later work as well.

One way that it does this, is through the argument that the unfinished character of *Being and Time* stands as a testament to Heidegger's failure to provide a conclusive answer. Indeed, Heidegger never published the projected third division of the first part to be entitled "Time and Being." Nor did he complete the second half of the work, which was to be an extensive reverse-reading of the tradition, from Kant through Descartes to Aristotle. Eventually, the label "First Half," which adorned the first few editions of the work, was removed from subsequent editions. As Dennis Schmidt tells us in the foreword to the text, "[*Being and Time*] is a torso of its own intentions and the fragment of a larger project."³⁴

This failure is said not to have discouraged the philosopher; instead, it is considered a productive failure. The now infamous "turn" in Heidegger's thought is often interpreted as the abandonment of his ontological project and the metaphysical language that motivated it. This abandonment is not a complete abandonment but a "turning away" from the trappings of his earlier approach towards a new, more poetic approach that focuses less on the (all too metaphysical) concept of being than it does on notions of art, technology, language and history.

³⁴ Dennis Schmidt "Foreword" *Being and Time*, xvi

This shift in direction is read as a kind of lesson learned, and that Heidegger's later writings are interpreted as the fruits of his failure.

Jacques Derrida, for example, argues that the incompleteness of *Being and Time* can be explained as a "running out of breath [*essoufflement*]." ³⁵ For him, Heidegger was unable to finish the project because he ran up against the limits of his "metaphysical" vocabulary. The idea is that after discovering the limits of his language, Heidegger abandoned talk of being as such and in general (which is too easily misconstrued as being-ness) and attempted to expand his vocabulary in order to surpass these limitations. Unfortunately, for Derrida, Heidegger's allegiance to the language of metaphysics never allowed him to fully rid himself of his metaphysical baggage.

The idea that *Being and Time* is a productive failure is certainly compelling. It is undoubtedly true that Heidegger's later writings differ from his earlier ones; yet, we must resist the notion that these are two radically different Heidegger's (a Heidegger I and Heidegger II as Richardson likes to classify them). For, as Heidegger himself tells us in the preface to the seventh edition, "[*Being and Time*'s] path still remains a necessary one even today, if the question of being is to move our Dasein."³⁶ Before we can make any definitive conclusions about Heidegger's "failure" and subsequent "turn" we must properly understand the ambitions of *Being and Time*, and on a background of double-forgetfulness, we must be wary of our own assumptions about what the project entails. Heidegger's aim is to "work out" the question of the meaning of being. Let us now consider more closely what he means to accomplish.

³⁵ Jacques Derrida, *The Question of Being and History*, 153.

³⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, xxvii.

Working Out the *Seinsfrage*

If to “work out” the *Seinsfrage* is not necessarily an attempt to answer the question, what else could it be? What does it mean to “work out” the question if not to search for an answer to it? Paying close attention to Heidegger’s language, we notice that the word he uses is “*Ausarbeitung*.” Translated into English as “work out,” the richness of the original is obscured. In English, the word “work” connotes the accomplishment of a task and the actualization of a possibility through labour. It is a broad term that can be applied to any kind of task or job, from the mundane to the extraordinary. A student *works* on their math homework, just as a politician *works* on restoring the economy. In German, the word “*arbeiten*,” can certainly be translated as “work,” but does not refer simply to the accomplishment of a task or the actualizing of a possibility (as the German “*werken*” does). Rather, *arbeit* is the labour by which we earn a living. It is the ongoing activity of self-preservation and endurance. It is a hardship that takes time and effort. It can be exhausting but is also rewarding. In everyday discourse, German speakers will often use the word *arbeit* to refer to one’s vocation. It is not just a one-time job, something to be accomplished and set aside, but is rather like a calling. *Ausarbeitung*, therefore, carries with it the weight of an enduring commitment. In this sense, to work out the question of the meaning of being is not something we do once and then put behind us, nor is it like a chore that we perform every now and again when necessary. It is a calling, something that spans an entire lifetime. It is not the striving after some destination, not a matter of arrival, but a way of living and of earning a living.

If this is what Heidegger intends to convey with regard to the act of questioning, then what does this mean for our understanding of the question-answer dynamic and the assumption that to pose the question is to strive after an answer? We tend to think of answers as destinations.

If what Heidegger is trying to achieve is an “*Ausarbeitung*,” however, we should not think of this a simple journey from point A to point B, nor should we think of it as an attempt to close the question. And yet, it is hard to imagine a questioning that does not involve an attempt at answering. Why are the two so closely associated? What is the relationship of the question and answer? How are we to understand the dynamic link between the two?

We have spent some time contemplating the nature of the question but have not said much about the nature of the answer. Perhaps, if we are to develop our understanding of the question-answer dynamic, it would be prudent to ask: what is an answer?

Heidegger offers a clue as to the essence of an answer when he writes: “in conformity to its most proper sense, the answer [to the question of being] provides a directive for concrete ontological research, that is, a directive to begin its investigative inquiry within the horizon exhibited—and that is all it provides.”³⁷ Here, it is clear that the answer is not the final conclusion of the inquiry, not the destination, but rather the “guiding directive” for inquiry. The answer, in a sense, is situated prior to the question. Indeed, as was discussed earlier, it is only on the basis of having an answer, in the form of a preliminary understanding of being [*Seinsverständnis*], that we can question being in the first place. We might say, it is not the question that begets an answer but the answer that begets the question. In this way, Heidegger looks to reverse the commonsense question-answer dynamic (at least as it applies to the *Seinsfrage*) in order to reprioritize the question. The issue, therefore, is not that an answer is lacking, quite the opposite. It is that the question is lacking, forgotten.

³⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 19.

Heidegger extends this sentiment in a letter to Richardson, published as the foreword to his book *Heidegger: From Phenomenology to Thought*, writing, “I hesitate with my answers, for they are necessarily no more than indications [*Hinweise*].”³⁸ The German word he uses here is *Hinweise*, which can be translated as indication but can also mean “hint.” From this we can see that even if Heidegger were attempting to answer the *Seinsfrage*, any answer given would not be definitive. Instead it would serve as a hint, an indicator or guide. To answer the *Seinsfrage* is not to solve the problem of being, but to give clues. It is to propose a general direction, not a specific path. Here again, we find Heidegger utilizing the language of a journey. Indeed, to reawaken [*zu wecken*] an understanding for the meaning of being is to embark on a journey, to provide answers is to guide that journey towards reawakening.

On a background of for-get-fulness, we can now begin to see that the task of “working out” the *Seinsfrage* is not founded on the lack of an answer, on an absence, but on the positive fullness of an already functioning (albeit implicit) answer. In light of this, therefore, we can begin to see how, for Heidegger, the question-answer dynamic of the *Seinsfrage* is different than we commonly think about it. Heidegger’s question is founded on the existence of a previously given answer, a giving before. This answer underlies all of our projects and activities, our thoughts and our actions; every moment of our lives, from the mundane to the extraordinary, is conditioned by it.

We might, at this point, wonder whether there is a contradiction in Heidegger’s reversal of the question-answer dynamic. In the opening lines of the preamble, Heidegger tells us that we no longer understand what we mean by the word ‘being.’ Not at all. If it is true, then, that the

³⁸ Martin Heidegger, “Preface” *Heidegger: From Phenomenology to Thought*, vii.

question arises *after* the answer, would this not mean that an understanding of being is not actually absent at all? Is this not a contradiction?

In short, there is no contradiction here; however, the point is a subtle one. Recall that our forgetfulness is founded on a full understanding of being. The answer to the question of the meaning of being, which underlies our everyday being in the world and the projects that we take up within the world, is rarely made explicit. This meaning resides in the disclosure of being. It lives in our assumptions. We take it for granted. Thus, the lack of an answer is not a genuine absence, but the absence of an obscuring. Heidegger addresses this concern in the introduction when he writes:

Beings can be determined in their being without the explicit concept of the meaning of being having to be already available. If this were not so there could not have been as yet any ontological knowledge. [...] Presupposing being has the character of taking a preliminary look at being in such a way that on the basis of this look beings that are already given are tentatively articulated in their being.³⁹

For the question to arise out from an answer, it need not be the case that the answer is expressed in a clear and straightforward statement about being. Being need not be clearly defined. As Heidegger tells us, “an enigma lies a priori in every relation and being towards beings as beings. The fact that we live already in an understanding of being and that the meaning of being is at the same time shrouded in darkness proves the fundamental necessity of retrieving the question of the meaning of ‘being.’”⁴⁰

Returning, then, to the question of the meaning of *Ausarbeitung* we find that the committed labour of “working out” the question is not carried out in a closing off of the question,

³⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 3.

but in manifesting the question—of bringing it out of the oblivion of forgetfulness. Understood in this way, the “out” of work out (the “*aus*” of *Ausarbeitung*) must not be thought of as a “putting out” or an extinguishing, but rather as a bringing out, an issuing or a manifesting.⁴¹ In the existential sense of disclosure, Heidegger looks to work out the *Seinsfrage* from under the coverings of an otherwise inauthentic dis-closure.

Recollection

This chapter gave an interpretation of the opening lines of *Being and Time*. My close reading of Heidegger’s preamble was intended to orient further reading, and to establish a foothold (of sorts) from which to launch an interpretation of the text and its project. By lingering on the preamble, reading carefully, we discovered that Heidegger’s task is perhaps not what it appears to be at first glance.

For Heidegger, the existential conditions of our time are such that we have forgotten what we mean by the word ‘being.’ To make matters worse, we fail to even be perplexed by this fact. By arguing that we are in a position of double-forgetfulness, a kind of Socratic double-ignorance, Heidegger intends to prepare us for a questioning that arises from presumption by putting those presumptions into doubt. Thus, the opening lines of *Being and Time* are not intended to orient its readers in the traditional sense of contextualizing and situating the project in relation to the

⁴¹ In English, the word “answer” carries with it some important connotations that can help to express this dynamic shift. The word is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word “*andswarian*,” which is comprised of the prefix “*and-*” meaning to return, to oppose or to stand against, and “*swerian*” meaning to take an oath, or attest to and verify the truth of some claim. This sense is retained in the word “swear.” Historically, therefore, to answer is to swear against, to testify to a truth in opposition to something. The word carries with it legal connotations and is related to the context of witness testimony in a courtroom. In a sense, we might think of an answer as a swearing against the question. Indeed, as we mentioned earlier, to answer a question is to condemn it. The revelation of an answer is to testify to some fact, it is an exposure to the truth of some claim, and in this ex-posing the question posed is closed off.

tradition, but rather by manifesting a deep sense of perplexity. The only way to “reawaken” the question of being is to first recognize that our understanding is asleep.

For, as we discovered, to forget being is to for-get it. According to Heidegger, our sleepy understanding is not to be understood as an absence of understanding but an obscuring fullness of understanding. We have for-gotten being by presuming and presupposing it in everything that we do, questioning included. Thus, we are no longer granted any certainty regarding our expectations about the *Seinsfrage*. The all too common assumption that Heidegger is trying to answer the question of being must be questioned. In so doing, we must also problematize the readings of prominent Heidegger scholars and commentators, including the likes of Lee Braver, Hannah Arendt, Jeff Malpas, and William J. Richardson. From this position of perplexity and doubt, a question is beginning to form; i.e. the question of questioning. What does it mean to question for Heidegger? If questioning is not a striving for answers (being-toward-answer), what is it?

Our initial musings on this question and consideration of Heidegger’s language (*zu wecken, Ausarbeitung*, etc...), it was argued that to “work out” the *Seinsfrage*, for Heidegger, is not necessarily to strive after an answer, but to resist the closure of an already implicit answer. To work out the question requires a level of restraint that is not found in the ordinary understanding of questioning. Such hasty groping after answers is doomed to fall into the repetitive pattern of forgetfulness. Heidegger’s task of working out the *Seinsfrage* is, therefore, no simple task. It is more like a long and difficult labour, a calling, by which we make manifest the *Seinsfrage*. This, of course, does not tell us exactly what is involved in the labour of working out the question, but it does provide a hint as to the direction we ought to move towards.

Our next section will attempt to give shape to an understanding of what questioning means for Heidegger and how it functions in the overall project of *Being and Time*. We will first consider the formal structure of questioning, looking at some of the comments Heidegger makes about it, which will then lead into a discussion of the existential analytic of Dasein (of which the majority of the text is comprised), followed by a meditation on the relationship of Dasein's being-there and questioning.

Chapter II: Into the Open

In the first chapter I suggested that Heidegger's project of "working out" the *Seinsfrage*, is not an attempt to answer the question, but to bring it out from behind the coverings of an already implicit answer. The question we now face is: what does this mean for how we interpret *Being and Time* and Heidegger's wider philosophical project? In attempting to address this question, two further questions arise: (1) what exactly is Heidegger working out? (i.e. what *is* the *Seinsfrage*?), and (2) how does this working out take place? (i.e. what is involved in the process of working out [*Ausarbeitung*]?).

The remainder of this thesis will be dedicated to addressing these questions. It will be divided into two chapters. The first will mine Heidegger's introductory remarks on questioning in order to get a better sense of what questioning, as such and in general, entails. It will be argued that questioning is not merely an action carried out by an otherwise unaffected questioner but is a mode of Dasein's being. In so doing, I will show that Heidegger characterizes questioning as disclosure via restrained-seeking; i.e. a receptive openness to the issue in question. This will be followed by a discussion regarding the eminence of the question concerning being, and how it can be set apart from other questions. It will be argued that the *Seinsfrage* is a way of being wherein Dasein fundamentally opens up to the issue (issuing) of being as such and in general, and that such openness is preparatory to a free, creative transformation from the ground up. This will lead into the third chapter where I will consider *how* the *Seinsfrage* is to be worked out. An interpretation of the existential analytic, as Heidegger's chosen path to work out or manifest an openness to the issue of being will be given there.

Opening an Issue

Earlier, we considered the possibility that Heidegger's project of working out [*Ausarbeitung*] the question of the meaning of being is not necessarily a unidirectional, striving movement from absence to fullness, ignorance to knowledge, problem to solution; i.e. question to answer. This, however, left us wondering what the *Seinsfrage* truly is. Let us now work to develop a richer sense of the question as Heidegger understands it; namely, what it is, how it works, where, when and why it can/should be posed.

Before attempting to capture what is unique about this question, we would be wise to first consider the claims Heidegger makes about questioning in general. In so doing, we must be attentive, not only to Heidegger's careful use of language, but also to the often implicit, though necessary, assumptions that inform our own thought (as well as our lives more generally). If we are not necessarily permitted the assumption that questions inaugurate a being-toward-answer, then how should we think about them? What might a question look like if it is not directed toward the ex-posure of an answering? How would such questioning function? Why should we engage in it? Would it not be a futile gesture? In order to appropriately respond to these questions, we should perhaps start with the more basic question: *what is questioning?*

Indeed, this is the same place that Heidegger starts. As he tells us, "to retrieve the question of being means first of all to work out adequately the *formulation* of the question [*die Fragestellung*]." ⁴² Engaging with the question concerning questioning, therefore, Heidegger proposes a formal structure of general questioning comprised of three key moments, what he calls: the *Gefragtes*, *Befragtes*, and *Erfragtes*, or that which is *asked about*, that which is

⁴² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 3.

interrogated, and that which is to be *ascertained*, respectively.⁴³ Reflecting on this structure, two characteristics immediately stand out.

(1) Although it is conceptually divided into three, none can be meaningfully separated from the others and left to stand on its own. It is a *tri-unitary* structure. For to ask about something, something must also be interrogated, and something must also be sought. An interrogation would make little sense without a topic of concern or a goal. Altogether, they give form and shape to questioning. Their unity is indicated by the fact that each of the three words share a common root. By adding different prefixes to the word “*fragen*” [“questioning”], Heidegger intends to capture the unity of these three key elements of questioning while at the same time illustrating their distinct aspects.

It is also important to note that the emphasis of these terms is not necessarily on their respective objects *per se* but on the action of interacting with their objects. While there certainly is some-thing asked about, some-thing interrogated, and some-thing to be gained, we must not forget that “*fragen*” is a verb. *Gefragtes* refers to the action of *having been asking*. *Befragtes* refers to the immediate action of *asking* or *interrogating*, and *Erfragtes* is the continuing action of *asking towards* a goal. Heidegger is not saying that questioning is a collection of three distinct beings, but that it is an activity of relating to said beings. Each prefix indicates an aspect of an otherwise singular *activity*.

(2) In addition to the active, tri-unitary aspect of questioning, Heidegger also wants to acknowledge its temporal character. The “*Ge-*” of *Gefragtes*, for example, indicates past tense (although it does not necessarily entail completion); the “*Be-*” of *Befragtes* indicates present

⁴³ Ibid, 4.

tense (a working on something or the changing of a state), and the “*Er-*” of *Erfragtes* indicates future tense (the attainment of something to come). Altogether, this structure gives a sense of questioning as a durational movement. For Heidegger, questioning is not something that happens in one frozen moment but is something that occurs in and through time. It is a dynamic, tri-unitarily structured, temporal activity, carried out in relation to beings.

As such, questioning ought not be seen as something objectively present and describable, an object of science, but as an activity performed by a questioning-being. More specifically, the fact that it is carried out in relation to beings suggests that this questioning-being must be privy to being in the existential sense, thus indicating that questioning is a possibility afforded to Dasein alone. To ask about beings, to interrogate beings, and to ascertain beings, requires a preliminary understanding-relationship to those beings. One must be in a world to question it. As Heidegger will say of the *Seinsfrage*, “[it is] nothing else than the radicalization of an essential tendency of being that belongs to Dasein itself.”⁴⁴

Indeed, as *Being and Time* unfolds it will become clear that the temporal structure of questioning is not only constitutive of questioning but is structurally fundamental to the existence of Dasein and thereby informs all of the varied modes of its being-in-the-world.⁴⁵ In this way, we can see the formal structure of questioning as Heidegger’s attempt to demarcate a link between Dasein (as temporal existence) and questioning (as temporal activity). This

⁴⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 13.

⁴⁵ I briefly discussed Dasein’s being-in-the-world in the first chapter. Deepening the sense of what this entails, Heidegger will interpret being-in-the-world in terms of Care [*Sorge*]. This means that the disclosive opening up and standing out into the world, that is conditioned by an understanding of being [*Seinsverständnis*], is carried out in terms of a specific occurring relationship to beings. This relationship finds expression in our everyday activities and ways of living (whether for work or leisure); in effect, the things we do. By investigating the nature of care, as a disclosive occurrence, Heidegger will discover that the essence of care is temporality [*Temporalität*], and that temporality provides the fundamental structure of the horizon of care. Thus, he will characterize Dasein’s existence as fundamentally temporal.

ultimately means that questioning, as a mode of Dasein's existence, is fundamentally disclosive. Through the activity of questioning, a world emerges in which Dasein as questioner finds itself immersed and engaged with the beings circumspectly surrounding it. We shall discuss the importance of this in greater detail in the third chapter.

Before we move on, however, we ought to pause and take note of the fact that the translation of "*die Fragestellung*" as "formulation of the question," although appropriate, can be misleading. Firstly, the suffix "*-ung*" indicates that the word is a noun crafted from a verb. As such it is a way of speaking directly about an action without implying that it is the action of some objective entity. What is more, although it is a noun, *die Fragestellung* is not a static object, place or thing, but a kind of action. To maintain this sense of continuing action we might be better off translating it as "formulating" (i.e. as "the formulating of the question") rather than "formulation," which implies completion and accomplishment.

Secondly, the word "formulation" also carries with it a sense of repetition and strict adherence to a rule. Mathematical rules, for example, are expressed as formulas. Indeed, any action carried out in an unchanging and repetitive manner is said to be formulaic. In German, however, "*stellen*" has a much less rigid sense. As a verb, it is used to mean "posing, positioning, placing, putting, setting or adjusting." "*Kann ich dir eine Frage stellen?*" for example, translates as "can I pose a question to you?" or "can I put a question to you?" With this in mind, we might translate the task of working out [*Ausarbeitung*] the *Fragestellung* as "the labour of making manifest the question-posing." Heidegger's concern is with the activity of posing a question and the functioning of its active structure. Thus, his account of the "formal structure" [*Die formale Struktur*] of questioning cannot necessarily be interpreted as an unchanging, fixed and formulaic structure, but an attempt to capture the way questioning emerges and is disclosed to us.

Heidegger's description of questioning concerns the way questioning occurs for us and by us today.

As was hinted at in the first section, answers are not conclusive statements, the crowning achievements of a successfully closed questioning, but are better understood as guides or launch points for further questioning. And so, we should not treat the *Fragestellung*, Heidegger's answer to the question of questioning, as a definitive and conclusive formula. By laying out a formal structure, he is not necessarily attempting to give a definitive, unchanging account of questioning. He is not trying to expose the platonic idea of questioning, or to establish a rule (formula) that all questioning must follow for all time. Considering the ontic way Heidegger describes the formal structure of questioning, outlining it in brief with a single paragraph, we should perhaps think of his description as a provisional starting point, as Heidegger's attempt to *open the issue* of questioning, rather than settle it.

Forward Forholding

The structure of question-posing relates questioning to Dasein, as a form of Dasein's occurrence. This fact alone, however, tells us very little about what Heidegger means by questioning, how it functions, what it accomplishes, and its general significance. Questioning is a way of being(in-the-world); it is an existential activity. What, though, sets it apart from Dasein's other activities?

It is common to view questioning as a purely linguistic exercise; i.e. as one form of discursive activity, among many, that we may or may not choose to carry out. Under such a view, sentences ending in question marks or an inflected tone function in much the same way as

sentences that end in periods or exclamation points. These sentences are uttered by a being that is untouched by them. They emerge from the speaker as a kind of byproduct that, once expelled, is detached from them. It thus becomes like a tool, ready to be picked up and used for a specific purpose.

In an economy of information, for example, questioning is only set apart from other linguistic expressions by the fact that it indicates an absence of “information” and marks a request for that information. Statements, on the other hand, are indicative of information possessed. On such a view, questions are distinct sorts of communication tools that can be used should the present situation call for it; questioning is the active use of a tool. As a miner uses a hammer-tool rather than a spoon-tool, the information exchanger may use a question-tool rather than a statement-tool. And, like the miner using the hammer-tool, whether or not the information exchanger uses the tool is of little consequence at an ontological level. It may alter the outcome of the task at hand, of course, but has no impact on the constitution of the inquirer herself. With or without the information she desires, the inquirer will simply carry on unchanged and untouched.

This picture of language, as detached from the language user, as a kind of tool that can be put to work, and of questioning as one language tool among others, can largely be traced back to the Aristotelian notion of man as animal rationale, the *zoon logon echon* [ζῷον λόγος ἔχων]. The rational animal is a being with the capacity to carry out rationally formulated projects. It is a being with a definitive ontological constitution. What Heidegger seems to be claiming, however, is that the act of questioning is not like using a tool but is a unique way of being-in-the-world. The question is not external to the being of the questioner, something objectively present, waiting to be used. It is not simply the expressed byproduct of a specific animal with an ability to

excrete word-signs. It is a form of Dasein's existential ontological occurrence—i.e a disclosive condition of possibility. Resisting the temptation to think about questioning in the above terms, therefore, how might we distinguish its disclosive functioning from Dasein's other existential modes?

As he lays out the formal structure of questioning, Heidegger makes two stand out points that we should now discuss:

(1) "All questioning is a seeking [*Suchen*]." ⁴⁶

(2) "[Questioning is] an attitude [*Verhalten*] adopted by a being, the questioner." ⁴⁷

Let us elaborate on the nature of these two aspects of questioning. In so doing, we shall enrich our interpretation of questioning as a temporally situated movement/action, and further expose the link between Dasein and questioning.

From mundane questions about the weather, to grave questions about the survival odds of a cancer patient, from shallow questions about dinner plans and neighborhood gossip, to deep spiritual questions about the meaning of life and the cosmos, all questions *seek* something. In such seeking, the seeker projects certain possibilities ahead of herself. She then moves to pursue those possibilities. In this respect, the English word "questioning" (quest-ioning) has an advantage over the German "*Fragen*," since it carries with it a sense of questing or embarking on a quest. As a kind of quest, questioning involves movement towards something.

⁴⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 4.

Heidegger, elaborates on this by arguing that, “questioning is a knowing search [*erkennende Suchen*] for beings in their thatness and whatness.”⁴⁸ In many ways, the goal of any search is determinative of the path that the search will follow. Thus, by dividing the *Erfragtes* of questioning into two forms, Heidegger distinguishes two ways of carrying out the questioning; i.e. of disclosing and moving through the world. We might wonder, though, why he makes this distinction. Why divide the seeking of questioning into two? Could he not have simply said that questioning is a knowing search for beings, and ended it there? What makes “thatness” distinct from “whatness”?

One way to interpret this division is to see it as a way for Heidegger to distinguish his questioning from the questioning of the ontic sciences. Heidegger’s questioning concerns the meaning of being [*das sinn von sein*]; i.e. the meaning of the that-ness of beings. His focus is on the fact *that* beings are at all. The ontic sciences on the other hand are concerned with the whatness or quiddity of beings. Biology, for example, questions beings as biological, chemistry as chemical, and physics as physical. As such, the questioning of ontic sciences remains within the confines of their predefined regions of being. The sciences are not concerned with the issue of being as such and in general. Their existence, in fact, is premised upon an understanding of “being” that cannot be questioned without stepping outside of the domain itself. Heidegger’s reason for emphasizing this divide in questioning is, at least in part, that he wants to set his searching at a distance from such forms of questioning.

Another way to think of this divide is to consider Heidegger’s further claim that, “every seeking takes its lead beforehand from what is sought.”⁴⁹ In a rough sense, what Heidegger

⁴⁸ Ibid, 4.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 4.

means by this is that questioning is never completely blind. The act of seeking implies a known goal that guides and directs the search. Of course, every aspect of the goal need not be explicitly known. It may be that the questioner only has a vague intuition of where her seeking is headed. Nonetheless, there must be always be a goal to attain and a direction to move towards, or else we would not know where to take our search, nor where to end it. When searching for lost keys, for example, the seeker understands what keys are and where they might be. The seeker tries to recall where they last had the keys. They return to retrace their steps, to examine the places where the keys may have been left. The same is true of questioning. What is sought, opens up a possible region in which to pursue the object sought after. In this way, the *Erfragtes*, as the leading moment of questioning, is also the moment that *discloses* and delineates the ground upon which the search is to be conducted. If, therefore, Heidegger is searching for thatness and not a whatness, the ground upon which the search is conducted will not be opened up by a “concept” but by being itself. What this means will be elaborated upon shortly as we discuss the uniqueness of the *Seinsfrage*. For now, though, our concern is with questioning in general.

Let us, then, turn to the second defining characteristic of questioning—the “attitude” that informs its seeking. For Heidegger, questioning is not carried out in a purely disinterested way. The questioner, in questioning, is not detached from the issue at hand, but is predisposed to it in some form or another (again, questioning is a mode of Dasein’s being-in-the-world and not the rational activity of a disinterested subjectivity). We might think of this questioning-attitude as the mood or disposition that accompanies and informs its questioning-seeking, something like the style or mood with which the quest is undertaken.

The word Heidegger uses here, “*verhalten*,” is appropriately translated as “attitude,” however, this translation does not capture the full and particular sense of the German. In English,

“attitude” is used to describe general posturing; it is the combination of a state of mind and a style of behavior or conduct. In this respect, the English and the German are relatively on par. That said, while there are a wide variety of different attitudes, from joyful to hateful, from lazy to ambitious, the word “attitude” more often than not carries with it a negative connotation. We might say that someone is “giving attitude,” or that they “have attitude” when they are posturing in an abrasive, self-centered, or indolent manner. Moreover, an attitude is something uninhibited and unchecked. We often tell others that they need to “lose the attitude” which is essentially a demand that they regain composure.

Verhalten, on the other hand, carries slightly different connotations that are perhaps more in line with the less common English “forhold” meaning “to withhold, to hold up, to hold back.” This is because *verhalten*, used as an adverb, invokes a sense of caution, and of taking care. It implies deliberation, and self-control. Instead of simply behaving, one behaves. Indeed, when converted to a noun, taking the form *verhaltenheit*, the word becomes essentially equivalent to the English word “restraint.” From this we get a better sense of what Heidegger means when he tells us that questioning is “an attitude [*verhalten*] adopted by a being.” For a questioner to pose a question is, accordingly, for them to take up an attitude of restraint.

We can interpret this to mean that the seeking of questioning is not carried out in haste. Although the questioner looks to ascertain something, they do not charge ahead in pursuit of it. Questioning, although futurally directed towards the attainment of some-thing (in terms of a whatness or thatness), is not entirely predetermined in its projection. In this way, rhetorical questions and those that come with explicitly preconceived answers are not genuine questions. While the questioner must have some sort of understanding of that which is sought after, genuine

questioning is restrained or withheld. This might not seem to be a very radical claim, but in fact it has broad implications on the kinds of inquiry that we ordinarily find ourselves engaged in.

Here, we might be reminded of the sense of forgetfulness we discussed in the first section. It was argued that to forget being is to for-get it, that is, to operate under the disclosure of a preemptive understanding of being. We might think of questioning as a for-holding in a similar sense. To for-get the meaning of being is to unhesitatingly presuppose its meaning. From such a position, forgetful seeking knows what it is looking for. There is no mystery involved, it simply “gets” what it already had be-fore. To adopt an attitude of for-holding, however, is to hold back our presuppositions. This can perhaps be understood in two ways. First, to hold the fore is to try and prevent its unrestrained influence. Second, to hold the fore is to hold it. That is, to recognize our reliance on the fore and to maintain one’s grasp of it. Instead of reaching out to grab at a presupposed answer, to “get” it, as one who for-gets does, the questioner holds it. In this way, the questioner recognizes that her presuppositions play a part in opening the search, but she does not allow them free reign to direct it. She does not necessarily try to dispose of her presuppositions, but simply to acknowledge them.

This attitude of for-holding serves to distinguish questioning from other forms of seeking. Take, for instance, the seeking of a mine worker. Searching for underground minerals, the miner bores her way through the earth. She knows, in advance, *what* she is looking for; she knows where to look for it, what tools are appropriate to the task, and her search is carried out without restraint. In fact, restraint would only serve to hinder her search and postpone the goal. Obviously, she must take care to mine safely and in a manner conducive to finding the hidden minerals, but even when rethinking strategy and contemplating approach, the search moves

forward without question. As an experienced miner, her presuppositions are not withheld, but exploited.⁵⁰

Before moving ahead, let us recapitulate what we have just discussed. Questioning is characterized by Heidegger as both a seeking [*Suchen*] and an attitude [*Verhalten*]. In its seeking, questioning ‘takes its lead beforehand from what is sought,’ thus opening up a domain in which to conduct a search. Seeking disclosively projects *ahead* of itself. This means that questioning always already involves a preliminary understanding of what is to be attained in its seeking. The attitude of questioning, on the other hand, is one of restraint and with-holding. The understanding by which the projected seeking takes its lead is held-back (although not dissolved). The attitude of questioning, as restraint, is the manner in which the questioner approaches the situation at hand and withholds their future projection. This attitude is less concerned with the future than it is with how things are *already* going. If seeking is most intimately linked to the *Erfragtes* of questioning, then this restrained-attitude is related most directly to the *Gefragtes* of questioning’s formal structure; it looks back to the “already” of the activity. Together, the forward projection of its seeking (for-getting) and the forholding of its attitude, in their struggle against one another, disclose the world. In questioning, Dasein opens up a path on which the quest is to be carried out *and* then follows it.

By laying out these two characteristics of questioning, we are now in a position to analyze and evaluate it in terms of Dasein’s existence. In order to better understand how

⁵⁰ Here, it may be important to discuss Heidegger’s concept of curiosity [*Neugier*]. Questioning can be carried out in the same pointed, projective way that the miner carries out her job. Heidegger defines the mood of such questioning as curiosity. Characterized as a distracted not staying [*Unverweilen*] and a never dwelling anywhere, “[curiosity] seeks restlessness and excitement from continual novelty and changing encounters” (*Being and Time*, 166). Curious questioning, therefore, moves by way of assumption and projection. It does not rest long enough to properly open up to the issue at hand. Curiosity does not listen.

restrained-seeking functions, let us now briefly discuss the shape of Dasein's existential structure, as Heidegger describes it *Chapter 5: Being-in as Such*, and try to map questioning onto it.⁵¹ Recall that for Heidegger, Dasein is the being that is being-in-the-world, always already conditioned by an understanding of being. The existential structure, as it appears in this chapter, concerns the shape and configuration that being-in-the-world takes.

First and foremost, Heidegger tells us that, “we see the two equiprimordially constitutive ways to be the there [to be Dasein] in *attunement* [*Befindlichkeit*] and *understanding* [*Verstehen*].”⁵² Together, he says, attunement and understanding are “determined by discourse [*Rede*].”⁵³ Here, again, we have a three-part structure that will, in the unfolding of the text, be exposed as ecstatically temporal in nature.

In the existential context, understanding [*Verstehen*] is to be sharply distinguished from what might be called cognitive understanding or “knowing,” which puts things in order and breaks them down into constitutive elements. Understanding, as *Verstehen*, works by projecting toward a possible future. As Heidegger tells us, “understanding in itself has the existential structure which we call *project* [*Entwurf*].”⁵⁴ This projection is no mere “looking ahead” and discovering possibilities that are already there, rather, the understanding first opens the future by disclosing possibility. In this way, understanding is an active occurrence, and can be distinguished from a sense of understanding where something is merely “understood” [*Verstanden*].

⁵¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 127-174

⁵² *Ibid*, 130.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 130.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 140.

Understanding, for Heidegger, is fundamentally built into the existential structure of Dasein and concerns the possibilities of its being, the possibilities that it *is*. As Heidegger explains, “understanding is the existential being [*Sein*] of the ownmost potentiality of being of Dasein itself in such a way that this being [*Sein*] discloses in itself what its very being is about.”⁵⁵ It is not as if Dasein can look to the future should it so choose, nor is it the case that the projection of understanding is something willed. As an equiprimordial moment in Dasein’s existential structure, understanding is always already underway so long as Dasein exists.

Likewise, attunement functions equiprimordially, together with the understanding, to bring Dasein and its world into being. Unlike the understanding, however, attunement is always already temporally oriented toward the past. Similar to what would commonly be understood as a mood or disposition, attunement reveals how the activity (of being-in-the-world) is already occurring. Its disclosive power, therefore, is acquiescent. As Heidegger explains, “in attunement lies existentially a disclosive submission to world out of which things that matter to us can be encountered.”⁵⁶ It reveals the fact that we are always already thrown into a world, a condition of our being that Heidegger calls thrownness [*Geworfenheit*]. Rather than push forward, Dasein pulls back. As an equiprimordial condition of its being, it is not possible for Dasein to be unattuned. We are never free from an attunement so that we can step into one at will; rather, we are always already attuned and can only shift from one mode (mood) into another.

Together, the to-be of the understanding and the having-been of attunement function disclosively in a struggle of forward projection and submissive pull back. That is to say, Dasein’s being-in-the-world, its appearance into and as the “there” (the “*Da*” of *Dasein*), is always already

⁵⁵ Ibid, 57.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 134.

shaped by the disclosive struggle of these two existential (temporal) moments. Heidegger explains that:

As existentials, attunement and understanding characterize the primordial disclosedness of being-in-the-world. In the mode of 'being attuned' Dasein 'sees' possibilities in terms of which it is. In the projective disclosure of such possibilities, it is always already attuned. The project of its ownmost potentiality of being is delivered over to the fact of thrownness into the there.⁵⁷

Emphasis is to be placed on the *disclosive* function of the attuned-understanding. Beings comes to *be as* what they are, meaningfully, in the attuned-understanding, the projecting-having-been of Dasein's opening up and standing out into the world.

The third moment of the existential structure, which was alluded to earlier, Heidegger calls discourse. It, too, functions disclosively alongside the attuned understanding to open up the world. As Heidegger explains, "discourse is the attuned intelligibility of being-in-the-world."⁵⁸ Where understanding is futural in its projection, and attunement is directed towards the past, discourse is most intimately linked to the present. What *is*, here and now, is disclosed discursively. As such, we must not think of discourse simply as the expression of some already present feelings or ideas; nor should we interpret it in terms of a communicative economy of already existent information. Rather, discourse is the condition of possibility of there being anything at all. Together with the attuned-understanding, it reveals the world and ourselves within it.

If questioning, is a mode of Dasein's being-in-the-world, then it should also cash out in terms of discursively expressed attuned-understanding. United as restrained-seeking, questioning

⁵⁷ Ibid, 143.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 157.

can easily be mapped onto this existential structure. As a form of discourse, questioning emerges in and through the struggle between the understanding projection of its seeking, and the attuned pull back of its restrained attitude; out of this struggle being manifests. Let us continue our investigation into the way by which the restrained-seeking of questioning differs from other forms of Dasein's (discursive) activity with a brief return from the abstract to the concrete.

To Listen and Let Be

For Heidegger, as important as it is to dig into the ontological ground of an issue, it is also important to be aware of its implications for the ontic every day. Let us, therefore, briefly reflect on how we might experience the disclosure of this restrained-seeking in our everyday questioning.

Consider an ordinary conversation between two people wherein one poses a question to the other. What happens in such a situation (provided the question is not rhetorical) is that the questioner poses a question and then pauses to listen for a response.⁵⁹ In this way, the questioner withholds an answer of their own, and instead waits to receive one from their interlocuter. Even if the questioner has an idea of what the answer might be, they do not necessarily push their presumptions onto the interlocuter. Could this "listening" be a part of what Heidegger is trying to get at with the notion of questioning as restrained-seeking?

⁵⁹ Interestingly, the English word "pose" can etymologically be traced back, first to the French "*poser*" (meaning to position, to place, to set, to fix), and in turn to the Latin "*pausa*" (meaning pause, break, or interval). It might be said, therefore, that an integral aspect of posing is pausing.

In §34, Heidegger offers a discussion of listening and silence “as possibilities belonging to discoursing speech.”⁶⁰ If questioning, as we experience it ontically in our everyday lives, involves the pause of a receptive listening, perhaps this is what distinguishes it from other forms of discourse. But what, then, is the difference between such receptive, silent listening and less silent forms of discourse?

Heidegger tells us that discourse “constitutes the disclosedness of being-in-the-world.”⁶¹ This, however, does not mean that when we talk about beings we automatically ‘get it right.’ Recall the fact that disclosure is also a dis-closure. This means that the dangers of inauthenticity are prevalent in the disclosure of existential discourse; as Heidegger tells us, “speaking a lot about something does not in the least guarantee that understanding is thus furthered. On the contrary, talking at great length about something covers things over and brings what is understood into an illusory clarity, that is, the unintelligibility of the trivial.”⁶² While discourse opens up the world of beings, it can oftentimes do so in a manner that closes or covers over its own discursive operations by limiting the possible projections of our understanding. In a sense, hasty discussion can lead to the closure of being’s more genuine possibilities.

Ostensibly, this means that to combat this for-get-fullness we need silence. For, as Heidegger explains, “listening constitutes the primary and authentic openness of *Dasein*.”⁶³ To be present for the genuine disclosure of beings, *Dasein* must not engage in idle chatter about it, but should instead listen. Of course, listening in Heidegger’s sense does not mean simply being quiet, or not making sound. Silence is not the absence of sound *per se*, as he explains:

⁶⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 156.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 155.

⁶² *Ibid*, 159.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 158.

To keep silent does not mean to be mute. On the contrary, one who is mute still has the tendency to ‘speak.’ Such a person has not proved that he can keep silent, he even lacks the possibility of proving this. And the person who is by nature accustomed to speak little is no better able to show that he can be silent and keep silent. [...] Authentic silence is possible only in genuine discourse. In order to be silent, Dasein must have something to say, that is, must be in command of an authentic and rich disclosedness of itself.⁶⁴

Heidegger will call this authentically disclosive silence *hearkening* [*Horchen*].

If questioning, as the forward forholding of restrained-seeking, is to function in the manner distinct to it, and not in the manner of an ordinary, unrestrained seeking, it must take the discursive form of such hearkening. If it fails to do so, it can no longer be considered a genuine questioning. In the discursive context of an information economy, for example, questions (as requests for information) do not meet the qualifications of genuine hearkening. For such inquiry is specific in what it asks for and what it will accept. Its seeking is not held back by an attitude of forholding but is unrestrained and for-getful. Such “questioning” concerns information and nothing else besides. It is not open to any other response.

To hearken is to “be in command of an authentic and rich disclosedness.” This does not mean to “control” or “dominate,” but to let be. And if Dasein is the being that lets beings be, this “command” is not one of giving direction but of allowing oneself to *be* oneself, of authentically disclosing being.⁶⁵ In German, the above passage reads: “*Um schweigen zu können, muß das Dasein etwas zu sagen haben, das heißt über eine eigentliche und reiche Erschlossenheit seiner selbst verfügen.*”⁶⁶ There is no mention of any “commanding” in the directive sense, but rather a being “über” in the sense of “being over” or “being about.” A less misleading translation,

⁶⁴ Ibid, 159.

⁶⁵ Remember: Dasein is not an actualized, objectively present being, but the existential opening up of possibility.

⁶⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 165.

therefore, might read as: “to be silent, Dasein must have something to say, that is about an authentic and rich self-disclosure.”

Questioning as a mode of Dasein’s existential occurrence may involve making sound (indeed, we may utter the words “what does it mean to be?”), yet to avoid the predetermination of a repetitive, assumptive and hasty answer, the questioner must also open themselves up in a hearkening that silently listens for an answer and in so doing allows itself and the world to be disclosed freely and without constraint. In this way, questioning can be understood as an ontological opening up and letting be, that allows Dasein to be itself, freely.

An Eminent Question(ing)

Before moving into a reflection on the *Seinsfrage*, let us briefly recap what has been laid out thus far in terms of a Heideggerian view of questioning in general. Questioning, for Heidegger, is an active occurrence. It is not an object to be described, but a way of being to be carried out by a questioner, i.e. Dasein. The occurrence of questioning is tri-unitarily structured by the *Gefragtes*, *Befragtes*, and *Erfragtes*. Each of these elements are aspects of an act of question-posing, and are indicative of a temporally structured, mode of being Dasein. This mode is existentially characterized as a restrained-seeking, a form of attuned-understanding that functions disclosively by opening an issue and withholding assumption. In questioning, the questioner listens to that which is at issue, that which emerges. She lets beings be, and in so doing allows them to speak for themselves without confining them to the terms of an idle chatter (what Heidegger calls *Gerede*).

While the *Seinsfrage* shares this formal structure of questioning, it is also an especially unique question. Heidegger describes it as an eminent [*ausgezeichnete*] question.⁶⁷ From his structural interpretation of questioning in general, how might we, in turn, interpret the *Seinsfrage* as a unique question?

The first, and perhaps most obviously unique aspect of the *Seinsfrage* is the concern of its *Gefragtes*; namely, the *meaning* [*Sinn*] of being. Heidegger defines meaning as, “that wherein the intelligibility of something maintains itself. That which can be articulated in disclosure that understands.”⁶⁸ For something to be meaningful, is for it to be intelligibly disclosed in an articulatable manner; that is to say, it must come to appearance *as* the being that it is. The meaning of the house across the street resides in its appearance *as* a house.

As Dasein, we are always already immersed in meaning. Our very being is the condition of possibility of meaning. Recall that, for Heidegger, Dasein is the being that in its being has an understanding of being [*Seinsverständnis*]. Our every encounter, therefore, is a meaningful encounter. For without meaning there is no-thing. Even the mysterious and unknown is disclosed *as* the mysterious and unknown. The *Seinsfrage*, as the question concerning the *meaning* of being, is concerned with the disclosure of being as such and in general, and thereby also with Dasein (as existence).

If questioning about being is always already premised on a provisional understanding of the meaning of being, no matter how vague and perplexing it might be, then the *Seinsfrage* is in some sense circular. We might, therefore, be tempted to say that this circularity is what makes

⁶⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 4.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 146.

the question unique and sets it apart from other questions. Yet, Heidegger is quick to deny the charge of circular reasoning, writing:

“Circular reasoning” does not occur in the question of the meaning of being. Rather, there is a notable “relatedness backward or forward” of what is being asked about (being) to asking as a mode of being of a being. The way what is questioned essentially engages our questioning belongs to the innermost meaning of the question of being. But this only means that the being that has the character of Dasein has a relation to the question of being itself, perhaps even a distinctive one.⁶⁹

How are we to understand this “relatedness backward or forward” if not in terms of a circular reasoning? Thinking back to the formal structure of questioning, we might consider this relatedness in terms of a temporal movement. Recall that there is a unity of relation between each structural moment of the question-posing [*Fragestellung*]. As the questioner questions, they occupy the temporal space of this relation. Engaging the *Befragtes*, the questioner resides in-between the *Gefragtes* and the *Erfragtes*.

Notice also that Heidegger places “circular reasoning” between quotations. He does this throughout the text to indicate that what he is talking about is to be taken in the ordinary sense. Indeed, quotations are meant to distinguish the author’s thoughts from an other’s thoughts. In this case, Heidegger is not quoting another individual’s words but the common sense notion of the term as it is typically understood (by those he will refer to as the “they”). By placing quotations around “circular reasoning” Heidegger wants to make clear that he is talking about the kind of circular reasoning that has been vilified by logicians for centuries and declared fallacious; the kind of reasoning that is called “begging the question” or *petitio principii*. When “begging the question” the conclusion is presupposed in the premises. This is considered faulty

⁶⁹ Ibid, 7.

reasoning because no progress is made. The thinker, rather than move forward towards a new and novel conclusion, a “truth” that can be added to our bank of knowledge, instead circles around to what they already knew beforehand.

“Circular reasoning” is considered “bad” because no new information (in the form of a propositional statement) is gained. In terms of questioning, what we seek to gain is the concern of the *Erfragte* or the act of ascertaining. This, of course, is most easily understood as an answer. Yet, as we discussed in Chapter I, it is unclear that an answer is what Heidegger is ultimately after. As Dasein, we operate under (and as) an understanding of the meaning of being. We already have an answer. To question being, therefore, is not necessarily to attempt to ascertain an answer, in the form of a logical conclusion or a proposition about the meaning of being (i.e. “the meaning of being is X”). Indeed, “circular reasoning” only occurs within the movement of a logical argument whereby a thinker moves from premise to premise towards a conclusion. Heidegger’s denial of “circular reasoning” may, therefore, not be a denial of circularity *tout court*, but a denial of the presence of the logical procedure. The *Seinsfrage* is a question not an argument.

Any circularity involved is not the circularity of faulty logic (questioning is not arguing), but a kind of hermeneutic circularity. That said, this hermeneutical circularity is not limited to the question of being. As a circularity built into the existential structure of Dasein, it is a condition of all questions. Take, for example, our earlier question: “what is questioning?” This question, too, falls into an immediate and necessary circle. The question asks after the essence of questioning, yet, itself is a question. No matter how we address the question of questioning, therefore, we unavoidably presuppose the nature of what we are addressing. Thus, the hermeneutic circularity of the *Seinsfrage* is not a distinguishing feature of the question and

cannot be considered distinctive. This means that we must look elsewhere for the *Seinsfrage*'s uniqueness.

Heidegger provides us with a hint when he says that the *Seinsfrage* holds priority [Vorrang] over other questions; specifically, an ontic-ontological priority.⁷⁰ How should we think about this priority? First, it is not to be understood as a *prior*-ity in any linear sense. It is clear that the question of being does not (always) come before other questions in any sequential fashion. Instead, what Heidegger considers the priority of the question is a kind of meaningful precedence. Indeed, the word used here, "Vorrang," can also mean precedence or preference. The priority of the question, therefore, is not related to its position on a timeline, but its position of importance.

When situated among other questions, the *Seinsfrage* takes precedence because it is a question to which all others inevitably defer. The question, "what time is it?", for example, only makes sense if we already have a vague understanding of the meaning of the word "time." Thus, to fully answer the question "what time is it?" we must first have an answer to the question "what is time?" Likewise, if we are to answer the question "what is time?" we must first have an answer for the question "what is *is*?" If we fail to understand any one of these elements, the initial question will not make sense. And since, an understanding of being is embedded in everything that *is*, the question concerning it (*die Seinsfrage*) enjoys a level of priority over all other questions, which without exception refer back to it.

The ontological priority of the *Seinsfrage*, Heidegger also tells us, is a "scholarly priority."⁷¹ It has to do with the *Seinsfrage*'s rank among the questions raised by the sciences. If

⁷⁰ Ibid, 8-13.

⁷¹ Ibid, 10.

the sciences can be divided up in terms of the questions that they engage with, then the question of being takes precedence over the entire discourse of science. How so? Discourse functions disclosively. Each of the sciences open up and operate within their own delineated regions of being based on their own fundamental concepts. For example, biology raises its questions in the region of biological-beings, chemistry in the region of chemical-beings, physics operates in the region of physical-beings, etc. These regions can be hierarchically construed in terms of the fundamentality of their basic concepts as they relate to the other sciences. While there is great debate among scientists today as to how we ought to organize this hierarchy,⁷² for Heidegger, the referential priority of the *Seinsfrage* means that every science has its foundation in the metaphysical discourse known as ontology.

Ontology is typically defined as the philosophical study of being—i.e. it is a questioning concerning being. Indeed, the word “ontological” is comprised of the Greek “*ón*” [ὄν] and “*logos*” [λόγος]. The former refers to being, the latter to discourse, speech, or reasoning. Just what questioning-being entails, however, has differed greatly throughout the history of the discipline. And so, although ontology is the most fundamental science, there is no single ontology on which to ground the rest of the sciences. Instead, there is a plethora of ontologies offered by a number of different thinkers. Plotinus, for example, offers a monist ontology, while thinkers like Anaxagoras offer what can be called a pluralistic ontology.⁷³ What is more, the discipline itself is not only concerned solely with the question of being, but is fragmented into a number of different questions. These include questions about the nature of reality and actuality,

⁷² Physics is often given the honor of most fundamental science, followed by chemistry, biology, neuroscience, psychology, and social science. In so doing, everything (all being) is reduced to and is ultimately explainable in terms of physicality.

⁷³ See: “Anaxagoras of Clazomenae” *A Presocratics Reader: Selected Fragments and Testimonia*, 101-109. and Plotinus, “Sixth Ennead” *The Enneads*, 509-698.

the existence of God, and the nature of time. St. Anselm's famous ontological argument, for example, is his answer to the question "does God exist?"⁷⁴

What we should take note of, however, is the fact that all of these questions meaningfully defer to the more basic ontological question, the question of being. Asking what reality *is*, what actuality *is*, what time *is*, or whether God *is*, necessarily involves the question of what *is* means. This is not to say that the ontologist asking these questions has posed and answered the question of being in advance, but that all of these questions are grounded in an answer to the *Seinsfrage*. If we want to fully address these questions, we must inevitably also address the question of being. And so, even the fundamental discourse of ontology is bound up with the question of being. For Heidegger, "all ontology, no matter how rich and tightly knit a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains fundamentally blind and perverts its innermost intent if it has not previously clarified the meaning of being sufficiently and grasped this clarification as its fundamental task."⁷⁵ In this way, the *Seinsfrage* maintains ultimate priority (in the sciences) in terms of scope. It is not only a question raised in the most fundamental of all sciences, ontology, but is the most fundamental question of that science.

So, what does this "scholarly priority" mean for those who would pose the question of being? Why does priority matter? After briefly raising the issue of what purpose this question should serve, Heidegger hints toward the creative possibility of the *Seinsfrage*. He tells us that, "true progress [of the sciences] comes about not so much in collecting results and storing them in 'handbooks' as in being forced to ask questions about the basic constitution of each domain."⁷⁶ This means that questioning concerning foundations is tantamount to scientific progress and

⁷⁴ Saint Anselm of Canterbury, "Proslogion" *St. Anselm Basic Writings*, 47-80.

⁷⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 10.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 8.

development. And, since the question of being is concerned with the foundation of, not only one, but all domains of science, one can only assume that “working out” the *Seinsfrage* is an activity with the capacity to progressively develop the scientific endeavor in its entirety. How exactly questioning does this, and what is meant by “true progress” is left unexplained. All Heidegger says is that it, “takes place in the revision of [the sciences’] basic concepts.”⁷⁷ Presumably, then, the various concepts of being that ground the sciences’ are “revised” in and through questioning. And since these concepts open and delineate the region in which each science operates, such revision prompts an overhaul of the entire discourse from the “ground” up.

In addition to its ontological priority, Heidegger tells us that the *Seinsfrage* enjoys an ontic priority as well, suggesting that its influence stretches beyond the realm of the sciences. The word “ontic” is derived from the same Greek root as ontological [*ón*], but without the addition of “logos.” The ontic realm is, therefore, not limited to the same conceptual constraints as the specific scientific discourses. For something to be ontic means that it pertains to beings generally. Indeed, anywhere beings manifest and are asked about, the *Seinsfrage* has relevance. For Heidegger, this means that the ontic realm is essentially coextensive with the existence of Dasein. In this way, the ontic priority of the *Seinsfrage* concerns its status among questions in general. The *Seinsfrage*’s ontic priority, therefore, precedes and supersedes its ontological priority in terms of scope. And, if the ontological priority of the *Seinsfrage* signals to its capacity to inspire “true progress” of the sciences, its ontic priority signals to its capacity to develop the entire world of being.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 9.

Yet, while scholarly questions are ultimately grounded in particular conceptions of being (as biological, physical, chemical), ontic questions are not grounded in the same way. The ontic realm is not delineated by particular concepts concerned with the whatness of beings but is the realm of being delineated by being's self disclosure in terms of the understanding of being [*Seinsverständnis*] that characterizes Dasein's existential situation. This understanding does not necessitate clear cut definition and definitive conceptualization but is largely intuitive and mysterious. Indeed, the understanding of being grounding the ontic realm is not a concept at all but a thatness. Heidegger makes this clear right away when listing three common misjudgments about being (what he calls prejudices [*Vorurteile*]). He tells us that:

The 'universality' of 'being' is not that of genus. 'Being' does not delimit the highest region of beings so far as they are conceptually articulated according to genus and species: οὐτε το ον γένος ['being is not a genus']. The 'universality' of being '*surpasses*' the universality of genus.⁷⁸

Being is not a whatness, not a universal category, but a thatness. Can such a thatness be revised in the same way a scientific concept can? At this point, we cannot say. Perhaps as we move forward the issue will become clearer.

An Open-Ending

Along with its ontic-ontological priority, the *Seinsfrage* can also be distinguished from other questions by its unique formulation. Question-posing [*Fragestellung*] in general involves three unified structural movements. The question of being is no exception. Mapping this temporal structure onto the *Seinsfrage*, however, we find that we are missing an element. The

⁷⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 2.

Gefragtes, as the asking-about, concerns the meaning of being. The *Befragtes*, as the interrogating, concerns Dasein. It is unclear though what the *Erfragtes*, as the ascertaining, is concerned with. What does the *Seinsfrage* seek?

The obvious answer is that it seeks the meaning of being. Yet, the meaning of being is that which concerns the *Gefragtes* of the *Seinsfrage*. Is it possible that it could also be the concern of the *Erfragtes*? If so, how? Considering an understanding of being always already informs our being, are we just searching for what we already have? Is the question of being just about clarifying our foggy intuition? Considering also the ontological difference, it would seem that no amount of clarification could ever bring our intuitive understanding of being (in terms of a thatness) completely into open as an explicit claim about being (in terms of a whatness). Such a quest would certainly be futile. Heidegger does, however, suggest that question has the power to inspire “true progress” through the revision of founding concepts. Could it be that the *Seinsfrage* aims to “revise” the thatness with which the *Gefragtes* is concerned, so that its *Erfragtes* is a new understanding of being? If so, this new understanding would ostensibly be under the same constraints as the old and could not be expressed as an explicit and direct statement about being. So, the question remains, what is the *Seinsfrage* after?

In Chapter I, we argued that the assumption that the *Seinsfrage* is a pointed striving for an answer must be cast into doubt on the basis of our forgetful condition. Nonetheless, we did not say definitively that the *Seinsfrage* does not seek answers. Instead, we chose to withhold our assumptions about what questioning entails to allow the essence of (Heideggerian) questioning to reveal itself. What we did say was that the *Seinsfrage* is always already being-out-from-answer. Rather than deny that questions seek answers, we bracketed the assumption, not permitting our own prejudices to obscure what Heidegger is trying to do. Thus, it was discovered that the

seeking of questioning is a restrained-seeking, a temporal action marked by a specific form of listening, what Heidegger calls hearkening [*horen*]. This seeking differs from other forms of seeking in that it does not hastily and without resistance project predetermined conclusions onto the landscape of the search. The restrained-seeking of such questioning withholds its own influence. Whatever is sought after, therefore, is not to be (for)*gotten*, but (for)*given*. And so, even if Heidegger is seeking an answer, the search will not be conducted in a pointed manner, nor will any possible answer come in the form of an expressed statement. He will open up and hearken for one. Practicing restrained-seeking, Heidegger prepares to receive.

What is ultimately unique and special about the *Seinsfrage*, therefore, and what sets it apart from other questions, is that it has no explicitly defined goal. It is a pure openness at the most fundamental level of existence. It does not function under the guidance of any universal concept. Instead, it serves the thatness of being itself; i.e. the vague, mysterious emergence of beings, that nevertheless implicitly conditions the disclosure of the world. The questioner does not seek a particular answer (given as a whatness), but hearkening to being, readies themselves to receive one. Rather than idly circle around in a predefined understanding of being, the questioner strives to withhold their assumptions, to let beings be. She prepares to receive an answer by allowing being to express itself through her Dasein on its own terms. And, if everything we think and do is carried out under the guidance of an implicit answer to being, to receive a new answer would be to radically transform the beings that we are and the world that we live in.

Recollection

The aim of *Being and Time* is to work the *Seinsfrage* out from the oblivion of forgetfulness. In order to understand what this entails, it was crucial to give an account of the *Seinsfrage* as a unique question. Following Heidegger's claim that we have forgotten the question, it was decided that we must begin with an textually internal reflection on questioning more generally. Examining Heidegger's account of the "formal structure" of question-posing [*Fragestellung*], it was argued that questioning can be understood as a tri-unitary temporal activity and engagement with beings. As such, questioning can be seen as a mode of Dasein. If this is the case, then in order to manifest a question-posing we must be transported into it (and as it). Paying careful attention to the language Heidegger employs, as well as to his off-hand remarks about questioning, it was argued that questioning is characterized by restrained-seeking as the specific mode of Dasein's attuned-understanding. This mode we called "openness to the issue at hand," can be interpreted as a kind of meditative listening, a hearkening, wherein Dasein, as questioner, withholds its necessary presumptions in order to remain authentically silent. It is not to deny our assumptions, but to hold onto them in a way that resists their unfettered influence. It is to check our expectations, to withhold ourselves, to exercise restraint, rather than address the issue with haste. In this way, questioning is a *preparing to receive*.

Ultimately, this suggested that the *Seinsfrage* can be interpreted as a particular manifestation of this mode wherein the questioner is opened to the issue of being. We can interpret Heidegger's task, therefore, not as an attempt to define and describe the *Seinsfrage*, but as an attempt to exemplify and embody it. To work out the question of the meaning of being, that is to manifest or bring out the question, is to become open to the issue (issuing) of being. What is more, since *Dasein* is the being that is ontically distinguished by its relation to being, the

Seinsfrage can be interpreted as a possibility unique to Dasein. As Heidegger puts it, “the question of being is nothing else than the radicalization of an essential tendency of being that belongs to *Dasein* itself.”⁷⁹ This, however, tells us very little about what is at stake in raising (i.e. becoming) the *Seinsfrage*.

In response to this concern, it was shown that Heidegger suggests questioning has the capacity to effect discursive/disclosive development. Heidegger argues that the progressive development of the sciences comes about in and through a questioning that concerns their fundamental concepts. The ontological priority of the *Seinsfrage* indicates that such questioning has the potential to effect broad scholarly development. The ontic-priority of the *Seinsfrage*, further suggested that this potential reaches beyond even the sciences towards our everyday lives as Dasein, as beings in-the-world. In questioning, by opening ourselves to the issue (issuing) of being, we prepare ourselves for a radical transformation of the very possibilities that we *are*.

At this point, we might wonder how exactly we are to go about manifesting the *Seinsfrage*? Is this something we can attain through proper exertion of the will, or, perhaps, through a lack of willful exertion? Is opening up to the issue of being as easy as holding our tongue? Earlier, it was suggested that the work [*Arbeit*] involved in working out [*Ausarbeitung*] the *Seinsfrage* is not the work of a one-time job, but a lifelong labour—a kind of vocation or calling. It is not the kind of work that actualizes a desired possibility but is the work that sustains our livelihood. To work out the *Seinsfrage*, therefore, is no easy task. In order to gain a deeper understanding of this task, the last section of this thesis will be dedicated to the question

⁷⁹ Ibid, 13.

concerning how Heidegger attempts to work out the question of the meaning of being in *Being and Time*.

Chapter III: Toward the *Seinsfrage*

In the previous chapter I outlined a Heideggerian interpretation of questioning and of questioning-being. I concluded that to question being is to existentially open oneself up to the possibility of a radical transformation at an ontological level. Such a transformation is not the result of a properly directed will, nor is it the product of some imaginative faculty, but is something *given*. In questioning we prepare to receive and be received, the rest is out of our hands. The questioner, rather than inject novelty into an already existent world, is readied to be thrown into a new one. With this in mind, we are now prepared to return to the first chapter wherein I argued that *Being and Time* is Heidegger's attempt to bring the *Seinsfrage* out from the oblivion of forgetfulness. Ostensibly, then, the work itself is Heidegger's attempt to manifest a readied openness to being. Thus, the existential analysis of Dasein, which comprises the majority of the published text, ought to be read as the means by which the question is to be posed. The task now is to reflect on how such an analysis might accomplish this goal. The leading question of this chapter will therefore be: how does an analysis of Dasein contribute to the work of manifesting the *Seinsfrage*?

If questioning is a mode of Dasein's being, and questioning-being an eminent form of this mode, then the structures that constitute Dasein's fundamental existence will play a key role in terms of conditioning and allowing such questioning. The nature of this role and the status of such structures, however, remain vague and unclear. As I meditate on this question, I shall engage in something of an *Auseinandersetzung* with what might be called the "transcendental interpretation" of *Being and Time* championed by Jeff Malpas and John Caputo.

The transcendental interpretation views Heidegger's project as an essentially Kantian one, albeit stripped of its Cartesian baggage. Its fundamental claim is that the existential analysis is an attempt to discover and map out the absolute *a priori* of existence in order to (a) lay the groundwork for an authentic ontology, one that overcomes the problems of historical ontology, and/or (b) provide stable ground from which to launch a critique of the tradition. The idea being that *Being and Time* is largely driven by traditional philosophic ambitions (i.e. "knowing" the nature of reality). For the transcendentalists, Heidegger's attempt to expose the existential structure of Dasein is an attempt to uncover the conditions of *any and all* possibility, to discover that by which being occurs, wherever and whenever it does so.

I shall argue that, although fair in many respects, the transcendental account ultimately underestimates the creative radicality of Heidegger's project. Approaching the text under the mistaken presupposition that questions are always being-toward-answer, and that Heidegger's aim is to "answer" the *Seinsfrage*, the proponents of a transcendental Heidegger mistake the *provisional* and *preliminary* character of his claims for definitive conclusions. This assumption ultimately leads to a misconstrued view of Dasein's existential structure as a universal and unchangeable framework. Considering Heidegger's reversal of the question-answer dynamic, wherein an answer always already precedes and guides the question, we can begin to recast the existential analysis in terms of the task of manifesting the *Seinsfrage*, rather than responding to it. This will prove to have serious, although subtle, consequences on how we understand the transcendental status of the analytic.

The existential analysis of Dasein is Heidegger's attempt to reawaken [*zu wecken*] the *Seinsfrage*. This means that the journey of reawakening, of moving out from the oblivion of forgetfulness and into the openness of an awakened questioning, is to be carried out analytically.

That said, how an analysis of existence can accomplish this task remains to be decided. A decision for which we must first consider what it means to analyze existence at all. I, therefore, ask: what *is* the existential analytic? And in so doing, I also ask the more fundamental questions: *what is existence? what is analysis?*

Before we begin, however, it should be noted that Heidegger presents the task of working out the *Seinsfrage* as a “two-fold task,” one that is both analytical and destructive. He aims to give an analysis of the existential structures of Dasein, and to loosen the distorting influence of tradition and its concealments by “[staking] out its *limits*.”⁸⁰ Ostensibly, the second part of this two-fold task was to be undertaken in the unpublished second half. There, Heidegger was to give a critical reverse reading of three canonical figures of western philosophy (Kant, Descartes and Aristotle), not by disputing their work, but by demonstrating how the question of being necessarily remained closed off to and by their work. Presumably, then, the existential analysis only represents part of Heidegger’s wider task, and not its absolute accomplishment.⁸¹ Without speculating on the reasons why Heidegger chose not to continue with publication of the second half of *Being and Time*, it is important to acknowledge the *preparatory* character of the published text. I shall consider this aspect of the analytic in further detail later. For now, let us ruminate on the above questions concerning existence and analysis.

⁸⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 22.

⁸¹ When considering the incompleteness of *Being and Time* we must be careful not to immediately consider this a failure. For failure is always in reference to a predetermined goal. As we discussed in Chapter I, the only concrete aim Heidegger puts forward is the reawakening of the *Seinsfrage*. His other aims, of exposing time as the horizon of the meaning of being and destructing the tradition, are entirely provisional and subordinate to the more pressing matter of questioning being. Thus, labeling *Being and Time* as a failure is only possible on the grounds that Heidegger never awakened his questioning. At this point, we are not in a position to make such a claim.

An Analytical Awakening

What is Existence?

The existential analysis, as its name suggests, is an analysis of *existence*. Recall that, for Heidegger, existence [*Existenz*] is a term strictly reserved for the human being as Dasein. It refers to the disclosive occurrence of Dasein's opening up and standing out into a world. The analysis, therefore, is a kind of self-examination. This examination, however, does not concern itself with the various accidental aspects of human existence, instead it focuses on what makes us unique—i.e. our understanding relationship to being. That said, it should not be confused with a purely taxonomic exercise in categorizing human being by setting it apart from other beings. For what makes Dasein unique, its existence, according to Heidegger, is also what disqualifies it from being considered one being among others in a totality of beings. For Dasein is not any one actualized possibility but is the condition of our varied possibilities of being. Thus, Heidegger limits the existential analysis to an explication of Dasein's capacity as a conditioning potentiality.

To emphasize this focus, Heidegger introduces a distinction between what he calls the existential and the existentiell; i.e. between that which is directly related to the process of clearing and that which is incidental to it, respectfully.⁸² As he explains, “all explications arising from an analytic of Dasein are gained with a view toward its structure of existence. Because these explications are defined in terms of existentiality, we shall call the characteristics of being of Dasein *existentials*.”⁸³ The existential analysis is not concerned with the ontic, existentiell aspects of Dasein's occurrence but is solely focused on its conditioning relation to being's

⁸² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 11.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 44.

disclosure. The aim is to uncover what is most fundamental to our *thatness* (as opposed to our *whatness*).

Now, it is important to remember that, for Heidegger, existence is not a stable, substantial “thing.” It is not an object, nor is it objective in a way that lends itself to straight forward description. Rather, it is a dynamically unfolding movement—an occurrence. Exploiting its etymological connection to the Greek *ekstasis* [ἔκστασις], Heidegger insists that existence is fundamentally disclosive. To exist is to stand-out into the world wherein beings (itself included) first come to be *as they are*. Dasein, as existing, is the condition of possibility of being’s disclosure via beings. As such, Heidegger will sometimes describe Dasein as a kind of opening up or clearing [*Lichtung*]. When attempting to interpret this description, however, we must be careful not to think of it as a static opening, some kind of neutral, objectively present enclosure, for it is the active, continual process of an ecstatic *opening* and *disclosing* of being (emphasis on the “-ing”). It is not a one-time happening, an act of creation that once accomplished is over and done with. As long as it exists, Dasein is always under way. It is never finished opening so that it may stand still, complete and entirely open.

This dynamism will prove to have important consequences on the nature of the analysis that is to be carried out. For, unlike an objectively present being, which can be objectively and disinterestedly described and broken down into distinctive parts, the being that we are (Dasein) cannot be so easily captured. Existence cannot be reduced to a set of accidental properties or categories.

What is more, if the goal is to expose what is fundamental to existence as such, Heidegger cannot limit his analysis to a single mode.⁸⁴ To expose what is fundamental to existence, as the condition of possibility of being, requires careful consideration of our varied ways of being. This is not just a matter of widening the field of vision, but of allowing the position from which, and the means by which, the analysis is carried out to also become dynamic. Because the analysis has a reflexive character (we ourselves are the beings under investigation), it could not be fully carried out from the position of disinterested observation. To approach existence in this way alone is to confine its self-analysis to one specific mode, one possibility of being. It is to narrow an otherwise wholistic investigation. In order to expose what is fundamental to Dasein's occurrence in its myriad forms, Heidegger's analysis remains open to the average, the everyday, and the otherwise mundane modes of existence often ignored by the sciences.

Heidegger is careful to emphasize, however, that while the investigation is opened to the average every day, it is no less concrete than other forms of scientific analysis. As he explains,

The explication of Dasein in its average everydayness, however, does not just give average structures in the sense of a vague indeterminacy. What is ontically in the way of being average can very well be understood ontologically in terms of pregnant structures [*prägnanten Strukturen*] which are not structurally different from the ontological determinations of an authentic being of Dasein.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Among the varying modes of Dasein's existence there are more and less authentic modes. Heidegger will spend a great deal of time demonstrating that the authentic mode of Dasein's being is anticipatory-resoluteness. He does this in order to discover the possible being-a-whole of Dasein, wherein the fundamental structure of Dasein's existence is fully disclosed. In no way does the discovery of anticipatory-resoluteness as Dasein's authentic mode of existence represent the conclusion of the analysis nor the posing of the *Seinsfrage*. It is a path-mark not a destination.

⁸⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 43.

The existential analysis, open to all forms of Dasein's occurrence, is on the lookout for the "pregnant structures" [*prägnanten Strukturen*] that constitute the existential aspects of Dasein's disclosive capacity. In simpler terms, the existential analysis is concerned with exposing and explicating the structural characteristics of Dasein that make it what it is (or rather, *that* it is). The question we as interpreters of this task now face, is how we are to evaluate Heidegger's efforts to uncover these pregnant structures. How will we know when he has found them? Where do they reside? Do they precede the manifestation of being, in order to give rise to it? Or, are they somehow coextensive with it? Do they have a kind of independent, autonomous, and sovereign presence? Or, are they necessarily embedded in and tied up with being's disclosure? Can these structure's change? Or, are they necessarily unchanging? If so, what would it mean to pin them down to a single form?

There are those that interpret the existential structure of Dasein as a consistent structure, one that is stable and unchanging. The transcendentalist interpretation of *Being and Time* sees the existential analysis as an attempt to expose the fundamental, unwavering conditions of any and all possibility. As Jeff Malpas argues, "[Heidegger is] centrally concerned to understand place as the *Da* of Being, so the place he seeks to understand is not any particular place but rather the place that makes every such place possible."⁸⁶ For Malpas, the structures that give shape to and inform Dasein's being (as the place of all possible places) comprise the fundamental foundation underlying *all* possibility. These structures run through every being and way of being—they are the highest laws of being's disclosure.

⁸⁶ Jeff Malpas, "Introduction" *Transcendental Heidegger*, Location 2057.

John Caputo similarly characterizes *Being and Time* as “a transcendental account of the conditions of possibility of the meaning of being, that is, of how one ‘meaning’ of being after another comes about.”⁸⁷ For Caputo, this means that existence is not subject to historical change and development but is the static condition of the possibility of history and the development of meaning. Whether in ancient Mesopotamia or some distant and unimaginable future, all historically meaningful possibilities are conditioned (made possible) by the same structures of Dasein. For Caputo, “what Heidegger means by the ‘meaning’ of being cannot have historical instantiation, because it is a transcendental theory about the history of metaphysics, not a theory which assumes a place within that history.”⁸⁸

The existential structure of Dasein, therefore, is taken by the transcendentalist to be an a-historical, *a priori* condition of all possibility of being; it “transcends” all ontic/existentiell possibilities in the manner of a surpassing that maintains an essential *priority* over them. Once Heidegger reaches the end of the analytic, having exposed and mapped out the existential structure, the issue can be considered definitively settled.

In this way, the transcendentalist interprets the project of *Being and Time* as a descendant of Immanuel Kant’s critical project. Like Heidegger, Kant engages with the question concerning human being and its relationship to the advent of phenomenal beings. He is interested in mapping out the universal *a priori* conditions of possibility, which he locates in a transcendental subjectivity. Kant’s reason for doing so is to provide the sciences with a stable foundation. Just as the wise man builds his house on rock rather than on sand, he plans to build a future metaphysics, one that will overcome the problems plaguing the metaphysics of his day. This fact

⁸⁷ John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger*, 10.

⁸⁸ *Ibid* 10.

is reflected in the preface to the first edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, which introduces the text as preparatory to an upcoming (but never completed) work entitled *Metaphysic of Nature*.⁸⁹

For the transcendentalist, Heidegger's project is Kantian in spirit and ambition, and only really differs from his predecessor in scope. Where Kant is concerned with transcendental structures of subjectivity, Heidegger is concerned with the transcendental structures of existence—that is, of being itself. This means that the phenomenal/noumenal split in Kant is dissolved in Heidegger. Where Kant focuses on the phenomenal realm of being, resigning the noumenal realm to the unspeakable and unspoken, Heidegger does not divide being in this way all. Indeed, Heidegger makes clear that the goal of analytic is to, “[expose] the horizon for an interpretation of the meaning of being in general.”⁹⁰ And, since all human activity (including metaphysics), for Heidegger, takes place under the guidance of a preliminary understanding of being, this horizon is both fundamental and all-encompassing. He thereby positions his efforts prior to the Kantian project in terms of logical precedence. As he explains:

It was intimated in the introduction that a task is furthered in the existential analytic of Dasein, a task whose urgency is hardly less than that of the question of being itself: the exposition of the *a priori* which must be visible if the question ‘what is human being?’ is to be discussed philosophically.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Interestingly, the preface to the second edition of the first critique, written six years later, no longer frames the project as preparation for a metaphysic, but as the enactment of a Copernican revolution. (Immanuel Kant, “Critique of Pure Reason: Preface to the Second Edition” *Basic Writings*, 12.) *The Metaphysic of Nature* is no longer mentioned. Kant's critical project evolves via his own questioning, from the menial task of laying groundwork to leading a revolution. We might recall Heidegger's claim that “true progress” of the sciences only occurs in fundamental questioning.

⁹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 15.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 44.

At first glance the transcendentalist interpretation seems to be a reasonable reading of the project. We ought to be reminded, however, (and never lose sight of the fact) that Heidegger's task is to *reawaken* the *Seinsfrage* and bring it out from the oblivion of forgetfulness. A key difference between the Kantian project and the Heideggerian one is that, while Kant sought to *answer* a question ("what is man?"), Heidegger looks only to pose one. Contextualizing the existential analysis in this way, and putting it into the service of questioning, changes the nature of the *a priori* project in ways we will soon discover.

Under the assumption that the question has already been posed and that an answer is being sought, an assumption informing both Malpas' and Caputo's accounts, the existential analytic certainly appears to be a task with definitive ambitions. For Malpas, "the question of being is not a question of how things, already understood as present to us, are constituted as the beings that they are, but, prior to this, it asks how it is that any being can even come to be present."⁹² Ultimately, this means that, "the question of being is indeed underlain by a 'more radical question'—namely, the question of place."⁹³ For Malpas, the existential analysis seeks to answer this more radical question in the form of Dasein's unchanging existential structure, thus establishing the ground of all metaphysics. For Caputo, on the other hand, *Being and Time* has destructive ambitions. "The quest for the meaning of Being," he argues, "is a deconstructive one which dismantles historical theories *in order to find out what makes them work* [my italics]."⁹⁴ In this way, Caputo frames the existential analysis as an attempt to establish a stable foundation from which to critically examine the history of metaphysics. The exposure of an unchanging, transcendental horizon would be instrumental to both the construction of an account of the origin

⁹² Jeff Malpas, "Heidegger's Topology of Being" *Transcendental Heidegger*, Location 1899.

⁹³ Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology*, 6.

⁹⁴ John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger*, 16

of being that authentically rests upon and is at home within this horizon, as well as a destructive effort to deconstruct the history of ontology. Without this kind of stability philosophy would, to quote Kant, become an “arena of endless contests.”⁹⁵

If, however, we are right to say that the question has not yet been posed, and that the analysis of existence serves only to accomplish this posing (not answering), then the status of the existential horizon need not be so definitively set. For questions, unlike answers, do not need a stable ground to uphold their dignity and status. In fact, questioning as Heidegger understands it fundamentally resists the determination of a single unchanging answer.⁹⁶ While it certainly emerges out from and under the guidance of an understanding of the meaning of being, this understanding need not be a-historical and unchanging. Questions are temporal, dynamic, in some sense organic, and do not need to be rooted in concrete. Thus, by emphasizing that existence is the condition of possibility of questioning, we can begin to cast doubt on the necessity of considering it in such definitive “transcendental” terms.⁹⁷

To be sure, Heidegger does say that “being and its structure transcend every being and every possible existent determination of a being. *Being is the transcendens pure and simple.*”⁹⁸ Nonetheless, he qualifies this statement in a footnote saying that this is not to be understood in the manner of a Greek-Platonic or scholastic *transcendens* (“despite every metaphysical resonance”), but as an ecstatic *transcendens*.⁹⁹ For Plato and the scholastics, to be transcendental is to occupy a place beyond the limits of the phenomenal, the physical and the experiential (the

⁹⁵ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, vii.

⁹⁶ Note: with the opening lines of the introduction, Heidegger questions the contemporary assumption that, “we are spared the exertion of rekindling a battle of giants concerning being” (*Being and Time*, 1).

⁹⁷ To be clear, I am not at this point refuting the transcendental interpretation outright. I am merely acknowledging where my own interpretation differs from that of Malpas and Caputo.

⁹⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 36.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 36.

place of all place, to use Malpas' turn of phrase). What Heidegger seems to indicate here, by claiming that the structure of being is *ecstatically* transcendent, is that it does not reside in some other worldly realm above and beyond the manifestation of beings (i.e. the realm of Platonic Ideas) but is co-extensive with their manifestation. This means that the structure informing the disclosure of beings cannot be separated from the beings themselves. The two arise together as one. Here again we ought to recall Heidegger's effort to etymologically link the German *Existenz* and the Greek *ekstasis* [ἐκστασις]. For Heidegger, the disclosure of existence is ecstatic in the sense that it does not occur on the basis of some other ground, one that is stable, unchanging, *a priori* and distinct from that which is disclosed. Rather, Dasein ecstatically opens on its own terms in its myriad forms; it arises from no-thing, springs into existence and is self-structured. The ecstatic nature of existence means that it manifests itself. In this way, Heidegger detaches existence from any notion of ultimate ground.

Now, the transcendental nature of Dasein's ecstatic existence means that its existential structure is not limited to any one particular disclosure. Being and its structure "transcend every being and every *possible existent determination* of a being." What, though, does Heidegger mean by 'possible existent determination'? The transcendentalist Heideggerian takes this to mean that the existential structure transcends any *and all* possible disclosures of being. This, however, is a somewhat hasty conclusion of which I am skeptical. The crux of my skepticism revolves around the interpretation of the phrase '*possible existent.*' Does Heidegger, as the transcendentalist contend, use the word 'possible' to mean anytime and anywhere, in any world or epoch that being manifests and is existent? Or, does he mean the possibility that is open to us right now, at this time, as a *current* possibility? Is the emphasis on 'possible' or 'existent'? Let us not decide

upon this just yet, and instead allow this question to ruminate in the background as we move toward the next question:

What is Analysis?

Moving forward, we should now consider more closely what it means to *analyze* existence. Commonly understood, analysis is a way of formally describing something, be it an objective entity or a state of affairs. Analysis is often carried out under the pretense of a task of understanding and evaluating the object's (or state's) constitution and general function; parsing it apart, breaking it down into its constitutive elements, and conceptually organizing them in order to further some wider task or problem-solving effort. An analyst typically begins with an initial impression of the object or state and then slowly works her way down to what is most fundamental to it, or else strives to isolate and root out problematic elements in it. This characterization is true of nearly all forms of analysis including budget analysis, computer system analysis, semantic analysis, etc. And in many ways, Heidegger's existential analytic follows this formula as well. It is, after all, an attempt to examine Dasein in order to expose and isolate the most basic structure of its existence. We may wonder, though, how this examination is to take place. How should we break down our own experience in order to discover the existential structure informing it? How do we know what constitutes an existential (verses an existentiell) aspect of our being? How does Heidegger distinguish the fundamental from the incidental?

First, it should be noted that the entity under investigation (Dasein) necessarily sets the existential analysis apart from other analytical tasks in two ways. To analyze Dasein is different: (1) for one, because Dasein is not an actualized "object" but a condition of *possibility*, and (2) for two, because the analyst is never a disinterested subject able to coldly and unbiasedly observe herself from an impartial position. As we briefly mentioned earlier, the existential analysis is a

reflexive procedure of self-examination and self-understanding. The examiner and the examined are one and the same. We cannot step back from ourselves as we can when analyzing other entities. What is more, Dasein, as being-in-the-world, is always already embedded in a world. Our encounters with ourselves always already take place in a meaningful context. The notion of a disinterested ground, for Heidegger, is an illusion.

Now, we might think that the immediate unity of the two aspects of analytic activity (examiner and examined) is enough to guarantee a direct line to the structure that is sought after. Unfortunately, Dasein's being-in-the-world, as a dis-closive occurrence, hinders the possibility of immediate clarity regarding ourselves. For not only do we open onto a world, we open *into* that world as well. As Heidegger explains, "initially and for the most part, Dasein is taken over [*benommen*] by its world."¹⁰⁰ To be "taken over" in this way is to always find ourselves in a position of self-understanding, wherein we have already been disclosed to ourselves. Depending on the nature of this disclosure, however, we can be closed off from a more authentic self-understanding capable of encountering what is fundamental to our own existence. The disclosure of existentials is conditioned upon the disclosive power of Dasein via those existentials. If, therefore, the world Dasein finds itself in is uncondusive to the occurrence of an authentic existence, then the task of an existential analysis can be severely impeded. In order for the existentials to be discovered, therefore, the analysis requires that we adopt an appropriate bearing.

From the oblivion of forgetfulness, such a task is undoubtedly difficult. This does not mean that it is impossible, but that the existential analytic must function on the premise that it

¹⁰⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 111.

could be, and likely is, operating under the influence of an inauthentic disclosure. What do we do when we cannot trust any of our possible ways of being? Despite this untrustworthiness, however, no matter which form our self-understanding takes, the existential structure informing it (as an ecstatic-transcendental structure) should be embedded in it. No disclosure is ever a complete closure. Despite its challenges, therefore, the task is never beyond reach.

In order to expose the existential structure of Dasein, we must strive to resist the closure of Dasein's self-disclosure. The question is, how might we do this? For one, the existential analysis of Dasein must avoid the interpretive assumptions built into the various scientific disciplines (physics, biology, chemistry, anthropology, psychology, etc...). Not only that, the existential analysis must resist all assumption about the human being, be it religious, secular, economic, or professional. This is undoubtedly an arduous task. For Heidegger, we tend to understand ourselves in ways offered up by the world we live in; a world that none of us chose to be born into, and a context that none of us chose to be a part of.¹⁰¹ We simply find ourselves here, always already adopting and taking on the roles made available to us. Recall, Heidegger's use of the term thrownness [*Geworfenheit*] to capture the involuntary aspect of our always already being-in-the-world. To be sure, however, this is not a case of mistaken identity. As Heidegger writes [*italics added*]:

Dasein is my own, to be always in this or that way. It has somehow always already decided in which way Dasein is always my own. The being which is concerned in its being about its being is related to its being as its ownmost possibility. *Dasein is always its possibility*. It does not "have" that possibility only as a mere attribute of something objectively present.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ To be clear, this is not a haphazard tendency in the manner of a preference but is an essential and necessary tendency of our very being as Dasein.

¹⁰² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 42.

We, at any given time, *are* the possibilities we take up, and nothing else besides. The problem, however, is that the possibilities of being that we currently take on have the propensity of covering over the existential aspect of our being.¹⁰³ And, in the context of the existential analytic, this is detrimental to a proper and full examination of our being.

The analytic must resist the influence of our ordinary self-understanding, while at the same time exploiting it—a fine line, indeed. Heidegger recognizes that we cannot escape the closure of dis-closure, that we can never encounter the structures of our existence in a bare way, free from all contextualized and assumptive influence. In recognizing this fact, however, he does not imply that the analysis is doomed from the start. The point is not that it cannot be done, but that there are certain constraints on the kind of outcome we can expect and method we must use when attempting the task. The existential analysis is not something that can be carried out naively or without restraint. The question we must ask, therefore, is: considering these constraints, *how* is the analysis of Dasein to be carried out?

Letting (the Hidden) be Seen

Heidegger argues that “the *point of departure* of the analysis, the *access* to the phenomenon, and *passage through* the prevalent coverings must secure their own method.”¹⁰⁴ By this, he means to say that the methods of analysis must be appropriate to the subject matter under investigation, that the being to be analyzed must be free to guide its own analysis; rather than forced to take on predetermined form or rigid methodological structure. The existential analysis,

¹⁰³ See the discussion of for-get-fullness in Chapter I.

¹⁰⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 34.

therefore, must function on Dasein's terms. And, as we have already noted, Dasein is not a objectifiable entity. It is, rather, a dynamic, flexible, and hermeneutically circular *opening*—a being that always already exists prior to the analysis, informing and shaping it. The method of procedure, therefore, must also be dynamic, flexible and attuned to hermeneutic circularity.

For Heidegger, this means adopting a phenomenological approach. Of course, what phenomenology means for him is somewhat unique. We shall, therefore, briefly explain what he entails by the term. Firstly, Heidegger tells us that, “the expression ‘phenomenology’ signifies primarily a concept of method. It does not characterize the what of philosophical research in terms of their content, but the *how* of such research.”¹⁰⁵ Unlike other -ologies, the term phenomenology does not delineate a discourse concerned with a predefined region of being. Instead, it refers to a discursive form of approach or strategy that is, in some sense, all inclusive. Heidegger elaborates on this with a brief look into the etymological significance of the word “phenomenology,” which comes to us from the Greek “*φαινόμενον*” [phenomenon] and “*λόγος*” [logos]. He defines *φαινόμενον* as “what shows itself, the self-showing, the manifest.”¹⁰⁶ And, *λόγος* he defines as the “letting something be seen by indicating it.”¹⁰⁷ Put together to form the word phenomenology, the term means “to let what shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself from itself.”¹⁰⁸ Thus, the phenomenological method consists, for Heidegger, in a letting be seen wherein great care and attention is given to preserve and uncover a pure sense of the meaning of things discussed as they *are* on their own terms.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 26.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 27.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 31.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 32.

Phenomenology endeavors not to confine beings to a preconceived schema or region of being, but instead strives to allow what *is* to speak for itself. This requires the withholding or suspending of any and all potentially distorting presuppositions that might cover over the phenomenon under consideration. For Edmund Husserl, the father of phenomenology, this withholding is carried out in the form of bracketing or *epoché* [ἐποχή] and is captured in the now famous slogan “back to the things themselves!” Heidegger adopts the spirit of this slogan, albeit within the context of questioning-being rather than Husserl’s project of “build[ing] anew all the sciences.”¹⁰⁹

All of this is not to say that, Heidegger is able to simply adopt and maintain a completely unbiased and disinterested position, one that is free of all prejudice, as if such a thing were even possible. Part of what it means to exist, as Dasein, is to be embedded in a world and in a meaningful context.¹¹⁰ By avoiding any definitive stance on being, the Heideggerian phenomenologist does not entirely abandon her assumptions about being, instead she tries to circumnavigate them in such a way that they do not hold the same determinative sway as before. *Epoché*, for Heidegger, is a continuous struggle, not a prerequisite state of being.¹¹¹ Remember, Dasein is understood in terms of perpetual and active engagement with the world, its analysis must not be seen as something static but temporal. If the analysis is phenomenological, then, we

¹⁰⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Mediations*, 2.

¹¹⁰ Husserl captures this embeddedness with the concept of intentionality, which carries with it certain metaphysical presuppositions regarding human being as subjectivity. This leads to the development a theory of transcendental subjectivity that is to serve as the culmination of the entire Cartesian tradition. Heidegger, on the other hand, explains this embeddedness via Dasein’s understanding of being [*Seinsverständnis*]. The difference between the two phenomenologists will ultimately come down to the level of radicality of their respective attempts to circumnavigate tradition. Husserl wants to ground the tradition, bringing it to a conclusion. Heidegger wants to escape the tradition, and move toward new ways of thinking and being.

¹¹¹ Note: Heidegger does not himself use this term.

ought to think of the analysis as a process of bracket-*ing*, rather than something that occurs once the bracketing is accomplished.

Part of the phenomenological struggle means incorporating, and even privileging, otherwise excluded experiences. For Heidegger, our most intimate interactions with beings do not take place at the height of scientific inquiry or theoretical brilliance, but in our ordinary, unremarkable encounters with them. Beings are most free to be themselves, when we are dealing with them in what might be called an “unthinking” manner. It is in our everyday dealings with the beings of the world that we operate outside the formal limitations of scientific investigation where beings present themselves without the constraints of a formal and conceptual discourse. Therefore, because it is capable of operating outside the limits of the ontic sciences, phenomenology reveals itself as the only appropriate method with which to carry out an investigation into the basic conditions of existence and being—i.e. fundamental ontology. As Heidegger explains, “*Ontology is only possible as phenomenology.*”¹¹² Ultimately, Heidegger wants to turn away from grandiose theory back towards our basic everyday experience, to be attentive to what is always already there.

Heidegger elaborates on this return to the everyday with reference to two forms of inner-worldly disclosure, what he calls the ready-to-hand [*Zuhandenheit*] (or handiness) and the present-to-hand [*Vorhandenheit*]. The latter refers to the theoretical way being wherein beings appear as objectively present objects made available for contemplation, while the former refers to the way beings are disclosed in our active and engaged dealings in the world. Heidegger prioritizes the ready-to-hand. For him, engaged action is the fundamental way by which we exist

¹¹² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 33.

in the world—recall that care [*Sorge*] is the word he uses to characterize Dasein’s being-in-the-world.¹¹³ As he writes, “handiness [*Zuhandenheit*] is the ontological categorical definition of beings as they are ‘in themselves.’”¹¹⁴ If we are to return to “the things themselves” it will likely occur under the disclosive influence of the ready-to-hand. This is not to say that present-to-hand observation of things provides no access to Dasein’s existential structures, nor that it is a completely different way of being than the ready-to-hand. For, as Heidegger explains, “observation is a kind of taking care just as primordially as action has its own kind of seeing. Theoretical behavior is just looking, noncircumspectly.”¹¹⁵ The present-to-hand, therefore, is a distinct form of active engagement with the world. What Heidegger does by prioritizing the ready-to-hand is not to exclude the present-to-hand, but to incorporate it into the ready-to-hand. Present-to-hand disclosure is but one mode of Dasein’s active engagement with the beings of the world.

The present-to-hand encounter is a hyper focused encounter, one wherein blinders are erected that block and narrow the phenomenon. It is a problem-solving mode. Things become present-to-hand, for Heidegger, during a moment of breakdown. When the flow of our everyday engagement is broken, the things that we are always already engaged with and taking care of are suddenly disclosed as brute, objectively present “objects.” Heidegger illustrates this with an example of a craftsman using a hammer.¹¹⁶ As long as the hammer is functioning well, and the task is moving along unproblematically, the person using the hammer hardly has to think about

¹¹³ See FN 50 on page 46 of Chapter I.

¹¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 71.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

it. It is only once the hammer breaks that it emerges as a thing, useful for hammering. Its brokenness pulls it out of the ready-to-hand to stand present and objectifiable.

This does not mean that the present-to-hand is an entirely disinterested mode, but rather that it marks a shift in Dasein's careful being-in-the-world. We continue to engage with entities at-hand (i.e. hammers), but in a new way. There is now a *problem* that must be solved. The activity continues, but it is not the same; there is an obstruction, the flow of the ready-to-hand is halted, and the being becomes an "object." For Heidegger, this is indicative of the way by which phenomenology differs from other forms of philosophic and scientific discourse. The ontic sciences, which begin with objectively presents beings (as objects), function in the manner of a problem-solving-disclosing. Their questions represent problems. Thus, they begin a step later than phenomenology, *after* some kind of a breakdown has occurred and a problem encountered (i.e. the Kantian scandal of reconciling the divide between the Cartesian subject and the world of objects). It is not that the Heideggerian phenomenologist never begins under the light of a philosophic problem, but that she does not remain within the confines of that problem. Instead, she strives to pull out of the limited context of the problem, back into the world, and the wider context of existence in and by which the problem makes its appearance.

Ultimately, Heidegger's emphasis on the priority of the ready-to-hand, on the active and the everyday, means that Heidegger does not begin from axiomatic or self-evident propositions, nor does his analysis move within the boundaries of a predefined problem. Instead, he opens up to, and moves carefully through, unjudgmental descriptions of our everyday experience. To a devoted scientific empiricist this is a dangerous move. For Heidegger's account thereby risks slipping into the arbitrariness of anecdotal evidence. By starting with the everyday, Heidegger's entire analysis seemingly stands and falls by the readers ability to sympathize with the

description. If his descriptions resonate with the reader both can move forward together. If not, the whole project falls apart. For the empiricist this dependence is sufficient grounds for dismissing Heidegger's project. Yet, we must not fall for this cheap rebuttal for two reasons. (1) For one, the accusation that the existential analysis is founded on anecdotal grounds is only a legitimate critique within the empirical scientific project and has little bearing on the task of questioning being. (2) For two, the empirical scientific project is grounded on preconceived metaphysical notions of, not only what it means to be human (as a subjective observer), but also what it means to *be* at all. Heidegger's task of raising the *Seinsfrage* cannot be subjected to such banal criticism, for by its very nature, the question of being precedes and supports the grounds of the discipline out of which the critique is extended.

Again, Heidegger is not looking to "know" the world, nor to provide "true" statements about it. His descriptions of the world are not accomplishments but stepping stones; he is not defining anything but trying to coax beings out into a more authentic light. Heidegger only wants to raise the *Seinsfrage*. In the service of this aim, the existential analysis is necessarily phenomenological. It is flexible, not limited to a set of assumptions or self-evident propositions. Dasein itself, as the dynamic opening up, as the existential condition of possibility, demands this form of approach. By withholding assumption and instead allowing beings to manifest themselves, the phenomenologist is primed and ready to encounter the Dasein's existential structure.

At this point, however, it is still somewhat unclear as to how phenomenological withholding is to take place. How does the phenomenologist come to embody the necessary phenomenological disposition? Responding to this question, we ought to take note of the way by which the analysis moves. In so doing, we ought to recognize that the process of bracket-*ing*

assumption and getting to the core of the issue of Dasein's being, is not a straight forward procedure. The analysis is not a pointed, one-way, path. Instead it is a winding, circling, repetitive journey. Recall Heidegger's insistence that there is no circular reasoning involved in working out the *Seinsfrage*, instead there is only a "relatedness backward or forward"¹¹⁷

As a discursive methodology, phenomenology can be characterized as fundamentally expositional. As a distinct form of *λόγος* it "[lets] something be seen *by indicating it*." The phenomenologist analyzes their experience (for Heidegger, their existence) linguistically, by giving phenomenal descriptions. In Heidegger's case, he begins with a general, unjudgmental, preliminary and ontic description of Dasein as the being that (in its being) understands being.¹¹⁸ Thinking through the implications of this, he arrives at the conclusion that this understanding of being takes the form of being-in-the-world.¹¹⁹ Rethinking Dasein's understanding of being in light of its being-in-the-world, it is revealed that Dasein's being-in-the-world is always already in the mode of care [*Sorge*].¹²⁰ Returning a third time, Heidegger considers Dasein's understanding of being in terms of the structure of care. Finally, he discovers that Dasein's care structure is fundamentally temporal and that ecstatic temporality is the structure that informs all existence and opens the horizon of the meaning of being.¹²¹ From here, he returns to rethink his earlier conclusions in light of ecstatic temporality.

Dennis Schmidt, in the introduction to the Joan Stambaugh translation of *Being and Time*, describes Heidegger's approach as a process of examination and reexamination that "continually rewrites itself [and] repeatedly revisits earlier analyses in the light of their own

¹¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 7.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 41.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 53.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 177.

¹²¹ Ibid, 309.

conclusions.”¹²² By continually returning to go over the same ground, meditating on the same occurrence, never deviating from it, and allowing it to slowly manifest itself, Heidegger finds that the influence of assumption can be resisted and a more authentic disclosure made possible. Interestingly, the German word “*Analyse*” has its roots in the Greek *análusis* [ἀνάλλυσις], which denotes “a loosening or a releasing” in the sense of unraveling.¹²³ Phenomenology, carried out in this way, is a kind of descriptive seeing that unravels the coverings of assumption. Lingering over the same ground in this way, Heidegger exposes what is always already there, but was previously hidden, covered over by the forgetful disclosure of the world that we, today, find ourselves in. What is the result of this exposure?

To recap: we are trying to understand how the existential analysis of Dasein can contribute to the project of working out the *Seinsfrage*. In so doing, we asked two basic questions: what is existence? what is analysis? Engaging these questions, it was demonstrated that Heidegger looks to expose the existential structure of Dasein, as the condition of possibility of being, via a phenomenological approach. This approach is characterized by both a widened perspective and a striving to be as unjudgmental as possible in the form of an unraveling. It is carried out via repetitive and ever deepening descriptions that are intended to allow the beings under investigation to reveal themselves on their own terms, rather than try to forcibly pull them out of oblivion. While the question as to exactly how this phenomenological analysis leads to the *Seinsfrage* remains open, there is beginning to emerge a sense of kinship between

¹²² Dennis Schmidt, “Foreword” *Being and Time*, xvi-xvii.

¹²³ Heidegger’s work is often seen as a precursor to French Deconstruction. It is easy to understand how his phenomenological analysis can be read as a primitive deconstruction of existence. That said, we must be wary of conflating Heidegger’s task of working out the *Seinsfrage*, and the deconstructive project of thinkers like Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy.

phenomenological analysis and questioning. Both involve a withholding of assumption, and an active, striving resistance to the distorting influence of worldly disclosure.

Preparing/Questioning

Early on, we hinted at the fact that the existential analysis was but one part of a twofold task: i.e. the task of working out the *Seinsfrage*. The two folds of this task are analytical and destructive. Thus far, we have considered the existential analysis on its own terms. Now, we ought to consider its relation to the destructive aspect of Heidegger's project. For, as Heidegger tells us, "the question of being attains true concreteness only when we carry out the destruction [*Destruktion*] of the ontological tradition."¹²⁴

The analysis of Dasein is ostensibly just the beginning. It is preparatory. And indeed, Heidegger makes this clear by titling the first chapter "The Exposition of the Task of a Preparatory Analysis of Dasein [*Die Exposition der Aufgabe einer vorbereitenden Analyse des Daseins*]."¹²⁵ If we are to fully grasp the way by which the existential analysis serves to manifest the *Seinsfrage*, we must consider its preparatory nature. Let us mediate on this now.

Our exploration into the nature of the analysis revealed that its aim is to allow the existential structure of Dasein, as the condition of possibility of being, as disclosive opening onto and into the world, to expose itself. The analysis has the character of a repetitive phenomenological exposition that develops into the progressive withholding of assumption in order to resist the distorting influence of our ways of being-in-the-world and uncover what is

¹²⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 25.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 41.

always already there. It begins from an initial impression (an otherwise obvious truth), then slowly and carefully exposes the meaningful essence of that impression by continually and repetitively going over and over it, giving ever deepening descriptions. In short, the analysis is a way of unraveling letting-be-seen.

From the transcendentalist assumption that questioning is always a being-toward answer (as opposed to being-out-from-answer), it looks as though the existential analytic is a preliminary examination of the terrain on which the search for an answer is to take place. Just as one might measure and mark the ground on which a building will be constructed, Heidegger is thought to be examining the existential ground of Dasein in order to prepare for the constructive work of building toward an answer (whether or not Heidegger intends to carry out such a construction is unimportant). Indeed, this is how Richardson interprets preparatory nature of Heidegger's fundamental ontology.¹²⁶ In a similar way, the transcendentalists interpret the work of the analytic as preparatory to an answering, and in some cases (i.e. for Arendt, Braver, Caputo etc.), as the answering itself.¹²⁷ As mentioned earlier, Malpas considers the question of place to be prior to the question of being, and the existential analysis, which answers the question of place, to be preparatory to the question of being. From our own interpretation, however, the dynamic here is subtly different. How are we to interpret the preparatory nature of the existential analytic as it strives to question out-from-answer?

We commonly think of preparation as a three-stage process: (1) forethought, (2) calculation, and (3) action. On this model, to be engaged in the activity of preparation is to look ahead from the position of a *now* to a *not-yet-now*. By way of forethought (literally "thinking-

¹²⁶ See: Chapter I, pp. 29.

¹²⁷ See: Chapter I, pp. 29.

before”), a preparer first establishes a field of vision wherein possibilities are projected onto the not-yet-now and set into competition with one another. The preparer then makes a prediction concerning the probability of each possible outcome. Informing this prediction is an implicit understanding that the future is causally conditioned by the now. Things carry from the present into the future in a cause-effect pattern, i.e. in a measurable and predictable manner. The present is seen as a precursor, the antecedent, to a conditional future; a future that is, for now, only a series of unactualized, but actualizable, possibilities. Of these future possibilities one stands out as not only actualizable, but desirable. An analysis of this field is then carried out to gauge the probability of this possible outcome, and the conditions required for it to become manifest. Through this kind of calculation, weighing the benefits and disadvantages of each path and possibility, the preparer selects the best action to achieve the desired outcome and avoid the undesirable ones. After a choice of action has been made, it is then implemented. Of course, that which is to be actualized cannot be guaranteed, or else preparations would not need to be made. Preparing is not simply making predictions, nor is it looking ahead and hoping for the best. Preparation culminates in the action we take, the arrangements we make now, situating and positioning things, that are to causally carry into the not-yet-now. Preparation is active organization.

This basic, every day concept of preparation is a matter of common sense. As such, it is difficult to envision any other form of preparation. From this perspective, the existential analytic of Dasein, understood as a preparatory procedure, is a combination of forethought, calculation, and action. Framing the existential analysis in these terms, it can be said that Heidegger first looks ahead to a future wherein we might be capable of posing the *Seinsfrage*, and then works to

actualize this potential future. The question of being, from this view, is a not-yet realized possibility that must be actively brought about; it resides in the future, we reside in the present.

We might wonder, though, if this is what Heidegger has in mind when he tells us that the existential analytic is “preparatory” [*vorbereitenden*] to the *Seinsfrage*. As we have seen thus far, the existential analysis is characterized as a phenomenological letting-be-seen. By resisting the closure of Dasein’s disclosure, Heidegger hopes to allow the existential structure that runs through our various possibilities of being to expose itself. Practicing phenomenal attentiveness, Heidegger strives to circumnavigate assumption in order to free up what is always already there. Moving toward the conclusion of the analysis is not moving toward a possibility that resides in the future, but one that is coextensive with the existence of our Dasein, one that is always already there. Thus, the preparation that Heidegger is actively carrying out is not the common preparation of looking ahead and organizing, in a projective and calculative manner; rather, it is the preparation of withholding and letting be; i.e. of bracket-*ing*.

We may recall that the forgetfulness that currently obstructs our path towards questioning being is predicated upon an always already implicit understanding of being that traps us in a vicious hermeneutic circle. This understanding, what we are calling an “answer” to the *Seinsfrage*, is what is to be exposed via the existential analysis. And so, when Heidegger explains that he is, “searching for the answer to the question of the meaning of being in general, and above all the possibility of radically developing this basic question of all ontology,”¹²⁸ we must not think of this an act of being-toward-answer, but as a preparatory act of exposing the horizon in which the question is constrained by an always already preconceived answer.

¹²⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 221.

Heidegger's questioning is not predicated on a desire to settle on a definitive conclusion, but in order to loosen its grip on us, to phenomenologically unravel it. The existential structure that is exposed via the existential analysis does not represent the transcendental place of all places, but the ecstatic transcendental condition of all possibilities that we are, today, in our time of forgetfulness. Through this unraveling exposure, the *Seinsfrage* is both prepared *and enacted*.

In the end, the preparatory nature of the analysis is not merely organizational, nor is it linear. It does not lead directly to the *Seinsfrage* (as if the question could be posed like a statue in a museum); rather, by phenomenologically moving "backward and forward" over the ground of existence, hermeneutically circling the answer that constrains the question, Heidegger looks to embody a questioning that does not search for something predetermined, but is opened to the radical possibility of a gifted ontological transformation. The act of preparing to receive is the act of questioning-being, a readying receptiveness. Thus, the ecstatic temporal structure ought not be thought of as final, but as yet another step on the road to such open receptiveness; something that in turn will also be unraveled. Ecstatic temporality is but a path-mark on the way to continued questioning, a questioning that takes phenomenological form.

Where does this leave our understanding of the unpublished second half of *Being and Time*? For one, we can now see that the destructive component of the twofold task of working out the *Seinsfrage* could not be carried out as an attack, launched from the stable ground of an unchanging transcendental horizon. For any action carried out from the position of an answer to the question of being, will only reiterate what it is trying to attack. Indeed, the destruction can only occur via the loosening of questioning's being-out-from-answer. Destruction is not the next step of a step-by-step procedure but is folded into the two-fold preparations of phenomenological exposition. In this way, the destruction occurs via the analysis itself and not after its

“conclusion.” What this means is that the unpublished half of *Being and Time*, is not indicative of a missing component but of a task accomplished earlier than anticipated. While it was, at the outset, thought to be a necessary aspect of posing the *Seinsfrage*, through the analysis, and based on the success of the analysis, the second half as originally envisioned comes to be unnecessary. Thus, Dennis Schmidt is wrong when he characterizes *Being and Time* as the “torso of its own intensions.”¹²⁹ Heidegger’s intentions from the beginning have been to question being, and this is what he does. The abandonment of the second half of *Being and Time* is not exemplary of Heidegger’s failure, but his success. His realization that the second half was no longer necessary, demonstrates the existential analysis effective loosening of our understanding of Being, such that the task itself is transformed.

Recollection

This chapter began with the intention of clarifying the nature of Heidegger’s existential analysis as preparatory to the goal of raising anew the *Seinsfrage*. As it turns out, the analysis is not preparatory in the manner of a coming-before, but itself is an act of questioning. Its phenomenological method, which takes the form of a continued effort to bracket assumption, is the concrete expression of questioning’s letting be via a restrained-seeking that hearkens. To question, therefore, is always to be on the move. Questioning is always preliminary and preparatory. Questioning prepares for further questioning. It is a dynamic process whereby the understanding that we live by is perpetually withheld. To question being, to pose the *Seinsfrage*, is to open up to the radical possibility and freedom of being-there. It is to loosen the grip of the

¹²⁹ See Chapter I, pp.29.

understanding of being [*Seinsverständnis*] that conditions us and the world we inhabit. It is to remain open, awaiting, ready to receive being. It is to prepare for a radically transformed future. Dasein, as the being that has the possibility of questioning in its being, lets beings be, and in letting beings be, piously journeys toward the un-known.

The transcendentalist interpretation of *Being and Time*, by assuming that questions are always being-toward-answer, rather than a being-out-from-answer, miss the radicality of Heidegger's project. Quite willing to settle on the existential structure of ecstatic temporality, unquestioningly, the transcendentalist usurps Heidegger's questioning and attempts to put it into the service of some predefined project; i.e. knowing the world or deconstructing history. And, as Heidegger is careful to point out, all such projects rely on a predefined, albeit largely implicit, understanding of being. Thus, the transcendentalist, by interpreting *Being and Time* in this way, closes down the questioning that Heidegger fought so hard to foster. Heidegger does not simply want to carry out this questioning himself, but wants to inspire such questioning in us, his readers. *Being and Time* is not a collection of statements, it is an invitation—an opening. Reading it, we are invited to join him on his quest to question the meaning of being. Heidegger's questioning is dedicated to those that will come after him, those future thinkers that will carry on questioning and in so doing continue to revolutionize our ways of thinking and being. As he will later write in the *Contributions to Philosophy*, "the task is to prepare for these future ones."¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 313.

Conclusion

“*Questioning is the piety of thought.*”¹³¹

The foregoing investigation sought to address the question: what is *Being and Time*? Consideration of this question led to a meditation on the nature of Heideggerian questioning and the free possibility of the *Seinsfrage*. Let us now look back on the path we have traversed to see what has been discovered.

In the first chapter, I set *Being and Time* up as a work of questioning. Reading closely the opening lines of the text, I reflected on the nature of Heidegger’s task of raising anew the question of the meaning of being [*die Seinsfrage*]. In particular, I examined Heidegger’s remarks on the constraints that, today, hinder such questioning; namely, a forgetfulness of being. Heidegger argues that to properly pose the question we must first reawaken [*zu wecken*] an understanding of it. Reflecting on the nature of our forgetfulness and speculating on what this “reawakening” might entail, I argued that to work out the *Seinsfrage* does not mean to answer it but to bring it out from under the coverings of an always already functioning answer; i.e. a conditioning understanding of questioning. For Heidegger, a more authentic understanding of the question is hidden by presumption. I determined that to fully grasp what Heidegger is attempting to do, we must be suspicious of our common assumptions regarding what questioning is and how it functions. From here I argued that, for Heidegger, answers do not mark the culmination of a successful questioning but serve as guides, opening and directing subsequent questioning.

¹³¹ Martin Heidegger, “Question Concerning Technology” *Basic Writings*, 341.

In the second chapter, beginning from the supposition that our common understanding is misguided, I carried out an investigation into the nature of questioning as Heidegger presents it in *Being and Time*. Following the hints established in the first chapter, as well as Heidegger's account of the formal structure of questioning [*die Fragestellung*], I argued that questioning is a mode of Dasein's existential occurrence. It is a way of being-in-the-world. As such, questioning is a disclosive activity wherein the questioner lets beings be. I further characterized the questioning mode of Dasein by examining some of Heidegger's pointed remarks about it. I concluded that questioning takes the form of a restrained-seeking, expressed discursively as a hearkening. It is not merely to practice restraint but to become it. To question is to ontologically open ourselves up to and clear the way for a free disclosive issuing of being. As Heidegger writes in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*: "[Questioning is] the open resoluteness to be able to stand in the openness of beings."¹³²

In questioning we move forward into the world in a uniquely self-possessed way. We do not charge ahead, relentlessly projecting old and outdated assumptions, nor do we stop entirely, adopting a position of complete disinterest. Instead, we sojourn. We meditate. We do not embark on a frantic search, wherein everything is laid out in advance and the path followed is carefully marked and well used. Instead, we move forward slowly, listening carefully and looking attentively to beings as they present themselves. Questioning is a disclosive activity, wherein beings are brought into being in such a way that they are freed to be themselves. This freeing disclosure is not something that occurs in an instant and is finished, rather it is a durational,

¹³² Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 24.

active occurrence, a dynamic opening up that must be upheld and perpetuated. It is not a one-time job, as simple as uttering some words and grasping at an answer.

From this general understanding of questioning, I then considered what it would mean to question being. I argued that the *Seinsfrage*, has the potential to ignite a radical ontological transformation. This potential is grounded in its position as an eminent question. The *Seinsfrage* enjoys a level of precedence [*Vorrang*] that other questions are not privy to. It is a question to which all other questions meaningfully defer. For any question to be posed concretely and meaningfully, the question of being must be addressed first. In a sense, then, the *Seinsfrage* is the question that resides closest to the ground of all questions. And since questioning functions by way of a disclosive opening up, and a preparing to receive, the *Seinsfrage* is an opening up at the ground level. It is preparatory to a complete transformation of the disclosure of ourselves and our world. Such questioning, therefore, is no mere frivolity. For it has the power to incite radical change and inspire creative newness. As Heidegger will declare in the sporadic and esoteric *Contributions to Philosophy*, “in questioning resides the tempestuous advance that says ‘yes’ to what has not been mastered and the broadening out into ponderable, yet unexplored, realms.”¹³³

Of course, however, this transition from the old into the new is not a straight forward movement. In fact, it is largely out of our hands. For everything that we think and do is carried out under the influence of an implicit and preliminary understanding of being [*Seinsverständnis*]. This understanding is not something human beings create, but something we embody, something that we *are*. It is the fundamental condition of our existence. It is a condition into which we are thrown. Human beings never stand outside of a world, in order to craft an understanding of being

¹³³ Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 10.

and then be transported into one. Rather we always already find ourselves here, without knowing how we got here. In a sense, our understanding of being is a gift. To questioningly open up and prepare to receive a new understanding is to allow ourselves to be appropriated by being once again, just as we were originally appropriated when we first entered into this world. Perhaps this is what Heidegger means, therefore, when in *The Essence of Truth*, he claims that: “Questioning is preparation for, and enabling of, a law-giving.”¹³⁴

After establishing the nature of the *Seinsfrage*, I considered the method by which Heidegger hoped to manifest it. Considering Heidegger’s claim that the *Seinsfrage* is forgetfully hidden beneath the coverings of an already implicit understanding of being, I argued that the task Heidegger sets himself is one of uncovering. The third chapter, therefore, explored what this uncovering involves. I argued that to work out the question is not to pointedly dig beneath and mine bellow our forgetful encounters, but to try and coax the question out on its own terms by continually resisting and bracketing the assumptions that have thus far kept it covered. Heidegger’s efforts to “work out” the question of the meaning of being, to “reawaken” it and bring it out of the oblivion of for-get-fullness, are largely efforts to loosen up the grip of our contemporary understanding of being.

Interpreting the existential analysis as Heidegger’s chosen path to this end, I considered the way by which it was to accomplish this loosening. In so doing, I explored the phenomenological character of the analysis, which I described as a process of continual bracketing, whereby the phenomenologist strives to resist the closure of their own disclosure. Heideggerian phenomenology, I argue, is an expositional process in which the phenomenologist

¹³⁴ Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 126.

repetitively examines the existential ground of an issue, over and over, in a way designed to free up the “things themselves” to allow them to occur on their own terms. In this way, questioning, as a restrained-seeking that hearkens, maintains a close kinship to the process of phenomenology. In fact, to question is to practice phenomenology. And so, while Heidegger presents *Being and Time* as preparatory to questioning, the text itself is an example of questioning in action. As such, we ought not interpret the text as a doctrinal contribution to philosophy, something to be accepted and espoused. For it does not intend to provide answers but serve as a guide to our own questioning and a provisional foundation for further questioning.

Thus, I argue that the existential structure of Dasein, as ecstatic temporality, should not be read in any absolute terms. It is not a universal condition of all possibility but is the fundamental horizon of our world *today*. Engaging the interpretations given by Jeff Malpas and John D. Caputo, I argued that the transcendental interpretation of *Being and Time* is a misreading of the text encouraged by an unquestioned assumption that questioning is a striving, being-toward-answer. Ecstatic temporality, as the horizon in which our shared world is situated, represents the implicit understanding of being that we all live by. It is the condition of all our possibilities. Hidden by its more vulgar expressions, ecstatic temporality carries on unthought and unquestioned. Heidegger’s phenomenological analysis of existence, by revealing temporality as the existential ground of contemporary Dasein, hopes to question out-from it; that is, to leap out (to be thrown) into a new horizon by way of an appropriation. Questioning does not settle on the horizon of ecstatic temporality but moves through and out from it. Heidegger does not arrive there, close his questioning, and then publish his findings in a collection of statements titled *Being and Time*. Rather, by allowing the ground to emerge, Heidegger prepares to leave it behind.

And so, in response to our leading question, I argue that *Being and Time* is the opening of a radical questioning. It is a movement not a destination. Its path is more important than the (re)marks made along the way. In full awareness of our limitations and constraints, Heidegger explores the possibility of circumnavigating our situation in order to overcome it. His quest is one of emancipation. The text itself does not represent a finished product, but an invitation to join him on his way. The nature of this quest is such that he cannot provide a clear-cut map for us to follow. For any such map will undoubtedly be constrained by the horizon of a limited understanding of being. Nonetheless, Heidegger, in and through his work, attempts to light the way into the unknown—to open the door that we ourselves must step through. As Heidegger says in the *Contributions to Philosophy*, “the issue is neither to describe nor to explain, neither to promulgate nor to teach. Here the speaking is not something over and against what is to be said but is this latter itself as the essential occurrence of being.”¹³⁵ Heidegger wants to inspire questioning, to instigate a lifelong revolution of thought. The committed labour of questioning’s *Ausarbeitung* is a vocational calling. It is not a one-time job to be accomplished and set aside, but something that we must return to again and again, striving to keep ourselves open to the radical possibility of being-there as witnesses to the unfolding of being. What, then, is *Being and Time*? It is the initiation of a revolution.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 6.

¹³⁶ It is often thought that *Being and Time* is an instructional work, teaching us how to live authentically. Patricia Huntington, for example, argues that “Heidegger’s thinking, like that of all great figures, endures because the ultimate subject of his thought can, when rightly understood, deliver us to a lived-reality: well-being” (“Stealing the Fire of Creativity: Heidegger’s Challenge to Intellectuals” *Feminist Interpretations of Martin Heidegger*, 352). For her, Heidegger’s great contribution to philosophy is one of instruction. Through him we learn to live well, to *be* well. Here the image of Heidegger as a radical revolutionary is supplanted by an image of the man as a self-help guru.

Others have argued that Heidegger is a hermeneut, concerned with mapping out sources of meaning and the conditions of interpretation. Thomas Sheehan, for example, argues that the *Seinsfrage* is really the *Sinnsfrage*. His book *Making Sense of Heidegger*, claims that what Heidegger really means by “being” [*Sein*] is “meaning” [*Sinn*].

By clarifying the nature of Heideggerian questioning, I hope to counteract a tendency in Heidegger scholarship to focus on the content of Heidegger's work rather than the path that it opens. If Heidegger is truly concerned with questioning, then anything he says along the way is not definitive but preparatory. And so, while there have been a number of different interpretations of *Being and Time* over the near century since its initial publication, few have appreciated the truly revolutionary ambitions of his questioning.

It is by questioning, constantly moving forward, perpetually opening up to the unknown and preparing to receive, that Heidegger hopes to ignite a revolution of thought and being. He is not looking to contribute to an already established discourse, nor to add to an already ongoing conversation. He is looking to transform discourse altogether. Heidegger is a revolutionary in the most radical sense.

Heidegger's philosophy, he says, "is solely and exclusively about meaningfulness and its source" (*Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift*, 10).

To make this move, however, largely ignores the nature of Heidegger's questioning. He is not attempting to define being (as meaningfulness or anything else), but to inspire us to question it. As per the ontological difference, being cannot be defined. By arguing that being is meaning, Sheehan closes the door to our own questioning. By "making sense" of Heidegger, and reducing his provisional claims to definitive statements, he settles the issue. There is no longer any need to question, for we now "understand" what Heidegger was all about. While it is certainly true that Heidegger has lots to say about the nature of interpretation (his work was instrumental to the hermeneutic philosophy of his student Hans Georg Gadamer, for example), what he says is incidental to his way of *saying* it, and especially to the questioning that informs and shapes such saying.

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Author C.V.

Name:

Joshua Livingstone

Education:

Kings University College

B.A. Honors Specialization in Philosophy (2012 – 2016)

Western University – Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism

M.A. Theory and Criticism (2016 –2018)

Honors and Awards:

S.S.H.R.C. Canada Graduate Scholarship – Masters (2016 – 2017)

John and Mary Snyder Scholarship (2015)

Presentations:

Heidegger: Dwelling, Thinking, and the Ethical Life (2017): “Heidegger: Preparing to Receive”

Huron Philosophy Student Colloquium (2014): “Matter, Memory, Being”

Huron Philosophy Student Colloquium (2013): “Einstein’s Theoretical Method”

Related Work:

T.A. (WS2270B – Women, Law, and Social Change) Western University (2016- 2018)

G.S.A. Italian Thought Conference - Kings University (2017)

President - Kings Philosophy Students Association (2015 - 2016)

VP. Student Relations - Kings Philosophy Students Association (2014 - 2015)