



The Question of Being

Thèse

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RÉSUMÉ

La difficulté éprouvée lorsqu'on considère la question de l'être est décrite par Étienne Gilson de la manière suivante : Dans « un domaine où la démonstration dialectique perd ses droits, chacun ne peut que regarder, dire ce qu'il voit et inviter les autres à tourner comme lui le regard vers la vérité. » En fait, Gilson dit, dans le même article : « De deux métaphysiciens également compétents et jouissant d'une égale habileté dans le maniement des arguments dialectiques, il se peut qu'aucun ne réussisse jamais à convaincre l'autre, parce qu'ils ne *voient* pas les mêmes choses. » Cela semblerait être le sort du vrai philosophe, qui est, comme il est décrit dans le *Sophiste*, difficile à voir, « car cette région est si brillante, et les yeux de l'âme de la plupart des gens ne peuvent pas supporter de regarder ce qui est divin. » Si le philosophe, la personne qui interroge l'Être, est difficile à voir, à cause de ce qu'il poursuit, alors ce qu'il poursuit doit être encore plus difficile à saisir. Comme Josef Pieper le dit, « La personne philosophante se trouve dans une telle situation ; ceci est, en effet, exactement ce que la distingue, c'est-à-dire, qu'elle est obligée de parler de quelque chose qui soit indéniablement rencontré, mais qui ne peut être exprimé avec des mots précis. »

Cette thèse est divisée en deux grandes sections. La première pourrait être décrite comme une section interprétative. Nous essayons ici de mettre en place, aussi précisément que possible, les différentes tentatives de répondre à la question de l'être proposées par Platon, Aristote et Martin Heidegger. Nous cherchons, dans un sens, à tracer les chemins qu'ils ont pris dans leur quête vers le sommet du mont Être. Chacune de ces subdivisions contiennent nos propres contributions à ce que nous proposons comme la bonne approche interprétative de ces trois philosophes. Ces appoints prennent en compte une interprétation préliminaire de ces auteurs, suivies d'une tentative de naviguer dans un véritable marécage de textes interprétatifs qui

prétendent nous dire, une fois pour toutes, comment bien comprendre les revendications ontologiques de Platon, d'Aristote et de Martin Heidegger. Nos contributions à la pensée philosophique entourant ces penseurs particuliers ne constituent pas, cependant, l'objectif principal de cette thèse. Au contraire, ils serviront à nous aider dans notre tentative d'atteindre, nous-mêmes le sommet de la montagne de l'Être.

Après avoir jalonné ces parcours, nous devrions être en mesure de mieux planifier notre propre approche à la question de l'Être. La première section sous-tendra ainsi la deuxième afin d'aborder, à nouveau, la question de l'Être. Cette deuxième section doit être considérée comme une section philosophique—la poursuite active de la sagesse. Dans cette deuxième partie, nous proposons d'aborder la question de l'Être, tout d'abord par la comparaison, l'analyse et la critique des trois penseurs que nous avons examinés dans la première section ; nous proposerons ensuite nos propres tentatives de répondre à la question de l'Être. Nous allons conclure avec quelques brèves réflexions sur la façon dont nos découvertes concernant l'Être pourraient affecter d'autres domaines de la connaissance.

ABSTRACT

The difficulty of approaching the question of Being is described, by Étienne Gilson as follows, “in a domain where dialectical demonstration loses its rights, one can do no more than look, say what he sees, and invite others to turn, like himself, their eyes towards the truth.” In fact, says Gilson, earlier in this same article, “Take two metaphysicians who are equally competent and in possession of equal ability in the handling of dialectical arguments, it is possible that neither of them will ever succeed in convincing the other, because they do not see the same things.” This seems to be the fate of the true philosopher, as he is described in the *Sophist*, who is hard to see “because that area is so bright and the eyes of most people’s souls cannot bear to look at that which is divine.” If the philosopher, the person who questions Being, is difficult to see, because of that which he is pursuing, then that which he is pursuing must be even more difficult to grasp. As Josef Pieper puts it, “The philosophizing person finds himself in just such a situation; this is precisely what singles him out, that is, that he is obliged to speak of something undeniably encountered but that cannot be expressed exactly in words.”

This dissertation can be divided into two major sections. The first major section could be portrayed as an interpretative section. We here attempt to establish, as accurately as possible, the differing attempts to answer the question of Being that were proposed by Plato, Aristotle and Martin Heidegger. We are, in a sense, attempting to map out the paths they took in their quest to attain the summit of Mount Being. Each of these sections contain our own contributions to what we propose is the proper interpretation of these three philosophers. These contributions take into account a preliminary interpretation of these authors, followed by the attempt to wade through a veritable swamp of interpretative writings that purport to tell us, once and for all, how to properly understand the ontological claims of Plato, Aristotle and Martin Heidegger. Our contributions to

philosophical thought surrounding these particular thinkers do not constitute, however, the primary goal of this dissertation. Rather, they will serve to help us in our attempt to climb the mountain of Being.

Having mapped out their paths, we should be better able to plan out our own approach to the question of Being. Thus, in the second section, we will use what we have learned in the first section in order to approach the question of Being anew. This second section should be seen as a philosophical section—the active pursuit of wisdom. In this second section we propose to approach the question of Being, first of all, through a comparison, analysis, and critique of the three thinkers we examined in the first section. This will be followed by our own humble attempts to answer the question of Being. We will conclude with some brief thoughts about how our discoveries about Being may affect other domains of knowledge.

THE QUESTION OF BEING

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To my wife Laury, thank you for your love and patience.
To my princess Corélie, and my boys Israël, Elijah, and William
To truly Be yourself,
Let yourself be moulded by He who truly Is.

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*Nulle vision métaphysique, si aiguë soit-elle,
n'épuisera jamais le mystère de l'être.*

Régis Jolivet

*Being superabounds everywhere;
it scatters its gifts and fruits in profusion.*

Jacques Maritain

INTRODUCTION

Being is, says the Eleatic Stranger in Plato's *Sophist*, of all the Forms, "the greatest and most important expression."¹ As great as it is, it also happens to be the most difficult to grasp, and the cause of endless debate. Yet, according to Plato's *Sophist*, it is Being which is most coveted by the true philosopher.² Josef Pieper notes that one of the essential elements of platonic philosophy is that "the philosophizing person, insofar as he philosophizes, is on the hunt for 'the Idea of Being'."³ He says in a different article in the same collection, "And it is this same totality of Being that is the object of philosophizing; indeed, with philosophizing, nothing more is meant than the contemplation of reality *as a whole*."⁴ The question of Being, then, is that one question that all true philosophers seek to answer; but, can it be answered? More importantly, when the purpose of a dissertation is to contribute to the sum of human knowledge, is it possible, today, to really say something that hasn't already been said about Being?

Étienne Gilson introduces his book, *Constantes Philosophique de l'Être*, with the following comment about the nature of the science of Being *qua* Being, and the temptation of the metaphysician, "The metaphysician never really has the impression of actually discovering something new; rather, he gets the impression that the truth which he has discovered, as everyone must rediscover it for themselves, has always been there, before everyone's eyes, and that even

¹Plato, *Sophist* 243d, trans. Nicholas P. White (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993), 33. Though this is a good translation, and makes the point with which I wish to introduce this dissertation, it should be noted that this comment could also be translated as "the greatest and foremost chief of them (Plato, *Sophist* 243d, trans. Harold North Fowler (1921; repr., London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 360-361.)", or as "the greatest and first (*πρώτου*) principle/origin (*ἀρχηγόυ*) (my translation)".

²Ibid., 254a.

³Josef Pieper, "On the Platonic Idea of Philosophy," in *For the Love of Wisdom: Essays on the Nature of Philosophy*, trans. Roger Wasserman, ed. Berthold Wald (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2006), 162.

⁴Josef Pieper, "A Plea for Philosophy," in *For the Love of Wisdom: Essays on the Nature of Philosophy*, trans. Roger Wasserman, ed. Berthold Wald (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2006), 119.

those who misunderstood it, or sometimes denied it, have always, in spite of this fact, used it. It must have been this way, as all the truth that we call science comes from that knowledge which is obtained from the principles. Metaphysicians, themselves, always knew this and more than one has envied, every once in a while, the joy of the scientist (scholar) who, in any domain, never ceases to learn more about his object, instead of the progress of the metaphysician which consists in recognizing that these principles, towards which, from the sciences, he moves, bury themselves progressively, to his eyes, in some sort of fog as if, contrary to what happens in the natural sciences, a sort of non-knowing, or non-science, was, in Metaphysics, the summit of knowledge. Research on the principle casts an envious look towards that research that is pursued from the principle.”⁵ The principle, of which Gilson speaks, is Being. Being, regardless of what we mean by this term, is the principle of all knowledge. Yet, says Gilson, there is no such thing as metaphysical progress; or, at best, the notion of progress, as seen in the natural sciences and in most university research, is meaningless when applied to the question of Being. The metaphysician, therefore, will always be somewhat of an oddity in the world of academia, for to “get ahead” in academia is to discover something new and to add to knowledge. Yet, if what Gilson says is true, then, necessarily, the actual results of our research may seem negligible when compared to the discoveries of the natural sciences, or, what Gilson calls all sciences other than metaphysics, “research that is pursued from the principle”.

Does this mean that our research is pointless, a waste of time and money? The greatest philosophers that this world has ever known, three of whom we will be considering in this dissertation, would say that, in a certain sense, the attempt to answer the question of Being just is “useless”.⁶ As Josef Pieper says, “Indeed, it is true: philosophy does not serve any purpose—not

⁵Étienne Gilson, *Constantes Philosophiques de l'Être* (Paris : VRIN, 1983), 12. Our translation.

⁶Joseph Owens points out that in the Aristotelian tradition, “metaphysics is of no use at all. It is above all

only as a matter of fact, but because it cannot and must not serve any purpose! In the words of Martin Heidegger: ‘It is entirely proper and perfectly as it should be: philosophy is of no use.’”⁷ Or, as Pieper says elsewhere, in referring to the question of Being, “Anyone who asked that question without warning in the company of people whose minds hinge on necessities and material success would most likely be regarded as crazy.”⁸

Josef Pieper echoes the very same sentiment about the progress of metaphysics, as is expressed by Gilson, when he says, “Whoever considers the basic question concerning the structure of Being in general (‘what does it mean to be something real?’) will certainly experience a progressive illuminating of reality, in keeping with the depth of his commitment to conceptual clarification and the impartiality with which he opens himself to reality and allows himself to be affected by it; and he will naturally be interested in doing precisely this. Nevertheless, it would actually be wrong to assert that the philosophizing person in this way comes face to face with something absolutely not yet known, never before thought, something new and unknown. On the contrary, what occurs is more akin to the growing distinctness of something already, albeit obscurely, known, the taking possession of something that has almost been lost, precisely that kind of retrieval of what has been forgotten we call memory.”⁹ So, our approach to the question of Being, according to Pieper, is less like discovering something that is new, and more like remembering something that we have almost already forgotten. It is something that we are in contact with in our everyday world, but always seems to be just out of

use. It is an end and not a means. It is to be pursued for its own sake, and not for any utility that it may bring to the other interests of human life. (Joseph Owens, *St. Thomas and the Future of Metaphysics* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1957), 21.)”

⁷Josef Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy: Classical Wisdom Stands up to Modern Challenges*, trans Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 41.

⁸Josef Pieper, *The Philosophical Act*, in *Leisure: The Basis of Culture and The Philosophical Act*, trans. Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 80.

⁹Josef Pieper, *A Plea for Philosophy*, 135.

reach. Pieper continues his thoughts on philosophical progress, a couple of paragraphs later, with the comment, “how do we measure progress in philosophy? Does such a thing exist at all?... ‘Progress’ is in fact a problematic category in the philosophical realm if what is meant by progress is a steady enrichment of our collective knowledge that increases *eo ipso* in a manner commensurate with the passage of time...Philosophical progress certainly exists, but not so much across generations as in the inner life experience of the philosophizing person—and that in the same proportion in which he, silent and attentive, catches sight of the depth and breadth of his at once new and primeval object.”¹⁰

If we cannot hope for progress, at least in the scientific sense of the term, then what are we doing in this approach to the question of Being? Perhaps we can gain some insight, in order to respond to this question, by returning to Gilson’s short article on the knowledge of the principle. He notes, concerning metaphysical debate, “Nothing, here, allows a metaphysician to respond for other metaphysicians, for in a domain where dialectical demonstration loses its rights, one can do no more than look, say what he sees, and invite others to turn, like himself, their eyes towards the truth.”¹¹ In fact, says Gilson, earlier in this same article, “Take two metaphysicians who are equally competent and in possession of equal ability in the handling of dialectical arguments, it is possible that neither of them will ever succeed in convincing the other, because they do not see the same things.”¹² Is this not the state of the philosopher, as he is described in the *Sophist*, who is hard to see “because that area is so bright and the eyes of most people’s souls cannot bear to look at that which is divine?”¹³ If the philosopher is difficult to see, because of that which he is pursuing, then that which he is pursuing must be even more difficult to grasp. As Pieper puts it, in

¹⁰Ibid., 136.

¹¹Gilson, *CPE*, 43.

¹²Ibid., 22-23.

¹³Plato, *Sophist*, 254a.

the article that we quoted above, “The philosophizing person finds himself in just such a situation; this is precisely what singles him out, that is, that he is obliged to speak of something undeniably encountered but that cannot be expressed exactly in words.”¹⁴

In the light of such comments concerning the nature of the philosopher, and the difficulty of accurately expressing what the philosopher is able to learn about Being, it seems entirely likely that this dissertation may end up being much ado about nothing. Is the attempt to answer the question of Being, therefore, in light of its difficulty and relative uselessness, not a quest worth pursuing? Interestingly enough, those very same philosophers, whose works have, without any exaggeration, moulded the minds of the great men and women around the world (and not just the western world, as many are wont to say), also attempted to answer the question of Being. Perhaps we can learn something from them?

Stanley Rosen, in a book on the same subject as our dissertation, states that, “If philosophy is the pursuit of truth, and our purpose is to explain the world, or Being, then our explanations must in fact be true. If they are true, then we must believe them, and if we believe them, then they must govern our lives, whether we like it or not.”¹⁵ The question of Being¹⁶ is a question that has plagued the history of philosophy.¹⁷ The question of Being is always in the background of every philosophical (not to mention theological and scientific) discussion, yet if it is left in the background it will come back to haunt the theories of even the most analytical of

¹⁴Pieper, *A Plea for Philosophy*, 139-140.

¹⁵Stanley Rosen, *The Question of Being* (1993; repr., South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2002), 120.

¹⁶Throughout this text I will use a lower case b with the word being when I am referring to a being or beings, and an uppercase B with Being when I am referring to Being in abstraction from any one being or collection of beings. When I insert a hyphen, Be-ing, I am referring to the act of Being (Being used as a verb).

¹⁷We have not explained what we mean by the question of Being at this point as we wish to discover, for Plato, Aristotle and Martin Heidegger, just what they mean when they ask the question of Being. We will only make a decision about what we mean by the question of Being once we have been able to interact with these philosophers work on Being.

philosophers.¹⁸ It seems that one cannot even consider ethical or political problems without at least paying homage to the question of Being. Those who don't, often run into problems in the long run. The greatest thinkers that humanity has ever known are, without a doubt, those who have wrestled with this question. Yet many modern and contemporary philosophers do not even mention this question in passing.¹⁹ It could be said that, from the end of the medieval ages to the time of Martin Heidegger, the question of Being was largely ignored and even rejected as a waste of time and an empty concept. All of a sudden Heidegger burst onto the philosophical scene, with the publication of his book *Sein und Zeit*,²⁰ and put the question of Being back on the philosophical menu. Heidegger notes, in the very first sentence of this great book, that "This question has today been forgotten."²¹ It almost seemed as if Heidegger would, in his own cryptic

¹⁸Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Introduction à la Métaphysique*, trad. Gilbert Kahn (France : Éditions Gallimard, 1967), 147, 150, 207-8.

¹⁹For example, a rapid survey of some of the best handbooks, introductions, and advanced textbooks on Metaphysics reveal that they do not even consider the question of Being as Be-ing, but, rather, spend more time considering the properties of beings, relations between beings, possibility and necessity, types of beings and other aspects of beings. D. M. Armstrong, the noted Australian metaphysician, discusses properties, relations, states of affairs, particulars, time, mind, etc., but *Being* does not seem to make it into either the preface or the index. If the reader pays careful attention they will find the skeletons of what could become a doctrine of being; which is not, however, developed. (D. M. Armstrong, *Sketch for a Systematic Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).) Peter Van Inwagen, noted professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, though he talks a lot about beings in his introductions to metaphysics, does not discuss the problem of Being except in an appendix at the end of his book. The great majority of the book is focused on the types of things that are, on giving a rational explanation of why things exist, and on a consideration of rational beings. (Peter Van Inwagen, *Metaphysics*, 3rd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009).) The book *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics* considers the same basic issues as Armstrong's book, with little or no thought about the problem of Being. (Theodore Sider, John Hawthorne and Dean W. Zimmerman, eds., *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).) This basic trend, that of giving little or no attention to the problem that the notion of Being causes for any consideration of beings, can also be found in a number of other books on Metaphysics, including Loux's Introduction and contemporary reader (Cf. Michael J. Loux, *Metaphysics: a Contemporary Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006). Michael J. Loux, ed., *Metaphysics: Contemporary Readings* (New York: Routledge, 2001).). These books deal more with beings than with what it means to be, and with the inherent problems in actually talking about Being, non-being, and becoming. It might be said that many of the problems that are considered in these books are discussed as necessary corollaries to the question of Being, however, this could only be the case if we assume a certain answer to the question of Being.

²⁰Martin Heidegger, *Sein Und Zeit*, Neunzehnte Auflage (Tubingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2006). Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008).

²¹Heidegger, *BT*, 21 [2]. Cf. Heidegger, *Introduction à la Métaphysique*, 51, 61, 74, 92, 138, 205-6.

way, resurrect interest in the question of Being, yet only a few philosophers followed Heidegger in his questioning of Being.

In this dissertation, we propose to take a fresh look at the question of Being by comparing the approaches of Plato, Aristotle, and Martin Heidegger. Heidegger did most of his greatest thinking at the edge of the *Schwarzwald*, at the base of the mountains near Friburg, Germany. Our dissertation, in light of what we have already said, will be somewhat like trying to climb a mountain that is enveloped in clouds. Like Moses, who, summoned by He who call Himself the *I am that I am*, climbed Mount Sinai and, thus, entered into the presence of the God of the Israelites, we propose to attempt a trek up the mount of Being. Will we catch a glimpse of Being? That remains to be seen.

From the foot of the mountain, the question of Being looks like an enormous challenge. Others have attempted to climb this mountain with little or no success, many stand at the bottom quibbling about how to start, and most, tired of the endless debate about Being, have left this question unanswered, and gone off to explore other avenues. This dissertation, however, stands before three trails that are rumoured to lead to the top. From the foot of the mountain it is impossible to see if all of these trails do indeed lead to the top, or if none of them do, or if one or two of them do. Furthermore, even if all of them lead to the top it seems plausible that one of them may be better than the others. The only way to learn if they lead to the top, to learn the advantages & disadvantages of each trail, and, to wisely decide whether it is better to follow one of them or to create one's own trail, is to actually travel each trail. Only then can we truly compare and contrast each trail and give advice on which one to follow, or whether we need to start over, or whether we should follow one of the trails to a certain point, and then branch off. We will, therefore, take Plato, Aristotle and Martin Heidegger as our guides, and venture up the mountain. We don't claim to have any special insights, not this early in the journey, but, we will

follow each path to its end, and when we have surveyed each path, then we will be better able to postulate about the best route up the mountain.

Many who have already attempted this trek remind us of the difficulty of precisely describing what we will see. As such, it seems best to follow, as precisely as possible, our three guides. This dissertation can be divided into two major sections. The first major section could be portrayed as an interpretative section. We will here attempt to establish, as accurately as possible, the differing attempts to answer the question of Being that were proposed by Plato, Aristotle and Martin Heidegger. We will, in a sense, be attempting to map out the paths they took in their quest to attain the summit. Each of these sections contain our own contributions to what we propose is the proper interpretation of these three philosophers. These contributions take into account a preliminary interpretation of these authors, followed by the attempt to wade through a veritable swamp of interpretative writings that purport to tell us, once and for all, how to properly understand the ontological claims of Plato, Aristotle and Martin Heidegger. Our contributions to philosophical thought surrounding these particular thinkers do not constitute, however, the primary goal of this dissertation. Rather, they will serve to help us in our attempt to climb the mountain of Being.

Having mapped out their paths, we should be better able to plan out our own approach to the question of Being. Thus, in the second section, we will use what we have learned in the first section in order to approach the question of Being anew. This second section should be seen as a philosophical section; the active pursuit of wisdom. In this second section, we propose to approach the question of Being, first of all, through a comparison, analysis, and critique of the three thinkers we examined in the first section. This will be followed by our own humble attempts to answer the question of Being. We will conclude with some brief thoughts about how our discoveries about Being may affect other domains of knowledge.

Gilson's comment, near the end of the article quoted above, illustrates, quite well, what we hope to do in our dissertation. He says, "The music of Beethoven really is his own, and this is why it interests us, but that which should interest us is not to know whether this is the *World* of Descartes, it is to know whether the world of Descartes is also the true [world]. We will resign ourselves, therefore, to not philosophize as an artist, in the manner of the idealist, and we will admit that it is perhaps even the case, progress in metaphysical intuition being rare, that to philosophize consists, for each person that does it, in modestly walking in the footprints of those philosophers who preceded him, or, rather, to rediscover for himself the path that those who went before him followed, and, in this way, taking up again [refaisant], for his own sake, apprenticeship in the same truth."²²

A note about our interpretative approach to the works of these three philosophers. There is always a danger, in approaching the writings of a great thinker, to have one's own understanding and interpretation of those writings tainted by what others have already said about the writings in question. One's interpretation may also be tainted by one's upbringing, the way that one has reacted to life's circumstances, etc. This is why Gregory of Nazianzus says, in a sermon on theology, that in order to do theology one must not only have knowledge, but, one must also be pious.²³ That is, one's actions, reactions, and character, have an effect on one's approach to philosophy—an effect which is not easily undone. This idea, that one's character affects one's approach to philosophy, would have been considered, prior to Heidegger and since Descartes, absolutely ridiculous. Today, however, and perhaps because of Heidegger's emphasis on lived human experience, such a notion may be more accepted amongst the members of academia.

²²Gilson, *CPE*, 50-51. Our translation.

²³Grégoire de Nazianze, *Sermon XXXIV : Sur la théologie*, in *Sermons de Saint Grégoire de Nazianze* (Paris: André Pralard, MDCXCIII), 2 :129-130.

It is, perhaps, absolutely impossible to escape all outside influences on our understanding and reading of these thinkers. We have, after all, had a number of years of formal training in the thomistic approach to philosophy and the history of philosophy, and much of our personal research has focused on thomistic metaphysics and natural theology (by studying Aquinas's own writings, and by reading the works of some of the great neo-thomists such as Étienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, Josef Peiper, Thomas Joseph White, Brian Davies, John Wippel, Joseph Owen, Frederick Copleston, etc.). This being said, we have done our very best to approach and interpret each of these thinkers (Plato, Aristotle, and Heidegger) so as to let them speak for themselves, and not to interpret them through the lenses of those thinkers that we have already studied in great depth. It should be noted that this entire document is, in light of Martin Heidegger's approach to Being, an experiment—an entirely new attempt to ask the question of Being. It remains to be seen how our interactions with these three very different approaches, one might say three very different traditions, to the question of Being will affect our final proposals concerning future discussions of the question of Being?

These considerations, have led us to use the following method in our approach to, and interpretation of, the pertinent works of Plato, Aristotle and Martin Heidegger. For each of these authors we have begun our consideration of their approaches to the question of Being by analyzing and interpreting, for ourselves (without consulting, nor reading, ahead of time, any commentaries on the works of these authors, nor articles that seek to explain their thoughts.), their respective works.²⁴ In the sections that follow, therefore, our interpretation of their works

²⁴For Plato, I read and interpreted for myself, in the “horizon” of my research for this study, the *Parmenides*, the *Theaetetus*, and the *Sophist*. For Aristotle, I read and interpreted for myself, in the “horizon” of my research for this study, the *Metaphysics*. In my interpretation of these two authors I was greatly aided by my ability to translate these works myself. For Heidegger, I read and interpreted for myself, in the “horizon” of my research for this study, primarily *Being and Time*, but, I also consulted Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*, *Identity and Difference*, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, *Basic Concepts*, and others of his works. As my ability to translate from German is less than adequate, at least to my eyes, I relied on the excellent translations of these works

should be read not as dependent on some other interpreter, but as our own considered interpretations of their works. After having read and interpreted, for ourselves, their respective works, we then turned to other authors in order to compare our understanding of these thinkers with that of others who are, more than likely, much more qualified than ourselves for interpreting these works. Our consultation of their works allowed us, at times, to correct, modify, or improve our own interpretations;²⁵ however, to our great pleasure, we found that in most cases our interpretations were shown to be faithful, in general, to the works in question. We note both in the text itself and in footnotes, and this as we provide our own interpretation of the respective works, those places where other commentators have influenced (through our subsequent reading of their interpretations) our interpretation, or those places where we disagree with the interpretations of other commentators. It might be said that, in working through the thoughts of these great authors, we have followed the advice that Heidegger gave to a student who would be studying Schleiermacher for her dissertation, “first read Schleiermacher himself...At first, all the secondary literature should be avoided...Only toward the end should she concern herself with the ‘literature.’”²⁶ Though we did not learn this approach, to the interpretation of a text, directly from Heidegger, it seems that he would have agreed with our approach (at least in his early years) to textual interpretation.

In the sections on Plato and Aristotle, as far as the organization of each section is concerned, we precede our own interpretation of Plato and Aristotle’s approach to Being with our understanding of other interpretations (from different well-respected commentators) of Plato’s

that have been published by the University of Indiana. I consulted the German text of *Sein und Zeit* when it was necessary for verifying the accuracy of key quotations.

²⁵When I corrected, modified, or improved my interpretations in relation to some one position, I note, as is the custom, this influence in my footnotes.

²⁶Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 72.

and Aristotle's approaches to Being. This is followed, in each section, by an analysis, based upon our considered interpretation of their doctrines of Being, of these major thinkers' approach to the question of Being. In this way we have been able to avoid, somewhat successfully, being influenced (negatively or positively) in our interpretations of these great thinkers by other interpreters and philosophers. One can never be entirely uninfluenced in one's approach to any thinker, but we have made a conscious effort (facilitated by the approach that we mention above) to interpret each of these authors such that they are being allowed to talk for themselves. Our success will have to be measured by those who know these authors best, and we submit our interpretations for correction by those who, better than us, know the thought of these great thinkers.

PART 1

PLATO, ARISTOTLE, AND MARTIN HEIDEGGER ON BEING

PLATO AND THE QUESTION OF BEING

OVERVIEW OF SOURCES

Exegetical Concerns

Before we can engage in any serious attempt to determine exactly how Plato approached the question of Being we should first answer some major methodological and exegetical questions concerning the philosophical writings of Plato.²⁷ First of all, what is the nature of these writings, and how should this determine our approach to interpreting Plato.²⁸ A related question concerns whether or not Plato presents us with a complete philosophy, and whether we can get a complete picture of Plato's philosophy from his writings, or whether we must rely on other writings in order to complete Plato's philosophy. Finally, we need to ask about whether the order of the redaction of the dialogues will affect our understanding of Plato's approach to the question of Being. Once these questions have been answered we will then be able to discuss which

²⁷ The irony of this fact is that, in a certain sense, some of these methodological and exegetical questions cannot even be asked until after a preliminary reading of Plato. That is, in order to even become aware of the need to ask these questions one must first read Plato. The interpretative process might be explained through an example that a good friend, and mentor, gave to me when I was working on my Master's thesis. Consider the first men to come into contact with fish. Not knowing what they are, these men first attempt to catch them with their hands. Their first attempts to catch the fish are clumsy and almost fruitless, except for one thing, though they may not have caught the fish, they learned something about the fish (what it is, how difficult it is to catch it, that at least one method for catching it is ineffective). Reflecting on this first endeavor, the fisherman decides to attempt a different method, a spear, or a net, or a rock, whatever. Through trial and error, and then reflection on these trials and errors, the fisherman succeeds in eventually discovering more efficient methods for catching the fish. As with fishing, interpretation begins with a clumsy reading, followed by reflection on the first reading, and then further reading, further reflection, and further reading. Eventually we come to a better understanding of the text.

²⁸ Richard Kraut discusses how to properly read Plato in his introductory essay on Plato in the *Cambridge Companion to Plato* (Richard Kraut, "Introduction to the Study of Plato," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (1992; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 29-30.). As will become evident, we are in fundamental disagreement with some of Kraut's proposals, and this in light of observations (that we will consider shortly) concerning the nature and purpose of the dialogues, as well as the findings of the Tübingen school (some of which are quite reasonable, others which can be rejected without serious detriment).

dialogues we will be considering, in particular, for our consideration of Plato's approach to the question of Being.

As anyone who has studied Plato in any detail will know, Plato's dialogues are primarily works of fiction (dramatic dialogues) whose primary purpose is to cause the reader to engage in critical thinking about important subjects that may have a great impact on their approach to, and understanding of, everyday life. A secondary purpose would be to propose possible solutions to the questions that are brought up by the first purpose, and, thus, to propose the basic elements of Plato's philosophical theories.

This understanding of the nature and purpose of Plato's dialogues entails a number of consequences for a proper interpretation. First of all, if our explanation of the nature and purpose of platonic dialogues is accurate, then we simply cannot assume that Plato put his most profound thoughts, and most advanced theories, into the dialogues. This first conclusion is also proposed by the Tübingen school's²⁹ interpretation of Plato in light of what they call the unwritten doctrines. Reale notes that though it is common knowledge that we possess all of Plato's writings,³⁰ we are not, therefore, entitled to think that we are in possession of Plato's final word on every subject upon which he writes.³¹ Rather, states Reale, "Plato expressly says that he did not believe it was appropriate to express in writing everything he thought, especially 'the things

²⁹Some scholars, even after so many years, still get up in arms at the first mention of the notorious "Tübingen school"—mainly, as Szlezak notes, because of horrible misunderstandings about what the Tübingen school is doing. I would advise the reader, prior to continuing with this lecture, to read the published discussion between Thomas Szlezak and Tanja Staehler (concentrating primarily on the letter written by Szlezak who points out a number of common misperceptions and explains the error in the misperceptions) that is found in the *Journal of Ancient Philosophy*: Thomas A. Szlezak and Tanja Staehler, "Plato's unwritten doctrines: a discussion," in *Journal of Ancient Philosophy*, v. 8, n.2, 160-166 (2014). It would also be helpful to consult Giovanni Reale's exceptional work (referenced below) explaining and defending the most important elements of the Tübingen school.

³⁰Giovanni Reale, *Toward a New Interpretation of Plato*, trans. John R. Catan and Richard Davies (Washington, D. C.: CUA Press, 1997), 3. Cf. Kraut, *ISP*, 20.

³¹*Ibid.*

of the greatest value”³² This, says Reale, is confirmed by his followers and students.³³ Reale also points to the self-testimonies in the *Phaedrus* and the *Seventh letter* as proof of Plato’s statement that he would not put his most profound thoughts into writing.³⁴ Reale concludes that “from the self-testimonies it is very clear that the dialogues do not contain those things which for Plato are of maximum ‘seriousness’; for our philosopher such things are not communicable in writing but only by means of oral communication.”³⁵ It seems, then, that the very nature of Plato’s writings, Plato’s self-testimonies, and the claims of his followers, all drive us to the same conclusion: we should not expect to find, in Plato’s writings (1) Plato’s most profound thoughts and most advanced theories, and, therefore, (2) a complete system of thought that can be attributed to Plato. These consequences would seem to imply that, in order to properly interpret most of the platonic dialogues, “it is necessary to discern the outlines of the key doctrines which support them; it is necessary to have an overview of these doctrines’ organic unity.”³⁶ In other words, we need to have a basic understanding of Plato’s basic “system” in order to properly interpret the dialogues. This will, of course, make our interpretation of Plato a little bit more difficult.

A second consequence of our observations about the nature and purpose of the dialogues is that they must be interpreted in the same way that one would interpret any other dramatic dialogue (such as the dramas that were written by Dante, Shakespeare or George Bernard Shaw).³⁷ This means that we cannot simply take what is said (even by characters such as

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., 51-74.

³⁵Ibid., 68. See also the observations of Richard Kraut (Kraut, *ISP*, 20-22.).

³⁶Ibid., 4.

³⁷Kraut also discusses this difficulty in *ISP*, 25-30. Kraut claims that comparing Plato’s dialogues to dramas is misleading (Ibid., 25), primarily because they do not have similar purposes (dramas are written to be performed in a competition, and in order to entertain audiences through beauty and emotion; Plato’s dialogues have none of these purposes (Ibid.)). I would propose that it is possible that Kraut is considering the wrong type of drama. Another purpose that a drama (or epic), or fictional dialogue, may (and frequently does) possess is to cause the reader to reflect on the problems, questions, subjects, or dilemmas that are brought up in the fictional work. That is, the fiction is written with the purpose of provoking the reader to think about the major issues presented in the fiction (examples

Socrates) as being the reflection of Plato's reasoned position.³⁸ Rather we must read the dialogues as unities whose messages must be gleaned from the entirety of the dialogue (including the characters, the context, the "scene", etc.), and not from any one section. Indeed, in some of the dialogues we see doctrines being proposed by Socrates, or by his dialogue partners, only to be later revised or rejected entirely. In many of the dialogues the participants simply do not arrive at a conclusion (though a conclusion may, sometimes, be hinted at), thus leaving the reader to think through the implications of the dialogue and arrive at his own conclusions. This means that the characters (their identities, backgrounds, personalities, and other descriptions) are of the utmost importance for the proper interpretation of the dialogues. We must note who they are, where they are from, when they appear in the dialogue, how they appear in the dialogue, and what they are saying. All of these elements will have an impact on our interpretation of the dialogues. Other elements that will impact our exegesis of platonic dialogues include: (1) an exploration of key terms and phrases (we should not, however, expect the development and use of a technical terminology, as we would see in a "scientific" work such as Aristotle's technical writings); (2) an exploration of references to other dialogues, and the relationships that are said to hold (within the dialogues themselves) between the dialogues; (3) Transitions in the conversations; (4) the cultural, historical, and social context of each dialogue.

We mentioned, above, the views of the Tübingen school. If the work of the Tübingen school is found to be essentially correct (we are referring here not to their particular

included, Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, George Orwell's *Animal Farm* or *1984*, and *the Clouds* by Aristophanes.) Plato's dialogues seem to be written primarily with this purpose, so, it is possible that considering the method of interpreting dramas (or even historical fictions, fantasized historical narratives) may help us to better understand platonic dialogues. Indeed, Plato's dramas have inspired an entire genre of philosophical dialogues.

³⁸It may be the case that Plato is presenting his own reasoned opinions through one single character, however we cannot (as Kraut seems to want to propose (Kraut, *ISP*, 25.)) assume, prior to interpreting the text, that this is the case. Rather if it turns out that it is the case that Plato is presenting his own reasoned opinions through one single character, this should be the conclusion of careful exegesis (Ibid., 26.).

interpretations of any one platonic dialogue nor to their understanding of the system of Plato, but to their claims concerning the role that the unwritten doctrines must play in our interpretation of the dialogues and the system.) this will have some important consequences on certain aspects of the debates concerning Platonic doctrine. First of all, Plato's most important and profound reflections will not be found in the dialogues, though they may be hinted at. If this is the case, then we will be dependent on the writings of Plato's best disciples (such as Aristotle) in order to complete our understanding of Plato's views. Furthermore, we will also not be able (and should not expect to be able) to rebuild a complete understanding of Plato's system from the dialogues alone. This may leave the impression (if we rely only on the dialogues) that Plato's system is incomplete (or as Ricoeur suggests,³⁹ incapable of completion); when, in fact, it may have not only been completed, but it may also have been relatively complete (in its main lines) from the very beginning of Plato's career (meaning that Plato would have already known, even as he was writing his very first dialogues—the socratic dialogues, the general lines of his system). Even if the Tübingen theory is not correct concerning the importance of the unwritten doctrines, to say that Plato's system is incomplete because an analysis of his writings seems to leave us with an incomplete system, is to beg the question and can only be supported by (a) denying the importance of the writings of Plato's disciples, and (b) an argument from silence (because Plato nowhere puts his completed system into writing).⁴⁰

A second consequence of the Tübingen school is that Plato's dialogues must be seen as introductory writings, initiating the beginner to Plato's understanding of philosophy. Reale notes 6 roles that the dialogues played for Plato: (1) A protreptic and pedagogical role—"In the earliest dialogues, which are closest in spirit to Socrates, Plato sets himself protreptic, educative, and

³⁹See our treatment of Ricoeur below.

⁴⁰To do so would have gone against the very purpose and nature of the platonic dialogues.

moral goals like those which Socrates set in his moral philosophizing... Consequently, the reader's role in the dialogues of the first period is very important: so much so as to be, in a certain sense, identified with that of a genuine interlocutor along with the characters within the dialogue. These works generally end without any explicit conclusion (or rather with a kind of aporetic solution), and leave the reader the task of taking the last step and of maieutically drawing from himself the solution of the problem discussed, the solution having been set up or, at least indicated by, the flow of the dialogue."⁴¹ (2) A pedagogical and methodological role—"The dialogues present well orchestrated dialectical discussions, in which we are shown the full resources of the *elenchus*: the method of inquiring about the truth by the refutation of adversaries."⁴² (3) A mnemonic role—"Writing ought to secure and make available to its author and others the ideas arrived at by other means, namely, in previous conversations, in the realm of the oral, which is prior to writing."⁴³ (4) A communicational role.⁴⁴ (5) A directional role, pointing the reader towards the oral teaching—"In his writings, Plato used philosophical themes as occasions for literary creation in which he sets on foot a truth-oriented process which proceeds 'toward the central unwritten nucleus of the Platonic philosophy without ever revealing it.'"⁴⁵ (6) A role of reliance wherein the dialogues depend upon and require the help of the oral teachings—"A noteworthy corroboration of this point of view comes from the recent contribution of Szlezak... He demonstrates that the oral *help* which is to be brought to the writings, and to which the *Phaedrus* refers, is the structure supporting all the Platonic writings, including those of his youth."⁴⁶

⁴¹Reale, *TANIP*, 76.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 77.

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 77-78.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁶*Ibid.* It is quite interesting that Reale finds support in Szlezak for the Tübingen position, especially when William F. Altman thinks he finds support in Szlezak against the Tübingen position (cf. William H. F. Altman, "The

Finally, it is possible that most of Plato's ontological and epistemological positions were already formed by the middle period (and, perhaps, the basic outlines already formed prior to the writing of the dialogues of the earliest period).⁴⁷ It follows, then, that aside from a general chronology it is not strictly necessary to determine the exact order in which the dialogues were written. Much more important is to determine the order in which the dialogues (based upon interior indices) should be read.⁴⁸ In what follows, therefore, we will present a very basic chronological order of the dialogues. However, in the next section we will consider which dialogues we will be especially considering for our research, and the order in which they must be read.

Reading Order of Plato's Dialogues," *Phoenix*, vol. 64, no. 1/2 (Spring-Summer, 2010), 22-23fn7. Kraut proposes a number of difficulties for the Tübingen theory (Kraut, *ISP*, 26-29.), but they mainly apply to an extreme version of the Tübingen theory and pose no problems for the approach that I am here suggesting. Indeed, some of Kraut's complaints against the Tübingen theory go too far, denying seemingly obvious facts about the Platonic dialogues (for example, Kraut thinks that it is dangerous to approach Plato's dialogues with the idea that Plato's purpose, by not giving final answers or full disclosure of his most mature ideas or by introducing errors into the works, is to cause the reader to think for himself. He thinks this is dangerous because one would have to show that there is a pattern of errors in the dialogues, that there is a worthy motive for introducing deceptive practices into Plato's writing, and that we have no evidence of what Plato really thought (*Ibid.*, 28-29).) These arguments do not affect our proposal (nor, for that matter, the proposal of Giovanni Reale, and other proponents of the Tübingen theory) concerning how to read Plato, as we are not proposing that Plato introduced error or willingly deceives the reader, nor that we must exclusively rely on unwritten doctrines in order to properly interpret Plato. To not include certain presuppositions in the writing of an academic/scientific book is not to deceive, and scholars do it all the time. Atheist scientists and historians do not take the time to analyze methodological naturalism at the beginning of each book they write, even though their findings are frequently based upon the presuppositions of methodological naturalism. We do not, because of this, say that they are deceiving the reader. That Plato does not explain his fundamental views is no more deceptive than those scientists and historians that we just mentioned. We might add that it is not strictly necessary to discuss "first principles", for example, in a dialogue concerning the nature of virtue or of the Good (and to not discuss first principles in such a work could never be considered deceitful or misleading, or even erroneous). If Plato never discusses, in any of his works, the most fundamental principles of his system, this is not to say (1) that he never thought about them, (2) that his system was incomplete, (3) that his system cannot be completed, (4) or that he was being intentionally deceitful or erroneous; but, rather, that he did not see fit to include them in any of his writings (though he may have spoken of them quite often in his oral teaching). If this is the case, then the Tübingen school (at least its most moderate proponents, such as Reale), may have latched on to something that may be helpful for better understanding Plato's system. Furthermore, the evidence of the Socratic dialogues, which, without exception, finish without providing a final answer to the questions asked, weighs in favor of the claim that one of Plato's purposes in writing the dialogues was to cause the reader to think through the issues for themselves.

⁴⁷As such the philosophy of Plato certainly developed over the years—holes were filled in, errors corrected, ideas tried—but this development occurred around a skeletal structure that may have existed prior to the writing of the first dialogue.

⁴⁸Cf. William H. F. Altman, "The Reading Order of Plato's Dialogues," *Phoenix*, vol. 64, no. 1/2, 18-51 (Spring-Summer, 2010).

Most scholars recognize, at least, four main chronological periods into which the platonic dialogues are divided.⁴⁹ We will not, here, propose any chronological ordering for the dialogues within each division.⁵⁰

The earliest period contains what are called the *Socratic dialogues* (so named because, even if they do not contain precise historical representations of actual dialogues most scholars agree that they do contain thoughts that are typically Socratic, and less influenced by Plato's own thoughts). Most scholars place the following dialogues in this division: *The Apology*, *Crito*, *Euthyphro*, *Laches*, *Ion*, *Protagoras*, *Charmides* and *Lysis*.

The next period contains what most scholars refer to as the *Transitional Dialogues* (so named because these dialogues are seen as presenting Plato's move away from the philosophical ponderings of Socrates towards the development of what would become the so-called Platonic system). Many of the transitional dialogues could be considered to be "Socratic dialogues", as there is no distinct separation between the early and the transitional dialogues. The division between the Socratic dialogues and the mature dialogues should not be seen as a clean cut, but, rather, as a gradual move from a more "Socratic" approach to philosophy (not providing, for example, any clear conclusions to the questions asked) towards Plato's more elaborate approach to philosophy (actually answering many of the questions that are asked). As such, lists will differ inasmuch as some scholars see a dialogue as being more or less Socratic in tenor. The dialogues

⁴⁹In what follows I will be primarily dependant on the list that is provided by Copleston (Frederick Copleston, *Greece and Rome*, vol. 1 of *A History of Philosophy* (1946 ; repr., Garden City, NY : Image Books, 1962), 1 :163-65.).

⁵⁰In my estimation, the summary that Leonard Brandwood provides of the various attempts to establish a precise chronology (beyond the general divisions) simply goes to show that it is almost impossible to provide a trustworthy and specific chronology (cf. Leonard Brandwood, "Stylometry and chronology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut, 90-120 (1992; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).). Furthermore, in light of our observations concerning the nature and purpose of the platonic dialogues it is simply not necessary to determine an exact chronology.

that are typically included in the transitional stage include: *Gorgias*, *Meno*, *Euthydemus*, *Hippias Minor*, *Hippias Major*, *Cratylus*, and *Menexenus*.⁵¹

After the transitional period, we find the period that is called the *Mature Dialogues* (so named because it is supposed that in these dialogues Plato is presenting his own personal—mature—views on many of the subjects that are discussed). The dialogues that are supposed to have been written in this period include: the *Symposium*, the *Phaedo*,⁵² the *Republic*, and the *Phaedrus*.⁵³

The final period, or the *late period*, includes the works of Plato that are said to have been written near the end of his life. These works are said to be late as it is assumed that they call into question some of the claims that Plato made in the Mature period. These works include the *Theaetetus*, the *Parmenides*, the *Sophist*, the *Statesman*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus*, *Critias*, the *Laws* and *Epinomis*, and perhaps, *Letters 7* and *8*.

The question of Being is explicitly discussed in the *Parmenides*, the *Theaetetus*, and the *Sophist*, each of which could be considered as some of Plato's latest works (even if the *Parmenides* and the *Theaetetus* are seen as being the later works of the mature periods as in

⁵¹Terry Penner gives a list that is quite different than the one that we provide above, placing all of the mentioned dialogues in the Socratic dialogue division, but noting that *Gorgias* and *Meno*, though Socratic dialogues, are most likely transitional dialogues (Terry Penner, "Socrates and the early dialogues," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (1992; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 124.). Richard Kraut provides a list that is as different from Penner's as it is different from the one given above. In the Socratic period, he places the *Apology*, *Charmides*, *Crito*, *Euthyphro*, *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, *Laches*, and the *Protagoras*. *Gorgias* is listed in the Socratic period with the remark that it is probably a transitional dialogue between the early and transitional periods. In the transitional period, he places the *Euthydemus*, *Hippias Major*, *Lysis*, *Menexenus* and *Republic* Book 1 (Kraut, *ISP*, 5.). Our explanation of the transitional dialogues may show why there can be such differences in the lists given by different authors. When we consider the ways in which the chronology of the books has been determined we are shocked at how subjective the supposedly objective methods actually are.

⁵²Kraut argues that the *Phaedo* is located in the Middle period in spite of the fact that it "forms a dramatic unity with the *Euthyphro* (Socrates on his way to court), *Apology* (Socrates on trial), and *Crito* (Socrates refusing to escape from prison) (Kraut, *ISP*, 7.)", each of which are located in the early period. This is, of course, based upon the various methods of determining the chronology based upon style, and the idea that neither Socrates nor the early Plato could have possibly thought of the notions that are included in the *Phaedo*.

⁵³Kraut includes the *Theaetetus* and the *Parmenides* in this period (Kraut, *ISP*, 9.), noting that it is common opinion that they belong in the middle period, though written after the *Republic* (*Ibid.*, 16.).

Kraut).⁵⁴ As such we can be fairly certain that we are dealing with some of Plato's most mature and well-reasoned thoughts and theories. Furthermore, there is very little that could be taken from the so-called unwritten doctrines that will help us in our understanding of Plato's approach to the question of Being (as will be seen at a later point). Even if these three dialogues had been earlier dialogues, and the question of Being never again brought up in any significant way, this would have no effect on our understanding of Plato's understanding of the question of Being. This is the case because, as we noted above it is entirely likely that Plato had already developed, through his studies under Socrates, at least a basic structure that he would later develop, correct and explain. Assuming that these dialogues were early, it would be entirely plausible to propose that his approach to the question of being might very well have been a major part of this basic structure. From this it seems to follow that our consideration of Plato's approach to the question of being is almost entirely unaffected by considerations related to the chronological order of the dialogues. Furthermore, if the Tübingen theory is correct, and if Plato had already developed, by the middle period, a fairly clear conception of his approach to reality, then anything coming near the end of the middle period, or after, will (insomuch as it is not directly contradicted by the so-called unwritten doctrines) reflect his mature and reasoned thinking. Based upon the above observations we can reasonably leave the question of chronology, for the most part, behind.

Where the Question of Being is discussed

As noted above we will be primarily concerned with the three main dialogues that discuss the question of Being: the *Parmenides*, the *Theaetetus*, and the *Sophist*. Though we will focus primarily on these three dialogues, we will not reject help from the other dialogues when they

⁵⁴Kraut, *ISP*, 9.

make claims that are useful for our consideration of Plato's approach to the question of Being. The *Parmenides*, the *Theaetetus*, the *Sophist*, and the *Statesman* (which we will not be considering) present a special challenge to the interpreter, as they are obviously linked by internal references, and subject matter. As will be shown later, in our interpretation of the *Parmenides*, the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*, the *Parmenides* provides the theoretical background for both the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*—both of which are responding to problems brought up in the *Parmenides*.⁵⁵ The beginning of the *Sophist*,⁵⁶ and the ending of the *Theaetetus*,⁵⁷ explicitly situate the *Theaetetus* as the dialogue that immediately precedes the *Sophist*—the discussion of the *Theaetetus* supposedly taking place the day before the discussion of the *Sophist*.⁵⁸ The *Sophist* begins with an allusion to two future dialogues that would take place, one identifying the *Statesman* (which is quite obviously the dialogue bearing this name), and the other identifying the *Philosopher*.⁵⁹ The *Statesman* opens with Socrates thanking Theodorus for introducing Socrates to Theaetetus and the Eleatic Visitor, followed by Theodorus's remark (letting us know that this dialogue follows immediately upon the *Sophist*, that they are to continue their discussion, and that they have yet to consider the statesman and the philosopher⁶⁰), that “perhaps, Socrates, your

⁵⁵This view is also explicitly stated by Paul Seligman who states that “This links up with the state of Plato's progress at the time of writing the *Sophist*, e.g. (a) with his own previous criticism of the theory of forms in the *Parmenides*. (Paul Seligman, *Being and Not-Being: An Introduction to Plato's Sophist* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 10. Cf. *Ibid.*, 5-11.)”

⁵⁶Upon arriving Theodorus says to Socrates, “We've come at the proper time by yesterday's agreement, Socrates, We're also bringing this man who's visiting us... (Plato, *Sophist* 216a, trans. White, 1.)”

⁵⁷The discussion in the *Theaetetus* concludes with Socrates statement, “And now I must go to the King's Porch to meet the indictment that Meletus has brought against me; but let us meet here again in the morning, Theodorus. (Plato, *Theaetetus* 210d, trans. M. J. Levett (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1990), 351.)”

⁵⁸Furthermore, as Auguste Diès notes, “*Le Sophiste est la suite logique du Théétète et reprend, après lui, pour le résoudre définitivement, le problème de l'erreur.* (Auguste Diès, *La Définition de l'être et la nature des Idées dans le Sophiste de Platon* (Paris : Librairies Félix Alcan et Guillaumin Réunies, 1909), 2. Italics are his.)”

⁵⁹Socrates suggests that the Eleatic Visitor discuss the distinctions and similarities between the “Sophist, statesman, and philosopher (*Sophist*, 217a.)”. The Visitor agrees, but says that he will begin by investigating the *Sophist*, which is the subject of the dialogue under consideration (*Sophist*, 218b-c). We are left with the idea that they will investigate the *Statesman* and the *Philosopher* in later dialogues.

⁶⁰There are hints in the *Sophist* (cf. 253e-254b) that there will be no discussion of the philosopher, or, perhaps, that no discussion will be necessary. Either way, the fact that there is no third dialogue in the proposed trilogy (treating of the *Philosopher*) has been the cause of much debate amongst serious students of Plato.

debt will be three times as great, when they complete both the statesman and the philosopher for you.”⁶¹ It seems, evident, then, that these 4 dialogues form a tightly knit whole, and that they need to be considered together in order to be properly interpreted (or, at least, that each dialogue in the series must be read in light of the preceding dialogues in order to be properly understood). So, in order to properly understand the *Statesman* one must interpret it in light of the three preceding dialogues;⁶² in order to properly understand the *Sophist* one must interpret it in light of the two preceding dialogues; and so on.

The *Statesman* will be of no help to our current interests, so we will leave it to one side in our consideration of the question of Being. We will, however, be considering, and in this order, the *Parmenides*, the *Theaetetus*, and the *Sophist*. Before we provide our interpretation of these dialogues, and our analysis of Plato’s approach to the question of Being, we will consider the views of some major players in the interpretation of Plato, especially as regards their interpretation of Plato’s answer to the question of Being.

Current works on the subject to be consulted

In order to provide an accurate analysis of Plato’s approach to the question of Being we will be considering some of the most important interpreters of Plato’s works, especially those who have made important and voluminous contributions to an accurate understanding of Plato’s doctrine of Being. As such, we will be primarily considering the works of Paul Ricoeur, Stanley Rosen, and Giovanni Reale. Other philosophers have made helpful contributions to a proper

⁶¹Plato, *Statesman* 257a, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson, trans. C. J. Rowe (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), 295.

⁶²Is it possible that the placement of a discussion about the statesmen, as following a discussion of Being and Non-Being is a subtle hint at the notion that discussions of political (and perhaps Moral) matters must be preceded by a discussion of Being and Non-Being.

understanding of Plato, and when it is necessary their works will be considered. However, these particular thinkers are of great interest as they represent some of the most important recent interpretations of Plato. Paul Ricoeur's interpretation of Plato was extremely influenced by his reading of Martin Heidegger, however he succeeds in giving what is considered by many to be the most important contemporary analysis of Plato's doctrine of Being. Stanley Rosen is probably one of the only contemporary Platonist philosophers to seriously interact with Martin Heidegger on the question of Being, and, as such, his views concerning Plato's doctrine of Being (especially in light of Martin Heidegger's interpretations) are of great importance. Finally, Giovanni Reale, in my humble opinion, presents one of the most balanced interpretations of Plato to be influenced by the work of the Tubingen school. Our consideration of the views of each of these scholars will deal primarily with their understanding of Plato's doctrine of Being. Their views will inform and direct us as we attempt to outline Plato's approach to the question of Being. We begin by an analysis of Stanley Rosen's approach both to Plato's *Sophist*, and his system.

INTERPRETATION OF PLATO'S APPROACH TO THE QUESTION OF BEING

Stanley Rosen's Interpretation of Plato's Approach to the Question of Being

Stanley Rosen is one of the only contemporary Platonists to explicitly interact critically with Martin Heidegger's understanding of Plato. It is due to this very fact that Rosen's interpretation of Plato is of such interest for a proper understanding of Plato's doctrine of Being. The purpose of this section is to understand Rosen's interpretation of Plato's doctrine of Being. To do so we will begin by noting his explanation of the appropriate starting place for the contemplation of Being, and the question of Being. We will then consider his understanding of just what the question or problem of Being is, and whether or not it can be answered. Thirdly, we

will consider his approach to Being, beings and what can be said about them. Finally, we will look at some of Rosen's Platonist critiques of Heidegger.

The Appropriate starting place for Ontology

Rosen unceasingly reminds us that the only appropriate starting place for any meaningful consideration of the common metaphysical questions is, quite simply, ordinary everyday life. In *The Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger* Rosen claims that "Everyday experience is the given; it is the starting point and the context for all theoretical accounts of beings, and hence of being."⁶³ Indeed, "Both the thinking of Being (or what approximates to such thinking) and the analytical description of the structures and rank-orderings of what presents itself are derivatives from everyday thinking."⁶⁴ This is the distinguishing feature of the true philosopher, he who is in pursuit of wisdom, "The sage, of course, abstracts himself from everyday life when in the midst of contemplation; but his use of beings and so his participation in everyday life is the necessary condition for contemplation, and not simply in a practical sense. *Contemplation begins with the perception of the particular existing thing.*"⁶⁵ Note that there is no one particular element of everyday experience that is singled out as a better starting point. Everyday experience, the simple *va et viens de tous les jours*, that which reveals itself to us at each passing moment, is the starting point for all ontological reflections. Rosen is, without any doubt, quite right concerning the platonic approach to the question of Being. The starting point of all ontological consideration, for Plato, just is the changing realm of sensible beings. This seemingly humble starting point,

⁶³Rosen, *QB*, 94. Cf. *Ibid.*, 42-43, 44, 208, 273. Interestingly enough Rosen claims that this starting point also appears to be the basic starting point for Heidegger's reflections on Being, "So too Heidegger, in his most powerful evocations of the ambiguity of the 'question of Being,' begins from simple reflections about beings... (*Ibid.*, 5.)"

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 99-100.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 273. Italics are mine.

however, does not leave Plato in a world of constant flux, but, because of various ontological and epistemological considerations, takes him beyond the realm of sensible beings to an in-depth consideration of the natures of these beings, and to a questioning of that which allows them to be. “The *logos* is accessible to the reflective consideration of our everyday experience of a thing, event, psychic modification, or relation. The term *on* or *onta*, ‘being’ or ‘beings,’ stands for any and all of these items of experience. Every attempt to view the beings directly leads to a consideration of something else: the properties of the being, its formal structure, an abstract concept, and so on. This ‘something else’ is the *logos*.”⁶⁶ So, from the *on* or *onta* of our everyday experience of the changing sensible world we are brought to a consideration of the *logos* which is in a determinative and causal relationship with the beings. Our consideration of our pet dog, of the plants in our garden, of the birds playing in the trees around our house, and of all the other beings that present themselves to our senses, is incomplete until we have considered the *logos* of the dog, the plants, and the birds. As Rosen says, Plato’s ontological considerations begin with the individual dog, the individual plant, and the individual birds, but is driven on to consider the properties of the dog, its formal structure or nature, the abstract concept of dog-ness, and, indeed, to ask why the dog is, and what it means to say not only that this dog is, but that *anything* is. Rosen warns that “If we do not take our bearings by everyday life, then we can make up any technical terminology we like. Ontology and metaphysics are then miraculously transformed into poetry, whether of the mathematical or the nonmathematical species.”⁶⁷ These considerations are what create the problem of Being.

⁶⁶Ibid., 93.

⁶⁷Ibid., 119.

The Question of Being

The Question of Being is typically understood to be “What is Being?” At first glance this question may seem fairly straight forward, however, upon further consideration we run into a major difficulty. Rosen notes, and explains, this difficulty as follows, “So we can ask, ‘What is a being?’ And this requires us to understand being. Heidegger has himself pointed out the most obvious difficulty in this line of reasoning. To ask What is being? (or What is Being?)⁶⁸ is to presuppose that we know the answer, since we are able to understand the use of ‘is’ in the question. Differently stated, the question What is...? is applicable only to something or another; ‘is’ here is already understood to designate a thing, and so the question demands the identification of a what, namely, what Aristotle calls a ‘this something.’ But being is not and cannot be a thing, since it is common to everything whatsoever... When we attempt to construct a table of categories or properties that define what it is to be anything at all, we must assume in advance what we mean by ‘to be.’”⁶⁹ For example, “Since the Idea of the horse differs from the Idea of Justice, each such What is X? question must receive a different reply. Even the question What is an Idea? will receive its own answer, albeit one that covers all Ideas.”⁷⁰ As such, when we ask the question “What is Being?” we must expect an answer that is applicable to anything which we can properly say “is” or “has being”.

Rosen thinks that insomuch as we ask about the Being of beings we will be able to adequately discuss the question of Being, but, if we once try to divorce Being from the beings,

⁶⁸It is important to note, in order to understand the repetition of this question, that when Rosen writes “being” with a miniscule “b” he is referring to things that be—to particular beings, but when he writes “being” with a majuscule “B” he is referring to what Aristotle called “Being *qua* Being”, and, perhaps, to what Heidegger called the “Being of being(s)”. In other words, “being” refers to the things that are, “Being” refers to the “is-ness” of the things that are.

⁶⁹Ibid., 118.

⁷⁰Ibid., 189.

we will be adventuring into a meaningless region of thought which is inexpressible and incoherent. Rosen says, “My point is not that there is no Being; this is an unintelligible claim. My point is that we cannot talk coherently about Being. Even the injunction against such talk is incoherent. The difficulty with Heidegger’s language is not that it is theoretically complex or technically sophisticated; the difficulty lies in the fact that he is not talking about anything at all, as he himself insists. Otherwise put, he is attempting to talk about the beingness of beings without referring to the being of beings, and so without referring to anything that is a this or a that, a something or another.”⁷¹ Rosen’s critique of Heidegger’s approach is about the object of his questioning, and not the questioning itself. That is, Rosen thinks that Heidegger is trying to talk about nothing rather than being—that is, there is no-being aside from, divorced from, the Being of beings, as such, to attempt to talk about Being in abstraction from beings is to talk about nothing. “In other words, awareness of the Being of the existent (e.g., of being qua being in the Aristotelian sense) is itself a kind of unreflective anticipation of Being itself; so long as we are concerned with the being of beings, we are at least asking the question *ti to on?* Or What is Being? Even if we have not rightly or fully understood what it is that we are asking.”⁷²

In fact, Rosen notes that in considering the Being of beings one is indeed asking the question of Being, “What is Being?” He explains that, “Being can offer itself *only in a concealed manner*, namely, through beings. As I have argued throughout this book, this fundamental necessity will never change, so long as intelligent creatures exist, because the gift of a pure presencing-process that presents us with nothing is a gift that is intrinsically impossible for intelligence to receive.”⁷³ Contra Heidegger’s approach to the Question of Being he explains that

⁷¹Ibid., 119.

⁷²Ibid., 309-310.

⁷³Ibid., 310.

“Despite Heidegger’s continuous assertion—or implication when he is not asserting—that the quest for Being will illuminate our experience of beings, I believe that the opposite is the case. The more we meditate on Being, the less we see of beings. On the other hand, the more carefully we inspect beings, the more clarity we achieve about Being... This is because there is no difference between the Being of beings (as distinguished from being qua beings) and Being.”⁷⁴

The question of Being, therefore, is not about Being as abstracted from beings, but of the Being of beings. The attempt to question Being in abstraction from beings is to ask a question that leads nowhere.

Does Rosen leave any room for an answer to the question of being? Yes and no. There is no answer to the question of being if we are asking about Being taken in abstraction from all the things that are, “If ‘being’ is taken apart from ‘what is,’ then we cannot arrive at a precise and coherent account of what we mean by ‘being.’ But we can say this: terms like ‘presence’ and ‘absence’ are obviously closely connected with ‘being’ and ‘nonbeing,’ but they are not synonymous. It is possible to be without being present to anyone; what has not been present cannot be said to be absent.”⁷⁵ It is a question that cannot be answered. Indeed, “I say only that if one wishes to voyage beyond the beings, one is condemned to play the role of Don Quixote, the simulacrum of Odysseus.”⁷⁶ However, if, on the other hand, Being is a Platonic form, an Idea, a real predicate, then not only can we coherently talk about Being, but we can, indeed, answer the question of being. “If Being exceeds beings, and so too real predicates, this is because it exceeds language and hence logic; more generally, it exceeds *logos*. For these reasons, I prefer the thesis

⁷⁴Ibid., 314.

⁷⁵Ibid., 122.

⁷⁶Ibid., 211.

that being is a real predicate to the rival contention that it is a logical predicate.”⁷⁷ In light of Rosen’s main thesis, that “We never grasp being or existence apart from something that is or exists”,⁷⁸ it follows that the question of Being can only be answered inasmuch as we do not divorce Being from the things that be. Being in abstraction from a what that is, is nothing—Non-Being.

Being, beings and the *logos* of Being

Many of the elements of Rosen’s understanding of Plato’s approach to the question of Being have already been brought out in the preceding sections. In what follows we will simply outline the primary elements of Rosen’s platonic understanding of Being, beings and Plato’s approach to the question of Being.

First of all, in Rosen’s understanding of Plato, the sensible “beings” of the changing everyday world are only “beings” in a derivative sense, that is, they are not true or genuine beings, they are “looks” (images?) of beings. Rosen states, for example, that his “hypothesis is this: no one can look directly at the beings; every look at the beings is at the look of a being, not at a being. The look mediates, and so is the middle term between, being and thinking.”⁷⁹ The “beings” of the changing sensible realm cannot be said to be in any meaningful sense of the word “be”, rather, as images, “looks”, or reflections of true being they only point us towards true beings. They serve, as Rosen says in the quote above, as mediators—directing the thinker from the realm of becoming to the realm of true being. Indeed, other than noting that by *ὀψία* Plato

⁷⁷Ibid., 208.

⁷⁸Ibid., 208.

⁷⁹Ibid., 86.

means the entirety, or whole, of all beings,⁸⁰ and that by *ὄν* Plato is pointing to individual beings of the sensible world,⁸¹ the individual beings of the realm of becoming do not play a major role in the explanation of Plato's doctrine of Being.

Secondly, Rosen discusses a "type" of Being which is ontologically distinct from the changing beings of the sensible world, but which is formally the same as these beings⁸²—the *logos*. He says, "As present within or apprehended by the intellect, the *logos* is clearly different from the *on*, since otherwise the being and the intellect would be identical. On the other hand, as exhibiting the ratio of intelligibility of the being in question, the *logos* is the same as that being in the sense that both have the same look or Idea."⁸³ The *logos* is the intellect's attempt to understand the changing reality that presents itself to the intellect in the realm of sensible beings. Indeed, "The *on*, or being, has a *phusis*, or nature, that consists of an order or ratio (*logos*) of elements of intelligibility."⁸⁴ By the very fact that the changing beings of the world of becoming imitate (participate or reflect) the true beings of the realm of the Ideas, the human intellect is able to grasp, in a confused way, the nature or rational and intelligible elements in the changing being which direct the human intellect to the consideration of the realm of the Ideas—the consideration of true being. "Perhaps I can convey my general conclusion as follows: the *logos* is ontologically distinct from the being (*on*), but formally it is the same. The eidetic look is the same in both cases. This is why the truth of the being can be discerned by looking into the *logos*. Thus the Idea that is the truth of the being is visible in the *logos*. And the *logos* is the middle term, according to Socrates' own words, that makes genuine being accessible to thinking. Stated in a preliminary

⁸⁰Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Sophist: The Drama of Original & Image* (1983; repr., South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1999), 30-31, 202, 230-231, 327.

⁸¹Ibid., 30-31, 180.

⁸²Rosen, *QB*, 69.

⁸³Ibid., 68-69.

⁸⁴Ibid., 68.

manner, the *logos* is the community of being and thinking.”⁸⁵ Rosen then describes the *logos*, further along, as follows, “the *logos* is the ratio of the intelligible elements of the being; it is the being as it looks or is intelligible to the human intellect.”⁸⁶ Again, “As a ratio, the *logos* is both the identity of the being, that by virtue of which we know it to be the being that it is, hence, what it is, and it is also the unity of that identity, that by virtue of which the identity coheres and is available as what it is to our intelligence.”⁸⁷ Rosen concludes, concerning the *logos*, that “*logos* has an ‘ontic’ sense here; it renders the *on* visible to or, as Heidegger would say, as unconcealed before, the intellect... The *logos* itself contains the openness or unconcealment of the being.”⁸⁸ Finally, we should note Rosen’s understanding of how the Idea brings being and thinking into communion, “The only way out of these difficulties is to make the Idea common to being and thinking while at the same time distinguishing being from thinking. *The Idea is what is thinkable in Being*, which I now spell with a capital B to bring out my criticism of Heidegger. The Idea is not the reification of Being, the perspectival projection that conceals Being; it is instead the accessibility of Being.”⁸⁹

Thirdly, we must note the place that Rosen makes for human claims about the *logoi*. In his commentary on Plato’s *Sophist* he interacts with Plato’s understanding of true and false speech. He states that “an accurate sketch, or icon, corresponds to a true statement by someone who possesses genuine knowledge. The inaccurate sketch corresponds to a false statement and is called a fantasm.”⁹⁰ In Rosen’s interpretation of the *Sophist*, the sketch or icon is the human description of the beings. It is, in a sense, the *logos*.⁹¹ In this sense it is like an image of an image;

⁸⁵Ibid., 69.

⁸⁶Ibid., 71.

⁸⁷Ibid., 71.

⁸⁸Ibid., 74.

⁸⁹Ibid., 79.

⁹⁰Rosen, *PSDOI*, 147.

⁹¹Ibid., 324.

we might even say it is an image of an image (the logos) of an image (the being) of true being (the Idea). On the other hand, we must note Rosen's claim concerning the relationship of a true image (a true statement) to the form, "If the paradigm of sketching has any pertinence, it must be because icons or true statements about empirical things or events capture or exhibit the formal structures intrinsic to the things or events themselves. In both the empirical and the formal cases, the form must 'shine through' the statement. If the statement is too defective a version of the form, then it will be at best an inaccurate copy, a phantasm or false rather than true statement. If it is sufficiently accurate to let the form shine through, then the picture or image presents the form itself, and the form is *present in* the statement."⁹² Again, "Qua accurate image, the statement presents, or contains, and hence is, the form...An inaccurate image of form F, as I put the point earlier, must still be an image of F."⁹³ So, in a sense, and only when true, a statement just is the form. So, a true statement is an image, the logos, and the form. This is because, as stated above, a true statement accurately re-presents the Form. It must, however, be remembered that for Plato, the statement is an image of an image (the logos) of an image (the being) of true being (the Idea). When it is a true statement the Idea is more evident—even present—in the statement; when it is a false statement the Idea is less evident—perhaps even covered over or hidden—in the statement. Rosen says, "It is easy enough to conceive of a device which, while not itself resembling what it copies, produces a copy of the original that does resemble it. A verbal expression is such a device."⁹⁴

⁹²Ibid., 156.

⁹³Ibid., 157.

⁹⁴Ibid., 173.

We have not, however, concluded our consideration of being, for, as Rosen notes, “As to the being itself, that is something else; we can know only how the being looks.”⁹⁵ This pushes us towards a final consideration—Rosen’s understanding of the true Being.

Finally, Rosen understands Plato as pointing us to the realm of the Ideas in order to find true beings. In his commentary on *the Sophist* Rosen says that “For Plato, if not for the logician, forms alone possess being. In the Stranger’s doctrine they do so by combination with the form *being*.”⁹⁶ Rosen states, in *The Question of Being*, that “In my formulation, following Socrates, the Idea is the genuine being, the *ontos on*, because it is the intelligibility or truth of the being.”⁹⁷ A little earlier he claims that “The genuine being, the Idea, is the eidetic intelligibility of the being about which we inquire. But it does not follow from this that the being is fully intelligible to us. What we apprehend or perceive is the Idea.”⁹⁸ Rosen says, again, that “The truth in question is that of the nature of the being, what it genuinely is, and so, it is the exhibition of what Socrates calls elsewhere *ontos on*, ‘genuine’ or ‘true’ being. This true being is often compared to the look of the thing...The *logos*, as the intermediary between the being and the human intellect, must have something in common with both.”⁹⁹ In fact, Rosen notes, in agreement with a proper interpretation of Platonic ontology, that Being is a Form that is participated in by everything that is in some way.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, “The form *being* stands apart from every other form. As so standing apart (namely, as *being* and nothing else), it is ‘*being* itself.’”¹⁰¹ Not only does the form Being stand apart from every other form, but, “there is a difference between the eidetic alphabet, one element of which is ‘being’ (τὸ ὄν), and the whole, or ‘being’ in the sense of the living and

⁹⁵Rosen, *QB*, 71.

⁹⁶Rosen, *PSDOI*, 233.

⁹⁷Rosen, *QB*, 78.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 69.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁰⁰Rosen, *PSDOI*, 30-32, 38, 44, 149, 188, 230-231, 237-239, 243, 264, 273, 277, 280, 281, 293.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 273.

indeed divine, cosmos (οὐσία).”¹⁰² Being, then, is one of the greatest forms, to be distinguished from all the other forms, and from all other beings (whether they be sensible, beings of reason, or linguistic). But everything that is other than Being can be said to be simply by participating, in some way, in Being.

As such, in Rosen’s understanding of Plato, the human knower “looks at” (“By ‘look at’ I mean ‘focus on,’ ‘pick out,’ hence ‘attempt to identify’ and so ‘attempt to understand and explain.’”¹⁰³) not the true or genuine beings, but at the “look” of a true or genuine being—that is, the particular, constantly becoming, instantiation, in the changing sensible world, of something that reflects or imitates a form. Our consideration of this becoming “being” points us towards the Forms or Ideas which are true beings. The Ideas, of course, are not objects of sensorial perception, but, in a sense, of intellectual perception—thinking. This fact, however, does not, warns Rosen, mean that the being of true beings is entirely perceptible to us. In the above quote he notes that what we perceive, when we think of the Ideas, is true beings. However, as we noted when we considered the logos, our perception of the Ideas is a deficient understanding of the Ideas—we only see how the Ideas appear to us, which bears some truth to reality, but which is also quite far from the truth.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰²Ibid., 30-31.

¹⁰³Rosen, *QB*, 86.

¹⁰⁴This, of course, drives us to ask Stanley Rosen just how the human knower comes to think of the true Forms. For example, Plato suggested that the knower already had knowledge (from having seen or observed) of the true Forms because after death, and prior to rebirth, he looked upon them in the realm of the Forms. Augustine denied this notion of Platonic reincarnation, suggesting that the Ideas are in the mind of God and installed in the human mind just prior to birth (after conception?). Both Plato and Augustine agreed that the Ideas were forgotten due to the traumatizing experience of birth. If Rosen accepts neither of these theories, then (1) how does he explain our knowledge of the true Ideas, and (2) how does he avoid the critique that, finally, the Ideas are creations of our minds. Does he rely on some form of Kantian categories of the understanding? If so, how do these categories come to be in the mind, and do the categories include all the Forms or Ideas? He seems to be forced, *malgré lui*, into some form of subjective relativism. Unless, perhaps, he accepts an Aristotelian approach to the cause of human knowledge of the Ideas (Idea formation).

Indeed, not only is our understanding of the Ideas impoverished by our incapacity to truly look at them, but we have yet to consider the Being of these true beings. This Being, however, according to Rosen, is close to being unthinkable. For Rosen, “We never grasp being or existence apart from something that is or exists.”¹⁰⁵ Rosen says, earlier in the same work, “I hold strongly to the view that nothing or next to nothing can be said about Being. And this is why I contend that metaphysics is rooted in silence.”¹⁰⁶ Being must have a nature, that it has a nature is not the problem; rather, the difficulty is that “there is no ontology or discursive account of the nature of being, whether of Being or of the being of beings. Discourse is imagery; words are copies, and inexact copies, of things, which in turn may be called inexact copies of Ideas.”¹⁰⁷ Indeed, for Rosen there simply can be no “science of Being.”¹⁰⁸ He states, in fact, that “the most evident implication of the Platonic dialogues as fictional dramas or poems is that there is no science of being qua being and certainly none of Being or the whole.”¹⁰⁹ In his preliminary conclusions concerning Aristotle’s so-called science of being qua being Rosen states that,

There is accordingly no science, that is, no discursive knowledge consisting of predicative statements, statements that say something about something, of the primary sense of being, namely, *eidōs*. Metaphysics, in order to be understood as the discursive analysis of being qua being, then becomes dependent upon a metadiscursive assertion of essence, and this in turn leads in two directions, both fatal for our science. Either (1) metaphysics devolves gradually into a descriptive phenomenology in which we exchange assertions about how essences look to us or else (2) it is replaced by a linguistic conventionalism, with rules or definitions that *stipulate* what shall count as an essence in each case.¹¹⁰

Rosen’s conclusions are entirely coherent with his basic understanding of Plato’s approach to Being. Plato, according to Rosen, understands the Ideas (*eidōs*) as true or genuine

¹⁰⁵Rosen, *QB*, 208.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 43.

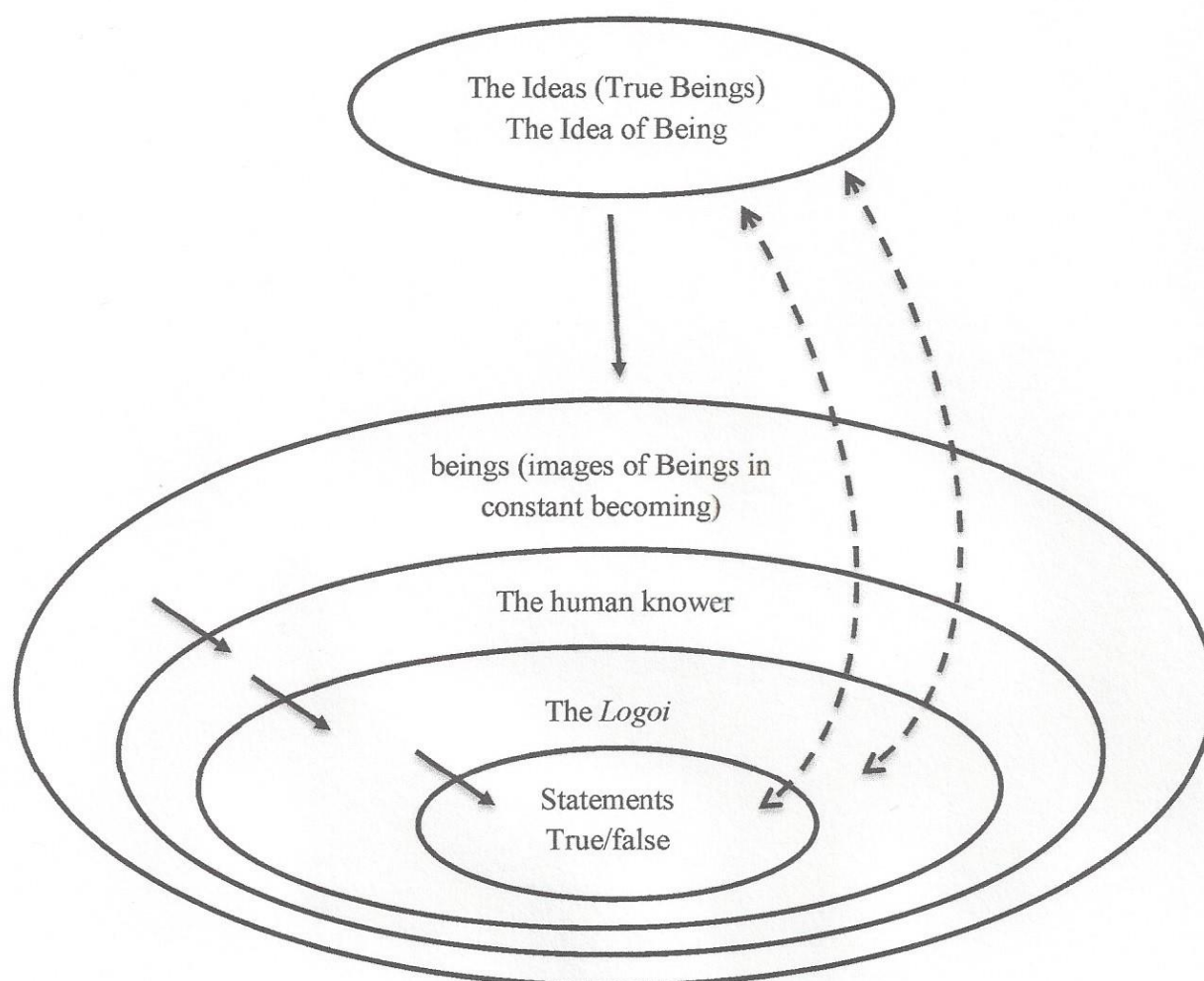
¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 28, 44, 59, 101.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 34-35.

being. In other words, the very essences themselves just are what it means to Be. To be is to be an essence. But if this is the case, then, in trying to understand being qua being we seem to fall into the dilemma noted above. We are provided, by Rosen, with an understanding of Plato's ontology that, though denying that it is scientific, paints us a picture of Plato's approach to the problem of Being.



This image allows us to illustrate Rosen's understanding of Plato's approach to Being. First of all, the Ideas (including the Idea of Being) are causally (both formally and ontologically) related to everything else (they are directly related, in both these ways, to the beings that imitate them as *looks*—including the human knower, and, indirectly, to the *logoi*). Secondly, the *logoi*

are directly caused by man's consideration of the beings that are the *looks* of true Beings. As such there is a relationship between the *logoi* and the Ideas (both are intelligible, for example), however the relation is not a direct relation. Thirdly, there is a relationship between the Ideas and the Statements, inasmuch as the statements are verbal (or written, or otherwise) expressions of the *logoi*. According to Rosen, when a statement is true, the Form is, in some way, in the statement; on the other hand, even when the statement is false the Form is somehow in the statement, though it is hidden from sight. Therefore, because we do not have direct access to Being itself there can be no science of Being, nor any entirely true answer to the question of Being—only approximations that can only be held non-dogmatically. All of this must be held tentatively because, for Rosen (and contra Reale), “Plato’s ideas are not intended as topics of metaphysical or ontological analysis leading to a systematic theory or account of the structure of the whole. They are a hypothesis—in Plato’s view no doubt a necessary hypothesis—that is required in order to account for order and intelligibility in our everyday life.”¹¹¹ Indeed, states Rosen, “My general suggestion, then, is that the postmodern identification of metaphysics as Platonism, even allowing for the distinction between the enigmatic dialogues of Plato and his historical influence, is not merely a crude oversimplification; it is largely on the wrong track. The ontological interpretation of Platonism is wrong in itself because it omits one of the two crucial components of the Platonic tradition: the doctrine of Eros or, more comprehensively, the dependence of *logos* upon *muthos*. As to the theory of Ideas, it is an invention of nineteenth-century historical scholarship, based not upon the Platonic dialogues but upon Aristotle.”¹¹² In other words, for Rosen, to attempt to develop a systematic metaphysics out of Plato’s writings is like trying to provide a systematic understanding of reality based upon Greek mythology. Plato

¹¹¹Ibid., 59.

¹¹²Ibid., 29. Cf. Ibid., 28.

develops, according to Rosen, no systematic understanding of Being, and even the so-called platonic theory of Ideas is non-platonic. All we get from Plato is a likely story about the way things might be. We turn, now, to our final consideration in relation to Rosen's interpretation of Plato, the way in which Rosen's "revived Platonism" approaches Heidegger.

Plato, Platonism and Heidegger

Rosen's critique of Heidegger's approach to Plato, and to metaphysics, could be summed up in the following statement, "what Heidegger calls Platonism is more properly entitled Aristotelianism."¹¹³ Furthermore the difference between Plato and Heidegger, according to Rosen, "is not that of the road taken by both on their philosophical travels, but rather of how each proposes to see the sights on the way."¹¹⁴ Indeed, says Rosen, "If the history of Western philosophy is the history of metaphysics, my goal is to defend metaphysics against the new way of thinking recommended by Heidegger."¹¹⁵ In order to understand Rosen's rejection of Heidegger's understanding of Plato we must first understand Rosen's understanding of Platonism. We have already come a long way towards our understanding of Rosen's Plato in the work that is outlined above, but a few more comments will be helpful.

First of all, true Platonism, according to Rosen, would be better described as "an attempt to think the whole, rather than to define the ontological constituents of the whole."¹¹⁶ Secondly, "One should not rule out the possibility that the true nature of Platonism is to *avoid* deciding between a dialectical and a nondialectical ontology. We are able to entertain this possibility when we read each dialogue as a whole, as a drama about human beings, not simply as a treatise on

¹¹³Ibid., xxii -xxiii.

¹¹⁴Ibid., xxiii.

¹¹⁵Ibid., xxiii.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 27.

semantics or epistemology.”¹¹⁷ Furthermore, as noted above, Plato’s reflections on the ideas do not reveal a systematic structuring of the whole, but, rather, a living awareness, and loving (*eros*) engagement of man with the whole of all that presented itself to him.¹¹⁸ It is a likely story (*mythos*) that Plato used to explain the way in which reality presented itself to him.¹¹⁹ Rosen points out that “some of the most important speeches in these [Plato’s] dialogues are myths.”¹²⁰ As such, Platonism just is man’s unsystematic attempt to make sense of that reality that presents itself to him in his everyday experience, and this as he lives his life. Rosen himself describes it as follows, “Platonist metaphysics is primarily the attempt to think the whole in the sense of attempting to be at home in it... The whole is where we find ourselves; what we do there is to make use of what it gives us and to adjust to what it takes away, in the unceasing and indivisible harmony of presence and absence, in order to carry out the task of making a life.”¹²¹ It is, in Rosen’s perspective, a philosophy of everyday life. In his commentary on the *Sophist* he states that “Socrates’ positive doctrine is precisely that philosophy is not a doctrine but a way of life, and this not in a common or public sense, but in a private one.”¹²² Indeed, “philosophy is a moral or practical as well as a theoretical activity: it is a way of life.”¹²³

The role of philosophy, then, is not so much to question Being, as it is to answer life’s most basic questions. “Philosophy is not and cannot possibly be solely the attempt to think the Ideas, that is, to answer the question What is Being? It is also and in the first instance, the attempt to answer the question Who and What am I?”¹²⁴ Rosen rephrases this understanding of

¹¹⁷Rosen, *PSDOI*, 46.

¹¹⁸Rosen, *QB*, 29.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 59.

¹²⁰Rosen, *PSDOI*, 47.

¹²¹Rosen, *QB*, 132-133.

¹²²Rosen, *PSDOI*, 325.

¹²³*Ibid.*, 158.

¹²⁴Rosen, *QB*, 98.

philosophy as follows: “I must know myself because it is I who am open to the whole. I cannot know the whole or know whether the whole is knowable unless I know myself.”¹²⁵ Why, then, do we ever move to a consideration of the ideas? We are moved to a consideration of the Ideas because they are the very cause of our existence. “The beings allow us to exist, and the Ideas are responsible for the beings.”¹²⁶

Rosen’s critique of Heidegger, then, comes down to the claim that by removing its connection with the everyday world, and the concerns of our ordinary lives, Heidegger is utterly destroying Plato’s metaphysics. Says Rosen, “Despite Heidegger’s continuous assertion—or implication when he is not asserting—that the quest for Being will illuminate our experience of beings, I believe that the opposite is the case. The more we meditate on Being, the less we see of beings. On the other hand, the more carefully we inspect beings, the more clarity we achieve about Being. This clarity may be analytical and it may be mythical. But it is clarity about Being, not about some inferior construct called ‘the Being of the existent’ or the being of beings. This is because there is no difference between the Being of beings (as distinguished from being qua being) and Being.”¹²⁷

Paul Ricoeur’s Interpretation of Plato’s Approach to the Question of Being

In analysing Paul Ricoeur’s understanding of Plato’s approach to the question of Being we must first look at his understanding of Plato’s overall ontological considerations. We will proceed in the following manner. We will begin by noting Ricoeur’s understanding of Plato’s starting place in the understanding of Being. We will then consider his understanding of Plato’s

¹²⁵Ibid., 98-99.

¹²⁶Ibid., 74.

¹²⁷Ibid., 314.

ontological realm of being, its nature, and its constituents. At this point, we will be in position to be able to consider Ricoeur's understanding of Plato's approach to the question of Being: his starting place (existentially, ontologically and epistemologically), his procedure, and his conclusion. We will conclude with some brief remarks concerning Ricoeur's understanding of the nature of Platonism—as an approach to philosophy in general.

The Question of Being—Where to Start

This question could have many different answers,¹²⁸ and Ricoeur proposes two different considerations concerning Plato's point of departure in his questioning of Being: an *existential* point of departure, and an *ontological* point of departure. For Ricoeur, Plato's existential point of departure is intellectual curiosity: the desire to understand not just what is, but to know what it is, that is—that is, the question of essence. It is because of a discomfort (“un malaise”) in knowledge (or a discomfort of the intellect)—that is to say, enumerations of what is no longer satisfy the curiosity, we want to know what is common to all the things that are being enumerated.¹²⁹ We are no longer satisfied with counting apples and oranges, we want to know what it is that we are counting, and so we ask the question of essence: “what is an apple? What is an orange?” This discomfort with a superficial understanding of what presents itself to us to be counted is the existential starting point, according to Ricoeur, of Plato's approach to the Question of Being.

Ricoeur's explanation of the existential point of departure reveals the ontological point of departure—Essence. Essence, for Ricoeur's Plato, is defined “by a function of unity and

¹²⁸Indeed, the question of starting points actually brings up some questions: Is there a “best” or “worst” starting point? Is there a “normative” starting point? How do we know when we have found an appropriate starting point? What is the nature of the starting point? Can the starting point for discussion be considered under different modes or aspects? How many aspects to the starting point are there (or could there be)? How would we know?

¹²⁹Paul Ricoeur, *Être, essence et substance chez Platon et Aristote*, ed. Jean-Louis Schlegel (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 2011), 23.

identity”.¹³⁰ So, we might say, the Essence of some particular X is that which unites and identifies it as a particular instantiation of “the Essence of X”. When we seek to understand what the essence of X is, we form an idea of X in our mind.¹³¹ In order to arrive at an understanding of the essence (at an idea), to pass from the enumeration of Xs to that which is common to all the Xs enumerated, it takes a “leap of the spirit”.¹³² The Question of Essence, “what is X?”, is the ontological point of departure for Plato’s questioning of Being because the question of being supports (“est sous-jacente”—is underneath or is foundational to) the question of essence. That is, when we ask the question of essence we presuppose the question of being.¹³³ “L’être comme existence apparaît déjà comme fondement de l’être, comme copule.”¹³⁴ Therefore, by asking the question of essence we are drawn towards the question of Being. We will need, therefore, to look at Ricoeur’s platonic ontology in order to understand how Ricoeur sees Plato moving from Essences to the question of Being. There is, however, one more question that needs to be answered before we move to the next section.

Is there a third starting point for the question of Being or, rather, a more foundational starting point? Later in his analysis of Plato’s ontology Ricoeur proposes that language is the foundation of Platonic ontology. Though it is the claim that Plato’s questioning of Being begins in essence that allows Ricoeur to say that Plato’s philosophy is founded upon language,¹³⁵ and starts with definitions,¹³⁶ this claim seems to contradict Ricoeur’s earlier claim that essence plays a limiting role on language.¹³⁷ Ricoeur claimed that Plato describes *ousia* as the measure of

¹³⁰Ibid.

¹³¹Ibid., 25. An *Idea*, for Ricoeur’s Plato, just is an image in the intellect—the intellectual visualization of the visible or sensible form (Ibid., 24.).

¹³²Ibid., 24.

¹³³Ibid., 25.

¹³⁴Ibid. In English we read, “Being, as existence, already appears as the foundation of being, as copula.”

¹³⁵Ibid., 107.

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷Ibid., 31.

language (*Cratylus*, 383d, 385c).¹³⁸ Plato holds to what Ricoeur calls a *Realism of signification*.¹³⁹ That is, language is limited and finds its source in the things which language attempts to signify (or point to). It would appear, then, that if language is determined by essence, then essence must be the starting point of platonic ontology. However, in light of Plato's understanding of language (and concept formation in the intellect), it might be better to say that though language is dependent upon essences, it is through the analysis of language that Plato comes to an understanding of essences. That is, language points to the things that point to the essences which points to Being. We could illustrate this movement as follows:

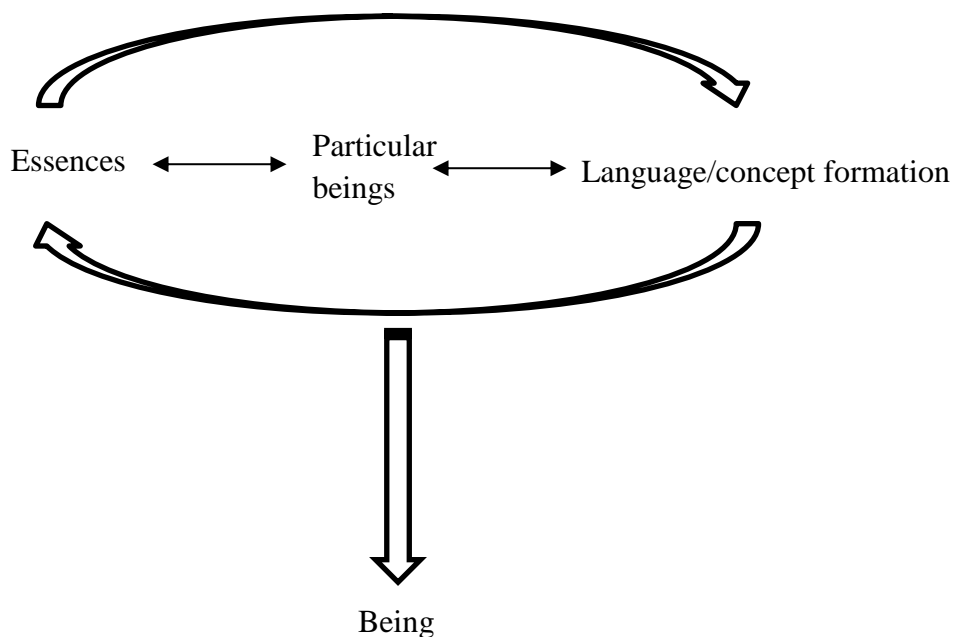
Language → particular beings → Essences → Being

If this analysis is correct, then language would be, for Plato, the point of departure for ontological analysis and the questioning of Being. I would propose, however (and we will consider this proposal in greater detail at a later point), that this movement is quite wrong. Though language does indeed point to particular beings, it is not the origin of the movement, rather, languages pointing at the particular beings is a "pointing back". The particular beings are the origin of the concept that is being conveyed through language. As such, though language is certainly prior to the essences in the questioning of being, particular beings, in a properly Platonic

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹Ibid., 32.

ontology, are prior to language. As such, a more accurate portrayal of the movement towards Being would be:¹⁴⁰



In the above image, we see the particular beings presenting themselves to the knower who forms a concept of them and points back to them with that concept and the words (language) that are used to signify the particular beings. From this movement, the knower is drawn to consider not only his concept of the particular thing, but the Essences which the particular things point to. This is when the knower asks the question of Essence, which, as Ricoeur notes, draws the knower to the question of Being. As such, it seems that Ricoeur's analysis of Plato's starting point is not quite right. It is a wonder that he did not posit the particular beings as the ontological starting point for question of Being; in light of (1) his claim that the existential starting point is the frustration and discontent that the knower experiences with the simple enumeration of particular beings, and (2) his claim that Plato understands language as beginning in the sensible particular things. He should have taken a further step, deeper into the platonic pool of ontology. This much

¹⁴⁰This chart is portraying, approximately, Ricoeur's understanding of platonic ontology. This chart in order to be truly platonic, must be modified, but, we will see this later.

can be said for Ricoeur's analysis of Plato, he sees the question of Essence as that which draws the human knower into the question of Being; and the question of Essence, he seems to think, is founded on language.

The Ontological Realm of Platonic Being

The preceding section has already introduced us to the primary constituents of Ricoeur's understanding of Plato's ontological realm: particular beings, mathematical entities, essences/Ideas/*ousia*, concepts/language, and Being.

Particular beings

Particular beings, the sensible things that impress themselves on our senses, for Ricoeur's Plato, though the lowest level of being,¹⁴¹ are not, simply "shadows" of the Ideas.¹⁴² That being said, Ricoeur notes that for Plato, the visible things of sensible reality are to the invisible things (the Essences or Ideas), as an image of something is to that of which it is the image.¹⁴³ So, whereas the particular beings may have some claim to being, and are not to be considered as shadows, they are no more than images of that which truly is. The analogy of the image of the real thing is a common platonic way of explaining the relationship between particular beings and the essences. The image, or painting, is a real thing that bears some superficial resemblance to that of which it is an image, but, when we go past the superficial appearance of the painting we realise that it is nothing like that of which it is an image. Thus, though sensible reality "is" in a sense, it is not to sensible reality that Plato refers when he talks about "beings" proper.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 148.

¹⁴²Ibid. Though it is from the Ideas that the particular beings have their nature/essence.

¹⁴³Ibid., 64.

The Mathematical Entities

Technically, Ricoeur notes, the mathematical entities are Ideas,¹⁴⁴ but, he proposes, they are a form of intermediate entities. They are, one might say, at the lowest end of the ontological hierarchy of true beings (essences). Though they are at the lower end of the ontological hierarchy of essences, they should not be considered as images, for, as true objects,¹⁴⁵ they do not change.¹⁴⁶ The question of the mathematical entities will allow us to consider, somewhat briefly, Ricoeur's understanding of Plato's ontological hierarchy. Ricoeur proposes that Plato places at the top, as principle of everything else, the Good-One-Being. Below the Good-One-Being is the "realm" of the Ideas which are, themselves, arranged in a hierarchy.¹⁴⁷ The Hierarchy of the Ideas places the 5 great genres at the top, and then the Moral ideas, and, finally, the mathematical Ideas.¹⁴⁸ The lowest level of the ontological hierarchy would be the sensible changing particulars.

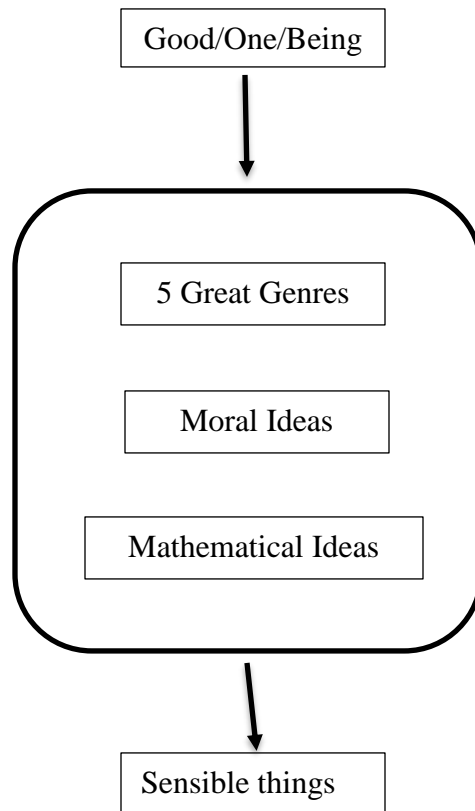
¹⁴⁴Ibid., 58.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., 67.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 66.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 59-60.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., 71-72.



Ricoeur notes that the hierarchy is ordered based upon the relationship of each constituent to the Good-One-Being. The mathematical beings are less than the moral ideas because they are not as close to the Good.¹⁴⁹ Therefore, the hierarchy of beings is based upon how (with more or less ease) the beings present the Good.¹⁵⁰

The Essences/Ideas

True being, that to which Plato refers when he talks about “beings” proper, is found only in the Ideas or Essences to which sensible things point. This is a fairly straightforward interpretation of Plato, so we will not spend too much time here. We will, however, point out a

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 71-72.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., 73.

number of important details for a proper understanding of Ricoeur's interpretation of Plato. The first thing that we should note concerning the essences, is that they are, for Ricoeur's Plato, individuals.¹⁵¹ The fact that they are individual beings, says Ricoeur, is based upon two laws of essence:¹⁵² (1) the law of distinct determination,¹⁵³ and (2) that Being cannot be defined.¹⁵⁴ Secondly, the essences just are the objects of platonic science¹⁵⁵—that towards which science is drawn.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, says Ricoeur, to ask the question concerning the end/purpose of science is to ask the question of contemplation (*theoria*).¹⁵⁷ But, if the essences are the objects of science, then we must ask how it is possible for man to know, indeed contemplate, the essences? Ricoeur will eventually respond that it is not possible,¹⁵⁸ and it is for this very reason that Ricoeur thinks that science (and indeed philosophy) is doomed to failure. For Ricoeur's Plato *noesis*—the moment of intelligence, the “vision simple, instantanée, en plein repos”—is the achievement (the end term) of science.¹⁵⁹ Science is achieved in intellectual contemplation.

This is the cause, thinks Ricoeur, of the four great problems of Platonism:¹⁶⁰ (1) the problem of the link between contemplation and the first *pre-earthly-life* vision of the Ideas¹⁶¹—the source of the myth of Reminiscence.¹⁶² In the *Banquet* we are told that the philosophers' research takes its beginning in the desire for eternity.¹⁶³ This desire brings him to the intuition of

¹⁵¹Ibid., 36.

¹⁵²Ibid.

¹⁵³Ibid., 35.

¹⁵⁴Ibid.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., 39.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., 42.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 40.

¹⁵⁸This is how Ricoeur responds to the question that we asked, earlier, of Rosen.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 74. In English we read, “simple vision, instantaneous, in total rest.”

¹⁶⁰Note how Ricoeur provides an analysis of Plato which concentrates on temporality (past, present, future) as the defining feature of the quest for a response to the question of Being (note, also the notion of death). We see, here, a very clear hint of Martin Heidegger's influence.

¹⁶¹Ibid., 74.

¹⁶²Ibid., 76.

¹⁶³Ibid., 77.

the Ideas which are intuited like a revelation.¹⁶⁴ This myth is repeated in the *Phaedrus*.¹⁶⁵ Ricoeur suggests that the purpose of the myths is to show that in any intellectual endeavour (especially the most intellectual—that of the philosopher) rationality is mixed up with irrationality: (i) by an irrational foundation;¹⁶⁶ (ii) by an irrational start— the all too human scandal or distress;¹⁶⁷ (iii) by an irrational momentum—the desire to know and learn¹⁶⁸—“Le côté existentiel de la progression intellectuelle.”¹⁶⁹ (2) the problem of the *present* contemplation of the essences which presents itself in the form of a restored soul and looks very much like a *death* to the things of this world.¹⁷⁰ According to the *Phaedo* philosophy is to prepare oneself for death, it is, indeed, to be dead¹⁷¹— *phronesis*. There are 3 levels of the noetic vision: (i) right opinion,¹⁷² (ii) reasoning,¹⁷³ (iii) dialectic or argument.¹⁷⁴ To pass through these three levels is to practice dying—it is to move towards and to become united with the Ideas.¹⁷⁵ (3) The problem of the present silence in the face of this contemplation of the essences,¹⁷⁶ and (4) The “problème de la fonction méthodologique de la théorie qui nous apparaîtra par contre moins comme l’abolition du discours, que comme son fondement au-delà du discours : l’intuition sera alors le principe d’un nouveau discours.”¹⁷⁷ The relationship between intuition (contemplation) and discourse ; between rest and movement.¹⁷⁸ We

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

¹⁶⁵Ibid., 78.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., 79-80.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., 80.

¹⁶⁸Ibid.

¹⁶⁹Ibid. In English we read, “the existential side of intellectual progression.”

¹⁷⁰Ibid., 75.

¹⁷¹Ibid., 82-83.

¹⁷²Ibid.

¹⁷³Ibid., 84-85.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., 85-87.

¹⁷⁵Ibid.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., 90-93.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., 75. In English we read, “problem of the methodological function of theoria which appears to us, on the other hand, less as the abolition of discourse, than as its foundation over and above discourse: Intuition will be, therefore, the principle of a new discourse.”

¹⁷⁸Ibid., 93.

must see all beings in one single Being—the One of the Good.¹⁷⁹ These problems lead Ricoeur to announce not only that Plato’s ontological system simply cannot be completed, but that if the system of Ideas was to be completed, then “l’intuition mythique serait entièrement récupérée dans l’acte philosophique.”¹⁸⁰ If this happened, then there would no longer be any need for the platonic myths (which seem to be so essential to Plato’s thinking). Therefore, “la réalisation de la philosophie dans l’intuition est peut-être finalement le mythe même de la philosophie.”¹⁸¹ It follows, then, that science is not possible—we simply cannot have a completed system. Philosophy is, and always will be, perpetually seeking the principle (Is it Being, the One, or the Good?).

A third point that Ricoeur brings up concerning the essences, is that they play a limitative role on language. That is, he suggests that for Plato the purpose of language is to signify (present) reality truly or accurately.¹⁸² But, reality just is, for Ricoeur’s Plato, the essences. Therefore, though he allows that language imitates the things, finding its starting point in the things, and pointing towards them,¹⁸³ in truth it is not the sensible particulars that limit (measure or determine) language, but the essences to which the sensible particulars point.¹⁸⁴ This is why Ricoeur says that Plato’s philosophy is founded upon language,¹⁸⁵ and starts with definitions.¹⁸⁶ If the essences limit and determine language, then language is based upon ontological realities,¹⁸⁷ and Platonism is the exploration of “significations” or meanings—that is, it is the exploration of

¹⁷⁹Ibid.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., 103. In English we read, “the mythical intuition would be entirely recuperated in the philosophical act.”

¹⁸¹Ibid. In English we read, “the realisation of philosophy in intuition is, perhaps, in the end, the true myth of philosophy.”

¹⁸²Ibid., 30.

¹⁸³Ibid., 32.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., 31.

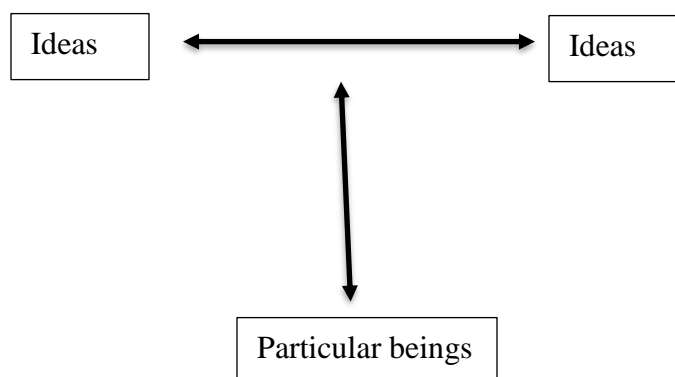
¹⁸⁵Ibid., 107.

¹⁸⁶Ibid.

¹⁸⁷Plato holds to what Ricoeur calls a *Realism of signification* (cf. Ibid., 32.).

language.¹⁸⁸ We might, of course, ask, in light of the fact that the essences cannot be truly known, how we could ever know when language is really referring to the realities. The answer is, of course, we can't.

The fourth and final point that we must mention concerning the essences, is that Ricoeur's Plato is primarily concerned (in a great majority of his dialogues, but specifically in the *Parmenides*, the *Theaetetus*, and the *Sophist*)¹⁸⁹ with the question of the relationships between the Ideas, and between the Ideas and the particulars. That is, he is concerned with horizontal and vertical participation.



In discussing *horizontal participation* Plato posits that the forms participate in each other. The notion of *vertical participation*, that for which Plato is most known, connotes the idea that the particulars participate in the forms. The question of horizontal participation has primarily to do with the 5 greatest Ideas (Movement and Rest, same and Other, and Being), and the claim that in order for the other Ideas (including themselves) to be, to be what they are—same, to not be the other Ideas—other, etc., the ideas must participate, at least, in the 5 great forms. Ricoeur draws 2 provisory conclusions : (a) “les difficultés de la participation vertical doivent être *coordonnées*

¹⁸⁸Ibid., 35.

¹⁸⁹Ibid., 128.

aux difficultés de la participation latérale.”¹⁹⁰ That is the difficulties related to the different relations of participation are somehow related. (b) These two types of participation must be *subordinated* to the question of Being : “que signifie *l’être* de chacun de ces êtres que sont les Idées ou Formes ?”¹⁹¹ That is, both types of participation are not possible without Being, therefore, we must answer the question of Being.

Language/Concepts

We have already considered Ricoeur’s understanding of Plato’s philosophy of language, so, at this point, we will only note that Ricoeur does not provide an analysis of Language’s place in the ontological hierarchy. This is not because it does not have a place, but that Ricoeur does not discuss its place. Technically language and concepts would occupy a place that is, as far as being is concerned, below that of the particular sensible beings. Yet, as we will see later, when a concept or proposition accurately represents the essences, the essence is, in a sense, in the concept or proposition.

Where is Being?

In our section on the essences we noted that Being was one of the 5 great kinds. As such, Being is an Idea/form,¹⁹² or, as Ricoeur seems to imply, a transcendental.¹⁹³ Ricoeur notes, however, that Being is not necessarily the most important of the 5 great kinds,¹⁹⁴ rather, Same

¹⁹⁰Ibid., 118. In English we read, “the difficulties that plague vertical participation must be *coordinated* with the difficulties that plague horizontal participation.”

¹⁹¹Ibid. In English we read, “What does the *being* of each of these beings, which are the Ideas or Forms, represent [signify, mean]?”

¹⁹²Ibid., 97.

¹⁹³Ibid.

¹⁹⁴Ibid., 138.

and Other are the greatest genres.¹⁹⁵ This discussion brings us to a discussion of Ricoeur's understanding of Plato's approach to the Question of Being.

Plato's Approach to the Question of Being

As noted above, the question of Being, "*ti on*—What is Being?", undergirds the question of essence, "What is x?".¹⁹⁶ This is because, as Ricoeur notes, Being presents itself through, or in, beings.¹⁹⁷ It would be easy, at this point, to think that Ricoeur is saying that Being presents itself in the sensible particular beings (and there is a certain truth in this, even for Ricoeur's Plato), but this is not what he is saying. On the contrary, when Ricoeur says that Being presents itself in beings, what he means is that Being presents itself in those true beings—the essences. This is precisely what he means when he says that the question of Being undergirds the question of essence: Being undergirds and is present in the essences/Ideas. When Ricoeur talks about the Being of beings he is, therefore, talking about the Being of the Ideas.

In light of this understanding of the question of Being, Ricoeur notes that even if we propose a theory of Being where Being just is an Idea/essence, we are still left with the problem of Being: "Que veut dire être pour une Idée?"¹⁹⁸ He rewords this question, a little later, as follows: "que signifie *l'être* de chacun de ces êtres que sont les Idées ou Formes?"¹⁹⁹ We may propose that "to be a particular sensible X just is to imitate/participate in/reflect the idea X", we are still left with the problem what it means for X (the idea) to be. In Plato we move from the

¹⁹⁵Ibid., 135.

¹⁹⁶Ibid., 23-25.

¹⁹⁷Ibid., 34.

¹⁹⁸Ibid., 107.

¹⁹⁹Ibid., 118. In English we read, "What does the *being* of each of these beings, which are the Ideas or Forms, represent [signify, mean]?"

question of beings (where the beings are ideas) to the question of the Being of these beings.²⁰⁰

This, for Ricoeur, is the true question of Being in Plato; and it is this question, proposes Ricoeur, that Plato neither answers, nor is capable of answering. “À son tour, la question ti on – qu’est-ce que l’être? – n’est susceptible de définition qu’à condition d’être rendue d’abord aussi obscure que la question du non-être.”²⁰¹ The question of Being is, therefore, according to Ricoeur, unanswerable.²⁰² Plato attempts to answer it, according to Ricoeur, by beginning with language by answering the question of essence, however, because Plato’s Philosophy is “une philosophie des déterminations intelligibles, donc une philosophie *des êtres* et non de l’être”,²⁰³ Plato never succeeds in answering the question of Being, and no philosophy of essences ever will.

The Nature of Platonism

We will conclude with some brief remarks concerning Ricoeur’s conception of Plato’s approach to philosophy. Ricoeur describes Platonism in a number of different ways in his work on Plato, such as: the exploration of significations or meanings,²⁰⁴ a perpetually incomplete ontology,²⁰⁵ a philosophy of the intelligible,²⁰⁶ an ontology of essences and intelligible

²⁰⁰Ibid., 108.

²⁰¹Ibid., 135. In English we read, “It turns out that the question ti on – what is being? – cannot be defined without making it as obscure as the question of non-being.”

²⁰²He does think that Plato answers the Genesis question, concerning how everything came to be, for, thinks Ricoeur, Plato’s “myth” of the Demi-Urge is not proposed as false story, but as a true (and, indeed, likely) explanation of how everything came into being (cf. Ibid., 151.). Indeed, the Demi-urge created the sensible world by looking at the forms/Ideas (Ibid., 154.), and Ricoeur posits that, for Plato, the Good is the cause of the realm of the Ideas: “le Bien est le fondement commun du connaissant et du connu, de l’Intelligence et de l’Intelligible, puisqu’il donne à l’un de connaître et à l’autre d’être connu. (Ibid., 190.)”

²⁰³Ibid., 159. In English we read, “a philosophy of intelligible determinations, therefore a philosophy *of beings* and not of being.”

²⁰⁴Ibid., 35.

²⁰⁵Ibid., 103, 159.

²⁰⁶Ibid., 146.

determinations,²⁰⁷ and a philosophy of beings and not of Being.²⁰⁸ These differing descriptions of the nature of platonic philosophy all take root, as should now be obvious, in Ricoeur's understanding of Platonic ontology and epistemology. For Ricoeur, Plato's ontology, as it is found in Plato's writings, is unfinished and incomplete.²⁰⁹ If we rely on earlier comments, this is not due to Plato having simply not completed his work, but, rather, according to Ricoeur, to the reality that Plato's ontology, an ontology of essences, simply cannot be completed. This observation, however, not only applies to Plato's philosophy, but, for Ricoeur, to any attempt at ontology. There simply is no possibility of a complete ontology—philosophy is a never ending search for an end that is unattainable. Ricoeur notes, for example, that there can be no science, as Plato understands the term.²¹⁰ *Science*, knowledge and contemplation of the essences,²¹¹ is impossible (which is why Plato thinks, according to Ricoeur, that philosophy is so difficult²¹²); therefore, philosophy (whose purpose is to unite the knower, intellectually, with the essences²¹³) is more a voyage, than a science.²¹⁴ It follows, then, that not only is philosophy a voyage, but it is a voyage that is doomed to failure.²¹⁵ Indeed, according to Ricoeur's interpretation of Plato, if the system of Ideas was completed, then "l'intuition mythique serait entièrement récupérée dans l'acte philosophique."²¹⁶ If this happened, then there would no longer be any need for the myths. Therefore, "la réalisation de la philosophie dans l'intuition est peut-être finalement le mythe

²⁰⁷Ibid., 159.

²⁰⁸Ibid.

²⁰⁹Ibid., 159.

²¹⁰Ibid., 39.

²¹¹Ibid., 40, 74.

²¹²Ibid., 41.

²¹³Ibid., 85-87.

²¹⁴Ibid.

²¹⁵Ibid., 48.

²¹⁶Ibid., 103. In English we read, "the mythical intuition would be entirely recuperated in the philosophical act."

même de la philosophie.”²¹⁷ As such, according to Ricoeur’s Plato, science is not possible—we simply cannot have a completed system. Philosophy is, and always will be, perpetually seeking the principle of beings (Is it Being, the One, or the Good?). It follows, then, that, for Ricoeur’s Plato, the question of Being is a question that will never be answered, but must be perpetually asked.²¹⁸

Giovanni Reale’s Interpretation of Plato’s Approach to the Question of Being

Introduction

In order to understand Giovanni Reale’s approach to the subject we must note that he claims, in agreement with the Tübingen school, that in order to properly understand Plato’s approach to the question of Being we must realise that the traditional way of interpreting Plato’s philosophy (by relying exclusively on the written works of Plato) is incapable of dealing with a number of important problems related to Plato’s philosophy. This entitles us, thinks Reale, to consider the unwritten doctrines of Plato which are found in the writings of his more prestigious and serious disciples, such as Aristotle, Aristoxenus, Plotinus, Xenocrates, Proclus, and others. Based upon observations that are drawn from a scholarly comparison of Plato’s written works and the unwritten doctrines that are transmitted by Plato’s disciples that are mentioned above,

²¹⁷Ibid. In English we read, “the realisation of philosophy in intuition is, perhaps, in the end, the true myth of philosophy.”

²¹⁸In the next major section, our consideration of Aristotle’s approach to the question of Being, we will notice a somewhat interesting phenomenon: Pierre Aubenque’s understanding of Aristotle’s approach to the question of Being and Paul Ricoeur’s understanding of Plato’s approach to the question of Being arrive at the same conclusion. They both arrive at the conclusion that (for both Plato and Aristotle) the Question of Being is a question that will never be answered, but must be perpetually asked. This is such a curious coincidence that it makes us wonder if their conclusions are not more a result of the influence of the contemporary philosophy of Heidegger than of a critical interpretation of Plato and Aristotle that is uninfluenced by modern and contemporary presuppositions.

Reale arrives at the conclusions concerning Plato's doctrine of Being that we will see in the following section.

Reale does not set out to explain Plato's doctrine concerning Being, however, through an attentive reading of Reale's work we are able to piece together what Reale would probably say is Plato's understanding of Being and response to the question of Being. In what follows, with the purpose of getting a proper understanding of Reale, we will accept Reale's claims concerning the importance of using the unwritten doctrines, and we will simply explain, as clearly as possible, Reale's understanding of Plato's approach to the question of Being. We will begin by considering Reale's comments on how Plato approaches metaphysical questions. We will then look at Reale's explanation of the platonic hierarchy of ontological realities. Having considered the hierarchy as a whole we will then consider Reale's treatment of the important elements of that hierarchy, looking first at the sensible world, and then at the Ideas. We will then consider Reale's understanding of the ultimate principles and the relationship between the Good, the One and the Beautiful. We will finally explain how, according to Reale, Being fits into that hierarchy, and we will explain Reale's understanding of Plato's doctrine of Being. It should be noted that Reale draws upon an extensive knowledge of all of Plato's written works, as well as the unwritten doctrines. Though this will go beyond our consideration of Plato's approach to Being in the *Sophist*, it will be a helpful addition to our understanding of Plato's general approach to Being, and will confirm many of the conclusions that we have already drawn, and will present below, from the *Sophist* concerning Plato's doctrine of Being.

Plato's approach to Metaphysical Questions

According to Reale the truly platonic approach to metaphysical reflection is demonstrated by the first and second voyage, as Plato explains them in the *Phaedo*,²¹⁹ and other dialogues. Reale considers these two voyages in the second part of his work on Plato's philosophy, positing that the second voyage has not been properly understood by what could be called the "contemporary traditional interpretation of Plato".²²⁰ The major difference between the contemporary traditional interpretation and Reale's interpretation is found in the explanation of the second voyage. Both interpretations agree, for obvious reasons, that the first voyage has to do with the exploration of physical and sensible reality. Both interpretations also agree that the second voyage is essentially the move from the exclusive consideration of material things and causes to the consideration of immaterial – super sensible – things and causes. Though the analogy of the second voyage is found in the *Phaedo*, we also find it explicitly stated in the *Parmenides*, where the young Socrates challenges Zeno to apply his theory to the realm of the Ideas—things that are not sensible, but can only be known through reason.²²¹ Reale notes that "The Second Voyage, then, has led Plato to recognize the existence of two levels of being: one phenomenal and visible, and the other meta-phenomenal, graspable only with the *logoi* and hence purely intelligible... We can, however, summarize the theoretical core of the Second Voyage as follows: the passage from the sensible to the supersensible, the introduction of a nonphysical and, hence, metaphysical cause, is necessary to explain the sensible and to free it from the contradictions in which it is involved if left to itself."²²² Where the traditional contemporary view and Reale stop agreeing, is that Reale proposes that there are two steps to the second voyage, "in

²¹⁹Plato, *Phaedo*, 9aA-102a.

²²⁰Reale, *TANIP*, 95.

²²¹Plato, *Parmenides*, 129e-130a.

²²²Reale, *TANIP*, 104.

the first, it achieves the realm of the Ideas; in the second, it achieves the realm of the Principles which is the highest level.”²²³ For Reale, the only way to make sense of both the written and the unwritten teachings of Plato is by understanding the second voyage as being accomplished in two steps, each step corresponding to a deeper consideration of the nature of reality. In light of this modification Reale describes the second voyage as “the first rational search for and demonstration of the existence of a transcendent and supersensible reality. In our opinion, it could even be said that this passage is, for reasons to be explained, the Magna Carta of Western metaphysics.”²²⁴ The second voyage, then, if completed, takes the thinker through the realm of the Ideas to the bi-polar principle of all that exists,²²⁵ the One-dyad.

Reale is thus able to conclude, rightly, that for Plato, “the metaphysical journey proceeds from the many (sensibles) to the unity of the Ideas; but these, in their turn, are many (many unities), and hence, relative to each other, imply a plurality at the intelligible level. So, in order to overcome their further plurality at the intelligible level, we must proceed to a further level of unification. We must place the absolute One at the head of the hierarchy.”²²⁶ Metaphysical reflections begin, therefore, with a consideration of the sensible world,²²⁷ yet are rapidly drawn to the super-sensible world. Beginning with the many, we are drawn to that which unifies them. Discovering yet another cluster of many beings, we are drawn to that which, being absolutely One, unifies them. Indeed, it seems that the metaphysical voyage is indeed completed when it once turns to the contemplation of that which is, more than anything else, reality—the One.²²⁸

²²³Ibid., 105.

²²⁴Ibid.

²²⁵Ibid., 150.

²²⁶Ibid., 205.

²²⁷Cf. Ibid., 349.

²²⁸Plato, *Republic*, ch. 7, 524d2-525a2.

The Platonic Hierarchy of Ontological Realities

In our explanation of the platonic approach to metaphysical reflection we have already been given a glimpse of Reale's understanding of the platonic hierarchy of ontological realities. The importance of this hierarchy, for our consideration of the question of Being, is highlighted by a passing comment made by Reale in his brief section on the *Sophist*, "Plato explains that Being cannot be fully grasped unless we understand its hierarchical structure and specifically the two planes of the sensible and the supersensible."²²⁹ The hierarchy of ontological realities could be outlined in two different ways, providing glimpses of reality that are the exact inversion of each other. The first way of approaching the platonic hierarchy is to present the levels according to their excellence (least excellent on the bottom, most excellent at the top). In this way we find, at the lowest level of reality, those things to which being can only be attributed in the sense of becoming: sensible beings, those things which occupy the material world that is present to our senses. Just above the sensible being are the mathematical beings, which are just below the intermediate beings. Above the intermediate beings are the Ideas in general, which are less excellent, and thus below, the great meta-ideas.²³⁰ Finally we arrive at that which is the most excellent, the First bi-polar principle: The One-Dyad. This hierarchy is a causal hierarchy in that the higher level causes, in a *formal* sense,²³¹ the level immediately below it.²³² The hierarchy looks something like this.²³³

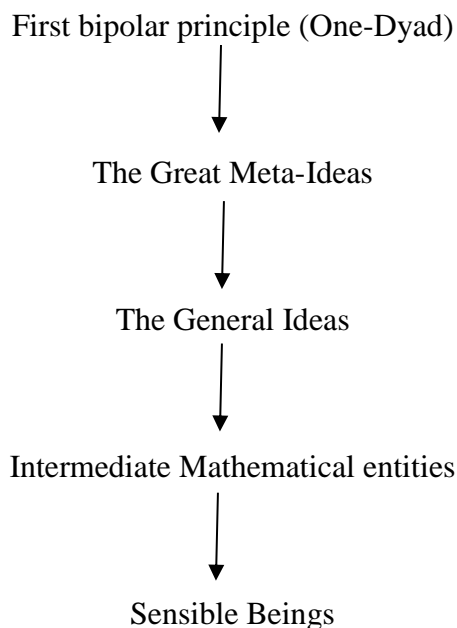
²²⁹Reale, *TANIP*, 246.

²³⁰*Ibid.*, 240.

²³¹*Ibid.*, 391.

²³²The efficient causation of the various levels under the bipolar principle is executed by the Demi-urge (*Ibid.*, 307.). In this portrayal of Plato's philosophy, the Demi-urge is the creator of everything except the bi-polar principle, and creates everything by contemplating, and representing perfectly, the One-Good-Beautiful. As such, we may understand the relationship between the different levels of the hierarchy as being causally related through formal causality. The efficient cause of each level (except the One-Dyad) is the Demi-urge (cf. *Ibid.*, 314-320, 349, 391.).

²³³*Ibid.*, 216, 219-220.



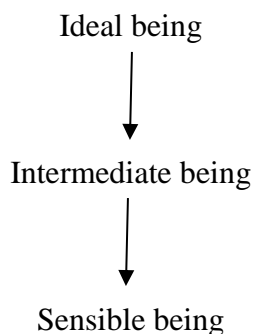
Considered according to that which is foundational, thus placing the foundational aspects of ontological reality at the bottom, and that which, ultimately, is supported by everything else at the top, we find that the hierarchy is inverted. Thus, the first bi-polar principle is the foundation for the great meta-ideas, which are foundational for the general ideas, which are foundational for the intermediate entities, which are foundational for mathematics, upon which all of sensible reality is grounded.²³⁴

This detailed understanding of the ontological hierarchy of reality helps us to understand the way in which the three-level view of the different levels of Being is described.²³⁵ Technically, according to Reale, Being is a product of the bipolar principle which, itself, is above Being.²³⁶

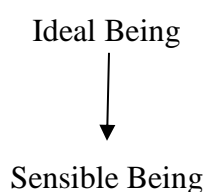
²³⁴Ibid., 220.

²³⁵Ibid., 388. Cf. Ibid., 407-408.

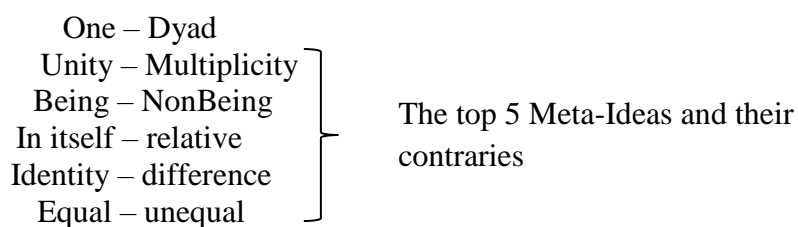
²³⁶Ibid., 207, 246. This, of course, leaves us wondering, “if the bipolar principle is above Being, is it?”



Sometimes Plato only speaks of a two-fold division of Being (leaving out intermediate beings):²³⁷



Of primary interest to us, in our consideration of the question of Being, is the hierarchical relationship between the bipolar principle of all things and the Meta-Ideas. Reale provides us with an outline of his view of Plato's understanding of this relationship, which we will here reproduce only in part, listing the top 6 levels.²³⁸



Having considered Reale's understanding of the Platonic hierarchy of ontological realities, which differs from the traditional contemporary understanding of Plato only by the

²³⁷Ibid., 130, 246-247, 381.

²³⁸Ibid., 240.

addition of the bi-polar principle, and the understanding that the Demi-urge is not some fictitious story, but an essential element of Plato's philosophy,²³⁹ we will now turn to a brief examination of those parts of this hierarchy which directly affect our consideration of the Plato's doctrine of Being.

The Sensible world

The sensible world, for Plato, is the source of some major problems. Reale notes that "The basic problem, hence, is the following: Why are things generated, why are they corrupted, why do they exist?"²⁴⁰ Indeed, the very existence of the sensible world raises the problem of how it came to be, "the problem is made even more complex, since Plato touches on a fundamental issue which had occupied much of the history of philosophy which preceded him: Is everything, the whole universe, produced by an irrational and wholly random power, or must we admit Intelligence and Wisdom as a productive and ordering cause? Plato clearly recognizes that this is the basic problem which man must confront when he is faced with the issue of the whole of what exists."²⁴¹ Plato, of course, denies the possibility of the first option, and clearly adheres to the theory (it is, for Plato, a necessary truth) that the whole of what exists is the creative production of an eternal intellect, the Demi-urge. Reale notes, "the sensible cosmos is an image executed by the Demiurge of a metasensible reality."²⁴² Indeed, "the thesis of the necessary existence of a

²³⁹Ibid., 276, 307, 319, 328-329, 349. See specifically, "Plato does not at all say, as many believe, that the doctrine of the Demiurge is a myth in the sense of a probable story. On the contrary, the thesis of the necessary existence of a demiurgic Intelligence is one of the four great metaphysical axioms which are incontrovertibly true. (Ibid., 366.)"

²⁴⁰Ibid., 96-97.

²⁴¹Ibid., 349.

²⁴²Ibid., 364.

demiurgic Intelligence is one of the four great metaphysical axioms which are incontrovertibly true.”²⁴³

The reason why the very existence of the sensible world is such a major problem is due to its nature. The sensible world is the place, the very lieu, of becoming “which is continually generated, is never true being, because it is continually changing; it is the object of opinion, that is, it is grasped by sensory perception which is distinct from reason.”²⁴⁴ This being the case we are left with two major problems. On the ontological level we are left with the very problem of being itself: If this sensible world is all there is, and if this sensible world is in constant flux, then nothing is, in any meaningful sense of the word “is”. On the epistemological level it seems that we will forever be incapable of possessing knowledge: If this sensible world is all there is, and if this sensible world is in constant flux, then nothing can be known, in any meaningful sense of the word “know”.

Plato solves these two problems by positing the entire theory that we outlined above, and which we are now considering in detail. In this philosophical approach to reality, the ontological problem is solved by positing that the material world of sensible reality “is an image executed by the Demiurge of a metasensible reality.”²⁴⁵ The sensible world is to the world of the Ideas what a human artists painting is to the sensible world.²⁴⁶ This helps us to better understand Plato’s constant claim that this world is not truly real, but is like the shadow of true reality. This sensible world is a perfect image, fashioned by the demi-urge, based upon the demi-urge’s contemplation of the Ideas and the highest principle of all that is.²⁴⁷

²⁴³Ibid., 366.

²⁴⁴Ibid., 362. Cf. Ibid., 363.

²⁴⁵Ibid., 364.

²⁴⁶Sensible world: Ideas :: Painting: Sensible world.

²⁴⁷Reale also describes Plato’s understanding of sensible reality in the following manner: “He tells us that sensible things, considered ontologically as images of the intelligible, are the imprints of eternal realities (namely, the paradigms of the Ideas), which come about in a difficult and marvelous way. (Ibid., 391.)” Cf. Ibid., 365, 408.

This leaves us with the epistemological problem: “The cosmos, insofar as it is continually generated or perpetually becoming, is not knowable by pure intelligence or pure reasoning, but is graspable by sensory perception and cognizable by opinion.”²⁴⁸ Reale notes that, for Plato, though the sensible world cannot be, by nature, the object of true knowledge, “in the respect that the cosmos of changing things is an image of pure being, which is its original model, it is knowable.”²⁴⁹ That is, though the sensible world, of itself, is only the object of opinion (due to the fact that it is in constant flux), through knowledge of the unchanging and eternal forms (upon which the things of this sensible world are based) we are able to know the things of this changing sensible world. We are able to know that this x, that x and all the other x’s are all imitations of the unchanging and eternal X.

The Platonic Ideas

Through our consideration of the images of true being we are driven, drawn and dragged towards that which truly is. Indeed, it is no secret that, for Plato, the Ideas just are that which truly is (this is a theme that we will see throughout the commentators of Plato that we will be considering). Reale notes that “the Idea are repeatedly described by Plato as true being, as being in the fullest sense, and as being-in-itself, as really real, stable, and eternal being, and as being on a wholly different plane from the sensible world. This attribute indicates the Ideas as that reality which is neither generated nor corrupted, which neither grows nor diminishes, which neither changes nor becomes in any fashion, and which has an essential relationship with the two attributes already noted [intelligible and incorporeal].”²⁵⁰ Having considered the sensible world it

²⁴⁸Ibid., 365. Cf. His earlier comment, “the sensible world, which is a mixture of being and nonbeing, is the object of mere opinion, while there is only absolute ignorance about nonbeing. (Ibid., 118.)”

²⁴⁹Ibid.

²⁵⁰Ibid., 117. Cf. Ibid., 207, 314. See also his comment about the proper understanding of the Ideas, “by the

is now very clear how Plato divides up Being. The highest level of being—true being—is occupied by the Ideas. The next level of being—the image of true being—is occupied by all those things that are natural parts of the sensible world, including even those original creations of human artists. The lowest level of being—images of the images—is occupied by those things that are reproductions of original creations or natural sensible beings.²⁵¹ Indeed, says Reale, “it is clear that they represent a different dimension of reality, a new and higher level of reality itself.”²⁵² The Ideas are the necessary and sufficient formal causes of the sensible realm, but it is not because of the Ideas that the sensible realm exists, rather, the sensible realm is, as we mentioned above, the voluntary creation of the eternal intellect—the demi-urge. The Ideas themselves are ‘caused’ by the highest, bi-polar, principle of all things. Reale reminds us that “it is hardly necessary to recall that the Ideas can be said to be produced by the first Principles and so are generated from them; but, in this case, talk of generation and production is only metaphorical, since what is at issue is a sphere of being wholly outside time and becoming. So, the metaphor here indicates simply their metaphysical structure as conditioned beings or derivative of the two highest Principles.”²⁵³

Not only are the Ideas seen to be true Being, as compared to the sensible realm of absolute becoming, but they are, according to Reale, *individuals*, “each Idea is an individual, and as such unifies the many sensibles...He plainly claims that each of the Ideas is one, but, because

notion of ‘Idea,’ Plato understands something which, in a certain sense, constitutes the specific object of thought, that is to say, that on which thought is directly turned, that without which thought would not be thought: in short Platonic Ideas are not products of thought. Rather, they are the things which are absolutely true beings. (Ibid., 179.)” They can become, we might add, the object of thought. Reale notes, a little bit later, “Thus Plato uses *idea* and *eidōs* to refer to this internal constitution, this metaphysical structure or essence of natural things, which is intrinsically intelligible; he also uses as synonyms the terms ‘οὐσία,’ that is, substance or essence, as well as ‘φύσις,’ meaning the nature of things, the reality of things. (Ibid.)”

²⁵¹Ibid., 314-315.

²⁵²Ibid., 128.

²⁵³Ibid., 355.

each appears everywhere in association with actions and bodies, and with other Ideas, it appears to be many.”²⁵⁴ As such, the individual Ideas that truly are, and which are the models upon which sensible reality is based, solve the problem of the perpetual becoming of the sensible world. Indeed, Reale notes that for Plato, “to truly explain becoming, Ideas cannot themselves be in becoming, but must have their own being which becoming does not have as its own, but must change and receive. Becoming as such is not being but only has being; in fact, it always implies nonbeing, and, therefore, insofar as it has being, it must have it through participation with another.”²⁵⁵

Not only do the Ideas solve the ontological problem related to the sensible world, but they also solve the epistemological problem of knowledge. In light of the fact that only that which truly is can be truly knowable, it follows that the Ideas, which, alone, truly are, are truly knowable.²⁵⁶ Plato was so convinced that knowledge was intrinsically related to Being that he held that the various levels of knowledge correspond to the levels of being.²⁵⁷ Indeed, “being is the foundation of thinking, the cause and the sine qua non of thinking (‘Thinking and the condition of thinking are the same’). Thinking is expressed always and only in being (‘for you will not find thinking without [that which] is’). This, being is the condition for thinking, it is the determining and founding reason for thinking.”²⁵⁸ But the Ideas just are true being. It follows, then, that the Ideas are the foundation and condition for the very possibility of thinking (and, also, for philosophy). Indeed, Reale confirms this point by noting that “Intellectual sight implies as its

²⁵⁴Ibid., 205. Reale is referring to Plato’s discussion in *Republic*, c. 5, 476a and following.

²⁵⁵Ibid., 119.

²⁵⁶Ibid., 118.

²⁵⁷Ibid., 159, 161. For more on the relationship between knowledge and being see, Ibid., 248, 329, 362, 365, 420.

²⁵⁸Ibid., 329.

ground what the Intellect sees: the Ideas. Hence, the Ideas depend upon a close bond, a unified structure linking sight, the object-of-sight, and being.”²⁵⁹

We may conclude by noting Reale’s summary of the 6 basic characteristics of the platonic Ideas:

- “1. Intelligibility (an Idea is par excellence the object of the mind or intellect and is graspable only by it);
- 2. Incorporeality (an Idea belongs to a realm totally different from the sensible corporeal world);
- 3. Being in the full sense (Ideas are the beings that are really real);
- 4. Unchangeability (Ideas are exempt from all kinds of change as well as from generation and corruption);
- 5. Self-identity (Ideas are in and of themselves absolutely objective);
- 6. Unity (Each Idea is a unity, unifying a multiplicity of things which participate in it.”²⁶⁰

Most of those who study Plato’s metaphysics see the Ideas as the summit of Plato’s ontological hierarchy of reality (admitting, within the realm of the Ideas, those Ideas which Plato considers to be superior), however, Reale is not stopping. Reale goes on to note, based upon hints from Plato’s written works, and clear statements in the unwritten doctrines (found in the writings of Plato’s top disciples), that Plato himself did not stop with the theory of the Ideas. We will consider, in what follows, Reale’s explanation of why not, and of what Plato posited above the Ideas.

The Ultimate Principles

We might wonder just why Plato did not stop with the Ideas, as many scholars would like to think. Reale notes that Plato simply could not stop with the Ideas for the following reasons. First of all, “It is a basic conviction animating all the philosophy preceding Plato that to explain means to unify.”²⁶¹ Secondly, proposes Reale, “The whole of Plato’s doctrine of the Ideas

²⁵⁹Ibid., 181.

²⁶⁰Ibid., 114.

²⁶¹Ibid., 143.

arose—as we saw above—from such a conviction...The plurality of sensible things is explained precisely by reducing it to the synoptic unity of the relevant Idea.”²⁶² So, Plato is seeking to explain the many by the One, but in so doing he ends up with another plurality which seems to be unexplainable.²⁶³ How will Plato go about explaining—and thus unifying—this new plurality of individual, eternal, and immutable ideas? Reale proposes that “Just as the sphere of the sensible multiplicity depends on the sphere of the Ideas, so the sphere of multiplicity of the Ideas depends on a further sphere of reality, from which the Ideas are derived, and this is absolutely the first and highest sphere. This is the sphere of the first Principles. Plato explicitly calls them the highest and primary realities.”²⁶⁴ Though it may sound like we have still stumbled onto yet another level of multiplicity—the first principles—it is to be noted that Reale explains Plato’s final level not as principles, but as one bi-polar principle.²⁶⁵ Like one magnet has two poles, so the first principle has two poles: the One and, its opposite, the indeterminate Dyad. Reale says, “The Principles are (1) the supreme One, which is the principle of formal determination, and (2) the indeterminate (indefinite or infinite) Dyad or the Dyad of the great-and-small, which is the Principle of indefinite variability.”²⁶⁶ In this way, Reale proposes, Plato’s system can be seen to be a complete and coherent explanation of that which is, which makes sense of Reality, its existence, and its knowability.

But how does Plato understand and explain these principles? As this part of Plato’s ontological hierarchy of reality is not strictly necessary in order to understand Plato’s approach to Being we will only provide a summary of Reale’s approach to this doctrine, and make some

²⁶²Ibid., 144.

²⁶³Ibid.

²⁶⁴Ibid., 144-145.

²⁶⁵Ibid., 185-188.

²⁶⁶Ibid., 145.

comments on its relevance to the question of Being. First of all, it should be noted that the Dyad is to Non-Being what the One is to Being.²⁶⁷ But just what is the One to Being?

The One, according to Reale, just is the Good²⁶⁸ and the Beautiful,²⁶⁹ and the Good just is the beautiful.²⁷⁰ It seems likely that Plato saw the One, the Good and the Beautiful as descriptions or modes of one and the same thing, as seen from different perspectives. Indeed, Reale states that “Beauty is a mode of the self-unfolding of the One in the sphere of being, or an unfolding of the highest Measure, by means of multifarious and multicolored refraction of Measure and Order into the different forms of the measured and the ordered, and, in this respect, it is the One made visible.”²⁷¹ Reale also notes not only that the One-Good-Beautiful is beyond and above being,²⁷² but that that which is the One-Good-Beautiful is, in a certain metaphorical sense, the cause of the Ideas, and specifically, of Being,²⁷³ as well as the principle of knowability, knowledge, truth, essence and morality.²⁷⁴ So the ultimate principle, the One-Good-Beautiful, is, in some sense, the very cause of Being, and, therefore, of the being of all that is. Reale, in fact, in making some comments on the *Lysis*, notes that the One-Good-Beautiful is the very foundation of Being.²⁷⁵

Plato’s Doctrine of Being

What is Being?

We will now consider Reale’s understanding of Plato’s approach to Being. It should, by now, be obvious that Being cannot possibly be the highest principle, or the all-encompassing and

²⁶⁷Ibid., 151.

²⁶⁸Ibid., 204-207, 220, 273, 281, 300, 357, 389, 420, 430.

²⁶⁹Ibid., 273, 299, 300-301.

²⁷⁰Ibid., 273, 299, 300.

²⁷¹Ibid., 301.

²⁷²Ibid., 139, 200, 203, 207, 246, 280, 313.

²⁷³Ibid., 139, 146, 148, 150, 151, 167, 200, 203, 207, 280, 312.

²⁷⁴Ibid., 207.

²⁷⁵Ibid., 280.

unifying principle, of Platonic philosophy—this spot is reserved for the ultimate principle, the One-Good-Beautiful. This means that, at best, being is to be found at the level of the forms. As we saw above, Being is placed, by Plato, at the level of the “Meta-Ideas” or the very great Ideas, yet is not even the highest, in the hierarchy, of those.²⁷⁶ Rather, above Being and non-Being are Unity and Multiplicity. This allows us to immediately situate being in the ontological hierarchy of reality, according to Plato: Being and non-Being make up one level of contraries in the realm of the highest Ideas. So, Being is an Idea or Form. Can we be more precise?

Reale is much more precise, both in explaining Plato’s conception of Being and in explaining his understanding of Non-Being. The platonic definition of Being, according to Reale, can be explained as follows: “being is produced by two primordial principles and hence is a synthesis, a mixture of unity and multiplicity, of determination and indetermination, of limit and unlimited.”²⁷⁷ Later Reale notes that “the Unwritten Doctrines consider Being as a mixture derived from the One-Being (and from the Dyad) given that the Good is above-being and not a mere being...The Being of which the *Sophist* speaks, therefore, is already a definite but very general Idea, and therefore is has the supreme Principles above itself.”²⁷⁸ Reale further qualifies this definition by noting that “Being for Plato is a mixture, and consequently the creation of the Demiurge is the creation of a mixture, that is, a passage from disorder to order, because being is this ordering of disorder, a unification of unlimited plurality.”²⁷⁹ Furthermore, “being as such contains within itself the limit and the unlimited (the *peras* and the *apeiron*), as equally essential ingredients. This statement holds for every being, beginning with the Ideas themselves.”²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶Ibid., 240.

²⁷⁷Ibid., 150. See also Reale’s quotation of Kramer on page 151.

²⁷⁸Ibid., 239. Cf. Ibid., 336, 421.

²⁷⁹Ibid., 333.

²⁸⁰Ibid., 267.

Being is characterized in the following terms, that “which is always (intelligible being) is not subject to generation and becoming, because it remains always the same; it is grasped by the intelligence with reasoning.”²⁸¹ As noted above, Being is particularly identified with the world of the Ideas.²⁸² This being said, an important distinction needs to be made between *Being-in-itself* and *Being-in-its-totality*. *Being-in-itself* (which might also be called Being as such, or Being *qua* Being), as we have just seen, should be considered as always the same, but, “Being in its totality ($\pi\alpha\nu\tau\epsilon\lambda\tilde{\omega}\varsigma\ \acute{\omicron}\nu$) is not to be regarded as immutable in solemn aloofness, devoid of intelligence, but it is to be conceived as necessarily including change, life, soul, and understanding.”²⁸³ The idea that is being expressed by the term *Being-in-its-totality* (which may also be called *the whole of Being*) is the entire collection of everything that in any way is. Inasmuch as sensible reality, the Demi-urge, and the Ideas all seem to be in some way,²⁸⁴ it is necessary to say that *Being-in-its-totality* is not immutable, even if *Being-in-itself* is. Reale makes this very same point when he says, “This does not mean taking the whole of Being (each and every Idea) as having these characteristics, but it means attributing a structural polarity to the sphere of ideal reality.”²⁸⁵

Looking to explain just what is meant by *Being-in-its-totality*, we should note that Plato, according to Reale, notes structural divisions in Being (by which we take him to be referring to being-in-its totality). That is, there is a hierarchy of “types” of Beings within the totality of Being. For example, Reale notes that “being can be divided into (1) self-sufficient beings (such as a man, a horse, the Earth, water, etc.); (2) beings existing in relation to other things, which can be

²⁸¹Ibid., 362.

²⁸²Ibid., 207.

²⁸³Ibid., 248.

²⁸⁴Indeed, even some of the ideas, by their very nature, imply movement, life, soul, etc.

²⁸⁵Ibid.

further subdivided into the categories (2a) contraries (as: even-odd, immobile-mobile, proper-improper, etc.); (2b) correlatives (as big-small, high-low, right-left, etc.).”²⁸⁶

It should be evident, then, that there is an important distinction between the Idea of being (or Being-in-itself) and the whole of Being (or Being-in-its-totality). Indeed, it seems, as noted earlier, that it is man’s awareness of, and interaction with, at least a part of the whole of Being, “the whole of what exists”, that raises, for human beings, the very question of Being-in-itself.²⁸⁷ In this sense, it would appear that for Plato there is no particular starting point that one must begin with in order to arrive at the question of Being, and to attempt to answer it. On the contrary, it is the whole of being itself, our very interaction with the changing sensible world that drives us to ask the question of Being, and to seek a foundation and principle (cause) for the changing sensible world.

Being, Eros, Poiesis and the Philosopher

Before we turn to Plato’s definition of Non-Being we should consider (1) the relationship between *Eros* and Being, (2) *Poiesis* and Being, and (3) The philosopher and Being. Interestingly enough Reale’s explanation of Plato’s understanding of the relationship between *Eros* and Being, as well as the way that Plato understands *Poiesis* and Being, is more informative about Being itself than his explanation of Plato’s understanding of the philosophical pursuit of Being. This is not, however, a fault in Reale’s explanation of these subjects, but is, as we shall see, an essential element of the platonic doctrine of Being.

²⁸⁶Ibid., 170. Cf. Ibid., 171-174.

²⁸⁷Ibid., 349.

Eros and Being

Eros, in the platonic dialogues is “always desire for what is felt to be lacking. This desire, and the lack which is essential to it, refers to beautiful and good things.”²⁸⁸ Reale gives a more precise definition a little bit later, “Hence, *Eros*, understood in its widest sense, is the tendency to the Good, and, indeed, the tendency to possess the Good forever.”²⁸⁹ As such, *Eros* is the intermediate drawing of all being towards each other as to the good and to the beautiful, and towards the perfect imitation of the bipolar principle the One-Good-Beautiful. As such, Reale notes, *Eros* is presented, by Socrates as “what connects all things to itself, as the bond of being.”²⁹⁰ Indeed, “Both in its perennial self-reproduction, and in its continual realization at various levels, in this dynamic-bipolar dimension, *Eros* guarantees the stability of the permanence of being.”²⁹¹

Poeisis and Being

In order to understand Plato’s doctrine of Being we also need to consider the relationship between *Poeisis* and Being.²⁹² In providing a definition of what Plato means by *Poeisis* we are immediately brought into contact with Being. Reale notes that for Plato, “‘Poiesis’ is a term that embraces every form of productive activity which is able to bring forth ‘being from nonbeing’.”²⁹³ Noting that the English term Poetry (or the French term *Poésie*) could be considered as a proper translation for the Greek *Poiesis*, Reale points out that “for the modern English reader, the term ‘poetry’ calls to mind only a limited range of things; specifically, the

²⁸⁸Ibid., 284.

²⁸⁹Ibid., 285. Cf. Ibid., 299.

²⁹⁰Ibid.

²⁹¹Ibid., 287.

²⁹²This is especially important as this Platonic theme has been taken up, in a very non-platonic manner, by a number of contemporary philosophers who are interested in the question of Being.

²⁹³Ibid., 323.

term has lost its connection with the verb *poiein*, ‘to do or make,’ and generally to produce.”²⁹⁴

Reale suggests that a better translation would be “creativity” or “creation”, inasmuch as we do not understand creation in the biblical sense of “creation *ex nihilo*”.²⁹⁵ Plato’s conception of *poiesis* is, however, a form of creationism, notes Reale, for “the productive arts (creation) are all activities involving a bringing forth of being from nonbeing.”²⁹⁶ It is important to understand, as we will see shortly, that nonbeing for Plato is not so much absolute nothingness, but the different, or the other. As such, *poiesis* is the bringing forth of Being from that which is other than that being that is being created. It can be seen, then, that *poiesis* is a term that can be applied not only to what we now count as the productive arts, but to any act by which something new is brought into being from that which it was not prior to the creative action of the “artist”.

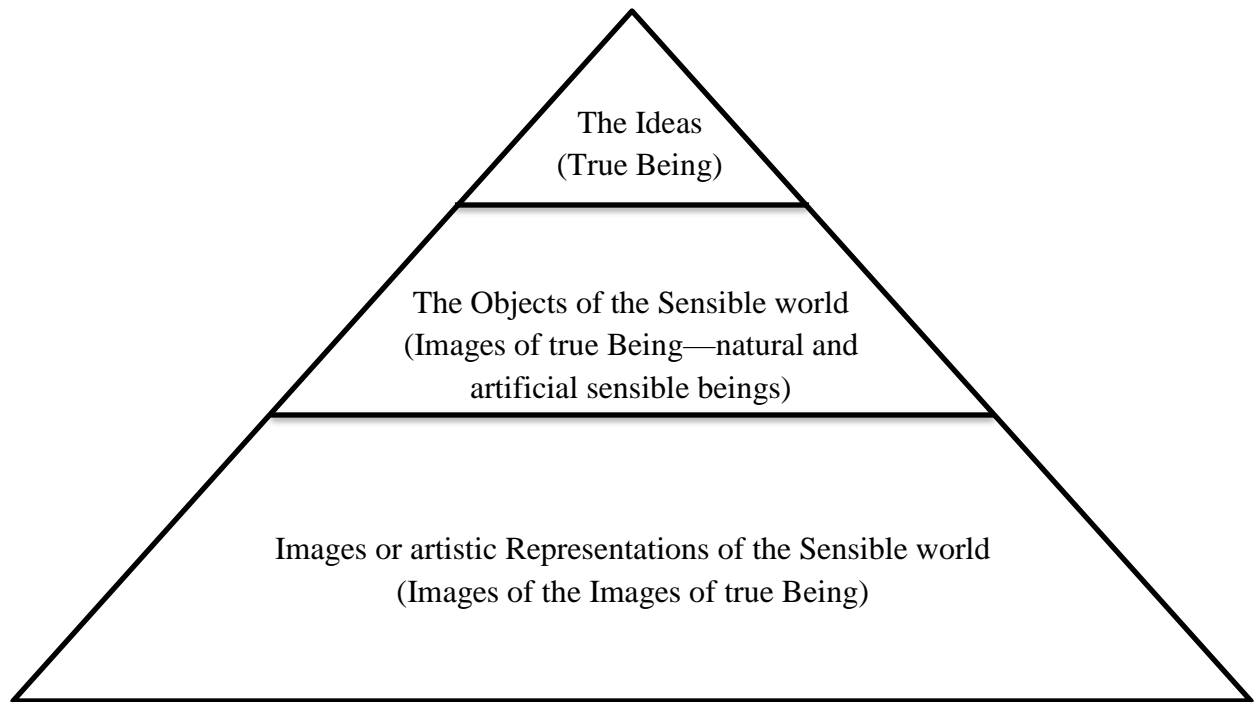
Before continuing it is worth our while to consider Reale’s analysis of the hierarchy of creators (of creative artisans), and of the Being of their work, in Plato. Here we find the enormous importance of the Demi-urge in platonic thought. This consideration brings us back to the ontological hierarchy of reality that we discussed above. Reale illustrates the Being of the work of the artisans by first noting three important creative levels of being:²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴Ibid.

²⁹⁵Ibid., 323-324.

²⁹⁶Ibid., 324.

²⁹⁷Ibid., 318.



Reale then takes the platonic example of the bed to point out how creation is carried out at each level of artistic being. He notes that the highest level, the idea of the bed, is created by the highest artisan – the Demiurgic God of Plato; the next level, the actual bed, is created by “the joiner”²⁹⁸—a human artist. Finally, the third and lowest level, the image of the bed, is produced by a painter or other artist that creates through imitation. This explanation is not as clear cut as we would like, and Reale notes this,²⁹⁹ however he also points out that Plato is adamant on the claim that the Demi-urge is, in some sense, the creator of the Ideas.³⁰⁰ It should be pointed out that there are, in a sense, two levels of Ideas within the group of general ideas: there are the ideas of “natural” sensible beings, and there are the ideas of “artificial” sensible beings (such as the bed). The Demi-urge is the creator not only of both groups of these Ideas, but, also, of the actual natural sensible beings which are modeled after the ideas of natural sensible beings (such as

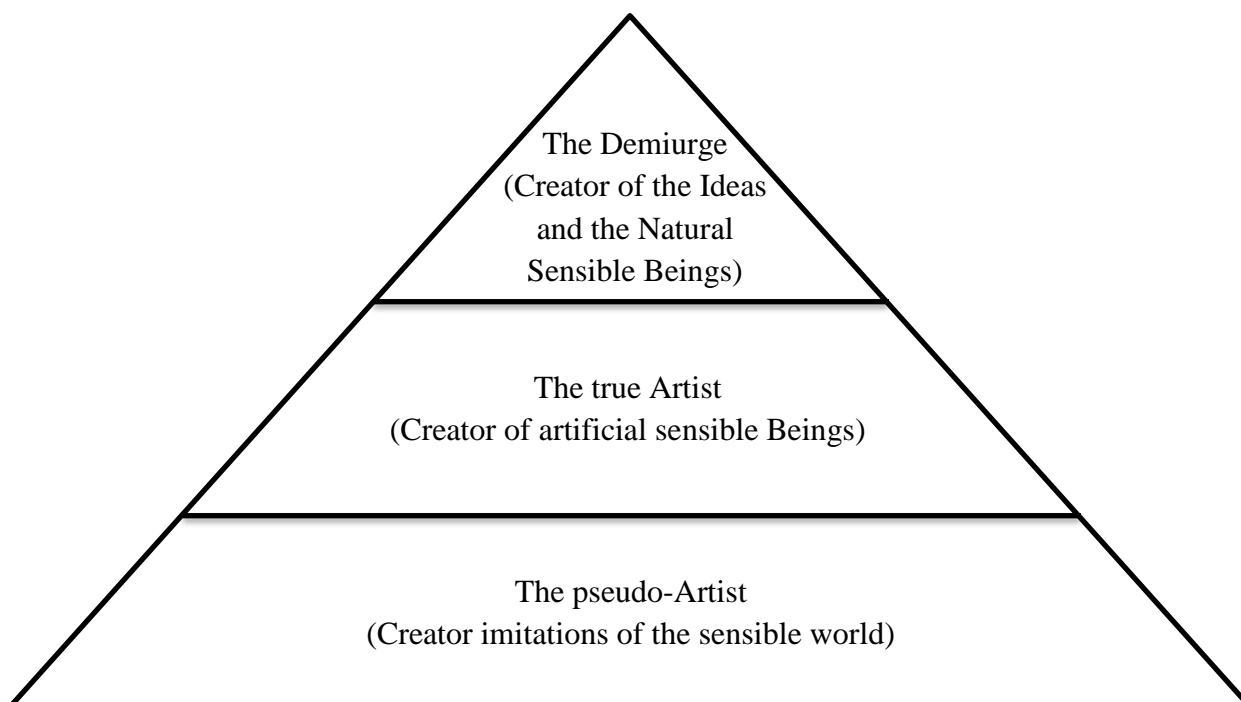
²⁹⁸Ibid., 319.

²⁹⁹Ibid.

³⁰⁰Ibid., 319-320.

horses, humans, and trees, etc.).³⁰¹ The human artist of the objects of the sensible world does not create the natural sensible beings, only the artificial sensible beings, and this by imitation of the ideas of artificial sensible beings.³⁰²

This bring analysis brings us to the hierarchy of artisans:³⁰³



The pseudo-Artist may be skilled, but their productions are not based upon knowledge of true being. Rather, their productions are imitations of changing imitations of true being. As such the value of their creations is significantly diminished. Moving up to the next level, the true artisans seek to know true being by contemplation of the forms, and seek to imitate, in their works, as best as possible true being. In this way, the true artisan is also imitating, and seeking to

³⁰¹Reale claims, for example, “In short, the divine Demiurge produces the whole realm of natural objects...All natural objects and the very elements from which they are derived (water, air, earth and fire) are produced by art and by the divine Intelligence. (Ibid., 324-325.)”

³⁰²Note the continuation of Reale’s claim in the previous footnote: “on the other hand, everything which is obtained using these objects [the natural objects, including the basic material elements, water, air, earth and fire] by combining and working on them in various ways, is produced by human art. (Ibid., 325.)”

³⁰³Ibid., 320-321.

emulate, the work and nature of the Demi-urge. Finally, at the summit of the hierarchy of artisans is the Demi-urge who alone is able to not only create the ideas themselves (based upon his contemplation of the highest bipolar principle), but is also able to perfectly imitate, in the creation of the natural world of sensible beings, the ideas. It seems, therefore, that the demi-urge, therefore, is the creator of true being, and it is the creative act of the demi-urge that provides us with the true meaning of *poiesis*: “to bring forth ‘being from nonbeing’.”³⁰⁴ The Demi-urge, in the fullest sense, is the true creator, as the Demi-urge is the creator of True Being. Every other creator, those in the two lower levels of the hierarchy, emulate the Demi-urge most when their creations bring into being something that is most like true being.

The Philosopher and Being

We will, at this point, simply note a short comment that Reale makes concerning the platonic philosopher’s relation to Being. Reale says “It is, therefore, no surprise that Plato describes the philosopher’s inquiry as a *yearning for being*, as a study capable of showing *that being which is always and does not stray through generation and corruption*, and like a conversion of the soul from *a day which is night to a true day*, and like *a true ascent to being*. He describes the sciences which prepare the soul for dialectic (and so for true philosophy) as *a winch which draws the soul from becoming to being*.”³⁰⁵ The true philosopher’s object of inquiry (that which the philosopher seeks to contemplate more than anything else) is true being. By True Being, as we have already seen, Plato is referring to the realm of the Ideas. If this is the case, then the true philosopher will not be content to remain in the first voyage (the analysis and study of the sensible world), but must pursue the second voyage.

³⁰⁴Ibid., 323.

³⁰⁵Ibid., 118-119.

What is Non-Being?

Having now considered Plato's doctrine of Being we can now provide Reale's understanding, which is entirely in line with the perennial interpretation of Plato, of Non Being. Non-Being, for Plato, just is, according to Reale, *Otherness* or *Difference*.³⁰⁶ Reale, at one point, summarizes ways in which we talk about non-being, "We thus speak of nonbeing in two very different senses: (a) one in which we understand it as the contradiction of Being, as a negation of Being; and another (b) in which we understand it as other than Being, that is, we understand it not as the contrary of, but as different from, Being. (a) In the first sense nonbeing cannot exist (because the negation of Being cannot be); (b) on the other hand, in the second sense, it can exist, because it possesses its own specific nature (the nature of otherness and of difference)."³⁰⁷ Though Reale draws out this distinction, he notes that "Plato-Eleatic Stranger says in so many words that nonbeing is, if it is understood in the sense of Otherness."³⁰⁸ He notes, in a concluding comment on the Demiurge, that "Nonbeing is not, for Plato, absolute, but the material Principle of excess, of the more-and-less, and of disorder; and this needs an opposed Principle with which to mix itself, so as to become being in the sense just given. In any case, speaking in the *Sophist* of nonbeing as different (in his particular sense of it), Plato says he had already said good-bye to nonbeing in the sense of absolute nothingness."³⁰⁹ It seems, then, that for Reale's version of Plato, Nonbeing is synonymous, or coextensive, with the Dyad, which, in some form of mixture brings about Being. This would certainly fit with his earlier statement to the effect that Simplicius had claimed that the Dyad was to be understood as nonbeing.³¹⁰ If this is the case, however, then

³⁰⁶Ibid., 242, 243, 421.

³⁰⁷Ibid., 241-242.

³⁰⁸Ibid., 242.

³⁰⁹Ibid., 421.

³¹⁰Ibid., 151.

Being is founded upon a mixture of the One-Good-Beautiful, and Nonbeing. It follows, then, that Being is, in a very important sense, less than Non-Being. Indeed, in light of the platonic doctrine of *Poiesis*, and the nature of Being (which we saw above), Being—true being—is created, in a sense, by the Demi-urge’s mixing of Nonbeing with the Demi-urge’s artistic imitation of the One-Good-Beautiful.³¹¹

Our Interpretation of Plato’s Approach to the Question of Being

In the introduction to the section on Plato’s approach to Being we note the importance, for this discussion, of a consideration of the philosophical contents of the *Parmenides*, the *Theaetetus*, and the *Sophist* (and in that particular order). In what follows, we will consider the particular contribution of each of these important dialogues to a proper understanding of Plato’s approach to the question of Being. This section will provide us with that material which is necessary for a proper articulation of Plato’s approach to the question of Being.

The Parmenides

The problem which Plato proposes for examination in this dialogue is the question, “can the theory of the forms really explain reality and our knowledge of it?” The question is

³¹¹See, specifically, Reale’s comment on the Demiurge’s creation of the Ideas: “But for someone who has trouble understanding what Plato means by a productive God (a Demiurge) of the bed which is by nature (the Idea of Bed), our philosopher makes use of the term *phutourgos* (φυτουργός), which in ordinary Greek means a planter (also father, or begetter), but is chosen for its specific reference to φύσις (nature) to express the concept of the Producer of nature, and to claim that He not only produced the nature of bed, but also made, in accordance with their nature, all the other things He created. (Ibid., 320.)” Note, also, Reale’s comment on the creation of the world by the Demiurge: “In his desire to construct the best and most beautiful thing, and guiding himself by the intelligible Model, which is the Living Thing itself, which is one and encompasses the totality of ideal Living Things, the Demiurge creates a single and unique universe, endowed with life and intelligence, which encompasses unitarily all sensible Living Things, which reflect the intelligibles. (Ibid., 398.)” See also, Ibid., 402-407. Note also Reale’s explanation of the arrangement of Plato’s system: “There are three great realms of reality that include all the further subdivisions: ideal, intermediate, and sensible. The being (οὐσία) that the Demiurge composes by mixing indivisible Being and divisible Being, provides the structure of intermediate Being, which, by being synthesized, mediates indivisible Being (the Being of the first realm) and divisible Being (the Being of the lower Realm). (Ibid., 407.)”

considered in specific connection to the question of the one and the many. The proposed purpose of this dialogue is found in Socrates challenge to Zeno: can Zeno prove that his theory holds, not only of sensible beings, but, also, of non-sensible forms.³¹² Indeed, the challenge of this book concerns primarily those things which are not objects of the senses but of Reason—the Forms. Parmenides begins by laying down a number of difficulties for the theory of forms, and then proceeds to take up Socrates’ challenge by showing how the Zeno-Parmidean theory of the One can be applied to the “things that are grasped by Reason.”³¹³ In the majority of this dialogue Parmenides is showing that the Forms cannot participate in each other, or, if they in fact do participate in each other, then they each participate in all the others. He proposes that if this is the case, then we are pushed into confusion and contradiction: X is both one and many, like and unlike, being and not-being, etc. Indeed, as many commentators have noted, the major part of this dialogue presents itself as a profound critique of Plato’s theory of Forms. That being said, many of the arguments only seem convincing because they are either un-nuanced, unqualified, or founded upon equivocation. As we will see when we consider the *Sophist*, this later dialogue is clearly interacting with some of the difficulties that are brought up in the *Parmenides*.

As many have already noted, it is highly unlikely that Socrates ever had this discussion with Parmenides. Parmenides lived circa 515-450, and Socrates circa 470-399. Socrates would have been about 20 years old the year that Parmenides died. Such a discussion is theoretically possible, but it is more likely that this dialogue is a dramatic confrontation between Parmenides’ approach to reality and the Platonic theory of Forms. The main actors in the dialogue are Zeno, the young Aristotle, Parmenides, and Socrates. It is important, for the proper understanding of a platonic dialogue, as mentioned above, to consider the characters that are used in the dialogue.

³¹²Plato, *Parmenides*, 129e-130a.

³¹³*Ibid.*, 130a.

Zeno is described as being in his late 30s, a disciple of Parmenides, and the author of a recent book which seeks to prove that all is one. Socrates is described as quite young. Compared to Zeno's late 30s Plato is trying to put Socrates in his late teens to early 20s, which is the age Socrates would have had to be if he were to actually have this discussion with Parmenides. Parmenides is the predominant character in this dialogue, and takes the role that Socrates normally plays in the Platonic dialogues—that of the teacher who questions the interlocutor in order to arrive at some conclusion. Parmenides is described as a venerable and distinguished philosopher who is probably in his mid to late 60s. In this dialogue, Socrates, who is portrayed as a brilliant young thinker, is also portrayed as in need of more education. Indeed, it is his theory of forms that seems to be the reason why Parmenides thinks that he needs to learn how to properly approach any given subject. In what follows we will consider three points that will be of importance for our understanding of the other two dialogues: Plato's approach to philosophy, Plato's discussion of Being and Non-Being, and Plato's discussion of the Forms.

The Parmenides on Philosophy

There are three relevant passages in the *Parmenides* concerning philosophy and the Platonic approach to philosophy. The first comment is related to the relationships between the Forms and the particulars, the second is Parmenides' explanation of the process of true philosophy, and the third concerns the knowledge of the Forms themselves. Both of these comments bring out difficulties with the Platonic theory of Forms. In the first place, Parmenides claims that Socrates has not yet been gripped by philosophy,³¹⁴ because Socrates has trouble explaining how the particular beings are related to the Forms. Rather than deal with this difficulty

³¹⁴Ibid., 130d-e.

Socrates is portrayed as attempting to avoid it. Parmenides says that this attitude shows that Socrates is more concerned with what people think than with pursuing the truth—an attitude that seems to be related to his youth. We learn two connected points from this comment. First of all, true philosophy does not acquiesce to the opinion of others, but, secondly, always pursues the truth (wherever it leads) in spite of what others may think. This reminds us of a comment made by Charles de Koninck in an address given to the bachelor class of 1951-1952, at Université Laval, in which he says, “Être attaché à l’opinion favorable des autres, c’est vulgaire. Nous sommes *alors* des êtres vendus à notre être objectif *dans la pensée si vaine des autres hommes*. L’intellectuel résiste difficilement à la flatterie. La critique lui devient impossible à l’égard de celui qui l’a flatté. Il ne refuse rien pour accéder aux honneurs. Sort misérable de la philosophie : on s’en occupe pour des raisons extrinsèques. « *Magis amica veritas* » (Aristote) »³¹⁵ Rather than pursuing the difficulties that he himself saw in his theory, the young Socrates avoided these difficulties, and, because of this, is described as non-philosophical.

The second comment about philosophy is the description that Parmenides gives of the process of true philosophy. In this section a method is outlined that is, in the rest of the dialogue, illustrated by an examination of the One. Parmenides notes that true philosophy asks of the objects that it is considering whether, first of all, they are or are not, and, secondly, how the being or not-being of that object affects things that are other than it.³¹⁶ In other words, true philosophy is concerned with the being and non-being of everything that falls under the wondering gaze of the philosopher, as well as the consequences of the being and non-being of that which is considered. Philosophy, then, true philosophy is a consideration of Being. This observation is of

³¹⁵Charles de Koninck, *Notes Sur nos Êtres Objectifs*, Extrait du cours spécial « Questions diverses » donné par Monsieur De Koninck aux étudiants inscrits au Baccalauréat en 1951-1952.

³¹⁶Plato, *Parmenides*, 135e-136b.

great importance, especially in light of the claim, made by some, that Aristotle was the first philosopher of Being. In truth, Aristotle's consideration of Being was nothing other than the continuation of what Plato considered to be the work of true philosophy.

The third passage is related to the knowledge of the Forms.³¹⁷ After demonstrating that only God could have knowledge of the forms, & therefore, that the Forms would be absolutely unknowable to man, it is pointed out that if this is the case, then philosophy is not possible. This discussion brings up two important points concerning Plato's theory. It is explicitly state that if (1) there are no Forms for things, and (2) no Form for each thing, then thought itself would be impossible. This is the case because if there is not "for each thing" "a character that is always the same", then there is no way to either know or think about anything.³¹⁸ It follows, from this, that the power of dialectic (discussion/discourse) would be entirely destroyed if there are no Forms. Not only could we not talk or think about anything, but philosophy itself would be impossible.³¹⁹ The point, here, is that some theory of Forms (though there may be many difficulties to work out along the way) is necessary for the very possibility of philosophy.

³¹⁷The question of Plato's treatment of knowledge, in the *Parmenides*, is, in itself, an interesting study. To know X, for Plato, is to know what X is (Ibid., 134a.). But, in order to know what X is, one must know the Form X. This is where the problem of the knowledge of the Forms comes in. The only things that present themselves to humans as objects of knowledge are the particular things in the world (Ibid., 134b. Which causes its own problems.); the Forms are not *in* the particulars things of the world that present themselves to us (Ibid.); Therefore, we cannot know the Forms through the particulars. But we don't have the form of knowledge in us (Ibid.), therefore, neither doe we know the Forms in themselves (Ibid., 134b-c.). All that we can "know", therefore, are the particulars, and not the Forms (Plato will attempt to define, without success, just what knowledge is—in relation to the particulars things—in the *Theaetetus*). Only the God—most likely a reference to what has become known as the demi-urge—can know the Forms (Ibid., 134c.).

³¹⁸Ibid., 135b-c.

³¹⁹Ibid., 135c.

The Parmenides on Being and Not-Being

It will be helpful to note some of the observations that Plato makes, in the *Parmenides*, concerning Being and Non-Being. The discussion of the *Parmenides* is primarily concerned with the One, but it is noted that this same method of philosophy should also be applied to the “Forms” of likeness and unlikeness, motion and rest, generation and destruction, Being and non-Being.³²⁰ The importance of this comment will not be lost on the person who is already familiar with the *Sophist*, for, aside from generation and destruction and Non-Being, the “Forms” of this list are the 5 great kinds that the Eleatic Stranger names in the *Sophist*. The 5 great kinds, as well as Non-Being, are, as we will see later in our discussion of the *Sophist*, said to be participated in by all of the Forms—including themselves. The first Platonic doctrine that we need to note, therefore, is that Being and Non-Being are Forms,³²¹ and, secondly, all the Forms are beings.³²²

A second doctrine that can be found in the *Parmenides* is that “to be” just is to partake or participate, in some way, in the Form “Being”.³²³ Indeed, to say “X is” is to say, in no uncertain terms, “X participates in Being.”³²⁴ On the other hand, that what “is not”, is said to partake in the

³²⁰Ibid., 136b.

³²¹Ibid., 136b.

³²²Ibid., 133c.

³²³Ibid., 141e-142a, 142b, 144b-c, 155e.

³²⁴Ibid., 142c. This claim was subject to a certain amount of debate, primarily centered around the *Sophist*, in scholarly articles surrounding Plato in the mid to late 1900s. Some of the questions that were of interest in this debate were: (1) Is there an existential sense of “is” in Plato? (2) What does Plato think that “X is” and “X is not” signify: an existential statement that need no completion (meaning simply that X has or does not have being) or an essential statement that is, as such, incomplete and should be understood as “X is F” and “X is not F”? (3) How many different significations for the copula are found in Plato? There was a blizzard of articles written debating these subjects, some concentrating on the *Sophist* alone, other considering Plato’s works in general. In order to become acquainted with the debates surrounding these questions see the following articles (this really is an incomplete list as there is much more that has been written on the subject): Robert Heinaman, “Being in the Sophist,” in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, v. 65, 1-17 (1983). Robert Heinaman, “Once More: Being in the Sophist,” in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, v. 68, 121-125 (1986). Lesley Brown, “Being in the Sophist,” in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, v. 4, 49-70 (1986). William J. Prior, “Plato’s Analysis of Being and Not-Being in the Sophist,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, v. 17, no. 2, 199-211 (1980). Charles H. Kahn, “Some Philosophical Uses of ‘To Be’ in Plato,” in *Phronesis*, v. 26, no. 2, 105-134 (1981). Bas C. Van Fraassen, “Logical Structure in Plato’s ‘Sophist,’” in *The Review of Metaphysics*, v. 22, no. 3, 482-498 (Mar., 1969). J. L. Ackrill, “Plato and the Copula: Sophist 251-259,” in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, v. 77, part 1, 1-6 (1957). Robert J. Flower, “G. E. L. Owen, Plato and the Verb ‘To Be,’” in *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science*, v. 14, no. 2, 87-95

Form “Not-Being”.³²⁵ Interestingly enough we are told that to say “X is not” is to signify that X does not participate in Being: “absence of being for whatever we say is not.”³²⁶ Based upon the claims concerning participation in Not-Being and what it means to say “X is”, we can infer that to say “X is not” is to say “X participates in Not-Being.”

It is commonly stated that prior to Thomas Aquinas no thinker ever even considered positing a distinction between Being and essence, however, it is interesting to note that Parmenides seems to make a distinction between the “Being of X” and “X itself” when he notes that: if X partakes of Being, then X is not itself Being. It follows, therefore, that if X partakes of Being, then X’s Being and X itself (one might say its *ousia* or essence) are different.³²⁷ In fact, as we will see, as we delve deeper into Plato’s doctrine of Being, there is a necessary distinction between Being and Essence for anything that is not, itself (or by nature), Being, but which can be said to “be”. This necessary distinction between the Being and Essence of any existing thing that is not, itself Being, is due to the fact that it can only be said to Be because it participates in the Form Being. It follows, then, that there is a distinction between Being and Essence in every Form other than Being itself, as well as in all particulars that can be said to be in any way.

A fourth doctrine that needs to be brought out, especially in light of Martin Heidegger’s work on Being, is that Parmenides seems to posit a necessary link, in a number of places, between Being and time. He notes, for example, that “was”, “has come to be” and “was coming

(Dec., 1980). G. E. L. Owen, “Plato on Not-Being,” in *Metaphysics and Epistemology*, vol. 1 of *Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Gregory Vlastos (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1971), 223-267. Edith W. Schipper, “The Meaning of Existence in Plato’s ‘Sophist’,” in *Phronesis*, v. 9, no. 1, 38-44 (1964). Jean Roberts, “The Problem about Being in the ‘Sophist’,” in *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, v. 3, no. 3, 229-243 (Jul., 1986). Frank A. Lewis, “Did Plato Discover the ‘Estin’ of Identity?,” in *California Studies in Classical Antiquity*, v. 8, 113-143 (1975). John Malcolm, “Remarks on an incomplete rendering of Being in the Sophist,” in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, v. 67, 162-165 (1985). More on this later.

³²⁵Plato, *Parmenides*, 162a.

³²⁶*Ibid.*, 163c-d.

³²⁷*Ibid.*, 143b.

to be” all refer to having been at a previous time—past being;³²⁸ and that “will be” and “will come to be” refer to what will be at some future time—future being.³²⁹ Having made this point it is noted that past and future being cannot be properly said to be. Rather, “is” and “comes to be” or becoming refer to the present time—to what now is, and can be properly said to be.³³⁰ Being, therefore, is to participate in the present—presence or now-ness. It follows from these observations that if X is not (was not, or will not be), then X has no being (in any sense of the word). In other words, if X cannot be temporally located, then X is not (does not participate, in any way, in Being). Inversely, if X is, was, or will be, then X can be temporally located—Being and Time are essentially related according to the *Parmenides*.³³¹

The Parmenides on the Forms

We have already noted Plato claiming, through the dialogue between Socrates and Parmenides, that the Forms must exist in order for philosophy to be possible, and this in spite of the fact that they are only knowable by the God (a point which will become important when we turn to our consideration of the *Theaetetus*, and even more important when we arrive at our interpretation of the *Sophist*). We have also already noted that there are difficulties in Plato’s explanation of the relationship between the Forms and the particulars. What else is there to say about the Forms? First of all, it should be noted that the Forms are described as being separate from (not, in any way in)³³² the many particulars;³³³ and that the particulars can be said to be *f*

³²⁸Ibid., 141d.

³²⁹Ibid., 141e.

³³⁰Ibid. It should, of course, be noted (and we will explain this in greater detail in the section on Heidegger) that the conception of time and temporality that is used by Parmenides is vastly different from that which is used by Heidegger; so much so, that they could not be understood (without equivocation) to be saying the same thing, in any way, shape or form.

³³¹Cf. Ibid., 151e-152a.

³³²Ibid., 133c.

³³³Ibid., 130b.

because they share, in some way, in the form of F-ness (which should come as no surprise to the reader of Plato).³³⁴ Furthermore, and this is important, the Forms are, each individual Form unto itself, unique beings.³³⁵ Note that Plato, though he notes difficulties with his theory of Forms, does not, in the *Parmenides*, change it in any significant way. Nor does he reject it. On the contrary, it must be true in order for philosophy to be possible. Therefore, the problems with the theory must be confronted and resolved, rather than avoided (which would be the reaction of the non-philosopher). The three lists of the Forms (what are most certainly Forms, those things which Socrates doubts are Forms, and those things for which there are no Forms) that are found in the *Parmenides* are well known and we will not outline them here.³³⁶

The Theaetetus

The *Theaetetus*, as mentioned above, is the first book in the trilogy composed of the *Theaetetus*, the *Sophist* and the *Statesmen*. The problem that is proposed for consideration in this dialogue is to discover just what knowledge is—that is, how do we know something?³³⁷ This dialogue must be read in the light of the *Parmenides*, and especially in light of the claim that because man only has access to the things of the changing sensible world, and the Forms are not *in* the things of the changing sensible world, therefore, only the God can know the Forms. We are not providing, in this dialogue, an overarching epistemology, but an attempt to understand just what it is to have knowledge of the things of the sensible world. In the course of the dialogue four definitions of knowledge are proposed and rejected: (1) Knowledge is whatever is taught by a

³³⁴Ibid., 130e-131e, 132d-133a, 133d.

³³⁵Ibid., 132a, 133c.

³³⁶Cf. Ibid., 129d-3, 130b-c, 131a, 131d, 134b-c, 135c, 136b.

³³⁷Plato, *Theaetetus*, 145e.

teacher,³³⁸ (2) knowledge is perception³³⁹ (whatever a man thinks, at any time, to be true),³⁴⁰ (3) knowledge is true judgement,³⁴¹ (4) knowledge is true judgement, with an account (*λογος*).³⁴² The final definition, which is also rejected,³⁴³ has become a very popular theory of knowledge (often referred to as the JTB theory of knowledge), as can be seen from a brief glance through a variety of introductory works on epistemology.³⁴⁴ The *Theaetetus* does not say much of anything about the question of Being, but it does serve as an interlude between the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist*, and sets the stage for the *Sophist*. As such we need to briefly survey some of the more important points that are brought up in the *Theaetetus*, as they relate to what we will see in the *Sophist*. We will begin by noting some interpretative keys to understanding the *Theaetetus*, followed by a note concerning Plato's description of the Philosopher, a note concerning Plato's approach to knowledge in this dialogue, and some comments on how Being is approached in this dialogue.

Interpretative keys to the Theaetetus

The main participants of the *Theaetetus* are Socrates, Theodorus and Theaetetus. The discussion takes place primarily between Theaetetus and Socrates. Theaetetus is described as a brave warrior,³⁴⁵ as having natural ability and intelligence,³⁴⁶ as resembling Socrates

³³⁸Ibid., 146c-d.

³³⁹Ibid., 151e.

³⁴⁰Ibid., 158e.

³⁴¹Ibid., 187b.

³⁴²Ibid., 201d.

³⁴³Ibid., 208b-c.

³⁴⁴Cf. Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A contemporary introduction to the theory of knowledge*, 2nd ed. (2003; repr., New York: Routledge, 2004), 220-227. Jonathan Dancy, *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* (1985; repr., Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 23-36. Louis P. Pojman, *What can we Know? An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (Stamford, CT: Wadsworth Thomson Learning, 2001), 80-163. Alvin Plantinga has recently, in attempting to respond to the Gettier counter-examples, come out with a very interesting version of the JTB theory which could be called Warranted True Belief. His main scholarly work on this subject can be found in his trilogy: *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³⁴⁵Plato, *Theaetetus*, 142b.

³⁴⁶Ibid., 142c, 144a-b.

physically,³⁴⁷ and, interestingly enough, as resembling the philosopher.³⁴⁸ As we will find out in the *Sophist*, to resemble the philosopher is not necessarily a good thing. Rather, the Sophist also resembles the philosopher. Though this is probably a later dialogue we find Socrates portrayed, as in the earliest Socratic dialogues, as seeking knowledge but not actually possessing any.³⁴⁹ Rather, having no knowledge himself of the subject under consideration he acts only like a philosophical midwife—having never had a child, knowing only how to bring children into the world and declare them bastard children, or legitimate children.³⁵⁰ It is also interesting to note that Socrates refuses to consider the Parmenidean theory of the One, in spite of recognizing that it is a necessary endeavor.³⁵¹ In light of what was said in the *Parmenides* this refusal might seem problematic—has Socrates still not been seized by philosophy? However, Plato will ultimately take on all of the great philosophers that inspired his approach to understanding the world, Parmenides and Heraclitus in the *Sophist*, and Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*.

The Theaetetus and the Philosopher

In the *Parmenides*, we were told that only God could have access to the Forms, seeing as the Forms are not in the particular beings which we have access to. In the *Theaetetus*, this declaration is slightly modified. The Forms are still not in the particulars, but there is a type of human-being that seems able to become like God through his pursuit of, and, at least, partial success at attaining, knowledge of the Forms. This human-being is what we commonly call the philosopher, a strange breed of man. In the *Theaetetus*, Plato does not allow that there is

³⁴⁷Ibid., 143e-144a.

³⁴⁸Ibid., 155d.

³⁴⁹Ibid., 150c, 157c, 161a-b, 210c-d.

³⁵⁰Ibid., 148e-151c, 210c-d.

³⁵¹Ibid., 183c-184a.

knowledge of particular beings, in fact all of the definitions of knowledge of the sensible world are rejected. Rather, Plato hints at another type of knowledge that is only available to one type of person—the philosopher. There are two observations that we can make about the philosopher and the beginning of philosophy from the *Theaetetus*.

First of all, in comparing the philosopher to the lawyer,³⁵² Plato describes the philosopher³⁵³ as a person who does not really pay attention to the things of this world that are important for most people (upbringing, relationships,³⁵⁴ position, prestige, wealth, property, etc.). Rather, the philosopher is concerned with everything and with what everything is. Rather than considering this or that man, the philosopher asks what man is, what man should or should not do, etc. As such, the concerns of this life are just not important for the philosopher, whose only purpose is to know truth, and by knowing truth to be like God in virtue (being just, pure and good) and in knowledge.³⁵⁵ The philosopher is brought up, therefore, in true freedom and leisure, constrained only by his desire to know truth. As such he appears, to everyone else, as a fool, and an idiot. “There are two patterns set up in the world.” says Plato, “One is divine and supremely happy; the other has nothing of God in it, and is the pattern of the deepest unhappiness.”³⁵⁶ We

³⁵²Ibid., 172d-177c.

³⁵³It should be noted that Plato is not saying that the following description applies to all those who “name” themselves “philosophers”. Rather, and this is one of the conclusions of the *Sophist*, there are those who “name” themselves “philosophers”, but who have not seen the Forms, and have no knowledge of them, and, therefore, are frauds—creators of likenesses—Sophists. It would be closer to Plato’s way of thinking to say that when we see someone to whom this description applies, we will then know that we are in the presence of a true philosopher, but we must not assume that because a person calls themselves a philosopher that this description applies to them. True philosophers, for Plato, are few and far between.

³⁵⁴Concerning the attitude of the philosopher, and the way in which the philosopher interacts with those around him, Socrates puts the following explanation into the mouth of none other than Protagoras, who is made to say that if a person who engages in discussion remembers that “he must be serious, he must keep on helping his opponent to his feet again, and point out to him only those of his slips which are due to himself or to the intellectual society which he has previously frequented”, then those who associate with that person will “seek refuge from themselves in philosophy, in the hope that they may thereby become different people and be rid for ever of the men that they once were. (Ibid., 167e-188a.)” We see here that the philosopher will engage in dialogue with the purpose of revealing the truth of things, and that it is also through dialogue that men are changed for the better.

³⁵⁵In 161c-d Plato notes earlier that philosophers are like God in that God is the sole possessor of all wisdom, and philosophers are those who, more than any others, seek to obtain wisdom (and succeed to some extent).

³⁵⁶Ibid., 176e.

become like that patten that we imitate.³⁵⁷ The philosopher imitates the pattern set by God (he who possesses all wisdom and gazes eternally upon the eternal Forms), and, so it is that the philosopher begins to resemble God. This is an important point to understand if we are to understand Plato. True knowledge, in Plato, is held only by the person who gazes upon the Forms. But the Forms are not visible to us, as they are not in the particular things of this world. The philosopher, however, is not concerned with the things of this world, but with that towards which this world points, and it is in this way that the philosopher comes to gaze upon the Forms, and gains wisdom.³⁵⁸ From this description we learn that the philosopher deals with essences (the Forms), sees this world only as an arrow that points to the “domain” of the Forms, and, therefore, that knowledge can be obtained in this world, but only by living in this world with one’s gaze fixed on the world of true being.

Secondly, the philosopher is also characterized by *wonder*,³⁵⁹ for all philosophy begins in wonder.³⁶⁰ This is what we might call the existential starting point of all philosophy (and, therefore, the existential starting point of the considerations that make up Plato’s approach to the question of Being). For those who are familiar with Aristotle we realize that Aristotle has no disagreement with Plato on this point, for Aristotle also thinks that all philosophy begins in wonder.³⁶¹

In our consideration of the *Parmenides* we saw that, for Plato, Being is a Form, the Forms are not in the particular things, that only God has direct access to the Forms, and that the only

³⁵⁷Ibid., 177a.

³⁵⁸Consideration of the *Phaedo* and the *Apology* allow us to add, perhaps, that the philosopher, by ignoring the sensible world so as to contemplate the Forms, is preparing for death. This preparation, pursuing only that which is eternal and unchanging in this life, will allow the philosopher, in the next life, to rise to the world of the eternal Forms so as to, like God, truly contemplate true Being.

³⁵⁹Plato, *Theaetetus*, 155d.

³⁶⁰Ibid.

³⁶¹Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982b12-13.

object of knowledge is the Forms (indeed, without the Forms we cannot even think or philosophize). We arrived at the conclusion that it seemed as if only God could actually possess knowledge. In the *Theaetetus* Plato notes that the philosopher is like God in the sense that the philosopher makes the Forms the object of his desires. Woken up by wonder, the philosopher turns from the particular things of this world to consider the Forms which they imitate, and, in this way (by imitating God), the philosopher approximates to knowledge. Indeed, we might draw the following analogy: as the particulars are to the Forms, so the philosopher is to God. As Being is a Form, it follows that insomuch as the philosopher, imitating God, gazes upon the Form of Being, the philosopher will be able to pose, and attempt an answer for, the question of Being.

The Approach of the Theaetetus to Knowledge

We have already noted that the purpose of the *Theaetetus* is not to define knowledge of the Forms, but knowledge of the changing things of sensible experience—the entire dialogue is asking if we can know the objects of perception.³⁶² Plato considers four different possible definitions of knowledge, only to reject them all. It has already been noted, in the *Parmenides*, that the Forms are not in the particular changing things, and in light of the reality of perpetual flux that plagues the realm of sensible reality, it is shown impossible to have knowledge of this changing world. This does not, as we have already noted, mean that no knowledge is possible, rather, the only thing that truly counts as knowledge is the intellectual union of the knower with the eternal and unchanging Forms—the realm of true being.³⁶³

³⁶²Plato, *Theaetetus*, 186d.

³⁶³*Ibid.*, 185c-e, 186a, 186e.

The Theaetetus and Being

Very little is said about Being in this dialogue. This should not come as a surprise for the primary object of discussion is knowledge of the changing world of sensible beings. We do note some familiar themes peeking through the cracks. First of all, Plato sets us up for the discussion in the *Sophist* by noting the relationship between Being and not-being, motion and rest.³⁶⁴ Secondly, we are also prepared for another theme that is seen in the *Sophist*, by the observation that though the realm of the sensible is a realm of becoming, there is a sense in which Being is common to these changing realities.³⁶⁵ Thirdly, we come to know Being and non-being, as well as the other Forms, when they are “perceived” by the soul when it is functioning through itself.³⁶⁶ In other words, we gaze on the Forms not in reality, but by the inner gaze of the soul—which we might call “reflection”. Plato also notes that truth is contingent on Being (not Being on Truth), and, indeed, that it is not possible to get at truth without first getting at Being.³⁶⁷ This means, of course, that those who do not push past the world of sensible reality, in order to reflect on the eternal Forms, will never seize truth. For unless we seize Being, Truth will always elude us.

We have now set the stage for our consideration of the *Sophist*. The *Parmenides* and the *Theaetetus* compose the intellectual (and also, in the case of the *Theaetetus*, the dramatic) background for a proper understanding of the *Sophist*. The *Sophist*, which is not the most popular of Plato’s dialogues, is one of the most important Platonic dialogues for gaining a proper understanding of Plato’s doctrine of Being, and it is to this that we now turn.

³⁶⁴Ibid., 153a.

³⁶⁵Ibid., 185a.

³⁶⁶Ibid., 185c-e, 186a, 186e.

³⁶⁷Ibid., 186e.

The Sophist

The many different interpretations of the *Sophist*, and the major debates that the *Sophist* has spawned, might seem curious when considered in the light of the main problem that is discussed in this dialogue: What is that curious beast that we call the sophist?³⁶⁸ It is in the context of the attempt to catch the sophist that Plato approaches the question of how we can distinguish between truth and falsehood. It is in the context of this question that Plato discusses the question of Non-being. Finally, it is in the context of the discussion of the question of Non-being that Plato discusses the question of Being. In order to get a better grasp of Plato's approach to the question of Being we will begin by providing a brief overview of this dialogue and the interpretative keys. We will then provide a short list of the key terms and the way in which Plato defines them. We will, thirdly, consider Plato's description of the philosopher, the statesman, and the Divine. We will next consider Plato's discussion of Being and Non-Being, and terminate with a summary of our observations.

Overview and Interpretative Keys to the Sophist

As has already been noted, many times, in order to properly understand any Platonic dialogue, we must first consider the dramatic context, including who the main actors are, and how they are portrayed. The *Sophist*, as the opening lines makes clear, is the sequel to the *Theaetetus*.³⁶⁹ Socrates, Theodorus and Theaetetus meet the day after the discussion that took place in the *Theaetetus*, in order to continue their discussion. This time, however, Theodorus and Theaetetus have brought a visitor. Theodorus is described, by Socrates, as respectful and just.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁸Plato, *Sophist*, 216e-217a.

³⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 216a.

³⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 216b.

Theaetetus, who we met in the previous dialogue (being described as resembling Socrates and the philosopher), and who will be the main dialogue partner in this dialogue,³⁷¹ is described as a young companion of Socrates who is relatively easy to handle (in a discussion) and is not a trouble-maker.³⁷²

The initial interactions of Socrates are quite interesting (especially in light of the different interpretations that have been given to this dialogue). It is Socrates that proposes the subject of the dialogue (what do the Eleatics think of the sophist, the statesman and the philosopher?),³⁷³ noting the difficulty that is inherent in any attempt to discern the relationship between these three types of people.³⁷⁴ Socrates notes that these three names are applied to different people, and proposes that it would be good to know why they are applied to these people—that is, why do we say that this person is a sophist, or a statesman, or a philosopher?³⁷⁵ It is important to remark something that Socrates says about “names” right at the beginning, as it comes into play later on in the dialogue. Socrates says that it is possible for one “name” to be applied to many different things, that many “names” can be applied to one single thing, and that it is possible to distinguish between kinds.³⁷⁶ These comments pose the problem of the one and the many, and the question of kinds (probably a reference to the Forms) as foundational for the dialogue; and each of these comments is discussed in greater detail later on in the dialogue. Having proposed the subject for discussion, Socrates then proposes two different ways in which the visitor might provide his answer: (a) a long monologue, or (b) by way of questioning.³⁷⁷ The visitor agrees to proceed by way of dialogue, and Socrates suggests that the best sparring partner for the dialogue is a young

³⁷¹Ibid., 281a.

³⁷²Ibid., 217d.

³⁷³Ibid., 216d-217c.

³⁷⁴Ibid., 216c-217a.

³⁷⁵Ibid., 216d-217e.

³⁷⁶Ibid., 217a.

³⁷⁷Ibid., 217c.

man.³⁷⁸ Socrates, then, is portrayed as a person who is accompanied by young men, teaching them by way of questioning (dialogue), in order to help them discover the truth. We should also keep in mind the description of the *Theaetetus* in which Socrates knows nothing of the subjects that he discusses, but acts as a philosophical midwife.

Although Socrates had refused, in the *Theaetetus*,³⁷⁹ to approach the Parmenidean doctrine of the One, Parmenides is omnipresent in the *Sophist*, though he is not one of the actors of this dialogue. This may be, perhaps, why Socrates does not play his usual role—the main interlocutor in the dialogue. Rather, we see Parmenides looming large in the background as the Visitor is said to come from Elea, and to have been heavily influenced by Parmenides.³⁸⁰ Parmenides' teachings are discussed at a number of points,³⁸¹ and Parmenides is used as a sparring partner, by the Visitor, in a dramatical philosophical dialogue.³⁸² In fact, in this dialogue, Plato has the Eleatic Visitor (a disciple of Parmenides) refute Parmenides in the presence of Socrates.³⁸³

Turning to the Eleatic visitor, he is presented as a disciple of Parmenides and Zeno (who were the main characters, alongside Socrates, in the *Parmenides*).³⁸⁴ The Visitor is also presented, by Theodorus,³⁸⁵ as a philosopher, which is quite important in light of the descriptions that Socrates gave us, in the *Theaetetus*, of the philosopher. Keeping in line with the descriptions of the philosopher in the previous dialogue the Visitor is described as divine,³⁸⁶ and Socrates asks

³⁷⁸Ibid., 217c-d.

³⁷⁹Plato, *Theaetetus*, 183c-184a.

³⁸⁰Plato, *Sophist*, 216a, 237a.

³⁸¹Ibid., 237a, 244e, 258d.

³⁸²Ibid., 241d, 244b-245e.

³⁸³Ibid., 241d-e, 244b-245e.

³⁸⁴Ibid., 216a.

³⁸⁵Thus, it is not Socrates who says that the visitor is a philosopher.

³⁸⁶Ibid., 216c.

if the Visitor is a “God of Refutation” who has come with the purpose of refuting their ideas.³⁸⁷

As a true philosopher it is only natural that the Visitor be described as divine, and we should expect him to have intimate knowledge of the Forms. That being said, Socrates cautions that it is very difficult to discern between genuine and false philosophers (sophists), thus casting doubt on Theodorus’ description of the Visitor.³⁸⁸ We are left in suspense as to whether or not this Visitor is a true philosopher, and, therefore, is truly divine—possessing knowledge of the Forms. The Visitor plays, in this dialogue, the role that is typically given to the character of Socrates;³⁸⁹ teaching the group, through questioning (the method being chosen not by personal preference, but out of respect for Socrates),³⁹⁰ how to catch the sophist.³⁹¹ The sophist is said to be a difficult prey to catch,³⁹² and so they begin by practicing the method (on an easier prey—the angler)³⁹³ by which they will catch him—the method of division.³⁹⁴ The dramatic context is now set for the hunt. Before moving on to the next section we will provide a brief outline of the dialogue.

1. Prelude to the Discussion (216a-218a)
2. The Discussion (218a-268d)
 - a. Introduction (218a-e)
 - b. Example of the Method to be used (218e-221c)
 - c. Use of the Method of Division in order to find the Sophist (221c-268d)
 - i. First attempt, and 1st appearance of the Sophist (221c-223b)
 - ii. Second attempt, and 2nd, 3rd, and 4th appearances of the Sophist (223c-224e)
 - iii. Third attempt, and 5th appearance³⁹⁵ of the Sophist (225a-226a)
 - iv. Fourth attempt, and 6th appearance of the Sophist (226b-231b)

³⁸⁷Ibid., 216b.

³⁸⁸Ibid., 216c-d.

³⁸⁹Ibid., 217a-end. Reminding us of the *Parmenides*, where Parmenides played the socratic role. It is surely not coincidence that in both the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist*, the socratic role is played by, in the first case, Parmenides, and, in the second case, a disciples of Parmenides.

³⁹⁰Ibid., 217d-217a.

³⁹¹Ibid., 218b.

³⁹²Ibid., 218d.

³⁹³Ibid., 218e.

³⁹⁴Ibid.

³⁹⁵This word can be interpreted in two, related, manners: (1) the sophist appears in the sense of being seen, or becoming present to the hunters, (2) the hunters have discovered the way in which the sophist could present himself—they have discovered, in a sense, the sophists’ disguises.

- v. Summary of Progress (231c-3)
- vi. Fifth attempt, and 7th appearance of the Sophist (232a-268b)
 - 1. Discovery that the Sophist is an imitator (232a-235d)
 - 2. Distinction between likeness and appearance-making (235d-236d)
 - 3. Preliminary analysis of appearance vs. being (236d-241c)
 - 4. Interaction with different approaches to Being and Non-Being (241d-249e)
 - a. Interacting with Parmenides (241d-244a)
 - b. Refuting Parmenides (244a-245e)
 - c. Interacting with Materialists and the Friends of the Forms (246a-d)
 - d. Materialists (246d-247e)
 - e. Friends of the Forms (248a-249a)
 - f. Conclusion (249a-e)
 - 5. Potential difficulty with conclusion (250a-e)
 - 6. Pushing Forward: How many names can apply to 1 being (251a-254b)³⁹⁶
 - a. No possibility of association (251e-252c)
 - b. Absolute association (252d)
 - c. Some association (252d-254b)³⁹⁷
 - 7. Pushing Forward: Most Important Forms and Interaction between them (254b-259e)³⁹⁸
 - 8. Speech, Being and Non-Being (259e-264c)
 - a. Can there be false speech and false belief? (260c-d)
 - i. The sophist would say no (260e)
 - ii. Further Examination (260e-264c)
 - 1. The Components of speech (261e-263b)
 - a. True Speech (263a-b)
 - b. False Speech/belief (263b-264c)
 - 9. Return to the 5th attempt to catch the Sophist, and the final appearance of the Sophist (264c-268d)

The 7 appearances of the sophist are as follows:

- 1. Having the expertise of hunting rich prominent young men (223b)
- 2. Having the expertise of soul-wholesaling words and learning dealing with virtue (224d)

³⁹⁶Note the link with the opening comments made by Socrates—who seems to have known ahead of time (1) that this would come up, and (2) what the answer would be.

³⁹⁷In this section, we are told that it takes an expert to know what can and cannot be associated (253a-c). It is proposed that this might be the philosopher (253c-254b), and similarities and differences between the sophist and the philosopher are noted (254a-b).

³⁹⁸Note the link with the opening comments made by Socrates, where he mentions distinguishing between the kinds.

3. Having the expertise of retailing things he made himself, dealing with virtue (224e)
4. Having the expertise of retailing words and learning (made by others), dealing with virtue (224e)
5. Having the expertise of making money from debates between individuals (225e-226a)
6. Having the expertise of soul-cleansing through the refutation (type of education) of empty beliefs (231b)
7. A game-player, a cheat and an imitator (235a): Imitator of the wise-man (perhaps a reference to the philosopher),³⁹⁹ he has the expertise of imitation through Socratic Method, but is insincere and without knowledge (268c-d).

Key Terms in the Sophist

That which is / is being (Gr. ὄντως εἶναι) – after having considered the different views that past philosophers had proposed concerning what it is to be, the Stranger presents a *preliminary* definition: a thing really is if it has any capacity or power (Gr. δύναμις) at all, that is, either that it has the capacity to do something to something else, or it has the capacity to have something done to it.⁴⁰⁰ In other words, that things that are – that which is – is nothing other than capacity or power.⁴⁰¹ This definition is Plato’s attempt to take changing reality into consideration. He feels obliged to admit that even those things which are entrenched in *becoming*, in some way *are*.⁴⁰² As such, that which is, or that which is being, just is the sum total of all that is, both that which is unchanging and that which changes.⁴⁰³ However, in light of what the Stranger will discover about non-being, it seems like we will be forced to say that Being just is that which is the *same* in something, as contrasted with that which is not.⁴⁰⁴ Note, in this later description, that

³⁹⁹Note that the “wise man” is described by Protagoras, in the *Theaetetus*, as “the man who can change the appearances – the man who in any case where bad things both appear and are for one of us, works a change and makes good things appear and be for him. (Plato, *Theaetetus*, 166d.)” That is, the wise man deals with appearances, changing them as he sees fit. A description that sounds very much like the sophist. The fact that this description of the wise man comes from the mouth of Protagoras is, no doubt, quite significant.

⁴⁰⁰Plato, *Sophist*, 247e, 248c.

⁴⁰¹Ibid., 247e.

⁴⁰²Ibid., 249b.

⁴⁰³Ibid., 249d.

⁴⁰⁴More on this later.

Plato is not saying what is common to all beings, but is, quite simply, saying that Being just is the sum of all beings—the totality of all that is.

That which is not (Gr. *μη ὄντος*) – not being just is one of the classes, or kinds, of Being, that permeates everything that is (as it partakes of Being⁴⁰⁵).⁴⁰⁶ That which is not, just is the *different/other than*, as it is contrasted with that which is.⁴⁰⁷ Indeed, the prefixes “not” and “non” are added on to the names that follow them in order to indicate something other than the names, or, rather, other than that to which the names following the negative prefixes are applied.⁴⁰⁸ The conclusion, then, is that when we say “not-being”, what we really mean is, that part of the being in question which is other than, or different from, Being.⁴⁰⁹

Appearances (Gr. *φαινόμενον*)⁴¹⁰ – early in the discussion appearances are defined as that which appears to be X, but, in fact, isn’t X, nor even like X.⁴¹¹ An appearance is a “seeming”, but not “being”⁴¹²—that is, it *seems to be X*, but *is not X*.

Copy or Image (Gr. *εἶδωλον*) – some X that is made similar to a true original (the real thing), but though being similar to the original is, in reality, other than the original.⁴¹³ It resembles or is like (*ἕτερον*) the true one.⁴¹⁴ In this comparison between that which truly is, and that which is its image, the words “true one” (*τᾶληθινόν*) can be construed as meaning “the one that really is” or “the real being”.

⁴⁰⁵Ibid., 260d-e.

⁴⁰⁶Ibid., 259b.

⁴⁰⁷Ibid., 258e.

⁴⁰⁸Ibid., 257c.

⁴⁰⁹More on this later.

⁴¹⁰Note also *φάντασμα* that is translated as *Appearance*, and is used synonymously by Plato (Ibid., 240d, 267a.).

⁴¹¹Ibid., 236b.

⁴¹²Ibid., 236e.

⁴¹³Ibid., 240b.

⁴¹⁴Ibid.

Imitation – (Gr. *Μίμησις* and cognates) is what happens when a person uses some instrument (i.e. – their body, their voice, etc.) to make something that is similar to (perhaps even indistinguishable from) something else.⁴¹⁵ It is the art of making images.

Speech (Gr. *Λόγος*) – said to be that stream of sounds that flows from the soul through the mouth, and contains affirmations or negations.⁴¹⁶

Belief/Thought (Gr. *Διάνοια*) – is said to be the same as speech, just without the sounds produced by the mouth—that is, a belief is the silent affirmation or negation that occurs within the soul.⁴¹⁷

Opinion (Gr. *Δόξα*) – a belief that is caused in a person by perception,⁴¹⁸ that is, the blending of perception and belief in a person.⁴¹⁹

A False Belief/opinion (Gr. *ψευδῆ δοξάζειν*) – “believing things that are contrary to those which are [or contrary to reality].”⁴²⁰

False Speaking (Gr. *ψευδῆς λόγος*) – early on in the examination of False speech we are told that to speak falsely is to say that those things which are, are not, and that those things which are not, are.⁴²¹ This definition is not modified, as we are later told that to speak falsely is to name or say things differently than they are, or to say of things that are not, that they are.⁴²² This definition of a falsehood resembles Aristotle’s definition of falsehood,⁴²³ once again demonstrating just how much Aristotle agreed with Plato.

⁴¹⁵Ibid., 267a-b.

⁴¹⁶Ibid., 263e.

⁴¹⁷Ibid., 264a.

⁴¹⁸Ibid.

⁴¹⁹Ibid., 264b.

⁴²⁰Ibid., 240d, 260c.

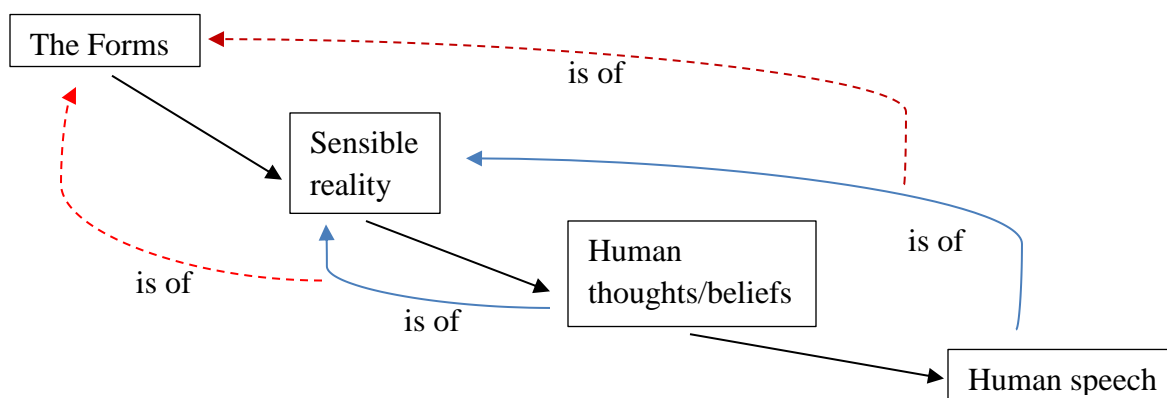
⁴²¹Ibid., 241a, 260c.

⁴²²Ibid., 263b.

⁴²³Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, bk. IV, ch. 6, 1011b26-28.

True Speech/speaking truly (Gr. *Λόγων ἀληθῆ*) – true speech is any speech that says, of X, that that which is, is.⁴²⁴

Our consideration of the key terms in the *Sophist* reveals a number of interesting points. First of all, Plato’s approach to true and false speech (truth and falsity) was accepted, as such, by Aristotle. Secondly, Plato struggles a great deal with providing a proper definition of Being and non-Being. We will look at this later. Thirdly, Plato does not seem to have changed, in any way, his basic understanding of Reality: the changing sensible realm is still relatively unknowable—clinging to Being by a thread. There is no knowledge of changing reality, only beliefs and opinions. There can be true or false beliefs and opinions. Furthermore, we see the following understanding of the relationships between the constituents of reality.⁴²⁵



Fourthly, we can see an interesting relationship between the opinions, beliefs, and speech of men, the things of sensible reality, and the Forms. The Opinions/Beliefs/Speech are to the

⁴²⁴Plato, *Sophist*, 263b.

⁴²⁵The black lines represent Plato’s understanding that the elements that are higher up on the “chain of being” are fundamental for the very “being” of those which are lower on the chain of being. The solid blue lines representing Plato’s understanding that human speech and thought have no impact on sensible reality nor on the Forms, but reflects sensible reality, and as such, points back to it. The red perforated lines represent the claim that human speech and thoughts, by pointing back to sensible reality, also point back to the Forms; But that human speech and thoughts do not change them.

sensible beings of changing reality, as these latter are to the Forms.⁴²⁶ Finally, we see a similar relationship between the terms appearance, copy/image, true speech/belief and false speech/belief. That is, false speech/beliefs are to appearances what true speech/beliefs are to the copy/image.⁴²⁷ In this dialogue the appearances look like the thing itself, but, in Reality, are nothing like it; whereas the images or copies, though not the thing itself, do look like it and resemble it. The idea that Plato is trying to get across, here is that false speech or false beliefs, though they may resemble that of which they are said, or believed; they are, when submitted to examination, nothing like them. True speech or true beliefs, though they are not that of which they are thought or said, do resemble it. This way of describing truth and falsity is a way of illustrating the claim, consistent throughout the dialogue, that truth is saying of what is, that it is, and of what is not, that it is not; and falsity is saying of what is that it is not, and of what is not, that it is.

The Philosopher and the Divine in the Sophist

The *Sophist* takes the descriptions of the philosopher that were given in the *Parmenides* and the *Theaetetus*, and develops them, so much so that the Eleatic visitor is forced to exclaim, have we found the philosopher in our hunt for the sophist?⁴²⁸ When the Eleatic Visitor arrives, with Theodorus and Theaetetus, we are told that the philosopher, though he is divine, is very difficult to recognize—it is as difficult to recognize a true philosopher as it is to recognize a god.⁴²⁹ Indeed, the philosopher is so difficult to recognize, not because he desires to be hidden or to deceive, but because he is seemingly surrounded by a very bright light that blinds all those

⁴²⁶Opinions/Beliefs/Speech : Changing sensible beings :: Changing sensible beings : the Forms.

⁴²⁷False speech/beliefs : appearances :: True speech/beliefs : copies/images.

⁴²⁸Plato, *Sophist*, 253c.

⁴²⁹*Ibid.*, 216c.

who are not accustomed to it.⁴³⁰ As such, it is that with which he surrounds himself (the divine realm of the Forms, and, specifically, true Being),⁴³¹ and the ignorance of those who are gazing at him, or at least trying to, (for they know not the divine),⁴³² that makes him so difficult to recognize. Indeed, says Socrates, the philosopher often appears (is falsely perceived by those who see him) as a statesman, as a sophist, or as insane.⁴³³ It might appear, then, that it will be very difficult to find the philosopher—though it is, more than anything, the philosopher that Socrates wants the Eleatic Visitor to find. In light of the difficulty of finding the philosopher, it is suggested that they begin their search with something a little easier (though by no means, as they are about to discover, easy to find). Though it is debatable whether or not we actually find the philosopher, we do learn something of the philosopher: his responsibility, his expertise and character, and his primary concern.

The responsibility of the philosopher is described as protecting knowledge. Indeed, the philosopher must use all of his acumen to fight off anyone who, through their theories, destroys the possibility of knowledge, understanding and intelligence, and, yet, who thinks they can say something about anything.⁴³⁴ We saw, in the *Parmenides*, that speech and philosophy are not possible if there are no Forms. In the *Sophist* we are told that it is the responsibility of the philosopher to defend the possibility of speech, thought and philosophy.⁴³⁵ This means that it is, according to Plato, the responsibility of the philosopher to defend ontological and epistemological realism, in some form at least. For, so thinks Plato, thought, speech, and philosophy itself, are only possible if some form of Realism is true. It is incredible to realise how

⁴³⁰Ibid., 254a. Surely a reference to the analogy of the cavern.

⁴³¹Ibid.

⁴³²Ibid., 216c.

⁴³³Ibid., 216d.

⁴³⁴Ibid., 249c.

⁴³⁵Ibid., 260a.

far from the tree so many so-called philosophers have fallen—or, perhaps it would be better to say that, for Plato, anybody who denies ontological and epistemological realism should not be considered a philosopher but, rather, a sophist. They may be convincing, and imitate quite well the philosopher, but they do not know the divine, for they have never gazed on it.

The philosopher is characterized as a thinker that does not give in to any form of reductionism,⁴³⁶ but seeks to integrate every single element of the reality that he is exploring.⁴³⁷ Furthermore, the “true philosopher”—the one who truly knows the Forms, is able to distinguish between the Forms, knows which Forms are able to associate with each other and which Forms cannot⁴³⁸—is said only of a person who has a pure and just love of wisdom.⁴³⁹ The *Sophist* agrees with the *Theaetetus* by saying that the reason why the philosopher knows the Forms in such an intimate way, is that the philosopher is not concerned with the things of this world, but seeks to stay as close as possible to the forms, and specifically the form of Being.⁴⁴⁰ Being is the philosophers’ primary concern, and that which he gazes on perpetually.

This is why it is said that the philosopher is divine. Not because the philosopher is God or a god, but because that which the philosopher seeks to emulate is God, and that which he seeks to know are the Forms. Indeed, the true philosopher seeks to gaze upon the divine (Being) and stay close to it, something that most people cannot do.⁴⁴¹ There is an interesting portion of the *Sophist* in which Plato compares the production of God and the production of the sophist. The God is

⁴³⁶Ibid., 249c-d. *Reductionism*, in any branch of thought, is the practice of reducing explanations to one element of the phenomena that needs to be explained, thus ignoring any other element, of the phenomena to be explained, that does not fit into the selected element. Take for example, *Materialism*, which reduces all that is to matter—ignoring, or trying to explain away, things that are not easily explained by matter; or *Idealism*, which reduces all that is to immaterial reality—ignoring, or trying to explain away, things that are not easily explained by pure immateriality.

⁴³⁷Ibid.

⁴³⁸Ibid., 253d-e.

⁴³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰Ibid., 254a-b.

⁴⁴¹Ibid.

responsible, through divine production, for original creation and divine copy-making,⁴⁴² whereas the sophist's type of production is all too human, and, rather than producing copies, produces appearances.⁴⁴³ The comparison here is quite interesting, especially in light of our observations concerning appearances, copies, and speech. The *God*, by looking at the Forms, creates the changing sensible world—not true being, but true copies of true being. The *philosopher*, triggered by his observation of the changing sensible world gazes on the Forms and creates true copies of the copies (in light of his knowledge of the Forms)—in speech. The sophist, however, not having knowledge of the Forms, and “knowing” only the changing sensible world, creates neither true being, nor true copies of true being, nor true copies of the copies (true speech), but, rather, appearances—false speech—copies of the copies that look like the true beings, but which are neither the true beings, nor even like them.

Being and Non-Being in the Sophist

The best way to approach Plato's treatment of Being in the *Sophist* is to follow the progression of the dialogue as the reader is taken step by step through one of the most profound discussions to be found in any of the Platonic dialogues. The first approach to Being is made in a discussion about appearance-making. It is stated that there is a relationship between appearing (*φαίνεσθαι*) and seeming/opinion (*δοκεῖν*) and not being (*μὴ εἶναι*).⁴⁴⁴ There is, furthermore, a relationship between not being and saying false things, or things that are not true (*εἶναι δὲ μὴ* and *ἀληθῆ δὲ μὴ*).⁴⁴⁵ Appearances seem to be, but they, in some sense, are not. How is it that what appears to be, is not? The answer to this question does not appear in this part of the *Sophist*, but

⁴⁴²Ibid., 265e-266a-d.

⁴⁴³Ibid., 268d.

⁴⁴⁴Ibid., 239d-240c.

⁴⁴⁵Ibid., 236e.

this whole problem seems to be trading on an ambiguity. That is, they are not distinguishing between (1) being in some qualified sense (as in “X is f.”) and being absolutely (as in “X is.”), and (2) not being in some qualified sense, and not-being absolutely. “X is.”, and “X is not.”, are contrary *existential* declarations.⁴⁴⁶ “X is f.” and “X is not f.” are contrary *essential* declarations. According to the *Parmenides*, when someone says, simply and without qualification, “X is” or “X is not”, they are making an absolute existential statement about what we might call the existence of X. The Platonic way of putting this would be to say that (1) to say “X is” is shorthand for saying “X participates/partakes/imitates the form Being.”; (2) to say “X is not” is shorthand for “X does not in any way participate in/partake in/imitate the form Being”; Or, “X participates in/partakes in/imitates the form Non-Being.” Note the way that “X is not” is explained in the *Parmenides* as compared to the *Sophist*.⁴⁴⁷ Though the form of non-Being is mentioned in the *Parmenides*,⁴⁴⁸ it is not used to explain what is meant by “X is not.”

As the dialogue proceeds, the relationship between false predication and non-being is noticed, and lamented, by the Visitor, who notes that Parmenides had always denied that this relationship was even possible (which may explain why the form of non-Being is mentioned by Socrates in his dialogue with Parmenides,⁴⁴⁹ but is not used by Parmenides to explain what is meant by “X is not”).⁴⁵⁰ In the *Sophist* the Visitor explains that that which is not ($\tau\acute{o}\ \mu\eta\ \acute{o}\nu$) is ($\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu\alpha\iota$), because otherwise we will be unable to explain how falsity ($\psi\epsilon\tilde{\nu}\delta\omicron\varsigma$) could possibly come into being ($\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\acute{\iota}\gamma\upsilon\epsilon\tau\omicron\ \acute{o}\nu$). Therefore, non-Being must, in some way, Be.

⁴⁴⁶ It should be noted that we are, in this paragraph at least, not using the word “existential” in the contemporary sense of “existential”, which tends to see “existence” as lived experience which forms character. Rather, we simply mean, a declaration that is referring to the existence (or non-existence) in reality, or the Being (or non-Being), of the being.

⁴⁴⁷ The previous way of saying “X is not” is the way that it is explained in the *Parmenides* (Plato, *Parmenides*, 141e-142c, 155e, 162a, 163c-d.) The latter is the way that it is explained in the *Sophist*.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 136b.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 136c-d.

This brings up the question of that to which “that which is not” (*τὸ μὴ ὄν*) applies. Here “That which is not” is treated as a predicate. If it is a predicate, then it could be said of some X. This creates a major difficulty. How could “That which is not” be said of “That which, in some way is”?⁴⁵¹ The following consequences are drawn out by the Visitor:

1. “That which is not” cannot be said of “that which is”.⁴⁵²
2. But “that which is” is said of that which we think is “something”,⁴⁵³ and this because “something” is always said of a “being”.⁴⁵⁴
3. Therefore, “that which is not” cannot be said of “something”,⁴⁵⁵ because “something” is said of a “being”.⁴⁵⁶
4. If somebody does not say “something”, then they say “nothing”.⁴⁵⁷
5. Therefore, it is not the case that a person who does not say something, thereby saying nothing, speaks, but says “nothing”.⁴⁵⁸ In other words, they are not saying anything, but by not saying anything it is not the case that they are saying “nothing”.
6. It follows, then, that it is not the case that a person who says “that which is not” is speaking.⁴⁵⁹

In this way the Visitor shows that false speaking seems to be impossible. The same ambiguity is present here as was noted earlier concerning “X is” and “X is not”.

The Visitor goes on to propose, that which seems fairly straightforward, that “That which is” and “that which is not” can never belong together.⁴⁶⁰ We can illustrate this claim with two

Venn diagrams:

⁴⁵¹Plato, *Sophist*, 237c-e.

⁴⁵²Ibid., 237c.

⁴⁵³Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴Ibid., 237d.

⁴⁵⁵Ibid., 237c.

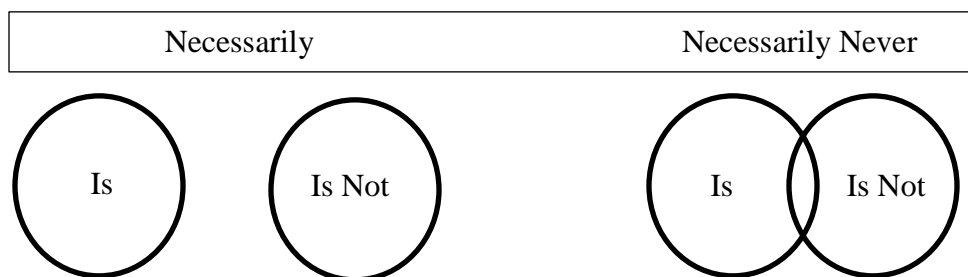
⁴⁵⁶Ibid., 237d.

⁴⁵⁷Ibid., 237e. Notice the obvious equivocation on the terms “say”, “something” and “nothing”.

⁴⁵⁸Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰Ibid., 238a.



But in spite of the fact that the above observation appears to be evidently true, it seems that we can indeed talk about Non-Being. In fact, it seems that we cannot say that non-Being is not without talking about non-Being.⁴⁶¹ It is quite impossible to talk about “that which is not” without attaching “being”, “one/unity” or “plurality” to it.⁴⁶²

This leads us to a consideration of what it means to be a likeness. When we talk about copies, likenesses, etc., we are comparing the copy to the “true thing”—that of which it is a copy. We see, here, the link between truth (*ἀληθινόν*) and Being (*ὄντως*). When we compare a copy with the original, we say that the original is the “True Being”. The Visitor notes that by “true” we really mean “really” Being, as opposed to not really being but only imitating.⁴⁶³ The imitation, or copy, is said to be not true, by which we mean is not really that which is.⁴⁶⁴ The true being really is, the copy “is” as a likeness of the “true”, real, being.⁴⁶⁵ In this way they arrive at the conclusion that “that which is not” really is, but, not being a true being, is a form of copy.⁴⁶⁶ It is worth noting, at this point, that the general picture that is being painted of the ontological makeup of reality is nothing more than stereo-typical Platonism. That is, those things which are (true-real-

⁴⁶¹Ibid., 238d-239a.

⁴⁶²Ibid., 239b.

⁴⁶³Ibid., 240b.

⁴⁶⁴Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶Ibid., 240c.

beings) are the Forms and that the particulars “are not”, in a sense, though they “are”, in a different sense (as copies of the Forms). Plato’s analysis of language (for that is really what is being considered in this dialogue – true and false speech) is based upon the ontological relationship between the Forms and the particulars. The sophist is portrayed as attempting to convince us that “that which is not” (the appearances) “truly are” (at least copies, at most, the Originals). The only person, as we have seen, who could dream of refuting the sophist is someone who knows the things which truly are (the Forms). Only God and philosophers (by their imitation of God)⁴⁶⁷ know the Forms, therefore only God or the philosophers can refute the sophist. This should provide us with an interpretive key for this dialogue—only a philosopher can refute the sophist, and the Visitor refutes the sophist.

At this point it seems as if the sophist will escape, and, it is, therefore, suggested that in order to really catch the sophist they will have to reject and refute “father Parmenides”⁴⁶⁸ by pointing out that that which is not, is (in some way), and that that which is, in some way, is not.⁴⁶⁹ It is at this point that that dialogue begins moving away from an *existential* analysis of Being towards an *essential* analysis of Being. Indeed, the phrase “in some way” is just another way of saying “in a qualified manner”. As mentioned earlier, this is one of those areas of the *Sophist* where we find ambiguities in the approach to Being. Whereas “X is” and “X is not” are often used in the *Sophist*, and the other dialogues, to refer to the existential meaning of “Being”—where we are saying either that there is or is not, in act (or present), some X; we here see Plato moving away from this type of explanation of Being. More on this as we proceed.

⁴⁶⁷Ibid., 254a-b.

⁴⁶⁸Ibid., 241d-e.

⁴⁶⁹Ibid.

This brings us to the first ever “history of ontology” to be recorded in writing.⁴⁷⁰ We are provided with a brief history of different ways that “Being” has been understood (3 things, 2 things, 1 thing, or some combination of the preceding).⁴⁷¹ The more serious positions are considered in the notorious war between the giants and the gods. Here the giants are described as arguing that “that which is (Being)” is only physical (matter),⁴⁷² whereas the gods say that “that which is (Being)” is only to be found in the eternal Forms, whereas that which is physical is only pure becoming.⁴⁷³ The Visitor thinks that it is relatively easy to demonstrate that the materialistic position is self-contradictory and false (a point with which Socrates would certainly agree),⁴⁷⁴ for Being is not in matter alone.⁴⁷⁵ This discussion brings us to our first definition of Being “a thing really is if it has any capacity [power] at all, either by nature to do something to something else or to have even the smallest thing done to it...those which are amount to nothing other than capacity [power].”⁴⁷⁶ Being, then, (that which is) is either that which is able to cause a change in others, or that which is able to be changed by another, or that which has both of these capacities. In the terms of one of Plato’s most well-known disciples we would say that Being, that which is, is either that which has active potency, that which has passive potency, or that which has both. This is not a bad definition, though it might appear to be damaging for the Platonic theory of the Forms (unless it could be shown that the eternal Forms are causally efficacious, or can be affected), as it seems that the Forms cause no change in anything, nor are changed, as they are only objects of knowledge and of imitation. Plato likely sees this possible difficulty for his theory

⁴⁷⁰Some have proposed that Aristotle was the first to be truly interesting in the history of philosophy, but, as we see here, this is simply not the case. He may have put more emphasis on it than Plato, but it would seem that he was only repeating what he saw Plato doing.

⁴⁷¹Ibid., 242c-e.

⁴⁷²Ibid., 246a-b.

⁴⁷³Ibid., 246b-c.

⁴⁷⁴Cf. Plato, *Phaedo*, 96a-99d.

⁴⁷⁵Plato, *Sophist*, 246d-247c.

⁴⁷⁶Plato, *Sophist*, 247e, trans. White.

of Forms, for in the section that follows he has the Stranger present the questionable argument that to be known is to be changed, and, therefore, that though the Forms do not change anything, they do have the power to be changed because they have the power to be known.⁴⁷⁷ But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

Following the preliminary definition of Being we are presented with a very interesting overview of what appears to be the Platonic theory of Forms. The Visitor argues that the position of the gods is no better than the position of the giants—that is, they both engage in a form of Reductionism. First of all, that which is immaterial is that which truly is, anything that is material is in constant flux.⁴⁷⁸ True Being never changes, it is eternally the same.⁴⁷⁹ It follows, then, that the preliminary definition of Being could only be applicable to the particular beings of the world of becoming, and, therefore, only to material things.⁴⁸⁰ The Visitor, therefore, would appear to be attempting to refute not only Parmenides and the Materialists, but Socrates and Plato as well. It might appear that in order to show the error of Platonic ontology the Visitor presents the argument that even the Forms change—for “to be known” causes a change in the thing that is known.⁴⁸¹ As noted above, this argument, far from falsifying Platonic ontology actually shows that Platonic ontology is ultimately able to accept the preliminary definition of Being.

It is concluded that both that which changes (the beings of the particular sensible world) and that which does not change (the Eternal unchanging Forms), must both be admitted as Being (though in different ways).⁴⁸² The Visitor concludes, as we noted above, that it is the responsibility of the philosopher to defend against both forms of reductionism: (a) those who say

⁴⁷⁷Plato, *Sophist*, 248c-249b.

⁴⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 248a.

⁴⁷⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 248c.

⁴⁸¹*Ibid.*, 248d.

⁴⁸²*Ibid.*, 249b.

that that which is (“everything”) is at rest (Parmenides),⁴⁸³ and (b) those who say that everything is in flux (the Materialists and Heraclitus). It seems, then, that Plato succeeds in the *Sophist*, through the Eleatic Visitor, in doing that which the character of Socrates put off in the *Theaetetus*—a refutation of Parmenides. The true philosopher must demand that “Being” be said of both that which is at rest and of that which is in flux.⁴⁸⁴ Note the subtle shift from “Being” considered as “beings”—things that are, to “Being” considered as “the totality of all that partakes in Being”. It is important to point out, however, that there is a sense in which, if we really want to know just what Being and Non-Being are, then we need to consider just how Being and Non-Being are said of everything that is said to Be or to Not-Be. It follows, then, that what is said of Being must be applicable to anything that is said to Be. It is the famous quest of Socrates, “I don’t want to have a list of X’s, I want to know what is common to all X’s?”

This analysis brings the Visitor and Theaetetus to the conclusion that if both rest and change “are”, then, necessarily, “Being” is some third thing.⁴⁸⁵ It is here that the theory of association is presented as a solution to the difficulty that was brought up in the *Parmenides*, and which has, once again, raised its ugly head—the relationship between the Forms.⁴⁸⁶ The theory of association posits that some things are able to “blend/associate” with others, and some things cannot.⁴⁸⁷ As noted above, it is the philosopher who knows what Being, and the other Forms, can and cannot blend with.⁴⁸⁸ We noted, above, that the Visitor remarks that the reason why it is so difficult to recognize both the philosopher and the sophist is that the philosopher is hidden away in Being (it is that which he gazes upon), and the sophist is hidden with Non-Being. But what

⁴⁸³The doctrines of the *Parmenides* are surely in view in this discussion.

⁴⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 249c-d.

⁴⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 250a-e. It should be noted that Rest, Change, and Being are, all three, listed in the *Parmenides* as those things which are, most certainly, Forms.

⁴⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 251d-253a.

⁴⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 252d-253a.

⁴⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 253a-244b.

could he possibly mean by this? After all, we have been, slowly but surely, working towards the conclusion that Non-Being, just as Being, is a Form. Is Plato saying that the sophist knows at least one Form? It would seem more likely, remaining in the context of this dialogue, that the Visitor is saying that the sophist deals in “appearances”—that which looks like true being but is not in any way; whereas the philosopher, like God, deals in “copies” of True Being—that which looks like True Being, and, in a way, is. The sophist not only deals in appearances, but, indeed, appears as many different things (i.e. – the philosopher, the statesman, etc.). The conclusion of the theory of association is that there are some Forms that necessarily associate with everything—each other, all the other Forms, and all of the particular “beings”. Those Forms that associate with everything are the great kinds: Being and Non-Being, Change and Rest, Same and Difference.⁴⁸⁹ Anything that is, in anyway (including all of the other Forms), participates in or is associated with Being. Anything that is not, in anyway (including all of the other Forms), participates in or is in association with Non-Being. This is even true of Being and Non-Being who both participate in Same & Difference in order to be what they are and not their opposite (Being is the same as Being, and Being and different from Non-Being, and vice versa).⁴⁹⁰ In this way Parmenides is refuted and we are shown that Non-Being in some way is: Non-Being (that which is not), just is the different as it contrasted with that which is.⁴⁹¹ Plato then applies these observations to speech in order to explain what falsity is.⁴⁹²

⁴⁸⁹Ibid., 254d-259c.

⁴⁹⁰Can we see here the beginning of the law of identity and the law of excluded middle?

⁴⁹¹Ibid., 258d-e.

⁴⁹²Speech is said to be one of the things that associates with Being—that is, it “is” in some way (Ibid., 260a.). Plato goes on to provide us with an analysis of how we use speech to “signify” something about Being (Ibid., 261e-262a): (1) Names/Nouns signify that which is, and (2) Verbs describe the actions of that which is. (3) The shortest form of speech is the existential judgement—that is, saying something about that which is, becomes or will be (“X is F” or “X F’s”). (4) False speech is the blending together, in speech, that which is not with that which is (that is, saying of what is, that it is not, in the very way that it is, and vice versa). (5) False Speech, therefore, is a being that is only an appearance of a real being—the real being “being” truth (Ibid., 263e-268d.).

The dialogue is really a profound attempt to refute Parmenides and the confusion that he created for Plato's ontology in the dialogue bearing his name. The necessary elements for Plato's solution to the antinomies of Parmenides are all already present in the *Parmenides* (the Forms of Being, Non-Being, Rest, Change, Same and Difference, as well as the notion of association between the Forms). Plato's basic response to the question of Being is that Being is a Form in which anything that "is" participates. It may seem as if Plato's ontology will be refuted by the Visitor, but, in fact, it is finally vindicated without any major modifications: The realm of the Forms is still the realm of True Being, the realm of the sensible world of becoming still imperfectly imitates the Forms (the sensible beings are in a sense). Anything that can be said to "Be" is thus, because it participates in the Form Being.

All of this, however, does not remove the fact that there is a fundamental ambiguity with Plato's treatment of the statements "X is" and "X is not". His basic position is that when we say "X is", what we are saying is "X is f"—where "f" equals some Form. When we say "X is not", what we are saying is "X is not-f"—where "f" equals some Form. It looks like Plato turns the existential question of Being ("What does it mean to say 'X is'?") into an essential question of Being—to say that X is, is to say X is f. The reason for this is probably that it is not Plato's purpose, in this dialogue, to consider the question of Being, but to show how it is possible to say something falsely. The closest we come to a definition of Being is the preliminary definition provided by the Visitor, which neither influences the discussion that follows it, nor the definition of Not-Being (which is said to be the different in relation to Being). The preliminary definition of Being was that a thing "is" if it has the power either to change, to be changed, or both. It seems, then, that if Plato had remained on the *existential* or *ontological* level, in his discussion of Being, he would have said that that which "is not" has no power either to be changed, to change something or both. Rather than remain on the ontological level, he seems to move immediately to

the essential level, saying that “to Be” is “to be f”. In this sense, then it appears that Plato’s philosophy is not a philosophy of Being, so much as a philosophy of Essence. Being just is a Form—an essence.

Concluding Observations

It seems that the Visitor has succeeded, through the Socratic Method, in giving an account of the sophist. Considering the dialogue as a whole we see that they first determine that the sophist presents himself (or appears) as an expert in the universal science (the knowledge of everything).⁴⁹³ It is then determined that this is not possible—it is impossible to know everything (by implication, there is no universal knowledge). If this is the case, then the sophist himself “is not”, in a sense. The sophist only “appears” to be wise, when in reality he is nothing but the poor imitation of the philosopher. In truth the sophist is only an expert at playing games with words, giving those who hear him the impression that he is a philosopher. The sophist, through the productive expertise of imitation, appears to be a philosopher.⁴⁹⁴ This imitation, of course, makes it quite difficult to catch him, unless one is a philosopher, and, therefore, actually able to discern between the Forms (Being, Rest, Change, Same, Difference, etc.) and which Forms can, or cannot, be acquainted. The sophist uses similar techniques as the philosopher, but without knowledge. The sophist claims to know everything, and, so, discusses similar subjects as the philosopher. The sophist even claims to accomplish the same basic thing as the philosopher. There are, however, some very important differences.

1. The philosopher does what he does for the sake of truth; the sophist for money.
2. The philosopher speaks and acts from knowledge; the sophist from ignorance.

⁴⁹³Ibid., 234a-b.

⁴⁹⁴It might be interesting to note that whereas the sophist calls himself a wise man, the true philosopher calls himself a lover of wisdom and others call him a wise man.

3. The philosopher is actually able to cure the soul of ignorance; the sophist creates more confusion.
4. The philosopher reveals that which is; the sophist fabricates the appearance of that which is, but is not.
5. The philosopher deals with Being; the sophist with non-Being.
6. The philosopher is able to discern between the Forms, and knows which Forms mix and which Forms don't; the Sophist has neither this discernment nor this knowledge.

Based upon some of the descriptions of the sophist, one might be led to think that the Eleatic Visitor is attempting to show that Socrates is a sophist (or, on the other hand, that Plato is portraying the Visitor as a sophist). This is only an “appearance”. The conclusion of the dialogue not only vindicates Socrates (leaving the reader with the impression that Socrates is a true philosopher), but also seems to vindicate the Visitor (for only a true philosopher is able to distinguish between the Forms, and catch the sophist). This dialogue succeeds in accomplishing what it set out to do, to catch the sophist. The discussion of, and comparison of, Being and Non-Being (Appearance), True Belief and False Belief, True Speaking and False Speaking, though important for understanding Plato’s views of these subjects, is not the primary purpose of this dialogue. Rather, the discussion of these subjects, rather, a supporting discussion used to support the claim that the sophist is an expert producer of imitations (appearances).

Though this dialogue could almost be read as an apology for Socrates, it does contain a number of important claims on the subjects just mentioned. Some of the thoughts “appear” to be anti-platonic (for example, when the Visitor discusses the views of the friends of the forms). This, however, is but illusory, as the Visitor goes on to vindicate, as we saw, the Platonic understanding of the Forms (and of the philosopher as the one who contemplates the Forms). In the end Platonism is seen to be true. We also find, in this dialogue, a number of claims and discussions that were probably quite influential on Aristotle, such as, the definitions of truth and error, the relationship between truth and Being, the relationship between speech and Being, and the short historical survey of past philosopher’s thoughts on Being.

Being and non-Being are presented as Forms that are associated with all of the other Forms, and all the particulars, but which are also, both different and the same, at rest and changing. These six forms are presented as the foundational Forms in which everything else participates. Materialism and pure Idealism are both refuted, as is Parmenides.

Plato approaches the question of Being through a theory of predication. It should not, however, be thought that his theory is, therefore, not connected to the “mind-exterior world”. On the contrary, the primary question, related to Being, is, “how do we say of those things which are, that they are?” Indeed, Julius M. E. Moravcsik notes that “The force of Plato’s argument is that in our ways of acting and talking we commit ourselves to the existence of moral characteristics as much as we commit ourselves to the existence of anything else.”⁴⁹⁵ Moravcsik states, a little later in the same article, concerning the ontological and semantical realms, that “the two are not sharply separated, and each helps to explain the other.”⁴⁹⁶ Plato’s primary approach, therefore, to the question of Being, is by asking how predication applies to that which is. The answer, in true Platonist “form”, is that predication is true of what is because of how that which is participates (or does not participate) in the Forms (and specifically the Form Being).

Conclusions concerning Plato’s answer to the Question of Being

Plato’s Ontological System

Before we can consider Plato’s approach to the Question of Being we need to provide an overview of Plato’s answer to the question of Being. We have, now, considered the way in which a number of prominent scholars understand Plato’s doctrine of Being. We have also considered

⁴⁹⁵Julius M. E. Moravcsik, “Being and Meaning in the *Sophist*,” *Acta Philosophica Fennica*, Fasc. XIV (Helsinki, 1962), 36.

⁴⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 77.

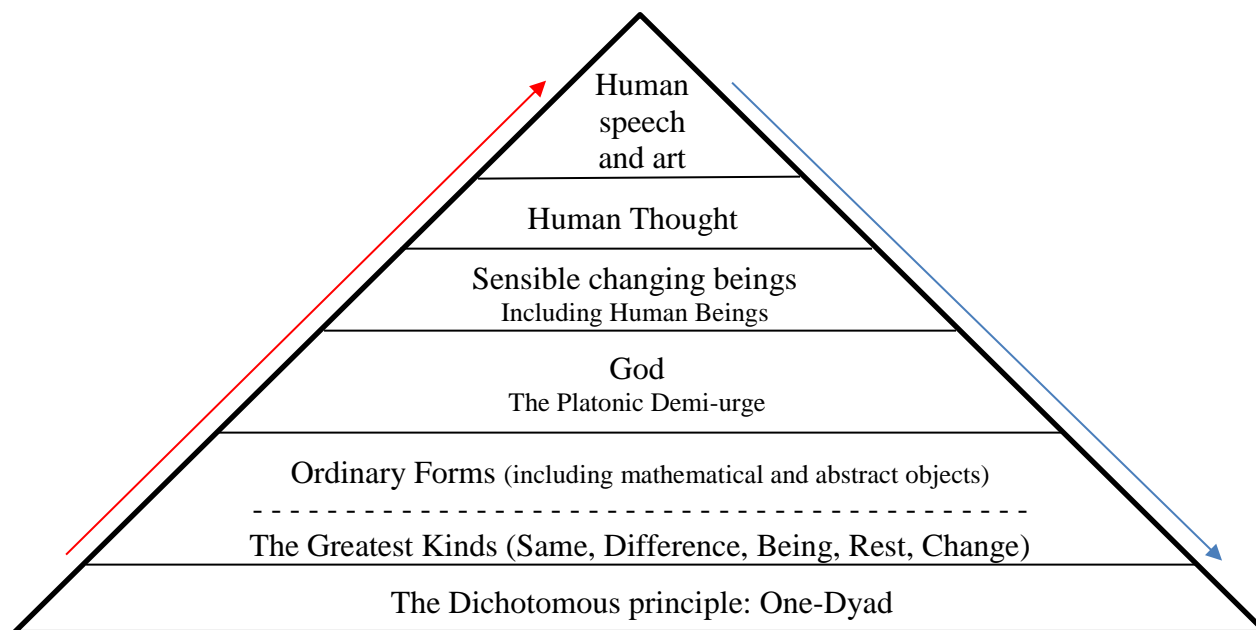
what Plato says about Being in what are probably the three most important dialogues for understanding Plato's doctrine of Being: *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, and *Sophist*. How, then, does Plato understand Being?⁴⁹⁷ The truth of the matter is that we cannot understand Plato's doctrine of Being unless we understand his entire portrayal and comprehension of reality—what we might call the totality of Being.

Foundational to Plato's doctrine of Being is the Heraclitean doctrine of perpetual flux. Plato accepts the notion that everything in the sensible world of particular beings is in constant flux—nothing remains the same, everything changes. He recognizes, however, that if everything, without exception, changes, then not only is it impossible to know what (the Socratic pursuit) is virtuous, but it is also impossible to engage in philosophy, and all speech is meaningless. It seems, then, that there must be something that does not change, yet it is obvious that the sensible world of particular being is a world of perpetual becoming. In true Socratic form Plato proposes that there must be some unchanging thing that is not only the foundation for meaningful language, but which is also, somehow, the foundation for the “beings” of the world of perpetual “becoming”—for though everything is changing, we are able both to recognize that the Socrates that we parted with yesterday (after the discussion of the *Theaetetus*) is the same Socrates that we meet again today (for the discussion of the *Sophist*); we are able to talk about changing Socrates as if, in spite of his changes, he remains the same. That which is common and unchanging is not in the things, it seems, for then either the things would not change, or the common unchanging things would change. So they are separate, yet imitated. We now have the theory of Forms.

Plato, then, adheres to what is today called ontological realism (there are real beings and natures that exist) and epistemological realism (those real beings and natures are knowable). He

⁴⁹⁷References in Plato, for everything that we will say below, can be found in the preceding analyses of the *Parmenides*, the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*.

argues, as we saw above, that philosophy, and speech itself, is not possible unless both ontological and epistemological realism are true—that is, unless there are real beings and natures that are knowable. Plato’s approach to reality could be illustrated as follows:



In this illustration, the lowest part of the pyramid represents that which is foundational and necessary for that which rests upon it.⁴⁹⁸ The red arrow, pointing to the top of the pyramid, represents, not causality, but foundational relationships—the higher levels imitate/associate/participate, somehow, in the lower levels. The blue arrow, pointing to the base of the pyramid, represents vertical representation – that is, the higher levels point back to the lower levels by representing them in some way.

⁴⁹⁸One might also invert the pyramid talking not of that which is foundational (which creates the image of some lower level supporting some higher level), but, rather, talking of the lower levels flowing down from the higher levels (using, perhaps, the image of a waterfall or river which flows down from its source). There is another way of inverting this pyramid, which is, I propose, the way in which Heidegger develops his ontology. One might turn Plato on his head and claim that Human speech and art is the foundational principle out of which the rest flows or grows.

We have included, in order to represent Giovanni Reale's understanding of Plato's ontology (based upon the unwritten doctrines), the supposedly most foundational level in this pyramid, in which we find the dichotomous principle: the One-dyad. Though this should, according to Reale, provide us with a more complete understanding of Plato's ontology, it does not necessarily add to our understanding of Plato's doctrine of Being. One might say that it should modify our understanding of Plato's doctrine of Being, because it places something else as ontologically prior to Being. Yet even without this added ontologically more foundational level there is already something else prior to Being in the Platonic ontological hierarchy of the Forms: Sameness and Difference.

In Plato's understanding of the Forms, as portrayed in the *Sophist*, Being and Non-Being are ontologically dependent on Sameness and Difference. With this understanding of Platonic ontology, we now come to the prickly question, what is, for Plato, Being?

Being as Form

This question has been subject to an enormous amount of debate through the 20th century, with such philosophical heavy-weights as G. E. L. Owen, J. L. Ackrill, John Malcolm, Gregory Vlastos, Richard S. Bluck, Paul Ricoeur and Stanley Rosen weighing in on the subject. Everybody seems to agree that Plato portrays Being not only as a Form, but as one of the great Forms or Kinds (μέγιστα γενῶν). Being, furthermore, is that Form that is imitated (or participated in) by anything that can be said, in any way, to be. In other words, Being is that in which anything that, in any way, is, participates; or, Being is that which is common to everything that, in any way, can be said to be. We can see, in this answer, two important elements: (1) that there may be many different "ways" or manners of being (or of participating in Being), and (2) that these "ways" or manners of being can be discovered through the analysis of the predication of

Being. Though this entirely platonic answer does not seem to answer the question, “what is Being?”, neither is it the only answer that Plato provides to this question. Consider some other answers that have been proposed.

Being as totality

A second way in which Plato talks about Being could be referred to as the *totality of Being*,⁴⁹⁹ by which Plato refers to the *extension* of Being, includes both changing and unchanging beings, material and immaterial beings, the Forms and the Particulars, sensible beings and super-sensible beings, temporal and eternal beings. Being is common to all these things, but the question remains, what is Being?

Being as *δύναμις*: The Preliminary definition of Being

The closest we come to a *qualitative* or *essential* answer to the question of Being is the preliminary answer given by the Visitor: Being is *δύναμις* – power. Being is power to change, or power to be changed, or both. Francesco Fronterotta suggests that the doctrine of Being (and the theory of Forms), as Plato reformulates it in the *Sophist*, must be interpreted in light of the definition of Being as *δύναμις*. Fronterotta explains that “En substance, le fait que l’être *possède* (κεκτημένον) une *δύναμις* désigne cette appartenance comme essentielle, fonde l’être sur la base d’une *δύναμις*. . . en soi le terme *δύναμις* implique déjà une ‘aptitude à’, une ‘capacité de’, une ‘ouverture vers’, donc une possibilité ontologique (non seulement une éventualité plus ou moins probable) d’établir des relations et de construire un système de rapports de participation.”⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁹Cf. *Sophist*, 248E-249A “τῶ παντελῶς ὄντι” which could be translated as “all that is”, “the totality of being”, or “every being”.

⁵⁰⁰Francesco Fronterotta, “L’être et la participation de l’autre: Une nouvelle ontologie dans le Sophiste,” in *Les Études philosophiques*, no. 3, Platon (Juillet-Septembre, 1995), 321.

Being is said to be *δύναμις*, but does Plato accept or reject this definition. Fronterotta says, “Nous chercherons au contraire à montrer que la formulation du discours ontologique de l’Eléate et l’articulation de son analyse ne sont possible qu’à la condition de conserver cette nouvelle définition de l’être. »⁵⁰¹ The rest of his article seeks to prove that Plato has not only defined Being as *δύναμις* to be moved or to move, but that his entire ontology is changed, in the *Sophist*, to take this new definition into account. The conclusion of the majority of Platonic scholars has been that Plato rejects this new definition as applied to the Forms.⁵⁰² In order for Fronterotta’s theory to work we must understand Plato as providing a definition of the Form Being (responding to the essential problem), and not as describing the totality of Being (the extension problem). Fronterotta turns to this question, therefore, by noting that “Il faudrait se demander encore de quelle type de réalité est l’être qui admet en lui-même le mouvement, si c’est l’être véritable, ou s’il s’agit d’une expression générale qui désigne l’ordre des éléments qui existent à différents niveaux, et qui englobent aussi bien l’être des idées que le devenir des choses sensible. »⁵⁰³

Fronterotta presents three arguments in his attempt to prove that Plato is describing true Being, the very nature of Being itself. In his first argument, he claims that *τὸ παντελῶς ὄν*, which we translated above as the totality of Being,⁵⁰⁴ must be “opposed”⁵⁰⁵ to *τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν* which he translates as “non-être absolu, à ce qui n’est pas, d’aucune manière”.⁵⁰⁶ Fronterotta argues that if *τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν* refers to “that which in no way is”—absolute non-being, then *τὸ παντελῶς ὄν*

⁵⁰¹Ibid., 323.

⁵⁰²Cf. Auguste Diès, *La définition de l’être et la nature des idées dans le Sophiste de Platon* (Paris: Félix Alcan, Éditeur, 1909). Richard S. Bluck, *Plato’s Sophist: A commentary*, ed. Gordon C. Neal (Manchester, Great Britain: Manchester University Press, 1975), 93, 101. Julius M. E. Moravcsick states that “This is not a definition of the Form of Existence, but merely an attempt to characterize the class of existents. (Moravcsick, “Being and Meaning in the ‘Sophist’”, 37.)”

⁵⁰³Fronterotta, 329.

⁵⁰⁴Fronterotta agrees entirely with this translation as can be seen from his translation “la sphere de l’être (Ibid.), and his comments on pages 339-341.

⁵⁰⁵Ibid., 329.

⁵⁰⁶Ibid.

must “*désigne l’ordre des réalités qui sont, réellement et pleinement.*” In other words, “that which in no way” is must be the *contrary* of “that which truly is”—which would refer, in Platonic terminology, to the Forms alone. Therefore, so it would seem, τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν, refers to the Forms alone, and, therefore, the definition of Being as δύνάμις, must apply to the Forms.

Fronterotta’s argument might seem quite convincing, however, when we consider these statements in light of the Square of opposition,⁵⁰⁷ we are forced to admit that the opposite, or contrary of the extension question (All beings are being in some way) remains an extension question (No beings are being in some way). In other words, the contrary of a list of things that are (all these things are, in some way), is the negation of that list (none of these things are, in any way). As such, it is simply false that the contrary of “that which truly is” is absolute non-being.⁵⁰⁸ Regardless of how we turn this, the opposite or contrary (or even contradiction) of a proposed quantity is the negation of that quantity—NOT the *quality* of that which is under discussion.

Now Fronterotta is, for the purpose of this argument, interpreting τὸ παντελῶς ὄν as referring to that which “truly” is (quality); however, as we see, both in a footnote on the same page and in his later discussion of the proper translation of this term, he does not want τὸ παντελῶς ὄν to refer *only* to the *intensity or quality* of Being (truly being versus being mixed with becoming or being in some way but not truly), but, he claims, it must refer, *at the same time*, to the *extension or quantity* of Being (the totality of all things that can be said, in any way to be).⁵⁰⁹ This, however, seems to beg the question against the possibility that Plato is here talking only about the extension of being (that is, that some things that can be said, in some way, to be, have

⁵⁰⁷Where All S is P is the contrary of No S is P.

⁵⁰⁸That is, unless by “absolute non-being” we intend to give a description of the extension of non-Being—that there is nothing that in anyways is.

⁵⁰⁹Fronterotta, 329fn3, 339.

the power to move or to be moved), and not about the intensity of Being.⁵¹⁰ That τὸ παντελῶς ὄν can be translated as “that which in any way is”, or “the sum of everything that in any way is”, is admitted by Fronterotta, who, however, maintains that this phrase must *also* refer to the intensity of Being (that which truly is vs. that which is by imitation).⁵¹¹ Fronterotta seems to want τὸ παντελῶς ὄν to mean one thing when applied to the preliminary definition of Being (essence of Being), and something else when discussing extension of Being.

The extension of Being and the intensity of Being are answers to two different ways of interpreting the question of Being—“What is Being?” We can understand this question as asking for a list of everything that can be said to be in any way, or we can understand this question to be asking for the nature of “Being”—that which is common to everything that in some way is. The answer to the first interpretation is *extensive*. The answer to the latter is *essential* (or intensive). There seems to be no reason to think that Plato has combined these two very different answers (which he frequently treats as different).⁵¹² If, rather than engaging in an interpretation of the *Sophist* that would ultimately contradict the claim that in order for there to be knowledge there must be something that is unmoved—a theme that is common to Plato (as noted above), we read this section of the *Sophist* in light of Plato’s already well-established and well-known ontology, as illustrated above, then we will tend to interpret τὸ παντελῶς ὄν in its most natural rendering, referring not to essence of Being but to extension of Being, as “that which in any way is”, or, “the totality of being”, “all being”. It would seem, then, that Fronterotta’s first argument does not help him prove his position on Plato’s ontology.

⁵¹⁰It also seems that he is committing the error of equivocation: using τὸ παντελῶς ὄν, when it is convenient, to refer primarily to “that which truly is”, and, later, when he discusses how we can prove that soul and intellect can be said to be, to use τὸ παντελῶς ὄν to refer to “that which, in any way, is”. Now, words and phrases can be used to mean different things, but using the same name in two different ways, in order to prove one’s position sounds a lot like equivocation.

⁵¹¹Fronterotta, 329fn3.

⁵¹²Cf. Plato, *Euthyphro*, 6d-e.

The second argument that Fronterotta presents is based upon the claim, made by the Visitor, that if we do not allow that Being just is *δύναμις*, then *νοῦν* is impossible.⁵¹³ Fronterotta notes that this term *νοῦς* just is the term that is used to refer to knowledge of true Being, and not to knowledge of changing beings.⁵¹⁴ Knowledge of the forms is not possible, according to Fronterotta's interpretation of the *Sophist*, unless the Forms, and specifically the Form of Being, are characterized by *δύναμις*—to be moved or to move. But this knowledge must be possible, for Plato, therefore, Being just is *δύναμις*—to be moved or to move. One problem with this argument is Fronterotta's questionable interpretation of *νοῦν*, which, in the text to which he is referring (249b5-6), is typically translated as “mind”,⁵¹⁵ “intelligence”,⁵¹⁶ and, in French as “l'intellect”.⁵¹⁷ Fronterotta would like this term to refer to knowledge of the Forms.⁵¹⁸ The context, however, does not permit such an interpretation, for in the very same section, just a couple lines later, the Stranger distinguishes between knowledge (*ἐπιστήμην*), wisdom or reason (*φρόνησιν*), and mind (*νοῦν*)—that in which both knowledge and wisdom can be found, and, incidentally, opinion (*δόξα*) as well. As we stated earlier, and this seems to pose a second problem for Fronterotta, Plato, throughout his dialogues, never ceases to claim that knowledge is only possible if unchanging, eternal Forms exist.⁵¹⁹ In the section which we are currently considering, the

⁵¹³Fronterotta, 330.

⁵¹⁴Ibid.

⁵¹⁵Plato, *Sophist*, 249b5-6, in *Theaetetus & Sophist*, trans. Harold North Fowler (1921; repr., Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 2006), 385. Plato, *Plato's Sophist*, part 2 of *The Being and the Beautiful*, trans. Seth Benardete (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1984), 43.

⁵¹⁶Plato, *Sophist*, 249b5-6, trans. Nicholas P. White (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993), 40. F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge: The Theaetetus and Sophist of Plato translated with a running commentary* (1935; repr., London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 241-242.

⁵¹⁷Platon, *Le Sophiste*, 249b5-6, trans. Nestor L. Cordero (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1993), 157. Platon, *Le Sophiste*, vol. 8 of *Platon: Oeuvres Complètes*, trans. Auguste Diès (Paris: Société d'édition 'Les Belles Lettres', 1925), 3: 357.

⁵¹⁸Fronterotta, 330. “mais *νοῦς* est le substantive qui se réfère à la connaissance pleine, à la connaissance de l'être véritable, et non à cette connaissance des réalités intermédiaires, qui n'existent pas pleinement, qui coïncide avec l'opinion (*δόξα*).”

⁵¹⁹Cf. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 185c-e, 186a, 186e. Plato, *Parmenides*, 135b-c.

visitor is arguing that, in light of the fact that minds (which, alone, can be said to have knowledge, wisdom or even, for that matter, opinions) are constantly changing (learning, studying, deducing, thinking, etc.), if the extension of Being does not include that which is moved or is able to move, then minds could not be said to be. But if minds are not, then neither is there any knowledge or wisdom. But we cannot say, and it would be abhorrent to the philosopher, that knowledge cannot be. Therefore, minds (changing realities) must be included in the extension of Being. This goes to prove, that the friends of the Forms must include, as in some way being, things that change. This argument agrees entirely with Plato's already well-known ontology and proposes no changes to it. A proper understanding of this argument, however, does seem to render impossible Fronterotta's interpretation. As such, his second argument does not seem to prove his position either.⁵²⁰

One might respond by pointing out that the Stranger states that to be known is a passive power or *δύναμις*.⁵²¹ Therefore, if the Forms are known (as Plato would say they are, by the Philosopher, as well as by the Demi-urge), then they must be moved, and, therefore, change is introduced into the Forms. This is a perfectly coherent argument; which Plato does not seem to make. Rather than consider the consequences of the Forms being changeable, Plato considers the consequences of what will happen if the mind, life and the soul (249a-b) all particular things that according to Plato's well-established ontology are changing things) are not moved. He then goes on to state that if everything is moved, as all things must be if the argument just mentioned is

⁵²⁰Cornford agrees with our response to Fronterotta, and our interpretation of this part of the *Sophist*, "When the Stranger protests that intelligence, life, and therefore change must have a place in 'that which is perfectly real', he cannot mean that everything which is perfectly real must be alive and therefore changing. The Forms, considered as objects of knowledge, must be unchangeable. This is asserted in later dialogues [Cornford cites, in a footnote, *Timaeus* 28a, 52a, and *Philebus* 59c.], and in the conclusion here: there can be no intelligence without unchanging objects. The Forms are never represented as living and thinking beings. As the conclusion shows, the Stranger means by 'that which is perfectly real' the *whole* world of real being. 'The real or the sum of things' (*τὸ ὄν τε καὶ τὸ πᾶν* 249D) must include 'both all that is unchangeable and all that is in change.' (Cornford, 244-245.)"

⁵²¹Plato, *Sophist*, 248e-249a.

accepted by Plato (If all ontological entities are knowable, at least by the philosopher, and known, then all ontological entities are moved.), then, for reasons stated in 249b-c, mind (and, therefore, knowledge, wisdom and opinion) could not exist (249b). It follows, then, that there must be some things that are not moved in any way. What do we do with this predicament? Well, either we change Plato's ontology entirely, as Fronterotta proposes, or, we accept the possibility that Plato was less concerned with the notion that something is moved when it is known, than with the notion that a person is changed when it knows. As Plato was more concerned with the latter, he did not take time to consider the consequences of the earlier notion (which ends up causing problems with his ontology). Plato seems to have been more worried about proving that changing beings are in some way (extension problem), and with proving this from his argument about mind, than he was about a particular section of this argument. Indeed, one could simply remove the notion that "to be known is to be changed" from this section and Plato's argument will still prove what he set out to prove—that changing beings are in some way. If Fronterotta is right, then all things are changing, but if all things are changing, then we have done away with knowledge, wisdom and the mind. The stranger explicitly states that it is the philosopher's job to combat in every way possible those who do away with knowledge, wisdom and mind. It seems, then, that platonic philosophers must combat Fronterotta's position in any way possible.

The third argument that Fronterotta presents is as follows: The philosopher alone is the one who knows Being and true Being, for he gazes upon it.⁵²² But the philosopher admits that rest and movement truly are—they are Forms.⁵²³ Therefore true Being truly is Rest and Movement. This argument pales in comparison to the earlier arguments. In these sections Plato is only saying that the philosopher knows the unchanging forms of rest and movement, not that all Forms are

⁵²²Fronterotta, 330.

⁵²³Ibid.

moving and at rest. On the contrary, when the visitor and Theaetetus discuss rest and movement in detail we are told that they cannot mix. If we keep in mind that Plato is talking about the totality of being, of all that is in some way, when we ask if the form Being associates with the form of Movement or the form of Rest, then our answer will be as follows. Being associates, in a uni-directional relationship,⁵²⁴ with the Form Movement because Movement is a Form (that is participated in by moving things, also in a uni-directional relationship – the particulars of the changing sensible world).⁵²⁵ Being also associates with Movement when something that is in some way is moving. Being associates with the Form Rest because Rest is a form (that is participated in by unmoving things – the Forms). Being associates with Rest when something that is in some way is not moving. But Movement and Rest themselves do not participate in each other.⁵²⁶

Should we, then, accept the preliminary definition of Being as the final word on the subject? It seems not. Indeed, says Cornford, “That he [Plato] does not in fact regard this as the definition of the ‘real’, is clear; for in a later section (249D ff.) the question, What does reality (Being, Existence) mean? Is put by the Stranger to himself and Theaetetus as still

⁵²⁴This is a precision that is not explicitly made by Plato (though it may be derived from his works, see my charts above for an illustration of the ontological relationship between the ontological entities), but which must be made in order to avoid the obviously non-platonic claim that Being is moved, for, as Ackrill notes, “For if ‘Motion blends with Existence’ means ‘Motion exists’, then ‘Existence blends with Motion’ must mean ‘Existence moves’. And then, if ‘Motion blends with Existence’ is equivalent to ‘Existence blends with Motion’, ‘Motion exists must be equivalent to ‘Existence moves’. Plato obviously did not intend this. (Ackrill, “Plato and the Copula: Sophist 251-259”, 4.)” What I have referred to as a *uni-directional relation*, Ackrill calls a *Non-symmetrical relation* (see his discussion of non-symmetrical relations in *Ibid.*, 3-5). Perhaps part of Fronterotta’s confusion comes from not recognizing the importance of uni-directional relationships between, at least certain, parts of Plato’s ontological world. According to the Visitor it is the philosopher who recognizes the relationships that are possible between the forms. As Ackrill notes, “surely the philosopher could not possibly achieve his purpose without specifying the *kind* of association there is in each case. (*Ibid.*, 3.)”

⁵²⁵F. M. Cornford, for example, notes that “Two Forms are said to ‘combine’ when they stand (eternally) in such a relation that their names can occur in a *true affirmative statement* of a certain type. For example, ‘Motion exists’ means that the Form Motion blends with the Form Existence. (Cornford, 256.)” Leaving aside the more controversial statement concerning what it means to say that two Forms combine, Cornford seems to agree with the point that we are making here.

⁵²⁶Plato, *Sophist*, 250a-d. Cornford agrees with our interpretation, “We can, indeed, connect two names in a false statement, *e.g.* ‘Motion is Rest’; but the Forms referred to do not combine. (Cornford, 256.)”

unanswered.”⁵²⁷ It seems that in this section Plato is trying to discover, without success,⁵²⁸ how to define Being (the essential question), but all he is able to say is what must be included under the umbrella (the extension question) of Being. He answers the extension question, but is still unable to say just what is common to everything that can be said, in some way, to be.

Predicative, Identical, and Existential Meanings of Being

Prior to giving our conclusions on Plato’s doctrine of Being we should say something about one of the most important, and longest, debates concerning Plato’s doctrine of Being. Commenting on this debate, Robert J. Flower makes the following, very perceptive, comment, “When it comes to Plato, the question which Aristotle tells us has plagued philosophers from the beginning – namely, ‘What is being?’ – has been reduced by certain contemporary commentators to the question, ‘How many syntactically distinct uses of the verb ‘to be’ can be discerned in Plato’s *Sophist*?’”⁵²⁹ We begin our brief consideration of this debate with F. M. Cornford, who, in *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge* (a book that might be said to be the source of the 20th century debates concerning the meaning of “is” in the *Sophist*), states that Plato recognizes “two meanings of ‘is’: ‘exists’ and ‘is the same as’.”⁵³⁰ He is here distinguishing between what we might call the *existential* meaning of “is”, and “is” as an *identity* statement (“is” or “is not”).⁵³¹ Cornford consistently denies, throughout his commentary on the *Sophist*, that we can find “is”

⁵²⁷Cornford, 239. Diès, whom Fronterotta interacts with (but does not in any way refute), also notes that though this definition is certainly platonic (and can be found in previous dialogues), it is in no way Plato’s final word on the subject of Being. Rather, says Diès concerning the definition, “Elle n’est pas davantage une solution définitive du problème de l’être : elle n’est expressément donnée qu’à titre provisoire; elle ne pouvait d’ailleurs être proposée à titre durable, car l’être est indéfinissable et la conclusion que Platon voulait atteindre est précisément qu’aucune définition de l’être ne peut tenir...c’est précisément pour opérer cette transition qu’est introduite la définition de l’être par le pouvoir de pâtir ou d’agir. (Diès, 17.)”

⁵²⁸Plato, *Sophist*, 250d-251a.

⁵²⁹Flower, “G. E. L. Owen, Plato and the Verb ‘to be’”, 87.

⁵³⁰Cornford, 281.

⁵³¹*Ibid.*, 295.

being used in what might be called the *predicative* (or copulative) sense.⁵³² Having summarized the meanings of “is” and “is not” (including only the existential and identity/difference), he states, “The statement that Plato ‘has discovered the ambiguity of the copula’ is far removed from the facts.”⁵³³ Cornford, in his analysis of Plato’s analysis of names and verbs, gives us his understanding of Plato’s doctrine of Being. He states, “‘Being’ may mean the nature of a thing. At *Laws* 895D, Plato says that in the case of everything there are always three factors: the ‘being’ or nature (*οὐσία*), the *definition* or account (*λόγος*) of the nature, and the *name* (*ὄνομα*)....In the case of Forms the *nature* and the *thing* are one and the same.”⁵³⁴ Having noted the two functions of a name Cornford states that “‘Thing’ or ‘being’ here has the wider sense, covering any object distinguished by a name, whether that object be a Form (the nature which is the *meaning expressed* by common name) or an individual thing which may be indicated conventionally by a proper name *standing for* it.”⁵³⁵ For Cornford, then, Being has two primary meanings: (1) the *existential* meaning—some Nature exists, and (2) *Identity*—some Nature is itself. The *name* refers to the *definition* which conveys in a verbal expression the *Nature* that *exists*. Finally, Being refers, as concerns *extension*, to anything that can be referred to with a name (Form or individual thing). Being, then, is both *a* Form, and *the* Form of some existing thing.

Cornford’s book, and especially his statement that Plato did not discover the *copulative* (or predicative) sense of “is”, seems to be the proximate cause of the ensuing debate concerning the different meanings that Plato gave to Being. J. L. Ackrill, in his 1957 article took Cornford to court on the claim that there is no copulative, or predicative, sense of “is” in the *Sophist*. He first

⁵³²Ibid., 259, 266, 269.

⁵³³Ibid., 296.

⁵³⁴Ibid., 306.

⁵³⁵Ibid., 306-307.

notes that everyone agrees that Plato used the existential sense of Being,⁵³⁶ and goes on to note that there are (not saying whether or not they are found in Plato) “two other meanings of ἔστιν, as copula and as identity-sign.”⁵³⁷ Ackrill argues convincingly that “where ἔστιν is being used as copula it gets replaced in the philosopher’s version by μετέχει.”⁵³⁸ As such, Ackrill seems to prove that Cornford’s claim, that there is no copulative use of “is” in the *Sophist*, is simply false.

In 1959 Julius M. E. Moravcsik completed his doctoral dissertation “Being and Meaning in the *Sophist* and the *Parmenides*”, from which his influential paper “Being and Meaning in the *Sophist*” was drawn (published in 1962).⁵³⁹ In this article Moravcsik presents a detailed analysis of the middle section of the *Sophist*. In the first main section of his article Moravcsik demonstrates conclusively that “In the first large section Plato considers the existential sense of ‘is’ and ‘is not’.”⁵⁴⁰ Not only does Moravcsik think that Plato is discussing the existential meaning of “is”, but, that “in addition to criticizing rival accounts Plato seeks to establish his own account of Existence. He claims that Existence is undefinable, and that it is necessarily all-inclusive.”⁵⁴¹ This claim is fleshed out in the pages that follow this claim. In the second section Moravcsik shows how Plato turns from the existential meaning of “is” to the predicative meaning of “is”, with the purpose of illuminating the discussion concerning truth and falsehoods. He states, for example, that “The demonstration of the Communion [of the Forms] yields a clarification of the different sense of ‘is’. Plato distinguishes Existence from a ‘relational Being’ which relates predicate to subject, thus amounting to an equivalent of the copula and qualifying along with the Same and the Other as a connecting Form.”⁵⁴² He also notes, later, that Plato calls

⁵³⁶Akrill, 1.

⁵³⁷Ibid.

⁵³⁸Ibid., 2.

⁵³⁹Moravcsik, “Being and Meaning in the *Sophist*”.

⁵⁴⁰Ibid., 26.

⁵⁴¹Ibid., 28.

⁵⁴²Ibid., 42.

attention to the distinction between the “is” of predication, the “is” of identity, and the “is” of existence.⁵⁴³ Though he distinguishes between the different uses, in Plato’s analysis of Being and Non-Being, he also notes that the three different uses are also, in Plato’s understanding of Being, related. Though identity is certainly related, in some sense, to existence; the “is” of predication appears to have, for Plato, a stronger relationship to the existential “is”: “It does seem that Plato regarded the connection between Existence and predication as something much stronger than that which exists between identity and Existence...Perhaps something like this: true predication presupposes existence, and every existential ‘is’ can be completed truly by a set of predicates.”⁵⁴⁴ Moravcsik, therefore, argued that Plato did indeed distinguish between the three different uses of “is”, but that they were, in Plato’s comprehension of Being, intrinsically related to each other such that they should not necessarily be held in opposition.

Two years after the publication of Moravcsik’s important paper, and three years prior to a lecture by G. E. L. Owen on Non-Being in Plato, Dr. Edith Watson Schipper, professor of philosophy at the University of Miami, argued that one could not separate, in Plato’s thought, the “is” of predication from the “is” of existence. She claims, in relation to Runciman’s proposition, that the “is” of predication must have existential import. That is, “for Plato, εἶναι (or ὄν) has more than a predicative meaning; it also has an existential one. If anything exists in the first meaning [the predicative sense], it also exists in the second [the existential sense].”⁵⁴⁵ The general analysis of the various meanings of “is”, therefore, seemed agreed that the “is” of predication and the existential “is”, in Plato, were distinguished but held together.⁵⁴⁶ That is to say, the “is” of

⁵⁴³Ibid., 51. Cf. Ibid., 52-56.

⁵⁴⁴Ibid., 55.

⁵⁴⁵Schipper, “The meaning of existence in Plato’s *Sophist*,” 38. Cf. Ibid., 39.

⁵⁴⁶Schipper notes that even W. G. Runciman agrees with this claim (Ibid., 39.).

predication, for Plato, implicitly presupposes the existential “is”—If you can talk about it in any way, then it must “exist” in some way.

1967 was a particularly fruitful year for studies concerning Plato’s analysis of being in the *Sophist*, including (in approximately the following order) a dissertation by Michael Frede (in which he proposed the controversial thesis that Plato never distinguishes between different meanings of “is” and “is not” in the *Sophist*),⁵⁴⁷ an article by John Malcom,⁵⁴⁸ and an important lecture presented by G. E. L. Owen. All three of these highly respected scholars, who seem to have been heavily influenced by the logical theories concerning the existential quantifier of Gottlob Frege, arrived at essentially the same conclusion: Plato does not distinguish the existential “is” from the other meanings of “is”.⁵⁴⁹

Malcolm seeks to prove, in his article, that Plato does not distinguish the existential sense of “is” from the “is” of predication and the “is” of identity.⁵⁵⁰ He claims, in fact, that Plato hardly even distinguishes between predicative statements and identity statements.⁵⁵¹ Malcolm’s argument hinges on a distinction between the meaning of Being and Existing, where all existing things have being, but all that has being does not necessarily exist.⁵⁵²

⁵⁴⁷Michael Frede, *Prädikation und Existenzaussage* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967).

⁵⁴⁸John Malcolm, “Plato’s Analysis of τὸ ὄν and τὸ μὴ ὄν in the *Sophist*,” *Phronesis*, vol. 12, no. 2 (1967).

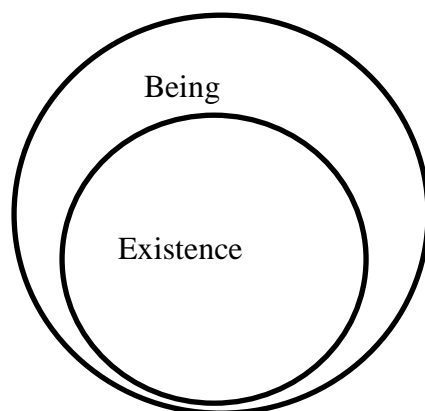
⁵⁴⁹Other scholars who concur with Frede, Malcolm and Owen include: (1) Bas C. Van Fraassen, who expressed his basic agreement with Ross, Malcolm and Frede by noting that “the notion of Being in the *Sophist* is very different from the contemporary notion of existence in philosophy of logic. For Plato, then, *to be is to be something or other*, to have some property. (Van Fraassen, “Logical Structure in Plato’s *Sophist*”, 489.)” (2) William J. Prior, who concludes that “if Plato does not separate the ‘is’ of identity from the ‘is’ of predication or the ‘is’ of existence in this passage, the belief of scholars to the contrary must be due in part to the assumption that any respectable interpretation of the verb ‘to be’ *must* make such distinctions, and the resulting desire to find them in the text. (Prior, “Plato’s Analysis of Being and Not-Being in the *Sophist*”, 208.)” Prior, however, does not agree with the way in which Frede, Malcolm and Owen are influenced by modern philosophy, and proposes that when Plato says “X is” (regardless of whether or not there is a predicate), what he means is “X participates in Y.” When there is no predicate Plato means “X participates in the form Being” (Ibid., 206.). When Plato says “X is not” (regardless of whether or not there is a predicate), what he means is “X is different from Y.” When there is no predicate Plato means “X is different from the form Being” (Ibid., 206.).

⁵⁵⁰Malcolm, *Plato’s Analysis*, 130.

⁵⁵¹Ibid., 145.

⁵⁵²Ibid., 131, 133fn10.

We could illustrate this distinction as follows:



Based on this distinction Malcolm goes on to attempt to prove that, in the *Sophist*, “‘is’ has an undifferentiated sense which covers both existential (complete) and predicative (incomplete) uses.”⁵⁵³ That is, that Plato does not distinguish between the “is” of existence and the “is” of predication. His basic strategy, which is similar to the strategy of Owen, is (1) to look at texts in the *Sophist* where many thinkers proposed a clear existential sense for “is” and (2) to show that these texts make no sense if “is” is taken to refer to existence. Though Malcolm is certainly right about some of the texts that he examines, not all of his arguments are equally convincing. In his discussion, for example, of the ontologies of the dualists and the monists, he claims that the third thing must, necessarily, be a third name.⁵⁵⁴ One wonders if it is not more likely, in light of what we have seen concerning Plato’s ontology, that Plato is saying that the third thing is the Form of Being, and that that to which the name “is” refers is the Form Being. Malcolm seems to be want to interpret Plato as talking about names when Plato is talking about what must be the case in order for names to be predicable. It seems likely, as some of the previous commentators that we looked at have noted, that Plato sees a link between what is and what we say about what is—language is founded in that which in some way is. He is, also, clearly

⁵⁵³Ibid., 130.

⁵⁵⁴Ibid., 131-132.

snatching at straws in his discussion of the materialists and the friends of the Forms. In order to avoid the existential “is” he claims that “We need only note that τὸ ὄν does not have to be read as ‘existence,’ but may be translated as ‘reality.’”⁵⁵⁵ This is surely a case of nit-picking, for the section in question is discussing the question “what is?”—“to what can being/existence be attributed?” Quoting a lesser known scholar who we mentioned above, Plato seems to think that “If anything exists in the first meaning [the predicative sense], it also exists in the second [the existential sense].”⁵⁵⁶ In other words, you cannot talk about the predicative sense of “is”, for Plato, without presupposing the existential sense of “is”.

In his influential article *Plato on Not-Being*,⁵⁵⁷ G. E. L. Owen, begins by noting a number of claims that have been taken to be true by the majority of scholars. “In Greek, but only vestigially in English, the verb ‘to be’ has two syntactically distinct uses, a complete or substantive use in which it determines a one-place predicate (‘X is’, ‘X is not’) and an incomplete use in which it determines a two-place predicate (‘X is Y’, ‘X is not Y’).”⁵⁵⁸ He continues by noting what these two syntactically distinct uses are said to signify. “The verb in its first use signifies ‘to exist’ (for which Greek in Plato’s day had no separate word)...while in its second use it is demoted to a subject-predicate copula (under which we can here include the verbal auxiliary) or to an identity-sign.”⁵⁵⁹ Having noted this distinction Owen then pushes back on the claim that, “the problems which dominate the central argument of the *Sophist* are existence-problems”,⁵⁶⁰ by

⁵⁵⁵Ibid., 135.

⁵⁵⁶Schipper, “The meaning of existence in Plato’s *Sophist*”, 38. Cf. Ibid., 39.

⁵⁵⁷The article by Owen makes the same basic claims as the article by Malcolm.

⁵⁵⁸G. E. L. Owen, “Plato on Not-Being,” in *Metaphysics and Epistemology*, vol. 1 of *Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Gregory Vlastos (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1971), 223. Also to be found in, “Plato on Not-Being,” in *Metaphysics and Epistemology*, vol. 1 of *Plato*, ed. Gail Fine, 416-454 (1999; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). This paper, which was published in 1971 in a volume that was edited by Gregory Vlastos, was originally presented as a lecture in 1967.

⁵⁵⁹Ibid., 224. It is interesting to note that Owen conflates, in his brief comments on recent platonic scholarship, the *copulative* (or predicative) “is” and the “is” of *identity* into one meaning, and this without argument. Both Cornford and Ackrill, prior to Owen, had kept them distinct.

⁵⁶⁰Ibid.

arguing extensively that Plato does not seek to discuss the existential meaning of “to be”, “is”, “not to be”, or “is not”. Rather, thinks Owen, Plato only discusses the “is” of predication (the copulative use) and the “is” of identity. “The *Sophist* will turn out to be primarily an essay in problems of reference and predication and in the incomplete uses of the verb associated with these. The argument neither contains nor compels any isolation of an existential verb.”⁵⁶¹ He does not claim that there are no existential uses of “is” to be found in the *Sophist*, only that the discussion does not concern the existential use of “is”: “I am not arguing that Plato never, or never in the *Sophist*, uses the verb *einai* in such a way that “exist” is a natural English translation. No doubt he does. What I hope to show is that the central arguments and explanations become broken-backed if they are read as containing an implicit or explicit separation of such a sense of ‘is’ from others.”⁵⁶² Ross claims that the main point of the *Sophist* is negative predication (which is not denied by those preceding him), and that Plato does not bring the existential “is” into the discussion in any meaningful way. For Ross, all relevant uses of “is” are either predicative (the copula) or identity statements.

In a 1980 paper Robert J. Flower took on both sides of this exhilarating debate by arguing that it is neither the case that Plato distinguishes 3 uses of “is” (existential, predicative and identity), nor that Plato distinguishes 2 uses of “is” (predicative and identity). Rather, argues Flower, Plato means one, and only one, thing when he says “is”: “There is only one use of the verb ‘to be’ in the *Sophist* – namely, the ‘is’ of *participation* – and it is this and this use alone that constitutes Plato’s answer to Aristotle’s question. Being, for Plato of the *Sophist*, is participation or, perhaps better, the ‘power of participating’.”⁵⁶³ Whether he knew it or not, and he does not

⁵⁶¹Ibid., 225.

⁵⁶²Ibid., 248.

⁵⁶³Flower, 87.

quote William Prior so we may assume that he did not know it, he was positing essentially the same theory that Prior had, earlier that same year, proposed in his paper on the same subject. In this paper Flower takes on Owen, and to a limited degree, Ackrill, in order to show that their theories are both incapable of explaining all of the texts in the *Sophist*.⁵⁶⁴ Flower argues that the debate is wrongheaded because “since ‘participates in’ appears to be the ‘is’ of predication, it seems obvious that ‘participating in Being’ is tantamount to the predication of Being to the thing which is said to participate in Being. And surely to predicate Being of an object is nothing more than to say that the object in question exists.”⁵⁶⁵ The philosophical trio of Frede, Malcolm and Owen would not, of course, agree with Flower on this point. They would argue that Existence and Being are not co-extensive; everything that exists has being, but not everything that has being exists. As such, they would argue, to predicate being of X is not, necessarily, to say that the object in question exists. One might reply, however, that they are allowing modern predicate logic (with the Existential quantifier) to taint their understanding of Existence and Being, and, thus, to taint their interpretation of Plato. Plato would probably not have agreed with Frede, Malcolm and Owen, concerning their distinction between Existence and Being, but would have agreed with Flower that to predicate Being of X is to say that X exists in some way. Flower is certainly right in noting that to say of X that “X is (or has being, or exists, or has existence)” is just to say that X participates in Being. Flower attempts, from this true observation concerning the predication of Being as it is applied to particular beings, to arrive at the conclusion that “all uses of the verb ‘to be’ are either obvious, or elliptical or fragmentary expressions of the ‘relation’ of participation. Being is not a property, but a relation.”⁵⁶⁶ Unfortunately for Flower’s

⁵⁶⁴Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶Ibid., 94.

theory, it does not follow from the claim that “to say of X that ‘X is (or has being, or exists, or has existence)’ is just to say that X participates in Being” that, for Plato, Being just is a relation, the relation of “participation”. This so-called response to the question of Being is no response at all, for one might then ask, “when I say that X participates in Being, what is this ‘Being’ in which x participates?” Flower could not say respond by saying “the ‘Being’ in which X participates just is the relationship of participating in Being.” Perhaps we could illustrate why Flower has confused the issue by looking at a different participatory relationship that is common in Plato’s works: justice. To say that X is just is to say that X participates in Justice. If I go on to ask, “when I say that X participates in Justice, what is this ‘Justice’ in which x participates?” It would be pointless, and ridiculous, to respond, “the ‘Justice’ in which X participates just is the relationship of participating in Justice.” The question has not been answered, it has been avoided, and clumsily at that. Though Flower was perceptive to note that Frede, Malcolm and Owen were wrong to say that there is no “is” of existence in the *Sophist*, and this due to Plato’s ontology, the theory that Flower proposes is untenable, and is certainly not the theory of Plato, who claimed, explicitly, that Being was a Form.

Robert Heinaman, in 1983, and again in 1986 (in response to a paper by John Malcolm), set out to demonstrate that though Plato may not have intentionally sought to distinguish the “is” of existence from the “is” of predication and the “is” of identity, this fact is not equivalent to the claim, and does not necessitate, that “the concept of existence plays no role in the philosophical problems discussed or their solutions.”⁵⁶⁷ Rather, Heinaman argues, “Plato may have failed to mark out the existential use of ‘to be’ while nevertheless using the word to mean *existence* with this latter concept playing an important role in the argument.”⁵⁶⁸ Heinaman uses the same

⁵⁶⁷Heinaman, “Being in the *Sophist*”, 1.

⁵⁶⁸*Ibid.*

strategy that Owen and Malcom used (showing how accepting their interpretation creates confusion in other parts of the text) in order to show that to be as dogmatic as Owen, Malcolm and Frede creates an untenable interpretation of the text. Malcolm defended Owens, and himself, from Heinaman in a 1985 paper,⁵⁶⁹ and Heinaman responded in a 1986 paper.⁵⁷⁰ He concludes this paper with the statement that “on my view existence is only one aspect of Being for Plato.”⁵⁷¹ In other words, “existence” is, for Plato, included in any use of the predicative “is”.

Many other authors have weighed in on this debate, such as Jean Roberts and Frank A. Lewis,⁵⁷² and their many observations have certainly helped better our understanding of Plato’s *Sophist*. Perhaps we could summarize some of the important elements of this debate as follows:

- (1) Though Plato does not explicitly distinguish between the different meanings of “is”, all three of these different meanings (existential, predicative, and identity) can be found in the *Sophist*.
- (2) The proposed purpose of the *Sophist* is to “catch or trap” the sophist. In order to do this Plato must provide an explanation for false predication. Plato founds his explanation of false predication on a theory of predication, which, itself, is founded upon Plato’s ontological theory of the forms and of participation. Briefly put, Plato’s theory of predication is based upon Plato’s ontology.
- (3) Plato thinks that anything that can be said to be participates in the Form of Being, by which he means that it, in some way, exists. Put negatively, if X does not exist in some way, then nothing can be predicated of it.

⁵⁶⁹Malcolm, “Remarks on an incomplete rendering of Being in the *Sophist*”, 162-165.

⁵⁷⁰Heinaman, “Once more: Being in the *Sophist*”, 121-125.

⁵⁷¹*Ibid.*, 125.

⁵⁷²*Op. Cit.*

- (4) To say that some particular x of the sensible world is, is to say that it participates in Being, which is to say that it exists in some way.
- (5) To say that some Form is, is to say that it participates in Being, which is to say that it exists in some way.
- (6) For Plato, any true predication, or statement of identity, presupposes that the subject of the statement exists, in some way.
- (7) The debate about the different meanings of “is” has only helped to eliminate various proposed solutions to the question of Being (Being is not the copula, it is not the relation of participation, etc.), but it has not provided us with a positive answer to the question of Being, other than that which we have already seen (Being is a Form).

Plato may be said to be the first philosopher of Being in that he first pointed out the difficulty in answering the question of Being. It is, however, debatable that Plato actually succeeded in answering the qualitative (essential) question of Being. Being must have a nature, in Plato’s ontology, for it is a Form, but just what that Form is has been left unanswered. The closest we come to an answer, in Plato, to the question of Being, is the claim that Being is that which is common to everything that can be said, in any way, to be. Being is that platonic Form which is imitated, not only by all the particular beings of the world of becoming, but also, by all the Forms. Anything that is, in any way, participates in the undefinable Form of Being. We now turn to our final section: an analysis of Plato’s approach to the question of Being.

Elaboration of and Explanation of Plato’s approach to Being

From our consideration of Plato’s response to the question of Being it has become obvious, first of all, that Plato’s response to the question of Being is attained in much the same

way as his responses to just about every other question that he asks. Plato begins by noting that we say of many different things that they are, exist, or have Being. There are many different beings, and it should be obvious that though they are all quite different, it is also the case that they all are, in some way. In the *Sophist*, as we noted above, Plato is forced to conclude that even the perpetually changing things of the realm of becoming participate, in some way, in Being. Plato's approach to the question of Being begins in an analysis of language, this is certainly true; but, it is also true that Plato thinks that language is a good starting place for this discussion because he also thinks that language is founded upon, by way of the particular things of the realm of becoming, the unchanging Forms.

We may characterize Plato's approach to the question of Being in a number of different ways. First of all, let us consider what we might call the *Literary Approach*. Plato is brought to the question of Being, in the *Sophist*, through the attempt to catch the sophist. The literary approach actually points to the both the hierarchy of Being and the existential approach. Going backwards, through the *Sophist*, Plato is forced to consider what it means to Be in order to answer questions concerning true and false predication. The question concerning true and false predication speech is brought up in the attempt to nail down the nature of the sophist. In this sense we might say that the question of being reveals itself to Plato as he is seeking to answer an entirely different question. Following the original question where it leads he is driven, by the questions he asks, to ask the question of Being. We might posit, then, that in a certain sense, the question of Being is hidden behind every other question, and that if we pursue the answer to these other questions long enough we will eventually come to the most fundamental question of all: What is Being?

Secondly, as concerns what we might call the *Ontological approach*, Plato's struggle with the question of Being may be characterized as climbing up the hierarchy of platonic ontology.⁵⁷³ Beginning with that which "is" least of all (*language* – man's humble attempt to describe the things that present themselves to man during man's short earthly life), Plato describes (not so much because he follows a reasoning through to its conclusion, but more by the simple imposition of his ontological theory to the question at hand) Being as that Form in which not only the particular things of becoming participate, but, also, that in which all the other Forms, in order to be, participate. Being is that which is common to all that is. In considering the language of Being Plato, though not explicitly distinguishing the three meanings of "is", considers what we mean when we say: (1) "X is.", and (2) "X is Y." In both cases Plato perceives a relationship of participation. In the first case it is a participation in Being; in the second case it is a participation in "Y", whatever that is. This is what allows him to answer the question of false predication. This approach may be characterized as such: (1) particular things, (2) concept formation and language, (3) concepts and words are applied to particular things, (4) this leads to the notion of essences, (5) the question of essences leads to the question of Being. It may appear that Plato's ontological theory begins with language, but, on the contrary, Plato actually begins in the everyday experience of the whole of Being. This is not to say that we experience all beings, but that from the whole of Being and our experience of this totality things are picked out by the human intellect, and we begin to discover the essences of the beings we experience. The inquisitive mind then makes what we might call the ontological jump. In every case there is a jump of the intellect, from purely essential questions ("what is x?") to the question of Being (we might simplify this

⁵⁷³See charts provided in our commentaries on *Parmenides*, *Theatetus*, and *Sophist*.

question as “is? What is is-ness?”). Note that even when we come to the question of Being we are still asking an essential question (what is the “essence” of Being?).

For Plato, none of these approaches are ever embarked on without the existential starting point. We might explain this in terms of an *Existential* approach. Plato noted that all philosophy begins in wonder—this is the Existential starting point. The human being will not begin questioning Being without coming becoming, first, intrigued about beings. The Existential approach begins with wonder about the fact that there are particular things that are, that seem to be the same, and which seem to be independently of us. From these observations the human intellect makes the jump to the question of Being.

Conclusion

Plato’s approach to the question of Being does not seem to truly answer the question. Being is a Form, and the Form in which all things that “be” participate. That is well and good, but just what is the nature of the Form Being? No answer is given to this question, and the reader is left hanging. Furthermore, the reader is also left with a mind-boggling question: how is it possible that that Form in which anything that “is” must participate in order to “be”, in some way, could be dependent on other Forms (which also are in some way)?

This first approach to the question of Being leaves us with our mouths watering for more, but can take us no further. Does that mean that this approach is faulty? Not necessarily. There is much to be gained from a proper understanding of Plato’s ontology. He is certainly right in noting that language is but a pale reflection of that which truly is, and that, though it may serve as a starting point for philosophical reflection, language is but a sign post that points to mysteries that are bound to envelop our minds if we are not careful. The true philosopher gazes on Being, but must be careful not to be blinded by its light. The true philosopher understands language, and

even the particular beings of this ever-changing world, to be but passing signs of the Real.

Looking past the signs the true philosopher seeks to know the Real, but, like the man who returns from his excursion out of the cave, is often incapable, with humble words that are barely fit to describe the realm of becoming, to describe the realm of the Real. The question of Being, then, is not answered by Plato, but he points to the answer with the hope that we will understand that he is not pointing to language, nor the particular things of the realm of becoming, but beyond these signs to the realm of the Real itself, to Being.

Plato's excursion into the realm of Being was the beginning of the mission of exploration. The first to truly discover this other realm he opened the door which would allow other adventurers to enter. Before we provide our final analysis of Plato's approach to the question of Being we will look at two other philosophers who, following Plato into that other realm, have, upon their return, struggled to answer the question of Being—Aristotle and Martin Heidegger. We turn now to Aristotle's well-known work on the question of Being.

ARISTOTLE AND THE QUESTION OF BEING

INTRODUCTION

We turn, now, to the attempt to discover how Aristotle approaches the question of Being. This implies that we consider not only his answer to the question of Being, but how he arrives at his answer to the question of Being. In order to properly analyse and explain how Aristotle approaches the question of Being, we must first determine where he approaches the question of Being and whether or not the manuscripts in which he approaches the question of Being actually provide us with insight into how he approaches the question of Being. Once we have determined whether or not we will be able to extract any useful information from Aristotle's works on Being we must then consider how a number of important scholars have interpreted Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Having completed these three steps, we will then be in position to be able to analyse and explain how Aristotle approaches the question of Being, as well as whether or not he actually attempts to answer the question. We will begin with an overview of the sources that we can reasonably consult as we seek to answer this question.

OVERVIEW OF SOURCES

Where the Question of Being is Approached

Though Aristotle discusses, in many of his works, many of the concepts that will play a role in his approach to the question of Being, he does not even attempt to pose the question of Being in any work other than the *Metaphysics*. As such, we will be limiting our consideration of Aristotle's approach to the question of Being to an analysis of the *Metaphysics*. We will only consider other works if they are helpful in explaining Aristotle's approach to the question of Being as found in the *Metaphysics*. In seeking to understand Aristotle's approach to the question

of Being we must begin by considering a proposition, concerning the development of Aristotle's work, which has been one of the most devastating theories, for Aristotelian metaphysics, to see the light of day – the developmental theory as proposed, originally, by Werner Jaeger. It is necessary to begin with Jaeger's developmental theory as it can be, and has been, proposed as the answer to the question "How did Aristotle approach the question of Being?" Indeed, one's answer to the question concerning Aristotle's approach to the question of Being will depend on whether or not one accepts the ideas of the developmental theory. As such, we will begin by explaining Jaeger's general theory, followed by a discussion of its application to the *Metaphysics*. We will then present some reasons why it, and similar projects, should be abandoned; as well as why they do not, and cannot, explain how Aristotle approached the question of Being.

The Development of Aristotle's Philosophy

Introduction to, and difficulties with, Werner Jaeger's Method

In his renowned work on Aristotle, Jaeger, using the methods of form criticism and the evolutionary view of the development of thought,⁵⁷⁴ presents his theory concerning the development of Aristotle's philosophical thought. He introduces his project by explaining that his main purpose will be to show that there is a process of development in Aristotle's work. He seeks to maintain this theory over against Aristotelian tradition before him, who, so he claims, views Aristotle's works as static, "The main reason why no attempt has yet been made to describe Aristotle's development is, briefly, the scholastic notion of his philosophy as a static system of conceptions."⁵⁷⁵ Throughout his study of Aristotle, Jaeger will consistently attempt to study

⁵⁷⁴Werner Jaeger, *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Development*, 2nd ed., trans. Richard Robinson (1948; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 4.

⁵⁷⁵*Ibid.* This is an unsupported claim, which is uncritically accepted as true by a great majority of Jaeger's readers.

Aristotle's thought in light of the following phenomena, "In the treatment of intellectual progress, if we are to give full weight to the creative and underived element in great individuals, we must supplement the general tendency of times with the organic development of the personality concerned."⁵⁷⁶

Jaeger's work is divided into three main sections, roughly following the three main stages of Aristotle's life and philosophical development, in which he studies those works which he places according to three main periods of Aristotle's philosophical career: Aristotle's time at the academy, Aristotle's travels, and the work of Aristotle's mature years. The guiding principle of Jaeger's historical construction is the evolutionary theory of theoretical development. Accordingly, his theory, concerning the order of redaction for Aristotle's writings, places any writings that seem to favour Platonism in the earlier periods, and any writings that seek to disprove Platonism in the later periods. This same theory is even used to divide up works such as the *Metaphysics*, such that any sections that seem to have a Platonic ring to them are seen as unedited earlier writings, and any sections that are clearly anti-Platonic are seen to be later writings. Using this theory Jaeger proposes that the *Metaphysics* is an unfinished and unedited compilation (most likely originally compiled by Aristotle himself), in some sort of fabricated order, of various writings which all touch upon a similar subject. Before we consider how Jaeger's theory plays out in this important work it should be noted that Jaeger's guiding principle, which remains unsupported by any sort of argument, is used to fabricate an equally unsupported ordering of Aristotle's works. The principle is mechanically applied, not only to the ordering of the individual books, but also to the books themselves, which ends up destroying the relative unity of Aristotle's books, which, if Jaeger's principle is rejected, seem to emanate a deep unity

⁵⁷⁶Ibid., 3.

of thought. There is certainly some form of progression in Aristotle's thought, this much cannot be denied; however, it is not the mechanical application of a questionable and unsupported principle to Aristotle's thought that will help to determine just how Aristotle's thought developed through the years.

C. S. Lewis, renowned literary critic and Cambridge professor of medieval and renaissance literature, discussing the very same method, used by Jaeger on Aristotle, in its application to the Gospels, states that "The idea that any man or writer should be opaque to those who lived in the same culture, spoke the same language, shared the same habitual imagery and unconscious assumptions, and yet be transparent to those who have none of these advantages, is in my opinion preposterous. There is an a priori improbability in it which almost no argument and no evidence could counterbalance."⁵⁷⁷ After noting that, in his own personal experience, critics of Lewis's works, his contemporaries, were wrong 100% of the time (and this in spite of living at the same time and in the same culture as Lewis, and speaking the same language),⁵⁷⁸ Lewis goes on to note that "The reconstruction of the history of a text, when the text is ancient, sounds very convincing. But one is after all sailing by dead reckoning; the results cannot be checked by fact. In order to decide how reliable the method is, what more could you ask for than to be shown an instance where the same method is at work and we have facts to check it by? Well, that is what I have done. And we find, that when this check is available, the results are either always, or else nearly always, wrong. The 'assured results of modern scholarship', as to the way in which an old

⁵⁷⁷C. S. Lewis, "Fern-Seed and Elephants," in *Essay Collection & Other Short Pieces*, ed. Lesley Walmsley (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000), 247.

⁵⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 248-249.

book was written, are ‘assured’, we may conclude, only because the men who knew the facts are dead and can’t blow the gaff.”⁵⁷⁹

Indeed, to summarize the claims of C. S. Lewis, if those critics who seek to explain the history of the development of the thought and works of their contemporaries are unable, using the very methods that Jaeger proposes to use on Aristotle, to attain to any useful degree of success, then we cannot expect those critics, who seek to explain the history of the development of the thought and works of authors who lived long before them, using the very methods that Jaeger proposes to use on Aristotle, to attain to any useful degree of success. Indeed, this fact seems to demonstrate the impossibility that Jaeger will, with any success, be able to reconstruct Aristotle’s philosophical development. We should, therefore, hold Jaeger’s theory as suspect. Indeed, Jonathan Barnes, in his article on Aristotle’s life and works, notes, concerning Jaeger’s theory, “For my own part, I am mildly skeptical of the whole enterprise.”⁵⁸⁰ Barnes is, in fact, skeptical of the possibility of dating the redaction of Aristotle’s works with any sort of precision.⁵⁸¹ He notes that Jaeger’s theory falls prey to a number of important difficulties. First of all, “we know little enough about Aristotle’s youthful attitude to Plato.”⁵⁸² This, of course, is a major difficulty for Jaeger’s theory, which begins by claiming, as noted above, that Aristotle practically worshipped Plato, and accepted, almost uncritically, all of Platonism. There is, as Barnes points out, simply no tangible proof of this supposed fact. It is simply assumed by Jaeger as the most

⁵⁷⁹Ibid., 249-250. Following this statement Lewis goes on to give a number of examples. He then notes the great advantages that a critic who is contemporary with an author has, in comparison to a critic of a work of a now dead author (especially an author such as Aristotle who live 300 years before Christ). He notes that in spite of these great advantages the contemporary critic is still quite unable to get anything right.

⁵⁸⁰Jonathan Barnes, “Life and Work,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (1995; repr., New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 17.

⁵⁸¹I think that Barnes is overly skeptical, though he brings up a number of important points that must be considered.

⁵⁸²Barnes, *LW*, 17.

likely attitude that Aristotle would have had. Furthermore, Jaeger theorizes that Aristotle's attitude towards Plato slowly changed from absolute commitment to close to absolute opposition (not hatred, but friendly opposition). Barnes points out, however, that regardless of the order that we attempt to impose on Aristotle's works, all of Aristotle's works betray some form of agreement with, and even dependence on, Plato. This fact is what led Jaeger to, in a very questionable manner, dissect most of Aristotle's works into early, middle and latter stages of writing. There is, of course, no need to assume that Aristotle wrote each work, in its entirety, in one sitting, however, neither should we use unsupported suppositions concerning Aristotle's attitude towards Plato as a reason to dissect Aristotle's works.

A second point that Jaeger mentions is that "it is usually difficult to be sure how accurately these 'fragments' report Aristotle's own words; and even when it is reasonably plain that Aristotle wrote this or that particular sentence, it is likely that the sentence will be open to two or three incompatible and equally plausible interpretations."⁵⁸³ This is an important remark, as it implies that we will not be able to learn too much about Aristotle, nor about what he wrote in his non-extant works, from the fragments. If the fragments are not reliable sources for Aristotle, then no theory should be erected on their claims. We may be able to get an idea of what Aristotle talked about in, for example, his work *On Philosophy*, but we cannot use this information to prove the time of its writing, the attitude that Aristotle had towards Plato, nor the maturity of Aristotle's philosophical thought in these works. These two difficulties (to which Barnes adds the point that none of the works contain explicit dates,⁵⁸⁴ that they contain very little references to world events that might allow us to date them,⁵⁸⁵ and that due to the fact that they were edited, it

⁵⁸³Ibid., 18.

⁵⁸⁴Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵Ibid.

is almost impossible to base one's dating on the style of the works⁵⁸⁶) not only invalidate Jaeger's method, but also make it almost impossible to create any accurate chronological order for the redaction of Aristotle's works. In spite of all of this, Jaeger's work has been revolutionary in the world of Aristotelian studies. As Jonathan Barnes notes, "The pioneer of 'developmental studies' was the German scholar Werner Jaeger. His book *Aristotle—Fundamentals of his Development*, which was first published in German in 1923, determined the course of Aristotelian scholarship for half a century."⁵⁸⁷ In this article Barnes draws out the very same observations as I have noted above, both concerning the basic principles from which Jaeger starts, as well as the major difficulties with Jaeger's extreme theory.⁵⁸⁸ Though one should not attempt to say anything on Aristotle without interacting with Jaeger, it is the opinion of this thinker that Jaeger's work is far too extreme to be of much use in the study of the development of Aristotle's philosophical thought. Jaeger's unsupported presuppositions push him into a circular argument which eats away at the trustworthiness of his theory. Probably the most important lessons that we can learn from Jaeger are: (1) that it is very difficult to present any dogmatic theory of the development of Aristotle. There are far too many suppositions that must be held and too many questionable deductions that must be drawn in order to arrive at any likely theory. Indeed, Giovanni Reale observes that "The reader will understand, by the presentation of this synthetic view of the historical-genetic interpretation of Book E, how according to the criteria followed today, anything can be affirmed and denied; the interpretations of one critic are exactly opposed to that of another and between the two extremes we can find all the possible nuances."⁵⁸⁹ Indeed, by

⁵⁸⁶Ibid., 19-20.

⁵⁸⁷Barnes, *LW*, 16.

⁵⁸⁸Cf. Ibid., 16-18.

⁵⁸⁹Giovanni Reale, *The Concept of First Philosophy and the Unity of the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, trans. John R. Catan (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1980), 183.

using the very same criteria and method we are able to arrive, with the very same facts, at opposing views, depending on what the interpreter understands as “platonic” or “Aristotle’s reaction to Platonism”, and depending on how they think Aristotle would have developed philosophically.

(2) Aristotle’s philosophy most likely developed over time, however it is impossible to prove, with any degree of likely hood, whether Aristotle moved away from Platonism or remained within Platonism. It is obvious that Aristotle disagreed with a number of Platonic claims, however, it is also obvious that he did not reject, in its entirety, Platonic philosophy. Rather, it seems that his is a somewhat modified Platonism. Reale points out, in fact, that “the conclusions at which this inquiry arrives, contrary to those we have examined, are the following: Platonism and empiricism are not episodes either diverse, contrasting, or genetically interpretable, at least in the scope of the *Metaphysics*; instead they constitute constants or dimensions that always work together in fruitful synthesis.”⁵⁹⁰ Reale notes, in the following paragraph that, “this, in fact, is the essence of Aristotle’s metaphysical thought: to keep strictly fused the ‘naturalistic’ or ‘empirical’ or ‘Ionic’ component with the ‘idealistic’ or ‘Platonic’ or ‘Italic’ component in all their subtle modalities and gradations.”⁵⁹¹

(3) We must be careful, when attempting to construct, from the *Metaphysics*, a general overview of Aristotle’s metaphysical thoughts, not to read the thoughts of later philosophers into Aristotle; and, it is possible to construct a general idea of Aristotle’s views concerning Being, and this in spite of the fact that it is difficult to know precisely when Aristotle wrote the *Metaphysics*. On this a comment of Jonathan Barnes is most helpful, “But there is a false antithesis in the air; for it is evident that development and system-building cannot be antithetical attributes, inasmuch

⁵⁹⁰Ibid., 12.

⁵⁹¹Ibid. Cf. Ibid., 94-96, 147.

as even the most rigid of systematic philosophers will have developed – he will not have been born with a silver system in his mouth. Thus the dynamic Aristotle and the systematic Aristotle should not be thought of as irreconcilable enemies.”⁵⁹² It seems, therefore, that we are more than warranted to attempt to understand Aristotle’s metaphysical thought, and to attempt to discover its general order – in other words, to attempt to give an outline of Aristotle’s systematic metaphysics. Prior to examining Aristotle’s answer to the question of Being we need to consider, at least briefly, the chronological order of Aristotle’s works (which will allow us to situate the *Metaphysics* in an approximate timeline of Aristotle’s philosophical work). It is to this task that we now turn.

On the Chronological Order of Aristotle’s Works

Two important questions remain, for the philosopher who sincerely want to understand Aristotle: “since we may assume some development in Aristotle’s thought, how, if it is even possible, can we determine in what order he wrote the works that are attributed to him?” and “where does the *Metaphysics* fit into this development?” These questions are of particular importance for the question of Aristotle’s approach to the question of Being as (depending on the chronological place of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* in comparison to his other works) it could be argued that Aristotle approached the very asking of the question of Being by way of the discoveries that he elaborates in his other works. This, indeed, is what we will discover as we consider evidence that implies that Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* was the fruit of his previous works that pushed him to ask the question of Being.

⁵⁹²Barnes, *LW*, 22.

We cannot simply rely upon the traditional ordering of Aristotle's books as a guide to the chronology of Aristotle's works, as it appears to not be based upon the time of redaction, but upon the order of knowing.⁵⁹³ I would suggest that many of the proposed manners (used by those who adhere to Jaeger's developmental theory) for determining the order in which Aristotle wrote his books are entirely untrustworthy as they depend upon unsupported assumptions. For example, there is no guarantee that, with time, Aristotle moved away from basic Platonism. It is entirely possible that Aristotle, even while at the Academy with Plato, opposed basic Platonism, but, with time, came to see its basic truth. If such is the case than this would provide different results for the chronological order of Aristotle's works. I would propose that the only trustworthy way of determining a basic ordering of the works of Aristotle is to begin by assuming the basic unity of each individual book,⁵⁹⁴ and then to consider his mentioning, within the works themselves, of previous or future works.⁵⁹⁵ Applied to Aristotle's works this proposal will not give us a perfect

⁵⁹³Cf. Barnes, *LW*, 20.

⁵⁹⁴After all, those who deny the unity of the individual books often accept form critical assumptions in order to deny that unity.

⁵⁹⁵Barnes argues against this way of discovering the chronology of Aristotle's works by noting that: (1) the cross-references are, if examined in their entirety, inconsistent; (2) that the cross-references are easily detached from their contexts; and, (3) assuming that the works were significantly edited, we should assume that they betray not chronology of redaction, but order in which they should be read (either as understood by the editor, or by Aristotle himself). The most important of the three objections is the first. The second could easily be stated of any author's writings, and not only of cross-references between books, but also of (a) cross-references within books (such as, "we have already discussed this subject", or "we will develop this subject later". We see this type of cross-referencing frequently in the *Metaphysics*, and it is frequently used as support to show that the books of the *Metaphysics* are in the proper order. See, for example, Reale, *CFP*, 343. Indeed, I would propose that if we can use the cross-references within books to support and even determine the proper ordering of the different sections of a book, then we can use the cross-references to other books to support and even determine the proper chronological ordering of the different books.), (b) the intentional and explicit dating of a writing, and, indeed, (c) of many of the sentences in any given paragraph. Indeed, this sentence that I am now writing could be removed in its entirety without changing the meaning of the surrounding sentences. It is a simple fact of the matter almost any and all cross-references which are used by any author in the original redaction of their work can be easily removed without changing the substance of the sentence. This contention should not be used to invalidate the use of cross-references as it could be used to invalidate those parts of a written work which we would consider most authentic and important. The third contention is no less an assumption than the assumptions that Jaeger used to build his own theory, and, on that basis need not be considered. The first contention is the most important as it is quite true. This, however, does not show that the use of cross-references cannot be used to establish a tentative dating for the works of Aristotle, but, on the contrary, simply shows that where there is inconsistency, no order can be established. As I will attempt to show, we are able to use the cross-references to establish a general chronological ordering of the books, which though tentative, seems quite plausible. Many of the works cannot be included in the ordering due to either inconsistencies or a lack of cross-

overview of the redaction of the different works, however, it can give us a general idea of the ordering of some of his most important works.

There are two enormous difficulties in attempting to establish some sort of timeline for the redaction of Aristotle's works through the method that I have proposed. First of all, it is entirely possible that Aristotle went back and edited some, if not all, of his works. If he edited them, including references to other works where he touches on the subjects in question, then it will be difficult to know which books came first, temporally.⁵⁹⁶ There are, however, quite a number of places where Aristotle says something along the lines of, either, "as we have already discussed in...", or, "we will discuss... in..." Variations on these two temporal indicators help to situate the books on a basic timeline. The second difficulty is that we do not possess all of Aristotle's works. Indeed, that which was probably one of his most important works, *On Philosophy*, is only known through the occasional references to it, either in Aristotle's writings themselves, or in the writings of those who, throughout history, have commented on his works. These references give us enough information about *On Philosophy* that we are able to know that it was a preliminary work in what he later came to call first philosophy, as well as a number of other important subjects. This is just one of the many lost works of Aristotle. This means that when Aristotle refers to a work on some subject, unless he explicitly names the work in question, it will be difficult to state with any type of certainty to which work he is referring. That being said, there are enough clear indices in his works that we are able to come up with a general idea of the temporal order of his writings.

references. In light of Barnes first critique, which is to the point, we must be cautious, and not overly dogmatic, in our establishing of any order.

⁵⁹⁶Cf. Barnes, *LW*, 21.

The application of this proposal, starting with the *Metaphysics*, would look something like this. First of all, in the *Metaphysics* 993a13 Aristotle mentions his work the *Physics*.⁵⁹⁷ From this, and the fact that a whole section of the *Metaphysics* is quoted directly from the *Physics*, we can safely assume that the *Physics* was written prior to the *Metaphysics*. The *Metaphysics* also mentions other already written books such as the *Analytics* (In works that follow the *Analytics*, and refer to the *Analytics* as “Analytics” we will assume that they are referring to both the *Prior* and the *Posterior* *analytics* as a complete work, or 2 volume series.) in 1037b10, and a book on ethics (we are not told which one) in 981b25. The *Eudemian Ethics*, which may be the work on ethics that is being referred to in the *Metaphysics*, also refers to the *Analytics* as a prior work in 1217a17. Having shown that the *Physics* was written prior to the *Metaphysics*,⁵⁹⁸ we are then able to understand Aristotle’s mention of previous in-depth discussions of potentiality and actuality (*Physics* 191b29) as referring, respectively, to the *Topics* (in which, book 5, Aristotle develops the notion of potentiality) and to *De Interpretatione* (in which Aristotle develops the notion of actuality).⁵⁹⁹ We can conclude, therefore, that both the *Topics* and *De Interpretatione* were written prior to the *Physics*, and, therefore, prior to the *Metaphysics*. Now, *De Interpretatione*

⁵⁹⁷Aristotle also refers explicitly to the already written *Physics* in *Metaphysics* 1076a9, and alludes to the *Physics* in *Metaphysics* 983b1, 985a13, 986b30, and 988a22. There is also mention of a treatise on Movement (*Metaphysics* 1049b36-1050a1), this could refer to the *Physics*, but it could also refer to an earlier work on movement either bearing that name (or a similar name such as his extant treatise, *On the Movement of Animals*), or under another name, thus it is best to remain agnostic on the identification of this work.

⁵⁹⁸One fact that has frequently caused grief for interpreters is that the *Physics* frequently discusses “first philosophy” (cf. 192a35, 194b15, 277b10, etc.). This reference, however, might very well refer to work that Aristotle did on what he came to call “first philosophy” in his lost work *On Philosophy*. Unless we assume the evolutionary theory of the development of thought, which would force us to conclude that the notion of first philosophy, as an important term in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, could not have been used by a young Aristotle, we are certainly warranted to presume, in light of the overwhelming evidence that the *Physics* was written after the *Metaphysics*, that the notion of first philosophy was discovered quite early by Aristotle, and, perhaps, used in his *On Philosophy*. This term is also found in his work called *Movement of Animals*, and his work *On the Heavens* (*Movement of Animals* 700b10, *On the Heavens* 277b10), however the same principle may apply, and there is, therefore, no need to place them after the *Metaphysics*.

⁵⁹⁹Again, as no treatise is explicitly named, he could also be referring to some lost work on these topics. There is, however, no reason to think that he is referring to the *Metaphysics*, which we have already proved must come later.

clearly refers to three works that were written prior to *De Interpretatione*: the *Analytics* (19b3), the *Topics* (20b26), and *On the Soul* (16a9). Though *De Interpretatione* does not refer to the treatise *Sense and Sensibilia*, this latter treatise does refer to a number of already written treatises: *On the Soul*,⁶⁰⁰ a treatise on mixture,⁶⁰¹ a treatise on the elements,⁶⁰² and a treatise on the movements of atoms.⁶⁰³ *Sense and Sensibilia* also refers to a treatise yet to be written on Generation,⁶⁰⁴ but is not clear as to whether it is referring to *On Generation and Corruption* or to the *Generation of Animals*.⁶⁰⁵ Aristotle's treatise *On the Soul* is one of his earlier works, and seems to refer to his lost *On Philosophy*,⁶⁰⁶ as well as to an already written treatise on the elements.⁶⁰⁷ Though no treatise explicitly refers to the *Sophistical Refutations*, this work refers explicitly to the already written *Analytics*,⁶⁰⁸ and seems to allude to the already written *Topics*.⁶⁰⁹ There can be no doubt about the order of the *Topics*, or the two *Analytics*, all three of which are mentioned by most of Aristotle's works as being already in existence, but which mention no other works explicitly other than themselves. *Topics* is explicitly mentioned, by the *Prior Analytics*, as an already finished work,⁶¹⁰ and the *Posterior Analytics* mentions the already finished *Prior Analytics*⁶¹¹ (which mentions the future *Posterior Analytics*).⁶¹²

⁶⁰⁰Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*, 436b10, 14, 440b27. It should also be noted that Aristotle's work on the *Generation of Animals* explicitly states that the work on the Senses (*Sense and Sensibilia*) was written after *On the Soul* (779b22).

⁶⁰¹*Ibid.*, 440b4.

⁶⁰²*Ibid.*, 441b10.

⁶⁰³*Ibid.*, 445b20.

⁶⁰⁴Aristotle, *Sense and Sensibilia*, 442a2.

⁶⁰⁵In light of arguments yet to come it is relatively probable that he is referring to *On the Generation of Animals* which was part of the series of studies on animals (cf. *On Length and Shortness of Life*, 467b9).

⁶⁰⁶Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 404b19, 406a3.

⁶⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 417a2.

⁶⁰⁸Aristotle, *Sophistical Refutations*, 165b10.

⁶⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 165b7.

⁶¹⁰Aristotle, *Prior Analytics*, 24b11, 46a31.

⁶¹¹Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 73a7, 15.

⁶¹²Aristotle, *Prior Analytics*, 43a36.

There are a number of works which seem to have been part of a series of studies concerning animals. These works, which are easily organized amongst themselves (except for a couple short treatises), are difficult to situate on the general timeline. We can discern, using the principle mentioned above, some order in an enormous series of works on biological research. Moving backwards in time *On Youth, Old Age, Life and Death, and Respiration* refers to the already written *On the Soul*,⁶¹³ the *Parts of Animals*,⁶¹⁴ and the *History of Animals*.⁶¹⁵ The *Generation of Animals* refers to the already written *On the Soul*,⁶¹⁶ *Sense and Sensibilia*,⁶¹⁷ the *Parts of Animals*,⁶¹⁸ and the *History of Animals*.⁶¹⁹ There is an allusion to some unnamed work which treats of Growth and Nutrition.⁶²⁰ The *Parts of Animals* refers to a number of already written treatises: *On Sleep*,⁶²¹ *Sense and Sensibilia*,⁶²² and an unnamed treatise which discusses necessity in relation to Generation,⁶²³ the *Progression of Animals*,⁶²⁴ the *Movement of Animals*,⁶²⁵ *On Breathe*,⁶²⁶ the *History of Animals*,⁶²⁷ and a treatise on *Anatomies*.⁶²⁸ The *Parts of Animals* also refers to the yet to be written *Generation of Animals*.⁶²⁹ The *History of Animals* looks forward to a treatise that will discuss the generation of animals,⁶³⁰ and backwards to an already

⁶¹³Aristotle, *On Youth, Old Age, Life and Death, and Respiration*, 474b11.

⁶¹⁴*Ibid.*, 468b29.

⁶¹⁵*Ibid.*, 477a5.

⁶¹⁶Aristotle, *The Generation of Animals*, 786b25-26, 779b23, 779b22.

⁶¹⁷*Ibid.*, 786b25, 779b22. At 779b22 Aristotle mentions that *On the Soul* was written prior to *Sense and Sensibilia*.

⁶¹⁸*Ibid.*, 715a7, 720b20.

⁶¹⁹*Ibid.*, 716b31.

⁶²⁰*Ibid.*, 784b2.

⁶²¹Aristotle, *Parts of Animals*, 653a20.

⁶²²*Ibid.*

⁶²³*Ibid.*, 640a10.

⁶²⁴*Ibid.*, 696a12.

⁶²⁵*Ibid.*

⁶²⁶*Ibid.*, 669a6-8.

⁶²⁷*Ibid.*, 696b15-16, 689a19.

⁶²⁸*Ibid.*

⁶²⁹*Ibid.*, 650b10, 653b15-18, 689a20, 692a15, 695a27.

⁶³⁰Aristotle, *History of Animals*, 523a14.

written treatise *On Plants*.⁶³¹ The *Movement of Animals* looks back to an already written work which discusses movement in relation to a first mover.⁶³² It is impossible to know to which treatise Aristotle is referring, as, based upon the description and context of the mention, it may be the *Physics*, the *Metaphysics*, or, perhaps, even the *On Philosophy*. If we were to speculate about which treatise he is referring to, we would propose *On Philosophy*, though I recognize that the *Physics* is equally probable. In so much as the *Metaphysics* presupposes much of Aristotle's work in the natural sciences, it seems a far stretch to say that he is referring to the *Metaphysics*. The *Movement of Animals* mentions the already written, *On the Soul*.⁶³³ The *Progression of Animals*, though mentioned by most of the preceding treatises, mentions none of them. Though some of the smaller physical treatises are difficult to fit into the timeline of Aristotle's biological treatises we are able to put the biological treatises of Aristotle in the following, approximate, order (from earliest to latest): *On the Soul*, *Sense and Sensibilia*, *On Memory*,⁶³⁴ *On Breathe*, *Optics*,⁶³⁵ *Problems*,⁶³⁶ *On Sleep*,⁶³⁷ *On Dreams*,⁶³⁸ on the *Progression of Animals*, on the *Movement of Animals*, the *History of Animals*, the *Parts of Animals*, the *Generation of Animals*, *On Youth, Old Age, Life and Death, and Respiration*. Though none of these works refer explicitly either to the *Metaphysics* or the *Physics*, we can probably situate them roughly between the *Posterior Analytics* and the *Ethics*. There is probably some overlap between these works and the works of what is known as the *Organon*.

⁶³¹Ibid., 539a21.

⁶³²Aristotle, *Movement of Animals*, 700b10.

⁶³³Ibid., 700b4-5.

⁶³⁴This book refers to the already written *On the Soul* at 449b31.

⁶³⁵This book is referred to, as already written, by the *Problems* at 913a23.

⁶³⁶This book is referred to, as already written, by the *On Sleep* at 456a29.

⁶³⁷This book is referred to, as already written, by the *Parts of Animals* at 653a20; and refers to the already written *On the Soul* (455a7), and *Problems* (456a29).

⁶³⁸This book refers to the already written *On the Soul* at 459a15.

There are also some works of Aristotle which are difficult to place as they either do not refer explicitly to the other major works, or the sparse references do not permit us to place them with any measure of certainty. These include: the *Poetics*,⁶³⁹ the *Rhetoric*,⁶⁴⁰ The *Eudemian Ethics*,⁶⁴¹ the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Magna Moralia*, the *Politics*,⁶⁴² and a number of smaller treatises. The *Metaphysics* mentions an already written ethics, but does not mention which one it is referring to.⁶⁴³ Due to the fact that these works do not explicitly mention enough works to allow us to situate them on the timeline, it is, perhaps, better to not be overly dogmatic in our speculations.

In light of the above, explicit, observations I would propose the following chronological order of the main works of Aristotle (earliest to latest):

On Philosophy
Topics
Categories
Prior Analytics
Posterior Analytics
Sophistical Refutations
On the Soul
Sense and Sensibilia
De Interpretatione
Poetics
Rhetoric
Physics
On Generation and Corruption
Meteorology
On the Heavens
On Memory
On Breathe
Optics
Problems
On Sleep

⁶³⁹The *Poetics* was clearly written prior to the *Rhetoric*, as the *Rhetoric* mentions it frequently (cf. 1419b5, 1372a1, 1404a39, 1404b7, 1405a4).

⁶⁴⁰The *Rhetoric* mentions the already written *Poetics* (see the previous footnote) and *Topics* (1355a29).

⁶⁴¹The *Eudemian Ethics* mentions the already written *Analytics* (1217a17).

⁶⁴²It is generally conceded that the *Politics* presupposes the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

⁶⁴³Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 981b25. It is generally conceded that the *Eudemian Ethics* constitute an earlier version of the *Nicomachean ethics*, and perhaps Aristotle is referring to this earlier Ethics.

On Dreams
The Progression of Animals
The Movement of Animals
The History of Animals
The Parts of Animals
The Generation of Animals
On Youth, Old Age, Life and Death, and Respiration
Eudemian Ethics
Magna Moralia
Metaphysics

I have not attempted to include, in this list, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Politics*, and a number of smaller works, as there is not enough explicit evidence to be able to speculate meaningfully about where they fit in the order. If I had to guess I would put the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics* between *Magna Moralia* and *Metaphysics*, but, that would be pure speculation based upon vague references (of course we could just as easily place them after the *Metaphysics*). It should be noted that by placing the works of Aristotle in this chronological order I am in no way implying that Aristotle didn't start thinking about ethics until after he had completed his studies of nature, or that he did not begin thinking about the problem of Being until he began his work on the *Metaphysics*. On the contrary, as I noted above, in my discussion of the lost work *On Philosophy*, I think that it is quite likely that a great majority of Aristotle's ethical and metaphysical views were already present, explicitly or implicitly, in his *On Philosophy*, and that the finished books, in the forms that they currently have, include thoughts and reflections that may date from Aristotle's time with Plato. It is a simple fact that scholars reuse, at a later date, material that they may have developed years earlier. They may, of course, rework the early material a bit, rearrange arguments, add or remove some thoughts, and change some earlier thoughts to reflect the development of their understanding. We can see this, most evidently, in the *Metaphysics*, which, though it betrays an overall unity and depth, shows signs of having been

formed from a number of different sources, and patched together into a rough outline of Aristotle's thoughts on Being and the causes of Being.

In this chronological ordering of Aristotle's works I have not assumed any overarching framework into which I tried to fit Aristotle's works, I simply noted his explicit references to other works (past or future depending on the work in question) and ordered the works accordingly. This method provides a much more reliable ordering than that used by Jaeger, and also, interestingly enough, corresponds, with some minor modifications, to the traditional ordering of Aristotle's works (The biggest difference is that I put the ethical works prior to the *Metaphysics*, but I also noted that this was only speculation, as there is only one explicit mention in the *Metaphysics* of an already written work on Ethics, and, aside from that, no other evidence that would help to decide either way.) Having determined that the development of Aristotle's philosophical ponderings causes no problems for understanding Aristotle's approach to the question of Being, and having situated the *Metaphysics* as being what should be considered, most likely, as Aristotle's most mature work (both problems which are exterior to the *Metaphysics*, but which are essential for the proper interpretation of the *Metaphysics*), we seem warranted to conclude that Aristotle approaches the question of Being in light of his discoveries that are recorded in his almost the entirety of his corpus. We turn now to exegetical difficulties with the special interpretation of the *Metaphysics* itself.

Exegetical difficulties

Some of the difficulties that the interpreter of Aristotle will run into include not only the exact time in his career when Aristotle wrote the *Metaphysics*, and, therefore, under whose influence he was writing, but, also, the question of the unity of the *Metaphysics* and the translation of the key terms that are used by Aristotle in the development of his "metaphysical"

theories. In this section we will consider, first of all, the way in which the key Greek words that Aristotle uses have been translated, how they should be translated, and what they mean in general. We will then turn to questions related to the structure and unity of the *Metaphysics*.

Key Terms

Ousia

Ὀὐσία is not only one of the most important philosophical terms of art in Aristotle, but it is also, and perhaps because of this, one of the most difficult Greek words to translate. Anybody who would say otherwise is simply not familiar with the debates surrounding the proper translation of this word. One of the major difficulties in translating any work of importance, and the cause of many nightmares for translators, is that one word can have many meanings, and one must never assume that the author being translated always uses the same meaning of the word in question. For example, the word ‘Bank’ can refer to a place where we deposit money, or to the side of a river, or it can be used as a verb to refer to an action that one undertakes while driving. As such, word meaning must frequently be determined by the immediate context of the word. This becomes touchy when all, or some, of the potential meanings of one word would work as appropriate translations in a given context, but, each of the potential meanings of that word could give a different meaning to the phrase. As such, the actual meaning of the term must always be determined by its use in the context.

How then do we translate *Ὀὐσία*? Do we need to have a definition of it before we can translate it? Is so, then we may have a major problem. Andrew J. Reck, in his presidential address, “Being and Substance”, begins by noting that “It is a philosophical commonplace that,

according to the traditional criteria of definition, Being cannot be defined.”⁶⁴⁴ If Be-ing cannot be defined, and *οὐσία* is the primary way in which Be-ing is said, is it even possible to define *οὐσία*? Regardless of the answer to this question many people have tried to translate *οὐσία*, and the debate has been informative. A comparison of the ways in which different translators have approached this term reveals that *οὐσία* is commonly translated as “substance”, however, the same authors who translate *οὐσία* as substance, in other contexts, translate the same word as “essence”.⁶⁴⁵ We cannot consider every attempt to give a proper translation of *οὐσία*, but we can consider the attempts of two great philosophers of our modern era to translate this term.⁶⁴⁶ Joseph Owens, in his doctoral dissertation, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, begins by arguing that both substance and essence are poor translations of *οὐσία*.⁶⁴⁷ Owens then goes on to argue that probably the best and least controversial way of translating *οὐσία* is to use the term *entity*.⁶⁴⁸ Alan Gewirth, in response to the first edition of Owen’s dissertation, argues that what worries Owens, and motivates him to suggest a different term for translation purposes is a non-

⁶⁴⁴Andrew J. Reck, “Being and Substance,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 31, no. 4 (June 1978), 533.

⁶⁴⁵Cf. Aristotle, *Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 1015a14-16, 1017b22-23. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, vols. 271 & 287 in *Loeb Classical Library*, trans. Hugh Tredennick, ed. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933 & 1935), 1015a14-16, 1017b22-23. Aristotle, *La Métaphysique*, 2 vols., trans. J. Tricot (Paris : Librairie Philosophique J. VRIN, 1991), 1017b22-23. In the footnotes that follow, if I provide my own translation of the *Metaphysics* it will be referenced as follows: *Metaphysics*, Bekker number. If, on the other hand, I quote or refer to a translation by another person it will be referenced as follows: *Metaphysics*, Bekker number, translator’s last name. Oliva Blanchette notes the same tendency, and provides a summary discussion of this term, in his voluminous *Philosophy of Being: A Reconstructive Essay in Metaphysics* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 97.

⁶⁴⁶Translating and defining are two very different actions. *Translation* simply attempts to discover a word in one language which is, roughly, the equivalent, used in the same way as referring to the same thing, of a word in another language. *Definition* seeks to explain what thing is, such that a term (for which there may be many words in different language) can be applied to it.

⁶⁴⁷Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, 2nd ed. (Toronto, ON: PIMS, 1963), 144-147, 152fn63. He does not seem to have ever changed his opinion concerning the inadequacy of the English words ‘substance’ and ‘essence’ as can be seen from his later book, published post-humously, *Aristotle’s Gradations of Being in Metaphysics E-Z* (Joseph Owens, *Aristotle’s Gradations of Being in Metaphysics E-Z*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2007), 16, 91-92.).

⁶⁴⁸Owens, *The Doctrine of Being*, 149-151. Robert Sokolowski seems to agree with Owens concerning this way of translating *οὐσία*, as he interprets Aristotle’s question “What is *οὐσία*?” as “what is entity, *ousia*?” (Robert Sokolowski, “The Question of Being,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 43, no. 4 (June, 1990), 716.)”

issue, and suggests that *substance* and *essence* should be kept as valid terms for translation.⁶⁴⁹ Owens later, in *Aristotle's Gradations of Being in Metaphysics E-Z*, seems to have changed his position concerning the use of *entity* as the proper translation of *οὐσία*. Near the beginning of *Aristotle's Gradations of Being in Metaphysics E-Z* Owen's notes that in light of difficulties with the English word *Substance*, and the uninspiring character of *Entity*, many modern authors tend to "leave the Greek *ousia* untranslated and to use it as an English word. But if 'beingness' is now acceptable, it serves the purpose neatly enough in instances like that of the present text. It cannot, of course, be used in general as a translation of *ousia*, since you cannot speak of a tree or a dog as a 'beingness' in the way each is referred to in Greek as an *ousia*."⁶⁵⁰ Reck, however, noting his indebtedness to Owens, argues that 'beingness' simply is the best translation of the Greek *οὐσία*, "it may be helpful to recall that Aristotle's Greek term for 'substance' is *οὐσία*, that *οὐσία* is a gerund derived from the feminine participial form of the verb 'to be,' and that its literal translation is 'beingness.'"⁶⁵¹

Owens later, in *Aristotle's Gradations of Being*, notes that the word that would be used to translate *οὐσία*, whatever it might be, must, "carry the force of the characteristic that makes a thing be. Likewise it has to signify, simultaneously, the thing that has the beingness..."⁶⁵² He then goes on to note the difficulties with *substance* and *essence*, and then notes that "The term 'entity' in English can be used for a concrete thing as well as for the abstract characteristic. It can accordingly function as a translating word for any of the instance of *ousia* in Aristotle. But it is a dull word, and does not carry any of the vitality and relevance associated with one's own

⁶⁴⁹Alan Gewirth, "Aristotle's Doctrine of Being," *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 62, no. 4 (Oct., 1953), 578-80.

⁶⁵⁰Owens, *Aristotle's Gradations of Being*, 16-17.

⁶⁵¹Reck, *Being and Substance*, 539.

⁶⁵²Owens, *Aristotle's Gradations of Being*, 92.

personal property, as does *ousia* in Greek or ‘substance’ in English.”⁶⁵³ Due to the difficulty of translating *οὐσία* Owen’s concludes that, “But in a rendition of the Aristotelian text itself, the one way of conserving the unity of its meaning throughout all its variations, seems to be the retention of the original Greek term *ousia*. At least the use of the term *ousia* allows one to keep aware of the consistency of Aristotle in seeing the singular thing as the primary *ousia* in a logical context, the form of the sensible thing as the primary *ousia* [sic.] in a physical context, and the supersensible forms as the primary *ousiai* (*Metaphysics*, 12.8.1074b9) in a metaphysical context.”⁶⁵⁴

Martin Heidegger, another great philosopher of the 1900s, in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, defined *οὐσία* as follows: “*Ousia*, then, can mean both the coming to presence of something that comes to presence *and* that which comes to presence in the whatness of its look.”⁶⁵⁵ This definition of *οὐσία* seems to be based on his previous contention that: “What grounds and hold together all the determinations of Being we have listed is what the Greeks experienced without question as the meaning of Being, which they called *ousia*, or more fully *parousia*. The usual thoughtlessness translates *ousia* as ‘substance’ and thereby misses its sense entirely. In German, we have an appropriate expression for *parousia* in our word *An-wesen* (coming-to-presence)...In Aristotle’s times, too, *ousia* was still used in this sense *as well as* in its meaning as a basic philosophical word. Something comes to presence. It stands in itself and thus puts itself forth. It is. For the Greeks, ‘Being’ fundamentally means presence.”⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵³Ibid.

⁶⁵⁴Ibid., 93.

⁶⁵⁵Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 193 [138]. The square brackets, per tradition, refer to the pagination in the Niemeyer German edition.

⁶⁵⁶Ibid., 64 [46].

Both Heidegger and Owens note important aspects that seem to be intrinsic to the term *οὐσία*: presence or Be-ing, and the whatness of the thing that is Be-ing or Presenc-ing itself. Both of these notions, as well as the notion of possession of the whatness of the Be-ing by the thing that is Be-ing must be included in any word that translates *οὐσία*. As such, it is my opinion that it is better not to translate *οὐσία*, but to leave it as it is in the Greek text. In some contexts, Aristotle puts more emphasis on the whatness of the Be-ing, and in other contexts he puts more emphasis on the Be-ing of the Be-ing. However, every time he uses *οὐσία* all of these aspects are present. This, of course, does not resolve the difficulty that we are considering. What is *οὐσία*?

If *οὐσία* means, as some have argued, *substance*, then we seem to be replacing Be-ing with another word, unless *substance* is understood in what is arguably its primary meaning (in English at least), as the foundational principle of that which *is*. In which case the question of Being would become, according to Aristotle, “What is the foundational principle of that which is?”

Looking at the other suggested translations, if, in this section, *οὐσία* means “be-ing-ness”, then one could claim that Aristotle is saying that the question “what is Be-ing?” simply is, “what does it mean to Be?” or “What is the essence of Be-ing?” or “What is it to Be?”. The meaning of this question, when worded in this way, can be illustrated by the following analogy: Asking “what is a horse?” just is to ask “what is horse-ness?”, or “what is the essence of Horse?” or “What is it to be a horse?”

The point of this discussion about the appropriate translation of *οὐσία* in this section, is that, regardless of how you translate *οὐσία* (essence, be-ing-ness, substance, etc.), in so much as your translation grasps a-hold of the notion “that which is foundational to that which is” or “that which makes a Be-ing to be and to be what it is”, then you are accurately translating *οὐσία*, and Aristotle is then found to be saying that the question “what is being?” just is the question, “what

is it that makes Be-ing to Be Be-ing?” or “what is it to Be?” This is the fundamental question of Metaphysics, and the primary question of all philosophy as Heidegger notes in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*. In other words, the primordial question is “What is Being – the foundational principle of anything that IS?”

We seem to be getting somewhere. Aristotle, interpreted in this way, understands the question “what is Being?” in exactly the same way that Socrates understood the question “What is Piety?” A “What is X?” question is asking for that which makes X to be X. Then, all of a sudden, in the third major section of Metaphysics Z Aristotle declares that *οὐσία* is said in four ways. Is this another list? Have we escaped one trap to fall into another? More on this later.

Ti to en einai

Joseph Owens, in *The Doctrine of Being*, says that “In Natural Philosophy and in the Primary Philosophy it [*ti to en einai*] designates the form as opposed to the matter and the composite. It denotes therefore the form or the specific definition precisely as such.”⁶⁵⁷ He goes on to explain that “the τί is the subject of the finite verb ἦν, with εἶναι as a predicate infinitive, while the article [τὸ] gives the whole expression the form of an answer to a question.”⁶⁵⁸ After giving support for the preceding claims, Owens states that “the phrase in this way is in itself a complete grammatical unit. No essential element has to be understood or supplied. The possessive datives, when added, merely apply it to the thing in question and restrict the ‘Being’ to a particular type of Being.”⁶⁵⁹ He then resumes his argument by noting that the ἦν, “the Greek imperfect cannot be taken here as denoting past time. It refers in this phrase to something still

⁶⁵⁷Owens, *The Doctrine of Being*, 180.

⁶⁵⁸Ibid., 181.

⁶⁵⁹Ibid., 182fn.83

present, and applies equally well to the timeless separate forms. It indicates ‘timeless Being,’ and so implies exemption from the contingency of matter and change upon which time follows.⁶⁶⁰ As such, Owens concludes that this phrase “expresses the formal, intelligible perfection of a thing.”⁶⁶¹ Charles H. Kahn notes that this “formula means quite literally a thing’s being-what-it-is, not merely the content or character of what-it-is (τὸ τί ἐστίν), the answer to the question, ‘What is it?’, but its being determinately so, as a man or a dog or a triangle.”⁶⁶² Such a notion is frequently expressed by the word *form*, and is said to be the form of the being. Ross and Tredennick both translate it, in this section, as “essence”.

Other Greek words for Being

There are many greek words that are used, by Aristotle, in the *Metaphysics* to talk about *being*. For example, in *Metaphysics* 1028a10-13 Aristotle seems to make a distinction between the “what-is” (τὸ...τί ἐστίν) and the “what” (τι). Most translations seem to understand Aristotle to be referring to the “essence” of a thing (“what it is”), and to its individuality (“*this* being”). If this is an appropriate translation, then Aristotle is talking about individual things and what they are (their essence). Tricot seems, in a slight variation of his translation of this section, to understand Aristotle to be referring to the ‘essence’ (“ce qu’est la chose”) and to the “substance”, the actually existing what-ness.

⁶⁶⁰Ibid., 183-184. This point is also noted by Lambros Couloubaritsis in his article, *Considérations sur la notion de TO TI HN EINAI* (Lambros Couloubaritsis, “Considérations sur la notion de TO TI HN EINAI,” *L’antiquité Classique*, T. 50, fasc. 1/2 (1981), 149.). In this article Couloubaritsis argues that this phrase is ambivalent due to the fact that it is able to join together, into one idea, both logical notions and ontological notions (Ibid., 150.).

⁶⁶¹Ibid., 185. Cf. Ibid., 184-188.

⁶⁶²Charles H. Kahn, “The Greek Verb ‘To Be’ and the Concept of Being,” in *Foundations of Language*, vol. 2, no. 3, (Aug., 1966), 261.

It seems to me that Aristotle could be better understood as referring to (keeping in line with all of the observations that we see in the different translations) the individual being (a composition of its essence and the fact that it is an individual existing thing) – “τὸ...τί ἐστὶ”; and the essence of the individual being – “τῆ”. Or, in other words, ‘the Be-ing’, and the ‘what-the-Be-ing-is’ – its identity, essence, or whatness.

Another Greek word that can be translated being is εἶναι, the present infinitive of the first person singular present indicative εἰμί (which is usually translated “I am”). εἶναι, then, should be translated “to be”, or in latin “esse”.⁶⁶³

We should also consider the greek word ὄντα which can be translated either as a singular accusative present participle – “being”,⁶⁶⁴ as a plural accusative present participle “be-ings”, or as a nominative plural present participle “the beings”.⁶⁶⁵ It can sometimes be difficult to decide on how to translate ὄντα, as it is frequently equally plausible to translate it (regardless of the context) as either the plural accusative present participle, or as the singular accusative present participle. In such cases I prefer to use the singular as it helps us to remember that Aristotle is talking about things that Be, and describing how we say Be-ing of different things. When in the plural the reader tends to think more about objects or things (as when Tricot and Ross translate ὄντα as or the beings) than the present action of Be-ing (like the action of running, walking or drinking,)

⁶⁶³Cf. Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, 140, 149. For an interesting consideration of the appropriate translation of εἶναι see the article, mentioned earlier, by Charles H. Kahn, *The Greek Verb ‘To Be’ and the Concept of Being*, where, as he is elaborating three important aspects of the Greek verb ‘to be’ (the veridical factor, the durative factor and the locative factor), claims that “the most fundamental value of *einai* when used alone (without predicates) is not ‘to exist’ but ‘to be so’, ‘to be the case’, or ‘to be true’. (Kahn, *The Greek Verb ‘To Be’ and the Concept of Being*, 250.)” Kahn’s contributions need to be taken with a grain of salt as he seems to overemphasize the veridical character of being, to the point of turning the Greek concept of Be-ing into truth “Being for these philosophers as for Parmenides means what is or can be truly known and truly said. (Ibid., 260.)”

⁶⁶⁴The accusative is the complement of the direct object of the verb. So, sleeping is the accusative in the following sentence: “I saw David sleeping.” A participle always ends with “-ing”.

⁶⁶⁵A nominative is always the subject of the sentence and is preceded by either a definite or indefinite article.

which is the point of both the singular and the plural forms of the accusative present participle (a hyphen can sometimes be inserted in order to emphasise that we are not talking about “a being” or “beings” but of “Be-ing” the present action of existence).

Another form that is frequently used by Aristotle is *ὄντος*, which is always the genitive singular present participle and, therefore, should always be translated as “of Be-ing” or “from Be-ing”. The genitive is the complement of the noun or pronoun, is used to describe the noun, and is used to represent possession.

Other greek words that express being that will be found in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* are *ὄντων* (the genitive plural present participle), which should be translated “of Be-ings”; *ἐστὶν* (the third person singular present indicative), which is translated as “is”, and is technically the copula; *ὄν*, always preceded by an article, frequently by the article *τὸ*, (the nominative singular present participle) is properly translated, “the Being”. It is important to keep this in mind when interpreting key phrases such as *τὸ ὄν ἢ ὄν*, which are properly translated, “the being as being”. The question that one needs to ask, even with this accurate translation, is: Should any special emphasis be put on the article? What does Aristotle mean by “the being”? The definite article seems to remove the possibility that he is referring to any particular being. In light of this being a present participle, we seem warranted to conclude that Aristotle is talking about the action of Be-ing that is common to all that in some way *is*.⁶⁶⁶

Finally, we also find the form *εἴη* (third person singular present optative mood), which should be translated “it/she/he would be” (the optative mood expresses wishes, desires or potential); and the form *ἦν* (first or third person singular imperfect indicative), which should be

⁶⁶⁶See the article by John G. Stevenson, “Being ‘qua’ Being,” *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science*, vol. 9, no. 2 (Nov., 1975), 47, where he claims that such is not the case.

translated “I/he/she/it have/has been” (an imperfect verb form indicates an event that began in the past and is still happening).

The meaning of λόγος

The appropriate translation for *λόγος* is often thought to be, indisputably, “word”. The fact of the matter is that this word can be translated in many different ways depending on the context and what is being expressed. Joseph Owens, in *The Doctrine of Being*, says that “In the earliest Greek writers, *logos* means only ‘word’ in the singular and ‘speech’ in the plural. Its various meanings in Aristotle are listed by Bonitz (Ind. Arist., 433a1-437b32) under the following heads: 1) Word, language, or speech. 2) Notion or thought. 3) The faculty of thinking or reasoning. 4) Mathematical proportion, relation.”⁶⁶⁷ We could add to this “a conceived plan”.⁶⁶⁸

Later, discussing the proper translation of *logos* in *Metaphysics Z*, chapter 5, 1031a12, Owens notes that, “The Greek word *λόγος* in the general sense employed in the present discussion is difficult to translate. It is wider than ‘definition’. The word ‘account’ is sometimes used to render its meaning. This word is clumsy, but it has a range of meaning to cover the extent of the Greek term in the present context. The Oxford translation uses ‘formula.’ The term is attractive, in spite of some distracting modern connotations. It is related verbally to ‘form,’ to which *logos* is often the equivalent in Aristotelian usage...But ‘formula’ expresses the *formal* character of the *logos* much better than the word ‘account.’ So for practical purposes it will make the best translation whenever a contrast with ‘definition’ is implied. Where no contrast is meant, and *logos* as a matter of fact signifies definition, the interests of clarity suggest that the English

⁶⁶⁷Owens, *DBAM*, 116fn35.

⁶⁶⁸J. L. Stocks, “On the Aristotelian Use of *λόγος*: A Reply,” *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 1 (Jan., 1914), 11, 12.

term ‘definition’ be used.”⁶⁶⁹ The difficulty that presents itself to the translator is that they must understand Aristotle well enough, in each context, as well as the many possible meanings of the Greek word in order to be able to *λόγος*, to be able to propose appropriate translations. Sometimes the context doesn’t help for determining the meaning of the term, and any number of possible words could be used, each giving a different meaning to the argument.

Owens was not the only great philosopher to discuss how to properly translate the Greek word *λόγος*. Martin Heidegger, who was well versed in Greek philosophy, also discusses the meaning of this word. In his *Introduction to Metaphysics* Heidegger relates *λόγος* to discourse,⁶⁷⁰ and then says, “But Aristotle is the first to give the clearer metaphysical interpretation of the *logos* in the sense of the propositional statement... This elucidation of the essence of the *logos* became the model and measure for the later development of logic and grammar.”⁶⁷¹ Interestingly enough we see one of the translators, Tricot, who in translating 1028a31-35, translates *λόγῳ* as “logiquement” (‘logically’ in English). Heidegger’s analysis of *λόγος* does not, however, stop with this observation. He continues his analysis of *λόγος* by claiming that *λόγος* is “the gathering”⁶⁷² and that it is the same as “*Polemos*”.⁶⁷³ Later he notes that “we just have to free ourselves from the opinion that *logos* and *legein* originally and authentically mean thinking, understanding and reason. As long as we hold to this opinion, and even interpret *logos* using the later conception of *logos* as logic as our criterion, our new disclosure of the inception of Greek philosophy will lead only to absurdities.”⁶⁷⁴ He goes on to say that “*Logos* means the word, discourse, and *legein* means to discourse, to talk. Dia-logue is reciprocal discourse, mono-logue

⁶⁶⁹Owens, *DBAM*, 351fn18.

⁶⁷⁰Heidegger, *IM*, 61 [44].

⁶⁷¹*Ibid.*, 61 [44-45].

⁶⁷²*Ibid.*, 65 [47].

⁶⁷³*Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 130-31 [94].

is solitary discourse. But *logos* does not originally mean discourse, saying. What the word means has no immediate relation to language. *Lego, legein*, Latin *legere*, is the same word as our *lesen* (to collect): gleaning, collecting wood, harvesting grapes, making a selection; ‘reading (*lesen*) a book’ is just a variant of ‘gathering’ in the authentic sense. This means laying one thing next to another, bringing them together as one – in short, gathering.”⁶⁷⁵

Heidegger continues by emphasising the relational aspect of gathering,⁶⁷⁶ which must be part of the meaning of *λόγος*, as gathering is a bringing together and a putting into relation. He says that, “we simply recall that the word *logos* retained its originary meaning, ‘the relation of one thing to another,’ long after it had come to mean discourse and assertion.”⁶⁷⁷ His analysis of *λόγος* starts to get complicated after his consideration of Heraclitus’s use of this term. He claims that *λόγος*, in the context of Heraclitus, means “the originally gathering gatheredness that constantly holds sway in itself.”⁶⁷⁸ As such, *λόγος* is “*the gatheredness of beings themselves.*”⁶⁷⁹ Two more quotes from Heidegger’s *Introduction to Metaphysics* will help us to better understand Heidegger’s views on *λόγος*, and how he relates it to Being. First of all he says “*Logos* is constant gathering, the gatheredness of beings that stands in itself, that is, being...*Phusis* and *logos* are the same. *Logos* characterizes Being in a new and yet old respect: that which is in being, which stands straight and prominently in itself, is gathered in itself and from itself, and holds itself in such gathering.”⁶⁸⁰ Secondly, “The essence of *logos* as gathering yields an essential consequence for the character of *legein*. *Legein* as gathering, determined in this way, is related to the originary gatheredness of Being, and Being means coming-into-unconcealment; this gathering therefore

⁶⁷⁵Ibid., 131 [95].

⁶⁷⁶Ibid., 131 [95].

⁶⁷⁷Ibid., 132 [95].

⁶⁷⁸Ibid., 135 [98].

⁶⁷⁹Ibid., 137 [99].

⁶⁸⁰Ibid., 138-39 [100].

has the basic character of opening up, revealing. *Legein* is thus contrasted clearly and sharply with covering up and concealing...In accordance with this relation, *legein* means: to produce the unconcealed as such, beings in their unconcealment. Thus *logos* has the character of *deloun*, of revealing, not only in Heraclitus but still in Plato. Aristotle characterizes the *legein* of *logos* as *apophainesthai*, bringing-to-self-showing (see *Being and Time* § 7 and §44)."⁶⁸¹

What can we ‘gather’, from these two great philosophers, about the meaning of *λόγος*, and how it should be properly translated? First of all, we need to remember, with Owens, that in translating any term we need to pay attention to how it is used by the author that we are translating, and we also need to be aware of the many possible meanings of *λόγος*, - that is, how it is used by different authors in different circumstances. Secondly, we need to remember, with Heidegger, that the primary meaning behind the word *λόγος* is a bringing together (gathering), bringing into relations and presenc-ing (displaying) of beings in their Be-ing – in other words, a letting beings be-together as they are in their own particular Be-ing and in relation to the Be-ing of other be-ings. This means that even when we are translating *λόγος* and giving it the sense of dialogue, discourse, word, saying, or some other speech related meaning, there is a sense in which an authentic *λόγος* displays the Be-ing of beings in themselves or in relation to the Be-ing of other beings in such a way that they are not distorted or changed but presented as they are. It is a letting-beings-Be as they are. This is, in a sense, what it means to speak truly of that of which one speaks. In this sense, then *λόγος* can be translated by many different words, insomuch as the words used in translation bring forth the sense that the author in question is attempting to display.

⁶⁸¹Ibid., 181-82 [130].

The structure and unity of the *Metaphysics*

It is traditional, when considering the work of any one philosopher, to comment on the purpose of the work in question, and the relation of the parts to the whole, among other textual questions. Much ink has been spilled in attempting to develop theories concerning the composition of the *Metaphysics* varying from the extreme conclusion that Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is a fractured pile of unrelated sections to the other extreme that the *Metaphysics* is a well-written and organized work.⁶⁸² The findings of this section are primordial for a proper understanding of Aristotle's approach to the question of being.

Werner Jaeger on Aristotle's Metaphysics

In the second main section of this work, Jaeger develops an intricate and detailed explanation of Aristotle's philosophical endeavours from the death of Plato up to his return to Athens and the founding of his school in the Lyceum. He begins by tracing Aristotle's travels from the time he left Plato's Academy up to his tutorship of Alexander the Great and the death of Philip of Macedon. Having given somewhat of a historical overview of Aristotle's travels, Jaeger turns to the work called *On Philosophy*. He seeks to show how Aristotle continued to develop, ever remaining faithful to his Platonic foundation. Jaeger examines, through an in-depth study of the fragments which seem to come from the work *On Philosophy*, how Aristotle develops his

⁶⁸²Ralph McInerny, "Preface," in Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, trans. John P. Rowan, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books, 1995), xxvii. Cf. Owens, *The Doctrine of Being*, 69-106. Thomas Joseph White, in *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity: A Study in Thomistic Natural Theology* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2009), 45-64, provides an outline of the *Metaphysics* that concentrates on the use of the term Wisdom, and finds the book to reflect a consistent movement of thought. Alan Gewirth notes that one of the difficulties of Owens' work is his analysis of the composition of the *Metaphysics* (Gewirth, *ADB*, 578.). Philip Merlan claims that "nothing in the manuscripts corresponds to the chapters as we find them in printed editions of Aristotle. This is a very important point. The division into chapters more than once creates the false impression of a consistent train of thought or simply of unit of meaning, whereas what we have before us are sentences very loosely connected or even not connected at all. (Philip Merlan, "On the Terms 'Metaphysics' and 'Being-Qua-Being'," *The Monist*, vol. 52, no. 2, Aristotle (April, 1968), 177fn8.)"

thoughts on cosmology, philosophy of religion, theology and the history of philosophy. Jaeger postulates that this treatise was written after the *Physics*, and notes that Aristotle clearly begins turning away from Platonic metaphysics. This look at the development of Aristotle's metaphysics leads Jaeger into an examination of what he calls the original *Metaphysics*. Here he outlines his theory concerning the composition and date of redaction of the various parts of the *Metaphysics*. His primary claim is that the *Metaphysics* was not compiled and written, in the order that we have received it, by Aristotle himself. Rather, his disciples later collected a number of his writings on the same (or similar) subjects, and did their best to arrange them as coherently as possible. He states that, "internal analysis leads to the view that various periods are represented; and this is confirmed by the tradition that the collection known as the *Metaphysics* was not put together until after its author's death."⁶⁸³ As such, Jaeger postulates, there is no intentional unity in the *Metaphysics*. Indeed, states Jaeger, "We must reject all attempts to make a literary whole out of the remaining materials by rearranging or removing some of the books, and we must condemn the assumption which overhastily postulates their philosophical unity at the expense of their individual peculiarities."⁶⁸⁴ Jaeger goes on to dissect our present version of the *Metaphysics* into different sections (the book is already divided up into books, but Jaeger even goes into the books themselves and divides them up), dating the different sections based upon their attitude towards

⁶⁸³Jaeger, *AFHD*, 168.

⁶⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 170.

Platonism. Jaeger's theory, which is followed closely by W. D. Ross,⁶⁸⁵ is, with a number of important nuances,⁶⁸⁶ as follows:⁶⁸⁷

Books *ABΓ* form a complete group (first group). Book *A* was apparently written quite early, while Aristotle was still a Platonist.⁶⁸⁸ Book *B* was also, in its entirety, a part of the earlier version of the *Metaphysics*.⁶⁸⁹

Book *Δ* was an independent lexical work that was used in a number of Aristotle's works.

Book *E* serves to transition from the first group to the second group.

Books *ZHΘ* form a complete group (second group) written at a latter period of Aristotle's life than *A* and *B*, and are not part of the original plan of the *Metaphysics* (laid out in *B*).⁶⁹⁰ *Z* is probably an independently written work on substance.⁶⁹¹ The final chapter of *Θ* is a late addition to *Θ*.⁶⁹²

Book *I* is a separate unity.

The purified early version of the *Metaphysics* included *ABΓEZHΘI* and probably *N*.⁶⁹³

⁶⁸⁵Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trad Ross, 1: xiii-xxxiii. Cf. David Ross, *Aristotle*, 6th ed. (1995; repr., New York: Routledge, 2006), 11-12. Ross's theory is as follows: Books *ABΓE* form a complete group. Books *ZHΘ* form a complete group. Books *MN* form a complete group. Book *I* is a unity. Books *ABΓEZHΘMNI* form one continuous work (p. xx, xxiii). Books *aKA* and *Δ* are all intrusions in the *Metaphysics* (p. xxix-xxvii, xxviii-xxix). Book *Δ* is most certainly a separate treatise (p. xxviii-xxix). Book *Δ* was a separate lexical work that was used in a number of Aristotle's works. Ross follows Jaeger in arguing that *K* is most likely a prior treatment of the same issues as are found in *BΓE* (p. xviii fn5).

⁶⁸⁶The nuances are in relation to sections of the different books which are said to be earlier drafts or later interpolations.

⁶⁸⁷Cf. Jaeger, *AFHD*, 169-170.

⁶⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 171.

⁶⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 175-176.

⁶⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 196-197, 198, 202.

⁶⁹¹*Ibid.*, 200-201.

⁶⁹²*Ibid.*, 204-205.

⁶⁹³*Ibid.*, 194.

Book *K* is most likely a prior treatment of the same issues as are found in *BΓE*, and may be the lecture notes written down by a student in a lecture.⁶⁹⁴ *K* is also prior to *ZHΘ*,⁶⁹⁵ but was not included in the original *Metaphysics*.⁶⁹⁶

Book *Λ* is most certainly a separate treatises, written as the outline for a lecture,⁶⁹⁷ standing in no relation to the others,⁶⁹⁸ which was composed after *N* and influenced by *N*.⁶⁹⁹ However, it is also evident, from the manner in which Aristotle seeks to show the existence of a God, that *Λ* is an early work, from Aristotle's Platonic days, predating the anti-platonic section,⁷⁰⁰ with the exception of chapter 8 which was most certainly, according to Jaeger, a later addition.⁷⁰¹ Indeed, says Jaeger, Aristotle's "original metaphysics was theology, the doctrine of the most perfect being."⁷⁰²

Books *MN* form a complete group, and "have no relation to the preceding".⁷⁰³ Furthermore, *M* was most certainly written at a later period, when Aristotle no longer considered himself to be a Platonist.⁷⁰⁴ However, the preface of *M* 9-10 "is a part of the original *Metaphysics* (along with *A* and *B*).⁷⁰⁵ Furthermore, book *N* is also from the original earlier *Metaphysics*, dating from a time when Aristotle still saw himself as a Platonist.⁷⁰⁶ Book *M* was, in Aristotle's mind, to replace *N*.⁷⁰⁷

Books *αKΛ* and *Λ* are all intrusions in the *Metaphysics*.

⁶⁹⁴Ibid., 208.

⁶⁹⁵Ibid., 209.

⁶⁹⁶Ibid., 214.

⁶⁹⁷Ibid., 344.

⁶⁹⁸Ibid., 219.

⁶⁹⁹Ibid., 224-225.

⁷⁰⁰Ibid., 221-222.

⁷⁰¹Ibid., 343-355.

⁷⁰²Ibid., 216. Cf. Ibid., 219.

⁷⁰³Ibid., 170.

⁷⁰⁴Ibid., 171, 177-178.

⁷⁰⁵Ibid., 188-189.

⁷⁰⁶Ibid., 189-191.

⁷⁰⁷Ibid., 194.

So, in conclusion, *ABΓEZHΘI* and probably *N* (though not necessarily in their entirety) formed the core of the original *Metaphysics*. *M* was a later addition, with the purpose of completing *N*. Books *αKA* and *Λ* are all later intrusions.

Jaeger develops many of these observations in his chapter on the growth of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Jaeger proposes that Aristotle's final years were occupied primarily with the study of nature, and the development of his numerous treatises on animals.⁷⁰⁸ Indeed, states Jaeger, Aristotle's works on Animals, "were written at a time when the metaphysical and conceptual attitude of his early decades, though still forming the constructive framework of his general view, no longer held any place in his creative activity."⁷⁰⁹ This does not mean, however, that Aristotle never returned to his work in the *Metaphysics*. On the contrary Jaeger goes on to propose that Aristotle did return to the *Metaphysics*, if only to revise and update his understanding of theology.⁷¹⁰ Though Aristotle did not, according to Jaeger, insert this revision into the *Metaphysics* himself, there is a major section of book *Λ* that was later inserted by the editors of Aristotle's works, and was probably written, according to Jaeger, late in Aristotle's life.⁷¹¹

Though his arguments gain support from a superficial (or shall we say, in-depth but biased) reading of the *Metaphysics*, in the end his theory is based upon circular reasoning: We know that Aristotle began as a Platonist and developed away from Platonism because we see this movement in his written works, and we use the knowledge that Aristotle began as an ardent Platonist and developed away from Platonism as the key for the chronological organisation of his written works, and even as the key that helps us to discover which parts of his written works are early and which later. The circularity of Jaeger's reasoning demonstrates the difficulties that any

⁷⁰⁸Ibid., 329.

⁷⁰⁹Ibid., 338. Cf. Ibid., 339.

⁷¹⁰Ibid., 342.

⁷¹¹Ibid., 342-343. Cf. Ibid., 348.

scholar will experience as they attempt to chronologically order Aristotle's works, or trace Aristotle's development. Indeed, Giovanni Reale brings out this exact problem in his book *The Concept of First Philosophy and the Unity of the Metaphysics of Aristotle* when he notes that "This is a defect of all the genetic interpretations: to make use of a thesis that requires demonstration by reading certain passages, or certain chapters, or entire books in a special way in order to deduce from this predetermined reading a proof of their thesis."⁷¹² In other words, their reasoning is circular. Other critiques that Reale brings against the developmental (genetic) theory include the fact that through the application of one method to the facts, one is able to arrive at entirely opposite conclusions, based upon how one understands Aristotle's philosophical development.⁷¹³ The various conclusions of the Genetic theory are based upon the overemphasis of some one element of Aristotle's synthetic philosophy – either emphasizing the platonic element or the empirical element.⁷¹⁴

Reale also claims, and this is an error that even Pierre Aubenque's theory falls prey to, that "the method of choosing some affirmations here and there, pulled out of context from one of the two redactions [referring specifically to *B* and *K*] in order to oppose them to each other—which is the method followed today—is in fact the source of all their errors."⁷¹⁵ This error, which Reale notes in relation to the various arguments concerning book *K*, applies across the board to almost all of the claims made by the genetic theorists, and even by Pierre Aubenque (as we will note later). In conclusion, we note Reale's conclusion concerning the developmental (genetic) theory, "The attempts to reconstruct an evolutionary trajectory for Aristotle's metaphysical thought are untenable on the basis of the method followed by contemporary critics, a method

⁷¹²Reale, *CFP*, 156n78.

⁷¹³*Ibid.*, 183. Cf. *Ibid.*, 209.

⁷¹⁴*Ibid.*, 204.

⁷¹⁵*Ibid.*, 248-249.

which tries to be ‘historical,’ a method according to which it is possible to uphold a thesis, its opposite, and an intermediate one: everything and thus nothing is secure.”⁷¹⁶ All attempts to reconstruct some form of evolutionary development for Aristotle’s metaphysical thought have failed, they have been shown to be bankrupt of explanatory power, and there is a general belief, today, that the entirety of the *Metaphysics* is authentic, and that it provides a unified look at Aristotle’s metaphysical thought.⁷¹⁷ In the next section we will give a brief overview of the organization and progression of thought in the *Metaphysics*. This section is of the utmost importance as it will allow us to understand how Aristotle approaches the question of Being.

The Structure and Unity of the Metaphysics

It is always important, in attempting to understand the thought of any author’s work to understand how each section of his work fits into the whole work. It is of the utmost importance for our look into Aristotle’s approach to the question of Being as it is only possible to understand Aristotle’s approach to the question of Being if there is at least some ordered structure and unity to the work known as the *Metaphysics*. Early thinkers (and most contemporary scholars), in spite of some misgivings concerning certain sections, saw the *Metaphysics* as united treatise of first philosophy. With the arrival of the monumental work of Jaeger, as we saw above, this all changed. No longer was the *Metaphysics* a united treatise, rather, it was a conglomeration of collected works from different periods of Aristotle’s life assembled and ordered by an unknown editor (some suggest Theophrastus). Giovanni Reale, in his *The Concept of First Philosophy and the Unity of the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, documents how different theorists came up with, frequently, contradictory theses about the development of Aristotle’s work. As I argued above,

⁷¹⁶Ibid., 323-324.

⁷¹⁷Cf. Reale, *CFP*, 320.

this method falls prey to serious difficulties. The more that I study the *Metaphysics*, the more I am convinced that there is a better way to understand the *Metaphysics*. Indeed, when one reads the *Metaphysics*, uninfluenced by the work of the developmental school, one is impressed by the overall unity of the *Metaphysics*. It seems to me that the *Metaphysics* is a relatively complete and unified work, quite possibly a set of lecture notes, placed in the proper order of inquiry and discovery in first philosophy. That is, Aristotle is attempting to lead the reader along a path of discovery which, rather than providing a completed doctrine of Being (though Aristotle goes a long way towards answering the question), launches the reader into the question of Being with the necessary principles, and a solid foundation, for continued inquiry and discovery.⁷¹⁸ It seems to me, therefore, that, in spite of some oddly placed sections, the *Metaphysics* is in approximately the right order, and the book and chapter divisions, though they are not always perfectly placed, can be useful for finding references.⁷¹⁹ Indeed, in considering the flow of thought from *E-A* one finds that it provides an in-depth exposition of the four ways in which ‘to be’ is said.⁷²⁰ A short overview of the general flow of the *Metaphysics* will be helpful to reveal the overall unity and movement of this work, and to provide the foundation from which we will be better able to analyze the various views of Aristotle’s interpreters, and to propose our own understanding of Aristotle’s approach to the question of Being.

⁷¹⁸Reale concludes, after his analysis of book K, that “The Stagirite’s work reveals, on the contrary, a compact and solid theoretical edifice, fruit of a creative act of thought, which, assuming that it was concretized in chronologically successive stages (indeed, this we do not intend to affirm or deny) is profoundly unitary in its philosophical inspiration and speculative substance. (Reale, *CFP*, 275.)”

⁷¹⁹For precision, all references to Aristotle will be noted in the traditional form of book, chapter and bekker numbers.

⁷²⁰There are, admittedly, many sections that seem, upon a superficial consideration, to be rabbit trails, or interruptions of the general flow of the work. Sometimes Aristotle treats a subject rapidly in an early section only to come back to it later. This fact does not, however, count against his treatise providing a systematic treatment of the four ways in which ‘to be’ is said.

The *Metaphysics* begins with that famous phrase “All men, by nature, desire to know.”⁷²¹ *Metaphysics A* provides a summary introduction to the object of first philosophy and an overview of what earlier philosophers had said, unknowingly, on this subject. The overview serves less as a history of philosophy, than as an overview of the different ways that thinkers prior to Aristotle had approached the question.⁷²² *Metaphysics A* is divided into 10 chapters. The purpose of chapter 1 is to show that wisdom (*σοφίαν*) is knowledge of certain, to be discovered, first causes (*τὰ πρῶτα αἴτια*) and principles (*τὰς ἀρχὰς*). Aristotle concludes, at the end of chapter 1, that wisdom is primarily found in the theoretical sciences, and especially is the knowledge of the causes and first principles.

In chapter 2 Aristotle seeks to state the nature (*φύσις*)⁷²³ of the science called wisdom, and, especially, what are the first causes and principles that are investigated by wisdom. Aristotle begins by noting 5 common beliefs about wise men: (1) that they know all things, but not as particulars, (2) that the knowledge they acquire is difficult to obtain, (3) that they are more accurate and able to teach the causes of things, (4) that wisdom is pursued for its own sake, and not some practical utility, (5) that wisdom is the highest of the sciences, as it is that science that orders all the others.⁷²⁴ Aristotle then moves on to support and explain the truth of the five claims concerning wise men.⁷²⁵ Aristotle goes on to provide what might be called an existential explanation of the beginning of philosophy in the minds of men, “For it is through wonder that man both now and at first began to philosophize.”⁷²⁶ He then explains that wisdom is not a

⁷²¹*Metaphysics*, 980a20.

⁷²²It resembles Plato’s history of the approach to Being, as found in the *Sophist*.

⁷²³*Metaphysics*, 983a23.

⁷²⁴*Ibid.*, 982a7-19.

⁷²⁵*Ibid.*, 982a21-982b7.

⁷²⁶*Ibid.*, 982b12-13.

productive science,⁷²⁷ that it is the only truly free science,⁷²⁸ that it is the most honourable of the sciences,⁷²⁹ and that, in light of the fact that (a) it is a science possessed, in the highest degree, by God alone, and (b) God is one of the principles (*ἀρχή τις*) and causes (*τῶν αἰτίων*) that is to be studied by this science, it is, therefore, the divine science.⁷³⁰

In chapter 3 Aristotle gives a brief overview of the types of causes and principles (explaining that they have already been sufficiently investigated in the physics), and then gives a survey of the different ways that the earlier thinkers (Thales, Anaximenes, Diogenes, Heraclitus, Hippasus, Empedocles, Parmenides, and Anaxagoras) had spoken of the causes. His discussion of the views of the early thinkers concerning the causes continues in chapter 4-7. In chapters 8 and 9 Aristotle points out the errors in the systems that were explained in the preceding chapters. Chapter 10 gives a survey of what was said in book A, and introduces the next book.

Book *α* is divided into three chapters. In Book A Aristotle had mentioned that one of the characteristics that is commonly attributed to wisdom is that it is difficult to obtain.⁷³¹ Book *α* begins by discussing this aspect of wisdom, “To make⁷³² truth the subject of one’s investigations (*θεωρία*)⁷³³ is partly difficult, partly easy.” The purpose of chapter 1 is to introduce philosophy, the science called wisdom, as the science of truth. Aristotle notes, in full agreement with book A, that one does not know the truth unless one knows its causes. It follows, then, that wisdom is the knowledge of truth because it is knowledge of the causes of the being of beings (*αἰτιόν τι ἐστὶ*

⁷²⁷Ibid., 982b14-25.

⁷²⁸Ibid., 982b25-27.

⁷²⁹Ibid., 982b28-983a5.

⁷³⁰Ibid., 983a5-12.

⁷³¹Ibid., 982a10-13.

⁷³²The exact word, *περὶ*, means “around, concerning, of, or about”. I have translated the phrase with “To make” in order to bring out the proper sense of the greek word “*θεωρία*”.

⁷³³Translated by Tredennick as “study”, by Ross and Apostle as “investigation”. The Greek word seems to be primarily defined as “the object that one is looking at”, such as a spectacle.

τοῦ εἶναι)⁷³⁴. The purpose of chapter 2 is to respond to a possible objection concerning the truth concerning the causes that is discovered by first philosophy. Chapter 3 seeks to prepare the reader (or student) to engage with the content of the *Metaphysics*.

Book *B* is divided into 6 chapters, and serves to introduce the aporia related to the science that he is calling Wisdom and philosophy. The first chapter serves to outline the difficulties related to the search for wisdom – that is, the search to understand the causes and principles of all that is. Aristotle explains that it is necessary to consider these difficulties prior to posing answers, as “those who wish to succeed in arriving at answers will find it profitable to go over the *difficulties* well; for answers successfully arrived at are solutions to *difficulties* previously discussed, and one cannot untie a knot if he is ignorant of it...and because those who inquire without first going over the *difficulties* are like those who are ignorant of where they must go; besides, such persons do not even know whether they have found or not what they are seeking, for the end is not clear to them, but it is clear to those who have first gone over the *difficulties*.”⁷³⁵ In chapter 2 Aristotle introduces the first five aporias. The first four aporia concern first philosophy (the science of substance - οὐσίας). In chapter 3 Aristotle considers the sixth and seventh aporias. In chapter 4 Aristotle considers aporias 8-11. Chapter 5 is a discussion of the 14th aporia, and chapter 6 continues the discussion of the 14th aporia, and finishes with a discussion of aporias twelve and thirteen. It is important to note that in his discussion of each of the aporias Aristotle provides two (sometimes hints of a third) seemingly contradictory answers. He does not, in these discussions, seem to take any positive position on the answers to these questions. The discussion of the aporias, as Aristotle says in chapter 1, is designed to introduce the student to the difficulties that must be answered by first philosophy.

⁷³⁴*Metaphysics*, 993b30.

⁷³⁵*Metaphysics*, 995a27-995b3.

Book *I* is divided into eight chapters whose primary goal is to explain and provide a defense of the first principle of Being, which is also the first principle of thought. In chapter 1 Aristotle briefly explains the nature and extent of wisdom. In so doing he explains that the science that seeks the first principles and causes is, by that very fact, seeking the causes of Being qua being. It follows, from what Aristotle has said previously, that there is one science that is, by its very nature, the divine science (for the two reasons enumerated above), and which is of the first principles and causes of Being qua Being. In chapter 2 Aristotle seeks to show that it belongs to one science (first philosophy or wisdom or the science of Being qua Being) to discuss Being qua Being, the substances, and whatever belong to these. This chapter begins with the claim that being is predicated in many ways (*οὕτω δὲ καὶ τὸ ὄν λέγεται πολλαχῶς*), but that all of these ways of predicating Being refer to one single principle (*μὲν ἀλλ' ἅπαν πρὸς μίαν ἀρχήν*). Aristotle goes on to prove and illustrate this claim. He then explains that if *οὐσία* is that one single principle to which all the ways of predicating Being refer, then it is of the principles and causes of *οὐσιῶν* that philosophers must undertake their research (*εἰ οὖν τοῦτ' ἐστὶν ἡ οὐσία, τῶν οὐσιῶν ἂν δέοι τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς αἰτίας ἔχειν τὸν φιλόσοφον*). In the rest of this chapter Aristotle proves that this one science studies all kinds of beings by studying that which is common to all beings, that this science studies unity and its contraries. He finishes by distinguishing between this first philosophy, sophistry and dialectics.

In chapter 3 Aristotle seeks to demonstrate that this science studies the first axioms and substance. In this chapter he begins his discussion of the first principle of thought, which is primarily a truth about Being and, secondarily (and in light of its grounding in being), a law of all thought. In chapter 4 Aristotle provides 9 refutations of those who would deny the truth of the first principle of thought. In chapter 5 he explains the source of the error of those whom he refuted in chapter 4. In chapter 6 he responds to those who arrived at this error through verbal

arguments. In chapter 7 he provides seven demonstrations to show that there can be no intermediate between 2 contradictories. In chapter 8 he gives 5 responses to the dogmatic, and contradictory, claims that all is true and that nothing is true.

In the section that is commonly called the philosophical lexicon, book Δ , the part of the *Metaphysics* where Aristotle provides nuanced definitions and distinctions for just about every important term that he uses in the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle outlines the ways in which ‘to be’ and ‘*οὐσία*’ are said (1017a7-1017b26). This book is divided into 30 chapters. In chapter 1 Aristotle provides 6 meanings of principle (*ἀρχή*),⁷³⁶ explains that cause is relatively synonymous with principle (an important point for understanding Aristotle), and explains the types of things which are principles. In chapter 2 he gives the four meanings (types) of cause (*αἴτιον*), and provides an important discussion of causation. In chapter 3 he explains the two meanings of element. In the following chapters he explains what is meant by nature (6 meanings), necessary (4 meanings), one (3 meanings), being (4 meanings), 4 meanings of substance (*οὐσία* – simple composite bodies, form, the delimiting parts of a body and *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*), same, opposite, prior and posterior, potency (5 meanings, as well as a discussion of the terms capable, incapacity, impossible, possible, capable, and incapable), quantity, quality, relative, complete (or perfect), limit, “that in virtue of which”, disposition, having (or habit), affection, privation, to have (possess or hold), to be from something, a part, a whole, mutilated, genus (4 meanings), false, and accident. The distinctions and definitions that are given in this book are of the utmost importance for a proper understanding of the rest of the *Metaphysics*. Reale notes, and defends this thesis, that “*Book Δ seems to have the character of a preliminary classification of the terms which the inquiry of the successive books makes use of as well as examines.*”⁷³⁷ Indeed, book Δ functions

⁷³⁶Tredennick, unfortunately, translates this as “Beginning”.

⁷³⁷Reale, *CFP*, 342.

very much as a nominal defining, and distinguishing the different meanings, of the key metaphysical terms to be used in the following discussions.

It becomes evident, from even a cursory overview of books *A-D*, that these books serve as a form of prolegomena to the question of Being, preparing the reader to deal with the difficulties of such a question. From here we move to the books *E-N* where the bulk of Aristotle's response to the question of Being is found. As such we will take a little more time in elaborating the structure of these books of the *Metaphysics*. Reale notes, and he is surely right, that books *E, Z, H, Θ* and *I* belong to the same course of study – the causes and principles of sensible *ousia*, responding to many of the aporias of book *B*.⁷³⁸ Reale explains, correctly, that book *K* is an integral part of the development of the *Metaphysics*, as it is “*a vision of the entire horizon of the metaphysics, before beginning to treat of its culminating part* that is, of the immobile, eternal, and transcendent substance.”⁷³⁹ Finally, books *L-N*, as we shall see, deal with supra-sensible substance.⁷⁴⁰

Beginning with book *E*, the main sections are organized as follows. Book *E* is divided into four main chapters. In chapter 1 Aristotle explains that first philosophy is the science that seeks to understand the principles and causes of beings as Being (*αἱ ἀρχαὶ καὶ τὰ αἴτια ζητεῖται τῶν ὄντων, δῆλον δὲ ὅτι ἢ ὄντα*). Aristotle's tune has not changed, first philosophy (Wisdom) is the study of the causes and principles of Being qua Being, and, as such, is the science of the divine (indeed, Aristotle here calls first philosophy theology⁷⁴¹). At the beginning of chapter 2 reminds us that Being is said in many ways.⁷⁴² In chapters 2-4 Aristotle considers two of the 4

⁷³⁸Cf. Reale, *CFP*, 215, 225.

⁷³⁹Reale, *CFP*, 278. Cf. *Ibid.*, 224, 250, 276.

⁷⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 225, 295, 307, 308.

⁷⁴¹*ἢ δὲ πρώτη καὶ περὶ χωριστὰ καὶ ἀκίνητα. ἀνάγκη δὲ πάντα μὲν τὰ αἴτια αἴδια εἶναι, μάλιστα δὲ ταῦτα: ταῦτα γὰρ αἴτια τοῖς φανεροῖς τῶν θείων ὥστε τρεῖς ἂν εἶεν φιλοσοφίαι θεωρητικά, μαθηματική, φυσική, θεολογική* (*Metaphysics*, 1026a16-19.).

⁷⁴²*Metaphysics*, 1026a34.

ways in which Being is said, showing that they are not the primary meanings of Being. In chapter 2 he explains why there can be no science of accidental being, and explains the cause of accidental being. In chapter 3 he discusses contingent causes, explaining that these occur by accident or chance. In chapter 4 he explains why true being (or being as true) is not the primary sense of Being (as true being is an affection of the intellect), and concludes his study of these two ways of predicating being by explaining that due to the fact that they are not the primary ways of saying being, that he will leave them alone for now.

Book Z is divided into 17 chapters. In book Z Aristotle moves on to an in-depth treatment of Essential Being (*οὐσία*). Essential Being includes the categories, but is primarily *οὐσία*. *Metaphysics Z*, is organized as follows: in the first chapter Aristotle gives an introduction and survey of the issues surrounding the question of Being. His primary purpose is to discover the primary meaning of essential being. He concludes that *οὐσία* is the primary (in every possible way) meaning of Being. This conclusion should not, of course, surprise us, as he has already mentioned this conclusion in early books. The second chapter is an overview of different answers to the question of Being, which was explained in the final phrases of chapter 1. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an introduction to an in-depth examination of *οὐσία*. In the third chapter He seeks to introduce the notion of *οὐσία* by providing the common view of the primary meaning of *οὐσία*. Aristotle discusses the four ways in which *οὐσία* is said, explaining that *υποκειμενον* is thought, by some, to be primary. He therefore begins by exploring the possibility that *υποκειμενον* is primary, by explaining 3 senses of the term. Of the three senses (the composite, matter, and the form), the form is primary. Thus, if *υποκειμενον* is the primary definition of *οὐσία* then form (being the primary sense of *υποκειμενον*) is the primary sense of *οὐσία*. Aristotle concludes that our preliminary description of *οὐσία* is not clear enough. The fourth chapter seeks to provide a preliminary explanation of *οὐσία* understood as *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι* (essence or form),

which the previous chapter claimed was the primary meaning of *υποκειμενον*, and, as such, was the primary meaning of *ουσία*. He begins by providing a preliminary definition of *το τι ἦν εἶναι*, followed by some questions concerning the essence of composites. He notes that there are many senses of the term *το τι ἦν εἶναι* but that *ουσία* is the primary meaning. It is important, at this point, to note Aristotle's claim that "just as existence (*υπάρχει*) belongs to all although not similarly, but to some primarily and to others secondarily, so whatness (*το τι ἐστίν*) belongs to substances (*ουσία*) in the full sense but to the others in a qualified way."⁷⁴³ Aristotle concludes that *το τι ἦν εἶναι* (essence or form) belongs primarily to *ουσία*, and only secondarily to the categories.

The fifth chapter continues the discussion of the preceding chapter and shows that definitions are properly made of *ουσία*. The sixth chapter, which may also be included as a major subsection of the fifth section, considers whether "this being (*ἐστίν*)" and "its essence (*το τι ἦν εἶναι*)" are the same. The point of this question is to discover whether Being can be separated from the essence of the being,⁷⁴⁴ as one of his arguments seeks to demonstrate. The point of this section seems to be to counter a platonic interpretation whereby there would be an ideal being that is separate from being. Aristotle concludes that each being and its essence are identical.⁷⁴⁵ It

⁷⁴³*Metaphysics*, 1030a21-23. Is it reading too much into the text to see, here, the beginnings of what would become, with Thomas Aquinas, the distinction between essence (whatness - *το τι ἐστίν*) and existence (*υπάρχει*)? Probably. Though it is tempting. Joseph De Finance, concerning the temptation to see, in Aristotle, the distinction between Essence and Existence, says, "Sans doute, ayant posé que l'être n'est pas un genre, ayant distingué d'autre part le nécessaire du contingent, et vu dans celui-ci un composé d'acte et de puissance, ayant reconnu enfin que la définition, même réelle, n'implique pas l'existence du défini, avait-il tous les éléments pour conclure à la distinction réelle de l'essence et de l'acte d'exister. Il n'y a pas conclu pourtant. (Joseph De Finance, *Être et Agir dans la Philosophie de Saint Thomas*, 2nd ed. (Rome : Librairie Éditrice de l'Université Grégorienne, 1960), 80-81." A contrary position is held by F.-X. Maquart, in his interactions with L. Rougier. Cf. F.-X. Maquart, "Aristote n'a-t-il affirmé qu'une distinction logique entre l'essence et l'existence?," *Revue Thomist*, 62-72 (1926). F.-X. Maquart, "Deux autres arguments de M. Rougier," *Revue Thomist*, 266-276 (1926). F.-X. Maquart, "Un dernier argument de M. Rougier," *Revue Thomist*, 358-366 (1926). Étienne Gilson's perspective on this debate is well-known, and can be found in his *L'Être et l'Essence* (Paris: J. VRIN, 1948), 59. We will not offer our opinions on this debate, more than to say that it is very tempting to see this distinction in Aristotle.

⁷⁴⁴*Metaphysics*, 1031b1. "καὶ τὸ ὄντι καὶ τὸ ὄν."

⁷⁴⁵*Metaphysics*, 1031b19-20. This is not to say that each thing is, by its essence, Being; but that each thing

follows, then, that “to know each thing is to know its essence.”⁷⁴⁶ In chapters 7-12 Aristotle explores how sensible things can be said to be (*οὐσία*). In these chapters he considers how generated things are generated (ch. 7); he demonstrates that the form of a generated thing is not itself generated and, as such, that only the composite is generated (ch. 8); he explains why some things are generated by art and/or chance, but that others are not (ch. 9); he explains the relationship between the “form of the parts” of some composite being and the “form of the whole” of some being (ch. 10); he responds to the question of what kinds of parts are of the forma and which parts are of the composite (ch. 11); and, finally, he explains some difficulties concerning the oneness and division of definitions. In chapter 13 Aristotle considers how the universal (*τὸ καθόλου*) is said to be *οὐσία*. In this chapter he provides an overview of what has been said up to this point, noting 2 ways in which a subject underlies its attributes. In considering how the universal is said to be *οὐσία* he notes that the universal is not, properly speaking the *οὐσία*. He supports this claim with four arguments. In chapters 14-16 Aristotle explains a number of problems that are entailed by Platonism, in light of their claim that the *οὐσία* of a thing is the ideal thing (which is what Aristotle means by the term *τὸ καθόλου* – universal). In chapter 17 Aristotle considers the question of *οὐσία* from a different angle – as a cause and principle. He considers a number of different “Why” questions, and notes that the *οὐσία* gives us the answer to each of these questions.

Book *H* is divided up into 6 chapters that continue a discussion concerning sensible substances. In chapter 1 Aristotle summarizes what has been covered, and introduces a discussion about sensible substance. He begins by discussing matter. In the second chapter Aristotle considers the actuality of sensible substances, in light of the view of Democritus. In chapter 3

is that which it is (basically the principle of identity).

⁷⁴⁶*Metaphysics*, 1031b20-21, Apostle.

Aristotle considers a number of difficulties related to the sensible substances. In chapter 4 Aristotle considers the causes of material substances. In chapter 5 he considers some difficulties related to the corruption and generation of contraries, and in chapter 6 he explains what causes any one being to be one. He notes that aside from the generating (efficient) cause (bringing potential x to be actual x), the cause of the oneness of x is its essence (*οὐσία*). He discusses the oneness of material substances and immaterial substances. Concerning immaterial substances Aristotle notes that aside from the essence of immaterial x, there is no other cause of the unity and actualization of immaterial x, unless it be the first mover that actualizes x (efficient cause).⁷⁴⁷

Book Θ is divided into 10 chapters and deals primarily with being in act and being in potency. In chapter 1 Aristotle turns to the question of being as potentiality (both active and passive). In chapter 2 he considers rational and non-rational potencies. In chapter 3 he refutes an error concerning potency and act. In chapter 4 he explains the relationship between what was discovered about act and potency, and that which is possible and impossible. In chapter 5 he explains how potencies are possessed, acquired and actualized. In chapter 6 he explains actuality by providing its nominal definition and by analogy. He also distinguishes motions from actualities. In chapter 7 he explains what allows some X to be potentially non-X, and when it has no such potential. In chapter 8 he demonstrates that actuality is prior to potency in every respect: in $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omega$ (word or definition), time, and *οὐσία*. He provides 5 arguments to show that actuality is prior to potency in *οὐσία*. In chapter 9 he explains some important consequences based upon what has been, thus far, discovered. In chapter 10 he returns to the notion of true and false being, and explains what is meant by true/false being.

⁷⁴⁷*Metaphysics*, 1045b23-25.

Book *I* is also divided into 10 chapters whose primary subject is a discussion of the one and the many, unity and disunity. This discussion is absolutely necessary for the *Metaphysics* (and seems to be in the appropriate spot), as, as Aristotle has already stated, *One* and *Being* are always said together. In chapters 1 & 2 Aristotle considers the question of unity. In chapters 3 & 4 Aristotle lays the groundwork for a discussion of how the one and the many are opposed, by considering the meanings of same, similar, distinct, genus, greatest, complete, and an in-depth consideration of contraries and contradictories. In chapters 5 & 6 he enters into his discussion of the opposition of the one and the many. In chapter 7 Aristotle explains the relationship between intermediaries and contraries. In chapter 8 he explains what is meant by “distinct in species” and “same in species”. In chapter 9 he explains why some things differ in species but others do not. In chapter 10 he shows that some contraries are so by accident, and others by nature.

Book *K*, whose authenticity has been questioned by some, is divided into 12 chapters, where he seems to be treating a number of questions that came up due to the reflections found in books *E-Θ*, as well as summarizing some of the responses that have been given to the aporia mentioned in book *B*. In chapter 1 he notes the aporias that were to be discussed, as mentioned in Book *B*, excluding those that had already been answered, and introducing some new difficulties. In chapter 2 he continues his review and expansion of the aporias of book *B*. In chapter 3 he answers the first aporia (is wisdom one science or many?), and notes that first philosophy is one science just because of the analogy of being (being is said in many ways but with respect to some one principle). In chapter 4 Aristotle summarizes the answer to the second aporia by showing that the principles and axioms of Mathematics and Physics are also studied by First philosophy. In chapter 5 he summarizes his defense of the principle of non-contradiction, and in chapter 6 he considers a further problem with the principle of non-contradiction, in light of a difficulty, posed by Protagoras, concerning sense perception. In chapter 7 he distinguishes wisdom (First

Philosophy) from the other sciences (by its proper object, the principles and causes of *οὐσία*), thus outlining the well-known hierarchy of the sciences. In chapter 8 he returns to the question of accidental and true being, and also discusses the question of luck and finality. In chapter 9 he discusses motion. In chapter 10 the infinite, and in chapter 11 & 12 the various types of change.

Book *A* is divided into 10 chapters, and is well-known as Aristotle's theology. In chapter 1 Aristotle summarizes what has been seen, concerning *οὐσία* in the previous sections, and reminds us of the causes and principles of sensible *οὐσία*. In so doing he considers three kinds of Essential Being (*οὐσία*). In chapter 2 he shows that there are three causes of change in sensible substances (form, privation and matter). In chapter 3 he continues his consideration concerning the principles of sensible substance and change. In chapters 4 & 5 he explains how the principles and causes of distinct things both are, and are not, the same for all. They are the same for all things in the sense that the first mover is the primary cause of all things, the form of each thing is its formal cause, the matter of each sensible thing is its material cause, etc. They are different in that each different genre of sensible being has a different form, and each distinct sensible being (even within a sensible genre) has different material, etc. In chapter 6 Aristotle begins considering immovable substances, and in chapter 7 he demonstrates that an unmoved mover necessarily exists. In this chapter he demonstrates that there is a necessary, eternally actual *οὐσία* that causes movement without being moved (therefore without any potency), and is unchanging, necessary, thought thinking itself, and, among other things, the very best life. In chapter 8 Aristotle asks whether there is only one, or many, unmoved mover. He summarizes the views of earlier thinkers and astronomers (Aristotle's unmoved movers where, essentially, the stars and planets), concludes that there are many unmoved movers, and then proves, from that there must be one first unmoved mover. In chapter 9 Aristotle explains, and responds to, some difficulties

with the doctrine of the first unmoved mover. In chapter 10 he discusses how all things are ordered to their good.

Books *M* and *N* are written in order to discuss the remaining, unsolved, issues for First Philosophy: the state of two other supra-sensible substances that have been proposed by those who came prior to Aristotle – mathematical objects, and separate forms.

As can be seen, from this brief overview of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, this is a philosophical work that testifies to an overall unity of thought. Whether or not Aristotle was consciously building a metaphysical “system” is another question. Aristotle sets out to understand the causes and principles of the things that exist. He considers the history and nature of the science that he is seeking to elaborate,⁷⁴⁸ he considers a number of questions that such an undertaking will need to answer, he defines his terms, and then he seeks to answer the question of Being. Whether he was successful, and, whether or not he thought he was successful, are two different questions. Our overview of the *Metaphysics* seems to show that Aristotle thought that he was successful. The next question that we need to ask is, if he was successful – if he did answer the question of Being – then what was his answer to the question of Being and how did he arrive at this answer. We will begin by considering some recent work that has been done on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

⁷⁴⁸Which is very different from saying that “that he is seeking.”

INTERPRETATION OF THE QUESTION OF BEING IN THE *METAPHYSICS*

Pierre Aubenque's Interpretation

Introduction

In *Le problème de l'être chez Aristote* Pierre Aubenque sets out to prove his theory⁷⁴⁹ that Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (the book, the "theory", and the method) is aporetic, and, therefore, that (1) the answer to the question of Being is to engage in a perpetual questioning of Being, (2) that Aristotle does not solve the aporias, and, therefore, (3) that Ontology is not a science, but a dialectic of Being *qua* Being. His conclusion is stated as follows, "We believe that we have shown that the aporias of Aristotle's metaphysics *had* no solution, in the sense that they were not solved somewhere in a universe of essences; but it is because they have no solution that it is necessary to always seek to solve them and that this search for a solution is, in the end, the solution itself. To seek unity is to have already found it. To work at solving the aporia is to have discovered. To never stop seeking to discover what being is, is to have already responded to the question: What is being? ...Aristotle...was less the founder of a tradition than the initiator of a question which, he had warned us himself, always remained primary (initiale) and that the science that posed it was eternally 'sought'."⁷⁵⁰ This is the conclusion of a voluminous work in which Aubenque develops and argues for a number of key affirmations that must be true of

⁷⁴⁹This theory was already partially developed in two previously published papers: Pierre Aubenque, "Sur la notion aristotélicienne d'aporie," in *Philosophie Théorique*, vol. 1 de *Problèmes Aristotéliens*, 39-52 (Paris: VRIN, 2009). Pierre Aubenque, "Aristote et le problème de la métaphysique," in *Philosophie Théorique*, vol. 1 of *Problèmes Aristotéliens*, 117-130 (Paris: VRIN, 2009). Indeed, in this volume (*Philosophie Théorique*, vol. 1 of *Problèmes Aristotéliens*) we find many different articles which, individually, develop different parts of Aubenque's theory concerning the problem of Being in Aristotle, as proposed in his book, *Le Problème de l'être chez Aristote*, 5th ed. (Paris: PUF, 2009). Such articles include discussions concerning Aristotle's conception of Language, Dialectic, and substance, as well as the structure of the *Metaphysics*, and the inauthenticity of book K. Each of these discussions contribute to Aubenque's overall theory concerning Aristotelian metaphysics.

⁷⁵⁰Aubenque, *PEA*, 508. All quotations of Aubenque are my own translations.

Aristotle's philosophy in order for Aubenque's theory to hold. In what follows I will outline the key steps of Aubenque's theory, followed by a critique of Aubenque's theory.

Aubenque's First Step

Aubenque sets out to prove his theory by arguing, first of all, that there are two distinct sciences (which cannot be combined) grouped, by tradition under the title *Metaphysics* – namely, theology (first philosophy) and ontology (the unnamed science⁷⁵¹ of Being *qua* Being). According to Aubenque, Aristotelian theology and ontology do not, technically, overlap in any way, though similar ways of discussing their respective proper objects may create some confusion in the mind of Aristotle's reader.⁷⁵² Indeed, Aubenque states, *Metaphysics* cannot be properly considered as the appropriate title for first philosophy (theology).⁷⁵³ In order to prove this understanding of how these sciences are presented in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, he begins by pointing out that the title of Aristotle's philosophical work *Metaphysics* was not given to it by Aristotle, but was attached to the work a long time after it was written.⁷⁵⁴ This is, of course, a generally accepted fact. He then states that Aristotle had provided, in the designated work, at least two different titles for the science that he was exploring: *first philosophy*, which Aubenque will argue is also called *theology*,⁷⁵⁵ and the *science of being as being*.⁷⁵⁶ Aubenque then poses the question as to whether these titles refer to one unified science or to different sciences.⁷⁵⁷ He argues that they are two different sciences,⁷⁵⁸ as there is no way to reconcile the different

⁷⁵¹Ibid., 43.

⁷⁵²Ibid., 368-370. It follows, for Aubenque, that book *K* is inauthentic.

⁷⁵³Ibid., 67-68.

⁷⁵⁴Ibid., 28-29.

⁷⁵⁵Ibid., 37-39.

⁷⁵⁶Ibid., 28.

⁷⁵⁷Ibid., 28-29.

⁷⁵⁸In order for his hypothesis to succeed he is forced to argue that Book *K* is inauthentic. Cf. Ibid., 39-43. Pierre Aubenque, "Sur l'inauthenticité du livre *K* de la *Métaphysique*," in *Philosophie Théorique*, vol. 1 de

descriptions that are given to these different titles.⁷⁵⁹ *First philosophy* would be of the Supreme Being, that which is highest in the order of being – God – and, therefore, *theology*.⁷⁶⁰ *The Science of Being as Being* does not appear to have, argues Aubenque, a particular kind of being as its proper object, but that which can be said of all *beings*.⁷⁶¹ This apparent difference in proper object is enough for Aubenque to declare the distinction between the two sciences, “First philosophy is not, therefore, the science of being as being, and it is theology.”⁷⁶² Assuming the truth of this distinction, and after a consideration of three Aristotelian doctrines (namely, (1) that there is a proper object of every science,⁷⁶³ (2) what is it that makes something *anterior* to another,⁷⁶⁴ and (3) the order of Being versus the order of knowledge⁷⁶⁵) Aubenque declares, first of all, that first philosophy (theology) must be *anterior*, in every sense, to the physical sciences. He concludes that “theology was called first philosophy by Aristotle, not only because its object was first in the order of *being*, but also because it should be first in the order of *knowledge*.”⁷⁶⁶ He declares, secondly, that metaphysics must be *posterior*, in every sense, to the physical sciences.⁷⁶⁷ He notes that regardless of which sense is considered for being anterior and being posterior one is forced to include temporal anteriority and temporal posteriority.⁷⁶⁸ It follows, for Aubenque, that metaphysics and first philosophy cannot possibly be one science, “But if, as we have attempted to show, it is necessary to take seriously, at the same time, the anteriority of first

Problèmes Aristotéliens, 171-196 (Paris: VRIN, 2009).

⁷⁵⁹Aubenque, *PEA*, 35-39.

⁷⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 36-37, 39.

⁷⁶¹*Ibid.*, 35, 38.

⁷⁶²*Ibid.*, 38.

⁷⁶³*Ibid.*, 35.

⁷⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 45-50.

⁷⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 50-66.

⁷⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 67. Indeed, Aubenque seeks to demonstrate not only that the object of theology is the first in the order of being, and, therefore, that which is, by its very nature, the most knowable; but also that it must be, for us, that which is most known and first known. (cf. *Ibid.*, 50-67.).

⁷⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 50-66, 68.

⁷⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 46-50, 68.

philosophy and the posteriority of metaphysics, that is to say, to understand in both cases a temporal order of succession, we will agree that both titles cannot be applied to the very same speculations. *Metaphysics is, therefore, not first philosophy.*”⁷⁶⁹ Having shown, to his own satisfaction, that they are different sciences, Aubenque concludes that we now need to understand how these two different sciences are related to each other.⁷⁷⁰

Aubenque’s Second Step

The second step in Aubenque’s argument is to claim, (1) that Aristotle was seeking a universal and primary science (ontology), but, (2) that Aristotle failed. In considering the first claim, that Aristotle was seeking a universal and primary science, Aubenque begins by considering the role of history in philosophy, and Aristotle’s understanding of the nature of philosophy. He quotes Aristotle to the effect that, “The origin of philosophy, is ‘amazement that things are what they are’”,⁷⁷¹ and states that “But the correlate of amazement, is the *aporia*, that is to say, that state of things such that it consists of that which, at least, is an apparent contradiction...Philosophy is not born, therefore, in a spontaneous movement of the soul, but from the very pressure of problems: things manifest themselves, impose themselves on us as contradictory, as making questions; they push us, when necessary in spite of ourselves, into research.”⁷⁷² We are told, from the beginning, that Aristotle sees philosophy as an Aporetic dialogue⁷⁷³ which spans the history of mankind⁷⁷⁴ – it is the amazement of the person when confronted with seemingly contradictory beings that is the beginning of philosophy, and the

⁷⁶⁹Ibid., 68.

⁷⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷⁷¹Ibid., 83.

⁷⁷²Ibid., 83.

⁷⁷³Ibid., 88-89. A dialogue which is, at the same time, between the being and the philosopher and between philosophers.

⁷⁷⁴Ibid., 90-93. Indeed, history is the very place where philosophical dialogue takes place.

moving force that keeps philosophy going. Aubenque explains that if philosophy is a discourse, then it is important to understand what a discourse is. It is, therefore, necessary to explain Aristotle's theory of language. Here Aubenque considers Aristotle's doctrines concerning equivocal and univocal language. Equivocation, for Aristotle, is the primary vice of language. "From this we see that one single word signifies, necessarily, a plurality of things and that equivocation (that which Aristotle would call homonymy), far from being a simple accident of language, appears as its essential vice."⁷⁷⁵ Indeed, says Aubenque, "to not signify a single thing, is to not signify anything, and, if names do not signify anything, then, at the same time, all dialogue between men and even, in truth, with one's self, will be ruined."⁷⁷⁶ In other words, if equivocal language (where one word signifies, means, or points to, many things that are absolutely different) is the rule of language, then no discourse can be possible. This, of course, leads Aristotle to the conclusion that univocal language (where one word signifies, means, or points to one distinct thing) must be the rule of language in order for language to be possible.⁷⁷⁷ In his analysis of Aristotle's thoughts on equivocation, Aubenque says that there are two types of equivocations: "the one, natural and inevitable, which consists in the plurality of the things signified [there is one word that applies to many beings], the other accidental, which is the plurality of significations [there is one word that has many different meanings]."⁷⁷⁸ This distinction will become extremely important later in Aubenque's development of this step, as he will argue that there cannot be one science of Being *qua* Being for the simple reason that being is equivocal in the second sense – it is one word that has many different meanings. "But if we must turn to the verb *be* in order to signify not only the relationship of identity between the being and

⁷⁷⁵Ibid., 119.

⁷⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁷⁸Ibid., 120.

its essence, but also the synthetic relationship between the being and its accidents, we must renounce the temptation towards univocality and recognize that being can have many meanings, two at least.”⁷⁷⁹ So, Aubenque argues, *Being* has many meanings, and is, therefore, an *accidentally equivocal term*. Aristotle, therefore, according to Aubenque, failed to find this unique science of Being *qua* Being, not because of any deficiency in his intellectual capacity, but because *Being* has, by nature, many significations, and not one.⁷⁸⁰ The accidental equivocation of the word being leads us to the conclusion that being is said in each of the ways that the different categories are said. This, however, pushes us into the problem, raised frequently by Socrates, that we are not actually saying what Being is, but pointing at instances of Being.⁷⁸¹ It seems, then, that we are not able to answer the question of Being except by allowing for the possibility that there is not one question of Being, but many; and, therefore, not one ontology, but many.⁷⁸² If such is the case then the question of Being will never be completely answered because there is an infinite number of meanings for the word Being.⁷⁸³

Aubenque allows that this is not exactly what Aristotle had in mind, so he looks into possible solution to the problem. Perhaps Being is not accidentally equivocal, but naturally, or essentially equivocal.⁷⁸⁴ “But between the rigour of the Eleatic [philosophers], who refuse homonymy, and the indifference of the Sophists, who ignore it, is built up, bit by bit, the properly Aristotelian position: the homonymy of being must be reduced, but it cannot be reduced except by an indefinite research, and this infinity of seeking translates, at the same time, into the exigency of univocity and the impossibility to achieve it. It is because being has many meanings,

⁷⁷⁹Ibid., 142.

⁷⁸⁰Ibid., 159-190.

⁷⁸¹Ibid., 186. Cf. Pierre Aubenque, *Faut-il déconstruire la métaphysique?* (Paris : PUF, 2009), 72-74.

⁷⁸²Ibid., 249.

⁷⁸³Ibid., 188-189.

⁷⁸⁴Ibid., 189-191.

and an indefinite number of meanings, that we will never have finished asking the question: What is being? Being is always beyond its meanings... We must, therefore, conserve the word *being* in order to designate that which is beyond the categories, without which they would not be, and which does not allow itself to be reduced to them.”⁷⁸⁵ In looking into this possible solution to the infinite searching for the answer to the question of Being, Aubenque considers the question of analogical language – one word that is said in many ways, but always related to some unique term.⁷⁸⁶ That unique term which is the foundation for analogy is, according to Aubenque, what Aristotle calls *οὐσία* - essence.⁷⁸⁷ This, however, creates more difficulties, and the question of Being becomes the question of essence, in spite of the fact that essence is not quite Being.⁷⁸⁸ This proposed solution does not solve the problem, it simply creates a different problem.⁷⁸⁹ “The ambiguity of being remains, therefore, and in a double sense. First of all, in making being to be a *πρὸς ἓν λεγόμενον*, we do not so much remove the homonymy as transfer it to the *πρὸς of πρὸς ἓν*.”⁷⁹⁰

It seems, then, that regardless of whether *Being* is accidentally equivocal, or naturally (or essentially) equivocal (analogical), we are left with the homonymy of Being, and, therefore, the impossibility of any discourse concerning Being. Indeed, Aubenque notes, “the word *being*, as the *πολλαχῶς λεγόμενα* are in general, not only signifies different things, but signifies them differently and we are never sure that it has the same meaning at each time.”⁷⁹¹ This character of Being means that the so-called science of Being is doomed to perpetually ask the question of Being without ever finding an answer. “The proper character of the homonymy of being is to be,

⁷⁸⁵Ibid., 189-190.

⁷⁸⁶Ibid., 191.

⁷⁸⁷Ibid., 192-193.

⁷⁸⁸Ibid., 196.

⁷⁸⁹Ibid., 197-198.

⁷⁹⁰Ibid., 197.

⁷⁹¹Ibid., 173.

at the same time, irrational (as with all homonymy) and inevitable (precisely because the *πολλαχῶς* is here a *πρὸς ἓν*): in this, it is the problem that has never ceased to ask itself to philosophy and which, following the phrase in book Z, is always ‘a subject of research and embarrassment’.”⁷⁹² It follows, from these observations, that there cannot be one unified science of *Being*.

In spite of the equivocality of Being, Aristotle continues to seek for a discourse on Being. Aubenque thinks that certain elements of Aristotle’s philosophy combine to show us the very nature of Aristotelian metaphysics – an eternally aporetic questioning of Being – the unanswered (and unanswerable) Aristotelian Aporia of Ontology:⁷⁹³

1. There is a Science of Being.⁷⁹⁴
2. For any x, if x is a science, then x is of a determined genus.⁷⁹⁵
3. Being is neither a genus, nor under a genus.⁷⁹⁶
4. Therefore, there is no science of Being.⁷⁹⁷

Aubenque concludes that there can be no science of Being *qua* Being, though Aristotle has left the possibility open of their being many sciences of Being (the sciences of the individual members of the categories).⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁹²Ibid., 198. Aubenque goes on to consider (1) Thomas Aquinas’s solution (analogy of being) to the problem that Aubenque sees in Aristotle (Ibid., 199.), (2) Alexander’s solution (Univocity of being, Ibid., 199-202.), et (3) analogy of proportion (p. 202-206). Aubenque concludes, “And the problem of Aristotelian ontology remains complete: if being is equivocal or if, at least, its unity is based upon a relationship that is, itself, equivocal, how and, in the name of what, can we propose a *single* discourse on being? (Ibid., 206.)”

⁷⁹³Ibid., 222.

⁷⁹⁴Ibid., 206, 239.

⁷⁹⁵Ibid., 208, 222-226.

⁷⁹⁶Ibid., 226-239.

⁷⁹⁷Ibid., 239.

⁷⁹⁸Ibid., 249.

Aubenque's Third Step

Aubenque asks, thirdly, if Aristotle stumbled onto a dialectic of Being. No science of being is possible, in spite of Aristotle's ardent desire to find one – the Aristotelian Aporia of Ontology puts the final nail in the coffin of this sought for science. In the third step of his argument Aubenque gives an overview of the history of dialectic, concentrating primarily on a comparison of the platonic understanding of dialectic,⁷⁹⁹ and the Aristotelian understanding of dialectic.⁸⁰⁰ Aristotelian dialectic, says Aubenque, is opposed to science as being universal, and having no determinate object,⁸⁰¹ it “attempts to demonstrate the principles *communs* (κοινά) of all the sciences”,⁸⁰² and it is, by nature, interrogative.⁸⁰³ Aubenque proposes that first philosophy, that science that is sought by all philosophers, and which is supposed to be the source of man's happiness, is, because of its universality, a dialectic (not a science).⁸⁰⁴ This first philosophy, proposes Aubenque, is exactly what Aristotle was trying to discover in what we today call his *Metaphysics*.⁸⁰⁵ Aubenque concludes this step with the following question: “Why does the project of a science of ontology degrade, in fact, into a never-ending search, why does being not reveal itself to us except negatively, in the indefinite dialogue that men have about it, why, in a word, is the human word about being dialectic and not scientific?”⁸⁰⁶

⁷⁹⁹Ibid., 252-253.

⁸⁰⁰Ibid., 253-256.

⁸⁰¹Ibid., 256-257.

⁸⁰²Ibid., 257.

⁸⁰³Ibid., 286-287.

⁸⁰⁴Ibid., 271-275.

⁸⁰⁵Ibid., 279-281, 295-302.

⁸⁰⁶Ibid., 302.

Aubenque's Fourth Step

Fourthly, Aubenque argues that there is no one unifying science because there can be no relation (not even a relation of analogy) between incorruptible and corruptible being. He goes to great lengths to show that Aristotle is forced to accept a separation that cannot be bridged between divine being and sensible being.⁸⁰⁷ Indeed, says Aubenque, "being does not signify identically the corruptible and the incorruptible, the earthly and the divine, there is no 'being' that is common to the one and to the other, or, at least, this communality is not but verbal, equivocal, and it is not sufficient to constitute a single science."⁸⁰⁸ In light of this unbridgeable chasm that is found in the order of Being, it is unthinkable that there will be any way of scientifically (or even dialectically) bridging this gap. This fact, which Aubenque believes is sufficiently demonstrated, leaves us with the impossibility of a science of Being (at very best ontology will be a dialectic about Being)⁸⁰⁹ and nothing but a negative theology (nothing but negative predication is possible of God).⁸¹⁰ Indeed, states Aubenque, "If it is true that being as being refers to being in its unity, if it is true, on the other hand, that there is an irreducible chasm between the divine and the earthly, the incorruptible and the corruptible, the supra-sensible and the sensible, this chasm must destroy in its principle any project of unification."⁸¹¹ Aubenque concludes this step with the statement that "the relations between theology and ontology will finally find their articulation in the fundamental phenomena of movement: theology would be the

⁸⁰⁷Ibid., 314-317. Aubenque explains the platonic separation between the form and the sensible things that participate in the forms, as well as Aristotle's rejection of this separation (p. 308-314, 320-322.).

⁸⁰⁸Ibid., 317.

⁸⁰⁹Ibid., 302.

⁸¹⁰Ibid., 235-236, 354, 363. It is important to note that Aubenque does not understand Aristotle's God to be an actual being. Rather, "The God of Aristotle is an ideal, but, he is nothing more than an ideal; he is a model to imitate, but he is incapable of realizing himself...The immobile God of Aristotle is nothing more than the unity of our efforts. (Ibid., 410.)" I do not think that this is an adequate portrayal of Aristotle's understanding of "God". Aristotle's God may not have been exactly equivalent to the Christian God, but he was, in Aristotle's thought at least, certainly more than an ideal, and the unity of our efforts to realize ourselves.

⁸¹¹Ibid., 380.

only ontology in a world where there is no movement; ontology would be the only ‘theology’ possible in a world where there is nothing but movement.”⁸¹²

Aubenque’s Fifth Step

Fifthly, Aubenque goes on to argue that sensible being is so entrenched in movement, and enslaved to time, that there can be no science of sensible being. Aubenque states that “Aristotle’s ontology which, as a human word about being, moves in the domain of that being which is in movement in the sublunaire world, finds before it nothing but a fractured being, separated from itself by time, an ‘ecstatic’ being according to Aristotle’s own words, a contingent being, which is to say that which can always become other than what it is, a being whose form is always affected by a material which keeps it from becoming a perfectly intelligible being, a being, finally, which does not reveal itself to us except through the irreducible plurality of categorical discourse.”⁸¹³ We are left, therefore, with the impossibility, even, of any discourse that can reveal truth. Aubenque concludes that “We cannot say anything about simple beings because they are simple; we cannot say anything about composed beings, because the movement which affects them delivers them to a fundamental contingency.”⁸¹⁴ How, then, are we able to carry on what seems to be intelligible discussions about our world? Aubenque explains, “But it must be said that at the earthly level there are little clusters of relative simplicity, which are the essences, and relations of composition which let themselves be partially brought back to demonstrable attributions. It is in this middle-ground, halfway between ineffable simplicity and purely accidental composition, that human discourse moves. But the movement of discourse – and this

⁸¹²Ibid., 411.

⁸¹³Ibid., 456.

⁸¹⁴Ibid., 483-484.

may be the principle of its salvation – is here an image of the movement of things.”⁸¹⁵ The movement of composed things makes human discourse about them all but impossible, and the transcendence of the divine makes it only possible for negative discourse about “God”.

Aubenque’s Conclusion

Aubenque states, first of all, that only negative theology is possible. He begins with the claim that a positive theology is impossible for Aristotle, “But, with Aristotle, the impossibility of a theology is not only discovered and affirmed, it is progressively justified and this justification of the impossibility of theology becomes, paradoxically, the substitute for theology itself.”⁸¹⁶ Indeed, Aubenque notes that from the negations about God a theology is developed, “it is a theology that is realized, paradoxically, by demonstrating its proper impossibility, a first philosophy that is developed by establishing the impossibility of attaining the principle; the negation of theology becomes negative theology.”⁸¹⁷ Aubenque concludes that there can be, secondly, no science of Being *qua* Being (because both Being and language make such a science impossible), in any way, shape or form. “The failure of ontology shows itself, not on one level, but two: on the one hand there is no single λόγος οὐδὲν; on the other hand, in light of the fact that being as being is not a genus, there is not even an οὐδὲν that is one...the negativity of ontology translates not only the impotence of human discourse, but the negativity itself of its object.”⁸¹⁸ With these conclusions in hand Aubenque believes that he has proved what he set out to prove: that, for Aristotle, metaphysics is aporetic – a never ending questioning of Being that is only an authentic questioning of Being in so long as it never answers the question of Being but remains

⁸¹⁵Ibid., 484.

⁸¹⁶Ibid., 487.

⁸¹⁷Ibid., 488.

⁸¹⁸Ibid., 489.

eternally in the questioning. “We believe that we have shown that the aporias of Aristotle’s metaphysics *had* no solution, in the sense that they were not solved somewhere in a universe of essences; but it is because they have no solution that it is necessary to always seek to solve them and that this search for a solution is, in the end, the solution itself. To seek unity is to have already found it. To work at solving the aporia is to have discovered. To never stop seeking to discover what being is, is to have already responded to the question: What is being?
 ...Aristotle...was less the founder of a tradition than the initiator of a question which, he had warned us himself, always remained primary (initiale) and that the science that posed it was eternally ‘sought’.”⁸¹⁹

A Critical Analysis of Aubenque’s argument

Introduction

Pierre Aubenque presents, in his work on Aristotle, some very convincing arguments, supported by a very high level of scholarly research, concerning Aristotle’s interaction with the question of Being. The question we are left with is, do we, or do we not, accept Aubenque’s conclusions. In reading Aubenque’s portrayal of Aristotle’s theory the reader is left with the impression that Aristotle is less of an ancient philosopher, and more of a modern thinker than we have been led to believe. It seems as if, in spite of his high level of scholarship, Aubenque has read a modern perspective into Aristotle, and then, surprised to discover that Aristotle was really a closet Kantian and Heideggerian philosopher all along, Aubenque proceeds to explain what Aristotle is really saying. This is, in fact, one of the critiques brought, by Giovanni Reale, against Aubenque’s work, “The thesis from which Aubenque begins, that first philosophy is not

⁸¹⁹Ibid., 508.

metaphysics, is practically that of Mansion...carried to its extreme consequences and developed by grafting the thesis to an existentialist base composed of the structural problem and the impasse of the two inquiries.”⁸²⁰ What else could be said about Aubenque’s thesis? Reale notes that though Aubenque’s thesis is furnished with a great amount of textual support, “these rich texts are detached from their context and ordered according to lines of force that are not their originally.”⁸²¹ In other words, the many quotes and abundant textual support provided by Aubenque to support his thesis are, concerning the key steps, frequently ripped out of context and used to say things that Aristotle would never have said.

In a review, published not long after the first edition of Aubenque’s book was published, Pamela M. Huby proposes that Aubenque may have tried, doing exactly that for which he derides the traditional Aristotelians, to fill in too many of the gaps that were left by Aristotle. “For it has the neatness of a wellcontrived novel, and while Aubenque emphasizes that Aristotle left many loose ends, everything finds its rightful place in his own account. We must, I think, take this as a statement of the unconscious workings of Aristotle’s mind, but the matter is complicated by the fact that when Aristotle does not state something clearly it may be because he took it for granted, as with Aubenque’s ‘science recherchée’, or it may be because he had not yet formulated what was implicit in his thought, like the negative theology which the neoplatonists later developed. But after all, philosophy is like that.”⁸²² Huby has certainly hit on a difficulty with Aubenque’s theory. It is true that Aristotle left much unsaid, however Aubenque takes these gaps, combined with a couple phrases whose importance for Aristotle are blown quite out of proportion, to mean

⁸²⁰Reale, *CFP*, 430.

⁸²¹Ibid., 429. Robert Joly noticed the same difficulty in his review of Aubenque’s work when, in a review published in 1963 he notes that Aubenque pursues his purpose “au mépris parfois du vrai sens des textes et des silences du philosophes. (Robert Joly, “Pierre Aubenque, Le problème de l’être chez Aristote,” in *l’Antiquité classique*, tome 32, fasc. 1 (1963), 241.)”

⁸²²Pamela M. Huby, “Le Problème de l’Être chez Aristote : Essai sur la Problématique Aristotélicienne by Pierre Aubenque,” in *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 54, Plato and Aristotle Number (Jan., 1964), 86.

that Aristotle did not see ontology as something that actually possible, though it was an ideal to be pursued.

In a review written the year before, Joseph Owens brings a number of important critiques against Aubenque's thesis. He notes, first of all, that Aubenque's claim that Aristotle's conception of metaphysics is that of an Aporetic dialectic on being is certainly over-exaggerated, if not blatantly false. Owen's states, that "the thesis is difficult to apply to a great many assertions in the Aristotelian treatises about act and potency, substance and accident, the nature and eternity of motion, and the life of the separate substances. In these cases [many of these cases were proposed by Aubenque as subjects which Aristotle did not clearly answer] metaphysical tenets are arrived at definitely by Aristotle, and are not left in an aporetic [sic.] state."⁸²³ Owen's also brings into question Aubenque's interpretation of Aristotle on a number of important levels. Namely, Aubenque, who seeks to let Aristotle interpret himself, simply disregards a number of important claims that Aristotle made. For example, Aubenque claims, as noted above, that Aristotle's science of Being *qua* Being is seen by Aristotle to be a science without name, however, as Owen's notes, "He gives it the name 'First Philosophy' and 'Theology'."⁸²⁴ This, and a number of other elements that are certainly Aristotle's own ideas, "are recognized as Aristotle's own by Aubenque...but are deliberately set aside. Have they not every right to be used as norms for the interpretation of 'Aristoteles ex Aristotele'? In fact, any explanation that does not square with them may be readily suspected of using some other philosophy as an interpreting norm."⁸²⁵ This last claim is, indeed, the very same critique that we noted above, and which was also noted by Giovanni Reale. Interestingly enough, Owens points out three Cartesian

⁸²³Joseph Owens, "Le problème de l'être chez Aristote. Essai sur la problématique aristotélicienne by Pierre Aubenque," in *Gnomon*, 35. Bd., H. 5 (Aug., 1963), 462.

⁸²⁴Ibid.

⁸²⁵Ibid.

tenets that he suggests are used by Aubenque as spectacles through which to read and interpret Aristotle.⁸²⁶ However, states Owens, “But by many scholars they will be viewed not only as un-Aristotelian, but as positively anti-Aristotelian. To these readers the book, insofar as it uses such norms, will appear to be interpreting the ‘Metaphysics’ not through the reflections of Aristotle himself (15), but through the reflections of Descartes.”⁸²⁷

Is there anything that I might add to the numerous critiques of these reputable authors? First of all, though most of these critiques tend to attack Aubenque’s theory as a whole, casting doubt on his use of certain quotes from Aristotle, and upon the accuracy and objectivity of his interpretation of Aristotle (suggesting that Aubenque reads modern philosophy into Aristotle), they do not attack Aubenque’s overall argument, and, as such, are not quite precise enough to invalidate, or demonstrate the error of Aubenque’s theory. To these critiques of the theory as a whole, I would add, first of all, some minor quibbles concerning some of Aubenque’s supporting claims, and then three thoughts concerning three of the major steps in Aubenque’s theory.

Some minor Quibbles

First of all, Aubenque makes the very dogmatic statement that there is, quite simply, no analogy of Being in Aristotle, “a supposed analogy of being could not have any meaning for Aristotle.”⁸²⁸ It certainly appears as if Aubenque is simply playing around with semantics when he says that the word that Aristotle uses to talk about “Analogy” is never applied to “Being”, and, therefore, that there is no such thing as an “analogy of being” in Aristotle.⁸²⁹ In spite of

⁸²⁶Ibid. The three tenets are: “regarding metaphysics as ‘la racine de l’arbre philosophique’...making scientific reasoning essentially deductive...having epistemological primacy coincide with ‘la primauté ontologique’.” (Ibid.)”

⁸²⁷Ibid.

⁸²⁸Aubenque, *PEA*, 205.

⁸²⁹Ibid., 199. He here states, “If it is only a simple convention of vocabulary, by which we would decide to call analogical what Aristotle called *πρὸς ἓν λεγόμενον*, this substitution could be legitimate. But, as it turns out, the

Aubenque's contention,⁸³⁰ it seems as if somebody could simply reply to Aubenque, "But, if what I mean (or designate) by 'analogy' is what Aristotle means by 'πρὸς ἓν λεγόμενον', then, it seems that regardless of what Aristotle calls it, 'analogy', according to my definition of 'analogy', is found in Aristotle." Indeed, Aubenque himself seems to claim that something that sounds very much like the analogy of Being is found in Aristotle, who was obligated to create a new form of homonymy, a "sort of homonymy, but objective homonymy, which is no longer imputable to language, but to the things themselves, because it is founded on the relation (which is not, however, a relation of species to genus) to a term, to a unique 'nature'."⁸³¹ Aubenque is referring to what Aristotle says in the second chapter of book *I*, "There are many senses in which a thing may be said to 'be', but they are related to one central point, one definite kind of thing, and are not homonymous... So, too, there are many sense in which a thing is said to be, but all refer to one starting-point."⁸³² It should be noted that the greek word that Ross translates as "starting-point" is "ἀρχήν" which is normally translated as "principle", as in Aristotle's claim, a couple lines later that "if, therefore this [that which is primary and upon which all things depend] is οὐσία, of οὐσιῶν then the philosopher must grasp the principles (ἀρχὰς) and causes (αἰτίαις)."⁸³³ The point, then, is that some X may be said to be in many different ways, but all of these ways of predicating Being of X find their foundation in some one principle. If this is not the analogy of Being (many ways of saying something of different things, all of which refer to some common foundation), then what is the analogy of Being? Indeed, contrary to Aubenque, who denies dogmatically, and with no support, that Aquinas's analogy of Being is found in Aristotle, Ralph

word *analogy* has a particular meaning for Aristotle and is never used to designate the relation of the categories to being as being."

⁸³⁰See previous footnote.

⁸³¹*Ibid.*, 192.

⁸³²*Metaphysics*, 1003a33-34, 1003b5-6, Ross.

⁸³³*Metaphysics*, 1003b17-18.

McInerny, in a chapter on analogy in Aristotle, notes that “What we find in the text [Aristotelian texts, in general, which are commented by Aquinas, and to which Aquinas attributes some form of doctrine of analogy] is rather discussions of things said in many ways but with reference to one among them, *pros hen* equivocal. Our contention is that what Aristotle means by such controlled equivocation, and the accounts he gives of it, are exactly what Thomas means when he speaks of analogous names.”⁸³⁴ We might add John Wippel’s voice to that of McInerny, where Wippel notes that, “Aristotle’s point is that, notwithstanding the manifold ways in which being is predicated, all of these different usages can fall within the scope of a single science. Unity by reference to a first—*πρὸς ἓν* equivocation—is enough to ensure this.”⁸³⁵ In spite of his claims to the contrary, even Aubenque, as noted above, finds a form of analogy (the very form that Aquinas found) in Aristotle. It seems, then, unjustified to deny that there is a form of analogy of Being in Aristotle. The presence of the analogy of Being in Aristotle is, I propose, one of the elements that allows Aristotle to escape the problems posed by Parmenides.

Secondly, Aubenque states, early on, that ontology presupposes language,⁸³⁶ and, later on, that ontology is born from a reflection on language.⁸³⁷ It certainly seems as if Aubenque is reading Martin Heidegger into Aristotle’s frequent claim that Being is said in many ways. I think that an important distinction, that Pierre does not make, needs to be made here, namely: on the one hand, the possibility of language and dialogue presupposes a certain ontology (if this ontology is not true, then no language, dialogue or meaning is, in any way, possible); on the other hand, explaining, debating and dialogue concerning ontology presupposes, in an entirely different

⁸³⁴Ralph McInerny, *Aquinas & Analogy* (Washington, D. C.: CUA Press, 1996), 46.

⁸³⁵John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 2000), 78.

⁸³⁶Aubenque, *PEA*, 113.

⁸³⁷*Ibid.*, 372.

sense, language. In other words, unless a certain ontological framework is the case, no language, dialogue or meaning is possible; and, inversely, it impossible to express this ontology if language is not possible. This does not seem to be the point that Aubenque is making who wants to make all ontological discourse dependent not on Being, but on language itself. Contrary to Aubenque's understanding, Aristotle seems to be saying that the language that we use in ontological discourse is based upon, or found in, the way Being presents itself to us. Ontology, as discourse on Being, is based on considering the distinctions that are within the things themselves, and not on the way we say things.

Problems with the First Step

In Aubenque's theory, the first step depends on Aubenque ability to sufficiently demonstrate the absolute distinction in Aristotle's thought between theology and ontology. If this step falls apart, then much of Aubenque's argument, including both of his attempt to show the anteriority of theology and the posteriority of metaphysics, as well as the fourth step of his argument (that there is no one unifying science because there can be no relation—not even a relation of analogy—between incorruptible and corruptible being), falls apart. His establishing this distinction between ontology and theology is dependent upon two key arguments: (1) the inauthenticity of book *K*, and (2) that Aristotle is indeed proposing 2 distinct objects of knowledge (Being *qua* Being and God) for 2 distinct sciences, instead of 1 object of knowledge (Being *qua* Being) for 1 science (metaphysics) which allows us to speak negatively of the cause (or principle) of Being *qua* Being.

Concerning the authenticity of book *K*, I have already provided my analysis of the unity of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, including the place of book *K* within the *Metaphysics*. Furthermore, I see no need to attempt a more elaborate defense of its authenticity as Giovanni Reale has already

sufficiently proven both its authenticity and its necessary place within the *Metaphysics*.⁸³⁸ If book *K* is an authentic and integral part of the *Metaphysics*, then Aubenque, in order to defend his thesis, must explain why Aristotle equates the very sciences that Aubenque wishes to separate. If Aubenque is unable to explain Aristotle's claims in book *K*, then Aubenque's first step, at this very early point, falls to pieces.

In my understanding of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, which I will develop below, Aristotle is, contrary to Aubenque, not developing two distinct sciences.⁸³⁹ On the contrary, one gets the impression, from a careful reading of both Aubenque and Aristotle, that Aubenque is being influenced not by an Aristotelian understanding of metaphysics, but by modern interpretations of Aristotle on this question. This is because the modern distinctions in Aristotelian metaphysics make two very important mistakes. First of all, they made Aristotle's science of the first unmoved mover (the principle of being) into a positive theology, when, for Aristotle, it was, most certainly (as Aubenque himself claims⁸⁴⁰), a negative theology. By making it into a positive theology, a science of the divine essence, we are given the impression that there are, indeed, two distinct sciences in Aristotle. This impression, however, is but the result of confusion concerning the proper object of Aristotle's metaphysics. Indeed, positive knowledge of the first unmoved mover was not the proper object of metaphysics. Rather, negative knowledge of the first unmoved

⁸³⁸Reale, *CFP*, 277-280.

⁸³⁹Indeed, Reale demonstrates sufficiently, in *The Concept of First Philosophy and the Unity of the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, that from the very beginning of the *Metaphysics* (Books *A* and *α*), and throughout the entirety of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle conceives of First Philosophy as, at the same time, an *aetiology* (science of first principles and causes), a *ousiology*, a *theology*, and an *ontology*, and that these four components of First Philosophy are, in Aristotle's mind, inseparable. It follows that Aubenque's first step, distinguishing between 2 sciences, is not at all possible. I would submit, indeed, that Reale's work on the Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, in itself, sufficiently demonstrates the impossibility of Aubenque's theory. Cf. Reale, *CFP*, 38.

⁸⁴⁰Aubenque, *PEA*, 487-488. The difference between what I am saying and what Aubenque says is that for Aubenque Aristotle set out to develop a theology as a positive, and separate, science, however, he came to realize that nothing positive could be said about God, and his negation of theology became a negative theology. I am saying that Aristotle did not consider God to be the proper object of metaphysics, except as the cause of the proper object of metaphysics. Therefore, Aristotle's theology was necessarily negative from the get-go.

mover was obtained as it was considered as the cause of the proper object of metaphysics.⁸⁴¹ The proper object of metaphysics should be understood to be what that latin philosophers called *ens commun* –that *being* which is common to sensible being, and through knowledge of *ens commun* (which is an effect), knowledge of the principle/cause of *ens commun* (but this knowledge would only be a negative knowledge through what the scholastics called *demonstratio quia*).⁸⁴² If *ens commun* is the proper object of metaphysics, and if the divine cause of *ens commun* is only known through its effect (and not as it is in its essence), which is the proper knowledge that a particular science is able to have of the cause of its proper object, then it follows that Aristotle is not proposing two different sciences (ontology and theology), but one single science. Secondly, many modern metaphysicians include, uncritically, that which Aristotle considered as philosophy of nature (cosmology) which was most certainly not (contra Aubenque⁸⁴³), for Aristotle, metaphysics.⁸⁴⁴ In light of these two observations it seems as if Aubenque’s attempted distinction between ontology and theology falls to pieces. If so, then Aubenque’s first step is a misstep and his argument stumbles before it even gets off of the starting line.

Difficulties with the Second Step

The second step depends upon the successful demonstration of the so-called Aristotelian Aporia of Ontology. However, the second statement (what Aubenque claims is Aristotle’s definition of science)⁸⁴⁵ is highly debatable. First of all, in order for Aubenque’s explanation, of what he calls the Aristotelian Aporia of Ontology, to arrive at the positing of a truly unsolvable

⁸⁴¹As such, another science would certainly be necessary in order to truly know, in its essence, the first principle of being, however this would not be equivalent to the negative theology that we find in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, but a positive theology - knowledge of the essence of God.

⁸⁴²Cf. Wippel, *MTA*, 20-21.

⁸⁴³*Ibid.*, 422.

⁸⁴⁴Cf. Jacques Maritain, *Philosophy of Nature* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951).

⁸⁴⁵For any x, if x is a science, then x is of a determined genus.

aporia, Aristotle must understand the term “genus”, as it is used in the claim that “science is the study of one genus”, *in only one sense* – that is, as the material part of a definition. Unfortunately for Aubenque Aristotle notes that the term *genus* is said in at least four different ways, one of which is, as Aubenque states, the logical notion of a genus. Aristotle does, however, use the term *genus* in at least one other sense when saying that science is of a genus.⁸⁴⁶ If Aristotle does indeed use the term *genus*, in another sense, in his understanding of science, then Aubenque’s description of Aristotle’s definition of science would indeed be flawed, because overly dogmatic and inflexible. This possibility means that unless Aubenque proves that Aristotle never uses the term *genus* in a manner other than Aubenque suggests, then Aubenque’s dogmatic conclusion is false.

In fact, in the development of his argument concerning the so-called Aristotelian Aporia of Ontology Aubenque refers to a line in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* which, Aubenque seems to think, supports his claim that all science is of a determined genus. He states the following, “But to say that each science is only concerned with one genus, is to remind us of the other side of the previous rule.”⁸⁴⁷ He supports his claim that “each science is only concerned with one genus”, in a footnote, with the following line: “Of every genus there is a science, a single science for a single genus.”⁸⁴⁸ This, Aubenque claims, is the proper interpretation of a line found, in a section of the *Metaphysics* that we have just mentioned, at 1003b19. Aubenque quotes the line, in his footnote, as “ἅπαντος δὲ γένους... μία ἐνὸς... ἐπιστήμη.”⁸⁴⁹ Is this a proper understanding of this line?

⁸⁴⁶*Metaphysics*, 1003b19-22. Ironically, as we shall see, this is the very text that Aubenque uses to defend his claim that every science is of a genus.

⁸⁴⁷Aubenque, *PEA*, 224.

⁸⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 224fn1.

⁸⁴⁹*Ibid.*

We contest Aubenque's use of this line for two reasons: First of all, because he has, for some reason or other, selected (and separated from the immediate context) only those Greek words that support his claim. The text in question should read, in Greek, “ἅπαντος δὲ γένους καὶ αἴσθησις μία ἐνὸς καὶ ἐπιστήμη.”⁸⁵⁰ This line is followed by an example, and then an application of this notion to the question of the science of Being *qua* Being. “οἷον γραμματικὴ μία οὖσα πάσας θεωρεῖ τὰς φωνάς· διὸ καὶ τοῦ ὄντος ἢ ὄν ὅσα εἶδη θεωρῆσαι μιᾶς ἐστὶν ἐπιστήμης τῷ γένει, τὰ τε εἶδη τῶν εἰδῶν.”⁸⁵¹ Taken out of context, these words can be made to say anything, even to support Aubenque's theory. However, and this is our second difficulty with Aubenque's use of this section of the *Metaphysics*, in their context, Aristotle is simply not saying what Aubenque claims that he is saying. On the contrary, Aristotle seems to be supporting the very idea that we mentioned above, that genus is used by Aristotle, in reference to science, to refer to something other than the material part of a definition.

Let us consider what, exactly, Aristotle is saying in *Metaphysics* Γ 1003b19-22. It will be helpful, to begin, to consider different ways in which this section has been translated. Hippocrates G. Apostle translates these lines as follows: “For each genus of things there is both one power of sensation and one science; grammar, for example, which is one science, investigates all kinds of speech. Accordingly, it belongs to one generic science to investigate all the kinds of being, and it belongs also to one specific science to investigate each kind of being.”⁸⁵² In Tredennick's excellent translation we read, “Now of every single class of things, as there is one perception, so there is one science: e.g., grammar, which is one science, studies all articulate sounds. Hence the study of all the species of Being *qua* Being belongs to a science which is generically one, and the

⁸⁵⁰*Metaphysics*, 1003b19.

⁸⁵¹*Metaphysics*, 1003b20-22.

⁸⁵²*Metaphysics*, 1003b19-22, Apostle.

study of the several species of Being belongs to the specific parts of that science.”⁸⁵³ The translation of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* that is “commonly thought to be the one employed by St. Thomas”⁸⁵⁴ puts it this way, “Now of every single class of things there is one sense and one science; for example, grammar, which is one science, studies all words. And for this reason too it belongs to a general science to study all species of being as being and the species of these species.”⁸⁵⁵

The purpose of *Metaphysics Γ*, book 2, as becomes apparent from even a cursory reading, is to demonstrate that it belongs to one science to study being *qua* being, substance and whatever belongs to these. In the section under consideration (1003b19-22) Aristotle begins by noting that for every γένους “class, type, genus, or group” there is both a sense perception and a science. Aristotle continues by providing an example: Grammar, the science, roughly put, of words or speech. What does Aristotle seek to prove from this? That, therefore, there is one general science that studies Being *qua* Being and its divisions. So, in the section that Aubenque quotes in order to prove that there is no science of Being *qua* Being, Aristotle actually makes two very important claims: (1) For every genus there is a science, and (2) There is, therefore, a science of Being *qua* Being. The second claim of this section is the conclusion of a syllogism. The missing premise must be, in order to arrive at the proposed conclusion: Being is a genus (in some sense of genus).

But, Aristotle, as Aubenque has pointed out (and as all Aristotelian scholars know quite well), does not think that Being is a genus. On the other hand, and this is what is important to understand for this section, Aristotle does seem to think that Being is a genus in some sense.⁸⁵⁶ In

⁸⁵³*Metaphysics*, 1003b19-22, Tredennick.

⁸⁵⁴John P. Rowan, “Introduction,” in Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, 2nd ed., trans. John P. Rowan (Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books, 1995), vii.

⁸⁵⁵Aquinas, *CAM*, 196.

⁸⁵⁶In *Metaphysics*, 1024b4-6 Aristotle explains that one of the ways in which genus is said (the fourth way) is, “ἔτι ὡς ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τὸ πρῶτον ἐνυπάρχον, ὃ λέγεται ἐν τῷ τί ἐστι, τοῦτο γένος, οὐ διαφοραὶ λέγονται αἱ ποιότητες.” Roughly, “Also, in the *logos* (definition) the first element (or component, cf. Tredennick), which is said

book *Δ* Aristotle explains that *genus* is said⁸⁵⁷ (1) of the continuous generation of a race, (2) of that “from which things derive their being as the prime mover of them into being”,⁸⁵⁸ (3) as that which is common to many particulars, and (4) as that part of the definition which corresponds to matter. How, then, should we understand Aristotle’s claim that for every genus there is a science and that there is, therefore, a science that studies Being *qua* Being?

The missing premise in this argument, as we mentioned above, is that Being *qua* Being is a genus, in some sense. Now, if we understand genus, in this section, as Aubenque wants us to understand genus, then not only is Aristotle’s conclusion false, but he, in fact, contradicts himself.⁸⁵⁹ How, then, should we understand genus in this argument? Simply put, as Aristotle understands genus in this section. Context, context, context! Note, first of all, “There are many senses in which a thing may be said to 'be', but they are related to one central point, one definite kind of thing, and are not homonymous...So, too, there are many senses in which a thing is said to be, but all refer to one starting-point.”⁸⁶⁰ Aristotle says something similar, a couple lines later, “For not only in the case of things which have one common notion does the investigation belong to one science, but also in the case of things which are related to one common nature; for even these in a sense have one common notion.”⁸⁶¹ Note, secondly, “But everywhere science deals chiefly with that which is primary, and on which the other things depend, and in virtue of which they get their names.”⁸⁶² Just to keep this book in the context of Aristotle’s metaphysical explorations, in the very first book of the *Metaphysics* Aristotle describes the science (wisdom)

of the being (or, of the essence [cf. Ross, Tredennick], is the genus (or kind [cf. Ross]), whose differentiae are said to be its qualities.” This is the way the genus is understood in the act of the intellect by which a thing is defined. In this manner of understanding genus it is certain that there could be no genus of Being.

⁸⁵⁷*Metaphysics*, 1024a29-1024b6.

⁸⁵⁸*Metaphysics*, 1024a21, Tredennick.

⁸⁵⁹In the *Aporias* of book *B* he notes that Being and unity cannot possibly be a genus (998b21-26).

⁸⁶⁰*Metaphysics*, 1003a33-1003b6, Ross.

⁸⁶¹*Metaphysics*, 1003b13-15, Ross.

⁸⁶²*Metaphysics*, 1003b16-18, Ross.

that we are seeking as follows: “Clearly then wisdom is knowledge about certain causes and principles. Since we are seeking this knowledge, we must inquire of what kind are the cause and the principles, the knowledge of which is wisdom.”⁸⁶³

Aristotle is saying, therefore, if we allow the context to speak for itself (rather than imposing Aubenque’s theories upon it, that Being is a “genus”, not in the sense of the material part of a definition (which Aubenque proposes) – the fourth way of saying genus—but in two other very important senses. If we compare the four ways of saying genus that Aristotle describes in book Δ with what he is saying in book Γ, chapter 2, we find that Aristotle is saying that Being *qua* Being is indeed a genus in, at least, the *second* way of saying genus (as that principle, or cause, from which all being receive their being), and the *third* way of saying genus (as that which is common to all that is said to be). If Being is a genus in these ways, then Aristotle’s argument follows (and the Aristotelian Aporia of Ontology is solved). Aristotle’s argument is as follows: (1) For every genus there is a science; (2) Being is a genus (in the second and third way of saying genus); (3) There is, therefore, a science that studies Being *qua* Being. It seems, then, based upon the above considerations, that we have not only proved that Aubenque is forcing his own erroneous and dogmatic understanding of genus onto Aristotle argument, but, also, that in light of Aristotle’s claims, the argument works, and there is, indeed, a science of Being *qua* Being.

Secondly, this step is flawed because Aristotle, throughout his works, actually seems to provide many different descriptions of what it is to be a science. As Robin Smith notes in the article *Logic*, in the *Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, “Aristotle thinks of scientific knowledge as knowledge in a specific sense: to know something scientifically is *to know the cause or reason*

⁸⁶³*Metaphysics*, 982a1-5, Ross. Reale’s work on the concept of first philosophy in the *Metaphysics* shows that this concept of first philosophy is maintained consistently throughout the *Metaphysics*.

*why it must be as it is and cannot be otherwise.*⁸⁶⁴ Indeed, Aristotle himself, in Book A of the *Metaphysics* states that “Evidently we have to acquire knowledge of the original causes (for we say we know each thing only when we think we recognize its first cause).”⁸⁶⁵ Commenting on this statement Thomas Aquinas states that “we know each thing scientifically when we think we are not ignorant of its cause.”⁸⁶⁶ If such is the case, then there would be a science of Being *qua* Being when one is able to explain the cause or reason for Being, and why it cannot be otherwise. This is precisely what Aristotle seeks to accomplish in the *Metaphysics*, and, contra Aubenque, with relative success. Furthermore, even given Aubenque’s understanding of Aristotle’s definition of science, as was shown above, the science of Being *qua* Being is still a science because it is of the “genus” of Being (where genus is understood in the second and third ways of saying genus). It seems, therefore, that Aubenque’s so-called Aristotelian Aporia of Ontology is not a true aporia, but one that is fabricated for the purpose of Aubenque’s theory. An Aristotelian solution is certainly available, and the fact that Aubenque decides not to take it reveals more about Aubenque’s theory than about Aristotle’s metaphysics. It seems, then, that this key step is also subject to debilitating difficulties.

A problematic Fifth Step

Finally, step 5 depends on (1) a confusion of ontology and the philosophy of nature, (2) denying that Aristotle proposed a solution to the problem that the reality of change creates for the possibility of knowledge, and (3) the total absence of the notion of abstraction. We have, first of

⁸⁶⁴Robin Smith, “Logic,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (1995; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 47.

⁸⁶⁵Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 983a24-25, trans. W. D. Ross, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (1984; repr., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 2: 1555.

⁸⁶⁶Aquinas, *CAM*, lesson 4, section 70, 25.

all, already discussed the confusion of ontology and the philosophy of nature, and have shown that Aristotle distinguished these two sciences. If the philosophy of nature (which Aristotle frequently called physics, but which is not what we, today, would think of as physics) is not equivalent to ontology (nor an ontology) as Aubenque claims, then the fifth step runs into a major difficulty. Secondly, Owens, as we noted above, and most Aristotelian scholars along with him, challenged Aubenque's claim that Aristotle did not propose a solution to the difficulties that change created for knowledge. It seems, from even a cursory reading of Aristotle's *Physics* that Aristotle is indeed proposing solutions to the problem of change. If this is the case, then the fifth step is riddled with so many difficulties that it seems only a miracle could make it stay afloat. If we add, thirdly, the Aristotelian theory of abstraction, which accounts for our knowledge of sensible beings, we find that the fifth step is so full of holes that it simply won't float.

Conclusion

Aubenque's work on Aristotle's approach to Being is a monumental contribution to Aristotelian studies. In seeking to allow Aristotle to interpret himself, and in distancing himself from the theories proposed by Jaeger and company, Aubenque takes an enormous leap towards a better understanding of Aristotle. However, due to the numerous difficulties mentioned above, Aubenque's overall theory is rendered, quite simply, untenable. Not only are there major difficulties with Aubenque's approach to Aristotle, but the three foundational steps in his theory do not hold up to our analysis. Contra Aubenque, therefore, Aristotle did not think that metaphysics, the science of Being *qua* Being, was a perpetual questioning of the question of being (which sounds more like something Martin Heidegger would say), rather, Aristotle attempted to answer the question of Being, and his answers have been the source of some of the deepest philosophical thinking that humanity has ever seen. If Aubenque's theory concerning

Aristotle's approach to the question of Being is wrong, then we will need to look somewhere else to discover how Aristotle approached this intriguing question. Perhaps, prior to positing our own understanding of Aristotle's approach to the question of Being, it would be worth our while to consider some more traditional interpretations of Aristotle's metaphysical theories.

Some Traditional Interpretations

Sir David Ross on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*

In case anyone would be tempted to say otherwise, an analysis of the purported integrity, or lack of integrity, of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is necessary if one is going to adequately discuss Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Ross, though not going to the extreme of some (such as Jaeger) concerning the arbitrariness of the composition of the *Metaphysics*, does not think that the *Metaphysics* was originally in the form in which it has been received by modern philosophy. Ross theorizes that the title of the *Metaphysics* was provided by Andronicus, and that it was given to the collection of (mostly) independent treatises that "were placed after the physical works in Andronicus' edition."⁸⁶⁷ Concerning the composition and integrity of the *Metaphysics* Ross, following Jaeger, theorizes that the original text of the *Metaphysics*, that which should, primarily, be studied in order to understand Aristotle's "Metaphysical" thought, is composed of books *A*, *B*, *Γ*, *E*, *Z*, *H*, *Θ*, *I*, *M* and *N*.

In light of Ross's theories concerning the integrity and composition of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* it should come as no surprise that, in his overview of Aristotle's metaphysical thought,⁸⁶⁸ Ross only interacts with books *A*, *B*, *Γ*, *E*, *Z*, *H*, and *Θ*, with special mention given to *A*, due to the importance of its subject for modern metaphysics. It might seem curious that Ross

⁸⁶⁷Ross, *Aristotle*, 11.

⁸⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 161-194.

does not give explicit attention to books *I*, *M* and *N*, however, much of what is covered, in depth, in these books is discussed in cursory form in the other books. Also, it would be almost impossible to give a cursory exposition of the subjects treated in these books.

Ross's exposition of Aristotle's metaphysical theory is, quite simply, the standard contemporary understanding of Aristotle, and, as such, does not require much comment. I will, here, only note some of the important points of Ross's explanation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Ross claims that Aristotle's motive in the *Metaphysics* is "the wish to acquire that form of knowledge which is most worthy of the name wisdom."⁸⁶⁹ *Wisdom*, for Aristotle, is "knowledge of causes" and "of the first and most universal causes."⁸⁷⁰

Ross translates *οὐσία*, in the traditional way, as *substance*. Aristotle states that there are 4 meanings of the word, or ways in which we say, *Being*.⁸⁷¹ Aristotle sought to discover which of the 4 ways of saying *Being* was primary. Ross's explanation of Aristotle's rejection of the primacy of Accidental being and true-being is a relatively uncontroversial summary of Aristotle's analysis of these 2 ways of saying *Being*. Ross then turns to Aristotle's notion of *οὐσία*.⁸⁷² Ross shows why Aristotle thinks that *οὐσία* is primary to the categories.⁸⁷³ One of the more interesting parts of Ross's explanation of Aristotle comes when he notes the apparent ambiguity of Aristotle's use of the word *οὐσία* in the *Metaphysics*.⁸⁷⁴ This term is occasionally used to refer to the individual being & occasionally to refer to the essence or nature of the individual being.⁸⁷⁵ Ross does not appear to consider the fact that Aristotle discusses various meanings of *οὐσία*,⁸⁷⁶

⁸⁶⁹Ibid., 161.

⁸⁷⁰Ibid.

⁸⁷¹Ibid., 170-184.

⁸⁷²Ibid., 171-173.

⁸⁷³Ibid., 171-172.

⁸⁷⁴Ibid., 172.

⁸⁷⁵Ibid.

⁸⁷⁶Also, as some scholars have noted, Aristotle's *οὐσία* seems to always include the notion of the Being of some individual nature or essence.

and that this helps to explain why Aristotle, occasionally, uses the term *οὐσία* in different ways. Reale notes that distinguishing between the different ways in which Aristotle uses the term *οὐσία* helps to avoid confusion. “Now when Aristotle uses the formula ‘the inquiry concerning the causes and principles and elements of *substances*,’ with the term *οὐσία* he understands the composite or concretely determined entity, that is, he refers to the first sense mentioned; but when he says *οὐσία* is one of the four causes and the principle one (see Book A) or when he says that it is *αἴτιον τοῦ εἶναι* (see Books Z and H), he is referring to the second meaning pointed out above, that is, he understands *οὐσία* = *εἶδος* = *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι* = *μορφή*.”⁸⁷⁷ Ross’s confusion on this subject may also be why Ross does not accept the general integrity of the *Metaphysics*, in which Aristotle is exploring the question of Being (as *οὐσία*), with the purpose of discovering the principles and causes of the primary sense of Being (*οὐσία*). Of course, in order to answer this question, Aristotle begins with sensible *οὐσία* and, as he did with Being (*τὸ ὄν*), sets out to discover the primary meaning of *οὐσία*.

Jonathan Lear on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*

Lear proposes that in order to properly understand Aristotle’s metaphysical inquiry, as it is found in the *Metaphysics*, one must first grasp Aristotle’s understanding of the way the world is.⁸⁷⁸ As such, in order to accomplish the purpose of this book, Lear, by way of introduction to Aristotle’s understanding of reality, takes the reader through Aristotle’s views on “Nature”, “Change”, “Human Nature” and “Morality”. There are a number of important elements of Aristotelian philosophy that are developed in these preliminary chapters that will influence our

⁸⁷⁷Reale, *CFP*, 358.

⁸⁷⁸Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 10-11.

understanding of Aristotle's metaphysical claims. When Lear arrives at Aristotle's understanding of reality he begins by explaining Aristotle's understanding of logic and mathematics. Following his explanation of Aristotle's philosophy of mathematics Lear walks the reader through Aristotle's metaphysical inquiry into Being and substance. He takes the time to elaborate on book 7 of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. He concludes by noting the relationship between mind, man & nature. In this section he develops the important subject of Aristotle's monotheism.

Throughout this book Lear constantly compares the important parts of Aristotle's thought with some of the great thinkers that followed Aristotle, such as Hume, Kant, and Hegel. His discussion of Aristotle's principle of sufficient reason,⁸⁷⁹ Aristotle's understanding of causality,⁸⁸⁰ and Aristotle's view of the Principle of Non-Contradiction,⁸⁸¹ are absolutely essential reads for anyone interested in philosophical discussions.

Lear explains, near the beginning of the book, that the purpose of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is to catalogue "the puzzles surrounding the question of what are the basic elements of reality."⁸⁸² Such an inquiry, of course, assumes that one is in contact with reality (somehow), and that one is aware of puzzling questions that concern the basic elements of reality. Indeed, by the time that we arrive at the *Metaphysics* we have already thought long and hard about what it means to be

⁸⁷⁹Ibid., 57-8.

⁸⁸⁰Ibid., 30-5.

⁸⁸¹Ibid., 249-64.

⁸⁸²Ibid., 4. Lear also discusses (Ibid., 248.) where the name "*Metaphysics*" came from. He adheres to the notion that this book of Aristotle is named the "*Metaphysics*", not because of its place in someone's library (*contra* Ross *et al.*), but because it is the natural inquiry that follows the study of nature. That is, the inquiries of the *Metaphysics* come, naturally, after ("*Meta*") the study of physics or nature ("*phusis*"), and can only come after the study of the natural physical world. Lear also notes, rightly, that the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle just is the narration of the process of inquiry into the principles and causes of reality (Ibid., 278.). This view requires Lear to view the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle as being relatively complete and in the appropriate order (*contra* Ross *et al.*). His comments concerning the "cramped and impenetrable (Ibid., 272.)" style of *Metaphysics* VII, as well as not being a "finished work, but unpolished work (Ibid.)" do not imply that the *Metaphysics* is an out of order compilation that was compiled after the fact. On the contrary, the *Metaphysics* can be understood to be the relatively complete and appropriately ordered collection of unfinished notes documenting the progression of Aristotle's metaphysical inquiry.

human, how humans know, etc. As he begins his explanation of Aristotle's inquiry into being *qua* being Lear notes that metaphysics, the inquiry into the basic elements of reality, just is an inquiry into *substance* (which is the traditional translation of Aristotle's technical term, *οὐσία*.) This is important as, for Aristotle, the inquiry into substance (as principle or starting point) is not an inquiry into concepts, but an inquiry into that which is. Lear notes that "it may at first seem odd to a modern reader to see Aristotle call substance a 'starting-point' or 'principle.' Is it not certain premises or thoughts that are starting-points, not bits of reality? But by this stage of our inquiry there is no longer a significant distinction to be made between the order of our thoughts and the order of reality."⁸⁸³ Thus a certain portion of reality itself, substance, can be thought of as a starting-point...All reality either is substance or is somehow dependent on or related to substance. Thus the inquiry into reality as such is an inquiry into substance."⁸⁸⁴ Lear thinks that Aristotle's understanding of substance developed over time, and, therefore, that his views of

⁸⁸³For a person who has not followed Lear's argument through this book, this claim might be alarming. "What, no significant distinction between the order of reality and the order of thought?" However, it should be noted that for Aristotle, as explained by Lear, when a knower knows something, there is absolutely no distinction between the thing known and the knower. What is the thing known? For Aristotle, a material x just is "enmattered x". But x as enmattered is, according to Lear, only a "*first-level* actuality (Ibid., 129.)". That to which "x" refers is the "form" or "essence" X. "But it is the essence or form of a physical object that is intelligible. So the form which is, from one perspective, the actuality of the object is, from another perspective, a potentiality which is actualized in active contemplating. *The active contemplating of that form is the form itself at its highest level of actuality.* (Ibid., 131)" Lear notes that, "The intelligible form to which mind is receptive is the essence of the thing, which mind is able to think. The intelligible form which mind, in thinking, becomes is a second-level actuality. (Ibid., 130.)" As such, when a knower knows some x, the knower intellectually becomes x. As such, in knowing, there is no significant distinction between the knower and the thing known. Therefore, "in active thinking there is no difference between mind and object: mind simply is the form it is thinking. (Ibid., 131.)" It is due to this understanding of understanding that Aristotle, as explained by Lear, is able to claim that "the structure of reality constrains the structure of our thought...It is because the structure of our thought is responsive to – indeed, expressive of – the structure of reality that we thinkers are capable of conducting a very general inquiry into reality. (Ibid., 264.)" There is one more important comment to make here. In Lear's explanation of Aristotle, the essence of x just is the order (ordering) of x, it is that which makes x to be x and not y, z or w (cf. Ibid., 28-29.). Lear notes that "precisely because the essence does instantiate an order, it is intelligible. Mind can grasp the order manifested in an essence, and *thus* we can give an account or definition of it. (Ibid., 29.)" If the essence of x is the order of x, then the essence of some real thing, when known, becomes the order of the knowledge of x. As such, there is no distinction between the order of x as real and the order of x as known. There is much more that could be said (this is a very rapid survey), but this should help the reader to understand why Lear is able to say that there is no significant distinction between the order of reality and the order of thought.

⁸⁸⁴Ibid., 248.

substance in the *Categories* will not necessarily be the same as his views on substance as found in the *Metaphysics*.⁸⁸⁵ The primary question of the *Metaphysics* is “what is Being?”, which, Aristotle claims, just is the question “What is Substance?” Lear notes that, “when one is engaged in a philosophical inquiry into what substance in the primary sense is, one is engaged in trying to answer the questions: what is most real?, what is ontologically basic?, what is that upon which the reality of other things depends?”⁸⁸⁶

Before moving on to a consideration of Aristotle’s inquiry into the principles and causes of reality Lear reminds the reader of what has been seen, “The inquiry into nature revealed the world as meant to be known; the inquiry into man’s soul revealed him as a being who is meant to be a knower. Man and world are, as it were, made for each other.”⁸⁸⁷ If such is the case, then it may be possible to gain some knowledge of what the principles and causes of Being are.⁸⁸⁸

⁸⁸⁵Ibid., 265, 269, 272.

⁸⁸⁶Ibid., 269-70.

⁸⁸⁷Ibid., 248-49. This is, interestingly enough, the view of the Christian church throughout the centuries. Christian theologians from theological families as different as the Cappadocian greek fathers and American Reformed theology have taught that God has created man to know him, and has provided man with two books with which to know God (the book of nature, and revealed scripture). Stephen M. Hildebrand, in his recent introduction to the theological work of Basil of Caesarea (one of the great Cappadocian thinkers of the 4th century), notes that Basil understood man to be created as a reader (“for Basil, man is, at the heart of his identity, a reader and an interpreter...man is both reader and book or text, reader in soul and book in body. (Stephen M. Hildebrand, *Basil of Caesarea* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 17.)”). Basil also thought that God had provided man with two books to be read and interpreted (“Man’s texts, for Basil, are principally two, the Scriptures and the whole of creation, including the human body. The author of man’s two books is God himself. One important implication here is that both the Scriptures and creation, being texts, are full of meaning and significance. (Ibid.)”) Augustus H. Strong, a well-known and respected Reformed Baptist theologian, in his *Systematic Theology*, says essentially the same thing as Basil, “God himself, in the last analysis, must be the only source of knowledge with regard to his own being and relations. Theology is therefore a summary and explanation of the content of God’s self-revelations. These are, first, the revelation of God in nature; secondly and supremely, the revelation of God in the scriptures. (A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 3 volumes in 1 (1907; repr., Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1979), 25.)” He goes on to claim that both scripture and nature have the same author (Ibid., 28.), that they cast light on each other (Ibid., 27-28.), and that they are mutually dependent (Ibid., 29.). Both of these theologians, along with the great majority of Christian theologians, are claiming that man was created to know, and to know God; and that this world was created to be known, and to lead man to knowledge of God (supplemented and perfected by God’s divinely inspired scriptures). In this, Christian theology has always agreed with Aristotle.

⁸⁸⁸It should not be forgotten that Aristotle’s understanding of “principle” and “cause” are not concepts, but things, origins, grounds. Lear notes that “The Greek word which is translated as ‘cause’ does not mean cause in the modern sense: namely, an antecedent event sufficient to produce an effect. Rather, it means the basis or ground of something...the cause gives us ‘the why’.” (Lear, 15.)” Charlotte Witt makes the same distinction when she notes that “A principle, as we think of it today, is a rule, a law, or a basic truth. An Aristotelian *arche*, in contrast, means an

Indeed, because knowledge just is the intellectual union of knower and thing known, “Metaphysical inquiry can thus simultaneously be about man and world, because at this level of inquiry there is an internal coincidence between what is essential to man and what is essential about the world.”⁸⁸⁹

Lear notes that in Aristotle’s earlier work, the *Categories*, he had associated the notion of substance with individual things. Lear says, “one should see the *Categories* as *trying to answer* the question ‘What is ontologically basic?’ by offering particulars as primary substances. His reasoning, in brief outline, is, first, that primary substance is a subject for predicables, but is not itself predicable of anything further; second, that a particular is something which is not by its nature predicable of anything else. Since particulars are themselves subjects of predication, it follows that to be a primary substance is simply to be a particular.”⁸⁹⁰ Lear argues that Aristotle had not, at this point, dealt sufficiently with the problem of change, and, therefore, had not yet discovered *form* and *matter*.⁸⁹¹ Lear claims that once Aristotle discovered form and matter he was forced to totally rethink the question of substance.⁸⁹²

Lear, in his discussion of *Metaphysics* VII notes that Aristotle poses two criteria for what it means to be a substance: “substance must be both a ‘this something’ and a ‘what-it-is.’”⁸⁹³ Lear claims that “The idea of something’s being a ‘what-it-is’ is that of its being a thoroughly definable, and thus an intelligible, entity.”⁸⁹⁴ The ‘what-it-is’ is Lear’s translation of *to ti en einai*, which could be read as, “that which it is”. Many translators simply translate this technical phrase

‘origin’ or ‘source’, and bears traces of nonphilosophical usage in which it means a ruler. (Charlotte Witt, *Substance and Essence in Aristotle: An Interpretation of Metaphysics VII-IX* (1989; repr., Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 16.)”

⁸⁸⁹Lear, 249.

⁸⁹⁰Ibid., 270.

⁸⁹¹Ibid., 270-71.

⁸⁹²Ibid., 272.

⁸⁹³Ibid., 273.

⁸⁹⁴Ibid.

as *essence*. This may not be the best translation as most people understand the *essence* of x as an abstraction from the thing x, whereas Aristotle's technical phrase carries with it the idea of "an actual thing" as well as "what the actual thing is", and, therefore, the composition of the thing and its essence in one. The 'this something' is Lear's translation of *tode ti*. Lear says that "the idea of something's being a 'this something' is the idea of its being an ontologically basic, definite item."⁸⁹⁵ Thus, for Lear, Aristotle is saying that, in order for x to be a substance, x must be an ontologically basic, definite, thoroughly definable and intelligible entity. If such is the case, then, for Aristotle, neither a *particular* nor a *universal* qualify as substances. Lear follows Aristotle's reasoning in *Metaphysics* VII and shows how Aristotle arrives at the conclusion that the form of the species just is substance.⁸⁹⁶ Lear then goes on to discuss and respond to difficulties that might be raised by this theory,⁸⁹⁷ as well as how Form can be ontologically independent.⁸⁹⁸

Interestingly enough, Lear's explanation of Aristotle's answer to the question "What is Being?" appears to be almost exactly the same as Stanley Rosen's explanation of Plato's answer to the question "What is Being?" Lear argues that Aristotle answers the question "What is Being?" by saying that Being is substance and substance just is *form*.⁸⁹⁹ Stanley Rosen seems to imply that Plato's answer to the question "What is Being?" was, Being is *a form*.⁹⁰⁰ The

⁸⁹⁵Ibid.

⁸⁹⁶When discussing sensible substance Aristotle notes that there are three basic "aspects": form, matter and the composite of form and matter. Aristotle argues that the substance of the sensible substance is neither its matter, nor the composite of form and matter. Therefore, necessarily, the substance of the form matter composite is the form. In his exposition of Aristotle's argument which concludes that form just is substance Lear does not seem to consider the possibility that Aristotle is beginning with sensible substance, (composites of form and matter) in order to begin with that which is easiest to know, with the purpose of discovering what is the Being or Substance of sensible Beings, and this so as to move on to a deeper analysis of what Being is.

⁸⁹⁷Ibid., 278-92.

⁸⁹⁸Ibid., 292-3.

⁸⁹⁹Note that Lear does not explicitly refer to the question "What is Being?", however, it is implied by his discussion of Aristotle's question "What is substance?", which, for Aristotle, just is the question "What is Being?".

⁹⁰⁰Cf. Rosen, *PSDOI*, 44, 149, 188, 197, 230, 237-39, 243, 264, 273, et al. Rosen is not quite as clear on this claim in his later book, *The Question of Being*.

difference between the two answers is that Aristotle, according to Lear, would have Being simply be the form of the substance, whereas Plato, according to Rosen, would have Being be one of the many forms – the separate ideas or essences.

Werner Jaeger's Interpretation of Aristotle's Metaphysical Theory

In spite of his non-traditional understanding of the development of Aristotle's thought and the disunity of the *Metaphysics*, Jaeger's interpretation of Aristotle's metaphysical theory still finds itself classed, against all odds, under the traditional contemporary understanding of Aristotle. Concerning the importance of Aristotle's metaphysical works, Jaeger notes, "All the lines of Aristotle's philosophy run together in his metaphysics, while it on the other hand stretches out into all other disciplines. It expresses his ultimate philosophical purposes, and every study of the details of his doctrine that does not start from this central organ must miss the main point."⁹⁰¹ Jaeger is certainly right on this point. It is, indeed, of the utmost important to understand Aristotle's metaphysical thoughts in order to understand the place and role of every other domain of research in his thought. What, then, does Jaeger make of Aristotle's metaphysical thought?

Jaeger does not begin attempting to explain what he sees as Aristotle's metaphysical thought until the last chapter of this important book. For Jaeger, "The *Metaphysics* is his [Aristotle's] grand attempt to make this Something that transcends the limits of human experience accessible to the critical understanding."⁹⁰² A couple of remarks concerning Jaeger's portrayal of Aristotle's metaphysical thought are in order.

⁹⁰¹Jaeger, *AFHD*, 376.

⁹⁰²*Ibid.*, 378.

First of all, for Jaeger, the legend by which the *Metaphysics* got its name due to it coming after the *Physics* in Andronicus's library is almost certainly false. Rather, the *Metaphysics* got its name, for Jaeger (agreeing with Lear), due to the very fact that the philosophical considerations found in the treatises that make up the *Metaphysics* are based upon the prior considerations of the *Physics*, but go beyond them.⁹⁰³ Indeed, "Metaphysics is based on physics according to Aristotle in the first place because it is nothing but the conceptually necessary completion of the experimentally revealed system of moving nature."⁹⁰⁴

Secondly, for Jaeger, the primary concern of the *Metaphysics* is to discover whether or not a supra-physical science is possible, "We usually overlook the fact that his commonest description of the new discipline is 'the science that we are seeking'. In contrast to all other sciences it starts not from a given subject-matter but from the question whether its subject matter exists. Thus it has to begin by demonstrating its own possibility as a science, and this 'introductory' question really exhausts its whole nature."⁹⁰⁵

Thirdly, for Jaeger, Aristotle's philosophy is thoroughly *Realistic*. "In spite of his critical attitude, therefore, he escapes no more than Plato did from the notion that all real knowing presupposes an object lying outside consciousness...which it somehow touches, represents, or mirrors."⁹⁰⁶ For Jaeger, however, Aristotle is a "critical" realist, whose primary purpose is to discover whether or not the science of Being is possible – "is such knowledge possible?"⁹⁰⁷ As such, Jaeger sees Aristotle as the precursor of Immanuel Kant, if not in Kant's *Idealism*, at least in his critical approach to philosophical knowledge of Being.⁹⁰⁸

⁹⁰³Ibid., 378-379.

⁹⁰⁴Ibid., 380. Cf. Ibid., 381.

⁹⁰⁵Ibid., 379.

⁹⁰⁶Ibid.

⁹⁰⁷Ibid., 379-380.

⁹⁰⁸Ibid.

Fourth, Aristotle's theory of Being begins with the sensible world. Jaeger puts it in the following, somewhat nebulous manner, "The starting-point of his theory of being is the world of perceptible appearances, the individual thing of the naively realistic consciousness."⁹⁰⁹ This is a nebulous description because of the term used by Jaeger, 'perceptible appearances', which, for post-Kantian philosophers, is anything but a philosophically neutral term describing what Aristotle meant by sensible being. Indeed, Jaeger's entire analysis of Aristotle seems to be inspired by, at the very least, Kantian terminology, if not by the philosophy which undergirds these terms. Jaeger goes on to explain that for Aristotle, "the complete determination of reality by the forms of the understanding and by the categorial multiplicity of their conceptual stratification is rooted not in transcendental laws of the knowing consciousness but in the structure of reality itself."⁹¹⁰ In spite of the Kantian terminology, Jaeger seems to be properly explaining Aristotle's understanding of the way things are. That is, Jaeger is saying that the forms and categories by which we understand reality, Being as it presents itself to us, do not find their source and foundation in the human intellect, but in the very 'structure of reality itself'. Reality, Being, just is such that we glean these forms and categories from it.

Fifth, for Jaeger, Aristotle's understanding of Being "drives us on towards an ultimate Form [this word is one of the typical English translations of the greek *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*.] that determines everything else and is not itself determined by anything."⁹¹¹ In other words, in light of the fact that "in every kind of motion Aristotle's gaze is fastened on the end",⁹¹² Aristotle follows the existence of form in matter to a "form" that is not composed with matter, and which is that towards which all reality tends. "In Aristotle's teleology substance and end are one, and the

⁹⁰⁹Ibid., 381.

⁹¹⁰Ibid., 382.

⁹¹¹Ibid.

⁹¹²Ibid., 384.

highest end is the most determinate reality there is. This substantial thought possesses at one and the same time the highest ideality as conceived by Plato and the rich determinateness of the individual, and hence life and everlasting blessedness. God is one with the world not by penetrating it, nor by maintaining the totality of its forms as an intelligible world within himself, but because the world ‘hangs’ (ἤρτηται) on him; he *is* its unity, although not in it.”⁹¹³ For Aristotle, then, the question of Being must necessarily drive the philosopher to God.

Charlotte Witt on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*

Charlotte Witt explains her understanding of the Aristotle’s doctrine of Being in the first two chapters of her book *Substance and Essence in Aristotle: An Interpretation of Metaphysics VII-IX*. In the first chapter, Witt begins by explaining how Aristotle begins his investigation of Being—by considering how thinkers before him had asked the question of Being. In order to understand the question of Being Witt explains that there are two *types* of questions concerning Being: (1) the *population* question, and (2) the *definition* question.⁹¹⁴ The population question asks “what *are* beings?”,⁹¹⁵ and the definition question asks “what *is* being?” (or, “what is it to be?”).⁹¹⁶ Witt notes that Aristotle does not think that his predecessors are worried about the

⁹¹³Ibid., 385.

⁹¹⁴Witt, *SEA*, 7-8, 35, 194-195. We have already come across these two types of questions in our analysis of Plato. There we called them the quality question and the extension question.

⁹¹⁵This question is essentially asking “What are the things that are beings?” An answer to this question will be a list of things that are beings. One could even answer this question by pointing at beings. For example, if I take my child to a farm and, looking into a field filled with animals, ask “Which ones are horses?”, the answer will be given either by pointing out the horses, or by listing which ones are horses (with a description so that I can single them out). It is important to note that unless one already knows what a horse *is* (its definition, essence or nature – which would be the answer to the definition question “What is a horse?”), one will be unable to answer the population question.

⁹¹⁶Ibid. Witt explains the definition question as: “‘What is the nature of being?’ Or, ‘What is being like?’ (Ibid.)” It should be noted that by asking the question in this manner one is immediately implying that Being has a nature or essence. Witt notes this implication near the end of the first chapter, “what is it to ask for a definition, to ask about the nature or essence of being? (Ibid., 35.)” This is, of course, a controversial implication.

population question, but are seeking to answer the definition question.⁹¹⁷ Witt explains that Aristotle does not think that the population question can be answered until one has first answered the definition question.⁹¹⁸ A definition, for Aristotle, “is of a nonlinguistic item,”⁹¹⁹ and “causal; for Aristotle, one knows what [a] thing is (i.e., its definition) when one knows its cause.”⁹²⁰ As Witt notes, “a definition is the appropriate answer to a question of the form ‘What is F?’”⁹²¹

Witt immediately points out the apparent shift of focus by which Aristotle claims that the question “What is *Being*?”, just is the question “What is *substance*?”.⁹²² With this apparent shift Aristotle is then able to begin answering the definitional question by inquiring, of things that are generally recognized to be substances (sensible substances), “what is a substance?”⁹²³ Understanding Aristotle’s notion of definition is primordial to understanding Aristotle’s question “What is Substance?” Aristotle is not asking for a “nominal” definition (the meaning of the word), but for “the principle or cause of a things’s being a substance...he is asking what it is in or about an entity that causes it to be a substance.”⁹²⁴ She goes on to describe how Aristotle goes about answering the question of Being, and in the process explains a number of important elements of Aristotle’s understanding of reasoning, knowledge and the pursuit of knowledge.

Following this important discussion, she asks the question, what does the science of Being study? The Aristotelian answer to the question, as Witt notes, is “being *qua* being, or beings

⁹¹⁷Ibid., 7.

⁹¹⁸Ibid., 8-9. Cf. Ibid., 111, 194, 195.

⁹¹⁹Ibid., 35. Cf. Ibid., 57.

⁹²⁰Ibid. Cf. Ibid., 57.

⁹²¹Ibid. Cf. Ibid., 54. Witt connects the Aristotelian notion of definition with Plato’s *Euthyphro*, where Socrates asks the young Euthyphro for a definition of Virtue (Ibid., 35-36.).

⁹²²Ibid., 8. Cf. Ibid., 39. Witt seems to accept, uncritically, the standard translation and understanding of *ousia* by which *ousia* means *substance*, and not, as many interpreters of Aristotle have argued, being-ness, or entity (cf. Owens, *DBAM*, 138-154.) This understanding of *ousia* certainly affects her exposition of Aristotle’s understanding of Being, “substance”, etc. She later seeks to determine why Aristotle would have substituted “Substance” for “Being” in the “What is X?” question. She interprets Aristotle as using this substitution because substance is prior as far as Being is concerned, when compared with the other ways of saying being (Ibid., 39.).

⁹²³Ibid. Cf. Ibid., 194.

⁹²⁴Ibid., 36-37. Cf. Ibid., 114.

insofar as they are beings”.⁹²⁵ That is, the science of Being seeks to understand the principles and causes of Being.⁹²⁶ Being, for Aristotle, is not a genus, therefore “there is no universal science of being because, for entities in different categories, what it is to be differs.”⁹²⁷ We have already addressed this difficulty in our discussion of Aubenque.

There is one major question that we need to ask at this point. How does Witt understand substance? In the section on the priority of Substance Witt notes, first of all, that “substances can be described as the *ontologically basic beings*.”⁹²⁸ The idea being that a substance does not depend upon another for it to be.⁹²⁹ Witt goes on to note that Aristotle often “refers to the category of substance as the ‘what is it’.”⁹³⁰ The third priority of substance is in knowledge.⁹³¹ In explaining this third priority Witt turns to sensible substances and notes that one cannot truly know the attributes or properties of a sensible substance unless one already, at least implicitly, knows the substance.⁹³² Knowledge of what the substance is must come prior to knowledge of anything else about the substance. At the beginning of chapter three Witt distinguishes between primary and secondary substances.⁹³³ As she is rounding up her final chapter she asks two questions that clarify some issues in her explanation, “Why can we not separate the question of substance (comprising both the population and the definitional question) from the issue of essence? Why can we not consider individuals (e.g., lecterns and animals) and determine their essences, without addressing any ontological issues?”⁹³⁴ From this question, and the final

⁹²⁵Ibid., 26. Cf. Ibid., 35, 61.

⁹²⁶Ibid. 26, 31.

⁹²⁷Ibid., 27.

⁹²⁸Ibid., 51.

⁹²⁹Ibid.

⁹³⁰Ibid., 54. This is a translation of the Greek words, *to ti en einai*, which is frequently translated as “essence”.

⁹³¹Ibid., 57-58.

⁹³²Ibid., 58-59.

⁹³³Ibid., 63fn.1.

⁹³⁴Ibid., 195.

discussion of the book, it would appear that Witt distinguishes *substance* and *essence* such that, the essence of X is given in the answer to the question “what is X?”, and to say that X is a substance is to say that it is a properly basic Being.

These are interesting answers, however, the question that we are left with, is “What is Being?” In other words, “What is it to be?” It would appear that, either Aristotle does not answer this question, or Charlotte Witt has misinterpreted Aristotle somewhere. We turn now to our analysis of Aristotle’s approach to the question of Being.

Our Interpretation of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*

We are trying to discover how Aristotle approaches the question of Being. This implies that we consider not only his answer to the question of Being, but how he arrives at his answer to the Question of Being. If we can first arrive at some idea of what Aristotle’s answer to the question of Being was, then we should be better able to retrace his steps in order to show how he arrived at this conclusion, as well as how he approaches this question. Now, at first glance, when we ask Aristotle, “what is Being?”, he seems to respond by saying, “It depends what you are talking about, Being is said in many ways.” Aristotle then proceeds to provide a list of things that *Be*. Though it seems that Aristotle is guilty of committing the very same error as Euthyphro,⁹³⁵ it is best to not jump to conclusions. In order to understand Aristotle’s answer to the question of Being, and discover if he actually answers it, we must understand how Aristotle understands the question of being. Indeed, one’s answer to the question of Being will be a consequence of how one understands the question.

⁹³⁵Cf. Aubenque, *FDM*, 73.

There are two entirely unrelated ways in which the question of Being, “what is Being?”, can be understood. The meaning that is given to the question will depend on which words are emphasized in the question, and on how one understands the terms used in the question. One of the ways in which this question may be understood is as a question concerning the extent of being. In other words, putting the emphasis on the “what” and understanding Being not as a nature, essence or something to be defined or described, but as a verb—the act of existence, we ask, “WHAT is be-ing?”⁹³⁶ Understood this way, the question is essentially asking “what is it that is engaging in the act of be-ing?”, or, “what can be said to be?” In the same way that upon seeing an unknown animal or group of animals moving rapidly across a field one might ask, “What is running?” In this sense one is not expecting the interlocutor to respond with a definition of “running”, but with a noun that running would be attributed to, thus replacing the X in the following phrase, “X is running.”

The second way of understanding the question “What is being?” may be understood as asking for the definition, nature or essence of being, rather than the extension of being. This second way of asking the question puts the emphasis on the word “is” and understands be-ing not as a verb, an act that is being engaged in by some unknown “entity”, but as a thing to be described or defined. As such we ask, “What IS being?” and seek to understand, in a sense, the nature or essence of Being – being-ness. This type of question is seen when someone says, for example, “I see deer running across the field”, and their interlocutor responds, “Yes, but what IS running?” These two ways of understanding the question “What is Being?” are, indeed, according to Reale, the two problems of ousiology, “The two problems of ousiology are, in fact: ‘*What is*

⁹³⁶The hyphen is placed in between “be” and “-ing” in order to accentuate the fact that this word is being used not as a noun but as a verb.

substance' in general, and 'what substances exist'.⁹³⁷ Before we can understand Aristotle's answer to the question of being we will need to understand how he understands the question.

Let us look, once again, at how Aristotle arrives at the part of the *Metaphysics* where he explicitly poses the question of Being. In *Metaphysics E* (1026a33-1028a5) Aristotle notes the four ways in which Being is said: Essential, Accidental, True, and Potential and Actual. He immediately notes, however, concerning Accidental Being and True-Being, that though they are both said *to be*, and though they both truly *are*, there is a sense in which they are not truly Being.⁹³⁸ That is, they are both dependent on another for their Be-ing. Accidental be-ing inheres in another, and True-Being is primarily in the intellect. Aristotle concludes book *E* with the following claim, "But, Being as accident [that which accompanies x] and as true we will leave alone [dismiss]. For the cause of the one is debatable [indeterminable], and of the other it is an affection of thought, and both are of [concerning, about, around] the remaining genus of Being, and do not make visible [manifest] Being [that which is] a certain [the particular] nature of Being. Therefore, disregard these, and reflect upon Being itself as being, its causes and the principles."⁹³⁹ As such, of the four ways in which Be-ing is said, only two remain (the others being said improperly). He, therefore, encourages us to leave accidental being and true being behind for the moment, and to move on to consider Being in itself, Being *qua* Being.

⁹³⁷Reale, *CFP*, 205. Cf. *Ibid.*, 210, 302, 311, 363.

⁹³⁸Reale notes that « Some hold that this fourfold division of the meanings of being [being as (1) the categories, (2) potency and act, (3) accident, and (4) truth and falsity] is proof that οὐσία is not only the object of the metaphysical inquiry for Aristotle, but *every being*. And since we have seen being does not express a common nature, identical in all things, Aristotelian ontology would only be this phenomenology of the various meanings of being. We reply that such an interpretation is not correct, indeed, because Aristotle explicitly affirms, after having distinguished the various senses of being, that two of them—the third and the fourth—*fall outside of metaphysical inquiry, insofar as they do not concern the meaning of being that matters to first philosophy*. (Reale, *CFP*, 174-175.)”

⁹³⁹*Metaphysics*, 1027b34-1028a4.

In Book Z, the section which deals with *οὐσία*, Aristotle sets out to explain Being *qua* Being. The opening sentences reveal that Aristotle considers what have become known as the *categories*, earlier described as *Essential Being*, to provide the answer to the question “What is Being?” Again we wonder if Aristotle is just going to give us a list of things that *Be*, rather than explain what is common to all things that *Be*. The opening sentences provide an interesting overview of what Aristotle will say, “The Being is said in many ways, just as we explained in the prior section concerning the many types. For on the one hand, it points to the *what-is*, and also the *what*, as well as the kind [type, sort, quality] or the quantity or each one of the others that are in this way said of it [being].”⁹⁴⁰ He notes that Be-ing points to the thing that is (the actually existent being), and the *what* (the what-ness or essence of the thing). In the next line he provides what is essentially his answer to the question of Being, “We speak of the Being in so many other ways, it is manifest that of these the primary being (*ὄν*), the *what-is-Being* (*τὸ τί ἔστιν*), is the very thing which is signified (or pointed to) by the *οὐσίαν*.”⁹⁴¹ Of all the ways in which Be-ing is said, the primary sense, that which really picks out what Be-ing *is*, is *οὐσία*; or, put in another way, Being is said in many ways, but all of these ways of saying being are rooted in the primary meaning of Being – *οὐσία*. We have narrowed the list down, no longer are we talking just about that famous list of things that are said of X (the categories), they *are*, but not primarily. Be-ing is the first member of the categories - *οὐσίαν*. The others *Be* in their own particular manner of being, but none of the other categories *Be per se*. That is, they are all said to be *of* that which primarily *is* - *οὐσίαν*.⁹⁴² Thus, as with accidental and true being, the 9 categories other than *οὐσία*

⁹⁴⁰*Metaphysics*, 1028a10-13.

⁹⁴¹*Metaphysics*, 1028a13-15.

⁹⁴²“On the other hand, Be-ing is said of the others, in this way, of being either to be how much, or the quality, or the passions, or the others other manners *of the what* (1028a17-20).” It should be noted that though this claim seems clear in this context, Jiyuan Yu has pointed out that “Aristotle claims that all categorical beings are essential beings or *per se* beings (*kath hauto*, *Metaph* V 7, 1017a23) (Jiyuan Yu, “What is the Focal Meaning of Being in Aristotle?,” *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science*, vol. 34, no. 3 (Sept., 2001), 219).” He

can be put aside as not being *per se*. “For, none of these is either, self-producing, nor able to be severed from οὐσίας, but, rather, the walking, and the dwelling and the healthy, [are] of the Be-ings.”⁹⁴³ Having discussed how all else is said of οὐσία, he goes on to note that though there are many ways of being first, οὐσία is first in all these ways. “But, then ‘the first’ is said in many ways. But, nevertheless, the οὐσία is altogether first, to λόγῳ and to knowledge and to time.”⁹⁴⁴ After providing an explanation of how οὐσία is first in each of these ways,⁹⁴⁵ Aristotle poses the famous question of Being and explains what is being asked, based upon the progress that we have made so far. We, here, find out exactly how Aristotle understood the question of Being. “And

goes on to explain what Aristotle means in relation to the ways of saying that something is *per se* (Ibid., 220-221.).

⁹⁴³Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1028a23-25. Note what Aristotle says about things that are said of Being: that they are neither, of themselves (which can be translated, *according to their nature*) self-producing, nor can they be separated from οὐσίας. Already we see οὐσίας being equated with Be-ing, but we also see that Aristotle sees Being - οὐσίας – as the thing which we describe by saying that it acts in this way or that. So, states of affairs (i.e. - X is running, X is dwelling, X is healthy) are of Beings, they do not BE of themselves, and are inseparable from the Be-ings - οὐσίας – that are their foundational principles. It is important to note that we are talking about *how* we talk about *actual* Be-ing.

⁹⁴⁴Ibid., 1028a31-35.

⁹⁴⁵He argues, for example, “And, on the one hand, this is first to the λόγῳ. For in the λόγῳ of each one the οὐσίας must be present [there] (ἐνυπάρχειν). (1028a35-37)” The word ἐνυπάρχειν can be translated, “existing” in. It is a word composed of the preposition ἐν, which means “in”, and the word υπάρχειν which is the singular accusative feminine noun of υπάρχω, which can be translated as “to begin, to come into existence (being), to be born or come out of, to be the result of, to be, to subsist, to be the foundation of, to be after, to be available, to be in possession, to belong, etc. This word, as with many other Greek words is used in a multitude of situations. However, the best translation in this text seems to be, “being present in”, as most of the translators above have noted.

Aristotle seems to be saying that substance is first in λόγῳ because the οὐσίας must be included in the λόγῳ of anything whatsoever. That is, in one’s display (description, definition, formulation, presenting) of a Be-ing (that which is, regardless of the nature of its Be-ing – i.e. – Be-ing purely in the imagination, Be-ing a cause of stress, Be-ing true, etc.) one necessarily includes its οὐσίας – its foundational and intrinsic beingness (its mode or way of Be-ing) and that which is particular to it (frequently described as its form, essence or nature – the way in which it presents itself). Not only is the οὐσίας necessarily included in any λόγῳ (formulation, definition or presenting) of a be-ing, but it is presupposed in all λόγῳ of that Be-ing (even in describing how it be’s in action, and those things which present themselves through it or depend upon the way in which a Be-ing is in and of itself in order to Be – commonly referred to by Aristotle as *accidental being* (cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1017a7-8).). One must be careful to not interpret Aristotle as saying that one cannot display, talk about, or define anything unless one knows what its οὐσίας is (unless one knows its Be-ing as it is). On the contrary, Aristotle only seems to be saying that in any λόγῳ (declaration, description, formulation, definition or word), about anything whatsoever, the λόγῳ presupposes that there is a οὐσίας that is the object of the λόγῳ, even if the speaker does not know, himself, the οὐσίας that is being brought to light by the λόγῳ. In other words, it is possible to talk about something without having exhaustive knowledge (or, in fact, any substantial knowledge at all) of the thing in question. Even a description of the things actions presupposes that there is a thing that has acted, and that can be talked about, regardless of whether or not one has any knowledge of what that thing is; all that is presupposed, in talking about the actions of any given thing is that that thing, whatever it is, at least exists or existed, such that it is, or was, able to act.

indeed, both long ago and now and always [the object of] inquiry, and forever [causing] perplexity, [is the question] “what [is] the Being?”, that is, “what [is] the *οὐσία*?”⁹⁴⁶

It is evident, therefore, that Aristotle’s first approach to the question of being, his very understanding of what this question is asking, is NOT that it is asking for a list of things that BE, but, rather, that it is asking for what is common to all the things that BE. It is important to note, here, that if this is the question, then it is necessary to include all possibly existing (be-ing) things – that is, all things that can be said to be. Aristotle began, in just this way, by listing the things that are said to be, and has already excluded, as we saw, a certain number of things that are said to be. What could possibly be left? Those things of which *οὐσία* is properly said, and of which

⁹⁴⁶Ibid., 1028b3-4. This is THE question, not “To be or not to be?”, Aristotle is right, the question: “what is Being?” is not only the most important philosophical question, but it is also the most confusing, and most difficult to answer. It is the most important question, because, first of all, if Aristotle’s claims concerning the priority of *οὐσία* as concerns *λόγος*, knowledge, and in temporal sequence (Jiyuan Yu notes, concerning Aristotle’s claim of temporal priority, “The first is that ‘of the other categories none can exist separately, but only substance’ (1028a34-5). This is usually called natural priority, although in VII 1 Aristotle strangely refers it to the priority ‘in time’. (Yu, 218.)”), are true, then we must answer the question, what is Being? (which is to say, as Aristotle notes in this section, what is *οὐσία*?) prior to answering any questions about *λόγος* (see fn. 18 for my discussion concerning the meaning of *λόγος*) or knowledge. Furthermore, as many philosophers have noted, we must answer the question of Be-ing (*οὐσία*) in order to speak meaningfully about what it means to BE human, to BE moral, to Be rational (intellectual), to Be social, to Be historical, etc. In fact, all discussions concerning created or uncreated Be-ing, contingent or necessary Being, Actual or Potential Be-ing, etc., all depend on the answer to the question “What is Being?” (See, for example, Pierre Aubenque who states that, for Aristotle, the very possibility of language (and meaningful communication) is based upon being (Aubenque, *PEA*, 133.))

However, as the history of philosophy demonstrates, this question is also one of the most difficult questions to answer, and has been the source of more confusion and useless debate than any other question. Does this mean that we cannot answer this question? Should we refuse to attempt to answer this question because we might make mistakes? Those who would think like this will never start any project. Rather, it is, perhaps, a good idea to return to Aristotle and start over, in a sense. Many philosophers have noted that in order for us to be able to truly answer the question of Be-ing we must return to the origins of the question, and ask it again. (Heidegger is a prime example of a philosopher who claimed that we can no longer go forward with this question, therefore, we need to return to its origin and start over (Cf. Heidegger, *IM*).) Another philosopher who made a similar claim is Étienne Gilson (cf. Étienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (1937; repr., San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), and *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (1952; repr., Toronto: PIMS, 2005)). Pierre Aubenque, in his Étienne Gilson lecture, presents us with an interesting comparison of the claims of Gilson and Heidegger concerning the history of the philosophy of Be-ing, and their recommended solutions to the problem. (cf. Pierre Aubenque, *Faut-il déconstruire la métaphysique?* (Paris : PUF, 2009).) Andrew J. Reck, in his presidential address at the Metaphysical Society of America says, “In view of this predicament, it is better to go back to Aristotle to illuminate the path of our inquiry. Our return to Aristotle should not be merely as scholars devoted to finding out only what he meant, but mainly as thinkers seeking to know and elucidate Being and finding the lessons of fundamental ontology in his writings. (Reck, *BS*, 540.)” cf. Oliva Blanchette, “Are there Two Questions of Being?,” in *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 45, no. 2 (Dec., 1991), 287.)

Aristotle has constantly reminded us throughout the *Metaphysics*, sensible and supra-sensible *οὐσία*.⁹⁴⁷ We are now able to understand how Aristotle understands the question of Being. It remains to be seen (1) how Aristotle answers this question, and (2) what, therefore, is his approach to the question of being. Let us begin by considering how he answers the question of Being.

Our survey of the first chapter of *Metaphysics Z* brings us not to the beginnings of an answer to the question “What is Being?”, but, rather, to a reformulation of the question. Aristotle does not say, “the answer to the question, ‘what is Being?’ is *οὐσία*.” He says, to ask the question of Being is to ask the question, “What is *οὐσία*?” However, before we move on to the next section we can already note that, *contra* Aubenque,⁹⁴⁸ Aristotle does not answer the question of Being with the list of categories. It still remains to be seen if Aristotle is able to escape Euthyphro’s error, and Aubenque’s criticism.⁹⁴⁹

By the time that we arrive at Aristotle’s analysis of Being in *Metaphysics Z*, we have already passed through the section of the *Metaphysics* in which Aristotle gave an analysis of the different ways in which *Being* is said. As we have shown, one of the ways in which *Being* is said, and, indeed, the primary way in which Being is said, is *οὐσία*. We noted earlier that *οὐσία* can be translated by many words, but that one must always ensure that their translation transmits the notion “that which is the foundational principle of that which is”. The problem is that *οὐσία* itself is said in many ways, as we see in the third main section of *Metaphysics Z*.⁹⁵⁰ Here Aristotle says that *οὐσία* is said of, primarily, the “τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι” which, literally translated, means “the What-

⁹⁴⁷Cf. Reale, *CFP*, 169-170, 183. In fact, Reale shows that the theological element of Aristotle’s metaphysical thought can be traced throughout the entirety of the *Metaphysics*, and in every single book (cf. *Ibid.*, 20-22 (*A & α*), 38 (*A & α*), 86-88 (*B*), 125-133 (*I*), 168-172 (*E*), 206-210 (*Z*), 220-221 (*H*), 223-224 (*Θ*), 281 (*K*), 296-297 (*I*), 324 (*M & N*)).

⁹⁴⁸Cf. Aubenque, *FDM*, 73.

⁹⁴⁹*Ibid.*

⁹⁵⁰*Metaphysics*, 1028b34-31029a7.

is-Be-ing”⁹⁵¹; secondly, the “τὸ καθόλου”, which, translated literally, means “the whole” or “universal”,⁹⁵² thirdly, the “τὸ γένος”, which simply means the “genus”; and finally, the “τὸ ὑποκείμενον”, which in this section is frequently translated as “substrate”⁹⁵³ or “substratum”,⁹⁵⁴ yet, which can also be translated as “something definite which underlies” something,⁹⁵⁵ “the subject”,⁹⁵⁶ or “the underlying subject”.⁹⁵⁷ Sometimes, due to the baggage that is attached to words such as *substrate* and *subject*, it is better to translate a Greek word literally. The most literal translation of this fourth sense of οὐσία, ὑποκείμενον, is “the foundational principle that underlies a thing”. So, according to Aristotle, οὐσία is used in four ways, it is said of the: (1) “What-is-Be-ing”, (2) “whole” or “universal”, (3) “genus” and, (4) “the foundational principle that underlies a thing”.

Aristotle does not hesitate to use οὐσία to refer to all of these concepts, which is part of why it is so difficult to give a definition of οὐσία that satisfies all philosophers. However, it is important to note that Aristotle, earlier in the *Metaphysics*, equates οὐσία with ὑποκείμενον and tells us that it is the primary meaning of οὐσία;⁹⁵⁸ in 1028b36-37 he further states that ὑποκείμενον, the foundational principle that underlies a thing, is “that of which the others are said, but is not itself [said] of others.”⁹⁵⁹ Therefore οὐσία just is ὑποκείμενον. As such, it seems

⁹⁵¹*Metaphysics*, 1023b34-36.

⁹⁵²*Ibid.* This word is translated by Ross and Tredennick as “the universal”. See Philip Merlan, *On the Terms ‘Metaphysics’ and ‘Being-qua Being’*, for a discussion of what Aristotle means by the claim that οὐσία is καθόλου.

⁹⁵³*Ibid.* cf. Tredennick.

⁹⁵⁴*Ibid.* cf. Ross.

⁹⁵⁵*Metaphysics*, 1028a26-31, Ross.

⁹⁵⁶cf. *Metaphysics*, 1028a26-31, Tredennick. 1019a5-6, Ross.

⁹⁵⁷cf. *Metaphysics*, 1028a26-31, Apostle.

⁹⁵⁸*Metaphysics*, 1019a5-6. “ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸ εἶναι πολλαχῶς, πρῶτον μὲν τὸ ὑποκείμενον πρότερον, διὸ ἢ οὐσία πρότερον,” (literally: “Since, the To Be (εἶναι) has many meanings, first of all (before all things, or in the first place), the foundational principle of a thing (ὑποκείμενον) is prior, therefore, the οὐσία is prior.” Ross translates this sentence as follows: “If we consider the various senses of ‘being’, firstly the subject [ὑποκείμενον] is prior, so that substance [οὐσία] is prior.” Tredennick is a little bit more explicit, translating as follows: “And since ‘being’ has various meanings, (a) the substrate [ὑποκείμενον], and therefore substance [οὐσία], is prior.”).

⁹⁵⁹*Metaphysics*, 1028b36-37.

plausible to say that though *οὐσία* is said of many things (at least four), it is primarily (its primary and proper meaning – that to which it primarily refers) is the foundational principle that underlies a being (an actual essence). Does this actually answer the question “what is Being?” Aristotle has been exploring the question of Being, and has, to this point, made the following progress: Being [*ὄν*] just is *οὐσία*, which just is the *ὑποκείμενον* of that which is. There are other ways of using each of these words, but, in the final analysis, what Aristotle is worried about, is not *how* we speak, but how what we say reflects what *is*. It is necessary, therefore, when answering the question of Being, to make sure that we are talking about the right thing.

Aristotle then moves on to an analysis of *ὑποκείμενον*. It should be noted that in his analysis of *ὑποκείμενον* he resides, intentionally, within the realm of sensible things. He does this, apparently, for two reasons. First of all, he is seeking to answer the question, what is Being (*οὐσία*). Yet, as he notes near the end of the first section of book Z, this is one of the most perplexing and difficult questions to answer. As such, it is necessary to begin with those things that are present to us and which are immediately observable. As he says near the end of the section that we are currently considering, “Now some sensible things are believed to be *οὐσίαι*, therefore it is to be sought in these first. For one begins an action with what is well-known. For the act of obtaining knowledge, in this way, proceeds through all those things that are less

knowable to the *φύσει*⁹⁶⁰ of the things that are most knowable.”⁹⁶¹ As such, the search to understand what is Be-ing necessarily begins with those things that are Be-ing-present-to us – sensible be-ings. Secondly, though he frequently, and without hesitation, claims that there is supra-sensible *οὐσία*, knowledge of supra-sensible *οὐσία* is not readily available, and its existence is contested. It is, therefore, necessary, in order to answer the question of being, to begin with what everyone readily recognizes and accepts as properly *οὐσία*. As such Aristotle begins with sensible *οὐσία*, which is accepted by everyone as *οὐσία*.

He has already considered such things in earlier books, and, therefore, is able to present the three elements of sensible things that *Be* – matter, form and the composite of matter and form.⁹⁶² Though most people think that *ὕλη* (matter) is the *ὑποκείμενον* of sensible be-ing, Aristotle concludes that the foundational principle of all sensible things that can properly be said

⁹⁶⁰*Φύσει* is the dative singular of *φύσις*. The majority of Greek lexicons tell us that this word has a large variety of possible translations, varying from birth, bringing into being, and production to native condition, nature, essence, manner of being, or Nature. In translating Aristotle, it seems that the best translation of this word, in most cases is the traditional “nature”. However, Heidegger, in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, in an attempt to trace the German terms *ich bin* and *du bist* back to the Greek *φύσις*, says that “According to the more originary interpretation, which stems from the confrontation with the inception of Greek philosophy, this ‘growing’ proves to be an emerging which in turn is determined by coming to presence and appearing. Recently, the radical *phu-* has been connected with *pha-*, *phainesthai* (to show itself). *Phusis* would then be that which emerges into the light, *phuein*, to illuminate, to shine forth and therefore to appear. (Heidegger, *IM*, 75 [54].)” Heidegger, earlier in the same book says the following, “Now what does the word *phusis* say? It says what emerges from itself (for example, the emergence, the blossoming, of a rose), the unfolding that opens itself up, the coming-into-appearance in such unfolding, and holding itself and persisting in appearance – in short, the emerging-abiding sway...*Phusis* is Being itself, by virtue of which beings first become and remain observable. (Ibid., 15 [11].) *Contra* Heidegger, Owens argues that, in general, Nature is the proper interpretation of *φύσις* rather than “birth” or emergence (Owens, *DBAM*, 18, 190). Disregarding Heidegger’s attempt to retrace *Ich bin* and *du bist* back to *φύσις*, it is worth noting that the way that Aristotle seems to be using *φύσις*, in the text that we are currently examining, coincides more with Owens understanding of the term than with Heidegger’s. That being said, the notion of *φύσις*, even if translated as nature, seems to include the idea of *the way in which a thing presents itself to the observer*. It seems, then, that in this way, Heidegger and Owens can be made to agree in the sense that, the *φύσις* of X is the way in which X presents itself, as it is in itself, to an observer. It should be noted that regardless of whether or not the observer fully grasps the presentation of X, X is presenting itself as it is.

⁹⁶¹*Metaphysics*, 1029a34-1029b3. Cf. Reale, *CFP*, 208, 302. On page 208 Reale confirms this point as follows, “the inquiry must begin from sensible substances because they are not contestable by anyone, insofar as they are immediately evident; then, by steps, it must pass from what is more evident *to us*, but less knowable *by nature*, to that which *by nature* is more knowable but less evident *to us*.”

⁹⁶²*Metaphysics*, 1029a1-7.

to Be – *Be-ing* – is neither the material element,⁹⁶³ nor the composite (*ὄλη + μορφήν*), and, therefore, that the *ὑποκείμενον* of sensible things is the *μορφήν*, by which he means the *ιδέας*.⁹⁶⁴ Aristotle goes on, in the rest of book Z to show that the *ὑποκείμενον*, which is the *ιδέας* of sensible be-ing just is the *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*, the primary way of saying *οὐσία*, and that this is Be-ing. As such, for Aristotle, the answer to the question “What is Being?” seems to be, *the that which is Being*—the essence that is, to borrow Lear’s terminology, enmattered (instantiated or existing essence). It is common to stop here, thinking that we have now discovered the key to Aristotle’s metaphysical thought, that we have his answer to the question of Being, and to see books A, M, and N as nothing more than anti-platonic appendices to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, and not strictly necessary for Aristotle’s metaphysical thought. However, as we have already noted, in order to answer the question of Being, understood as answering the question “what is common to all things that Be?”, one must consider all things that Be—one must consider how it is that all things that are, are. Therefore, before we can proceed to the conclusion we must consider one final piece of the puzzle in Aristotle’s attempt to answer the question of Being – supra-sensible *οὐσία*.

Three Types of *οὐσία*

As we noted above, there are two ways of understanding the “what is *οὐσία*?” question:

(1) as a question asking for the essence, definition, or nature of *οὐσία* (let us call this the *essence*

⁹⁶³Many translators, when providing the list of four ways in which *οὐσία* is said, translate *ὑποκείμενον* as *matter*. This, of course, appears to create a conflict in the section that immediately follows the list, because Aristotle goes on to demonstrate that the *ὑποκείμενον* is not matter, but the form (*μορφήν* or *ιδέας*). This conflict would appear to be resolved if, in the section 1029a1-33, Aristotle demonstrates that in sensible be-ings (things that are and that are present to human-beings) that which is commonly thought to be the *ὑποκείμενον*, *ὄλη*, is, in fact, not the *ὑποκείμενον*. Rather, the *ιδέας* of the sensible be-ing is the *ὑποκείμενον*. As such, in sensible be-ings, their be-ing is not matter (*ὄλη*), but the *ιδέας* of the sensible be-ing, which is their *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*; which, in the section immediately following (Ibid., 1029b13-1031a14), Aristotle will show to be the primary meaning of *οὐσία*.

⁹⁶⁴*Metaphysics*, 1029a1-33.

question) or (2) as a question asking for a list of things that are *οὐσία* (let us call this the *extension question*). There is a very real sense in which these two questions must be asked together, and, indeed, they are inseparable. In other words, is it really possible to answer the essence question without prior knowledge of the answer to the extension question, and, ironically, vice versa? I would propose that the answer to this difficulty is yes and no. It is not necessary to know, for sure (without a shadow of a doubt), the answer to the extension question prior to answering the question of essence. On the other hand, one must at least have an idea of those things that have been proposed as falling within the extension of the term in question. In other words, having determined all of the things that are thought to fall within the extension of the term in question, one can then attempt to answer the essence question, and correct one's answer as one proceeds. Answering the essence question in this way will then allow one to respond definitively to the extension question. This, indeed, is quite nicely stated by Giovanni Reale, "In solving the second question [the extension question], ousiology is posited immediately as theology, because by solving the problem *what* substances exist, the problem is resolved as to whether there is or is not another substance *besides* the sensible, that is, whether there is or is not a deity. But in resolving the first question [the essence question]—and this a point to be emphasized in a special way—that is, *what is* substance in general, Aristotelian ousiology can only apply to sensible substance, that is, to substance which is the specific object of the physics, this being the unique *οὐσία* to which we can make reference, without prejudicing *a priori* the solution of the problem of suprasensible substance."⁹⁶⁵

This, we propose is exactly how Aristotle approaches the question of Being. He begins by observing the things that are commonly named "Being". He examines each one of the proposed

⁹⁶⁵Reale, *CFP*, 302.

“beings”, only to discover that the only one, of the proposed items, that falls under the extension of being is *οὐσία*. This leads him to seek to discover just what *οὐσία* is. There are a number of things, which, according to book *A*,⁹⁶⁶ are said to fall within the extension of *οὐσία* (three types of *οὐσία*⁹⁶⁷) which itself is said in many ways (as noted above). In order to discover whether or not the three types of *οὐσία* truly fall within the extension of *οὐσία* one must know just what we are saying when we say that *x* is *οὐσία*. As such, as noted above, Aristotle embarks on a journey of discovery leading into the very heart of the question. He begins with that type of *οὐσία* which is not, in any way, debated, and which is also the easiest to study – sensible *οὐσία*. In book *A* Aristotle, having answered the essence question with the conclusion that *οὐσία* just is *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*, now returns to the extension question. There are three types of *that which is Be-ing*— actualized essences— that are proposed as *οὐσία*: sensible *οὐσία*, unmovable *οὐσία*, and a third *οὐσία*. As we noted above, in books *A*, *M*, and *N*, Aristotle turns to the question of supra-sensible *οὐσία*. This section of the *Metaphysics* is absolutely necessary if Aristotle is going to properly answer the question of Being. Another way of putting this is that Aristotle’s theological treatise in *A*, as well as his books that look at the two other proposed types of supra-sensible *οὐσία* (*M* and *N*), is not an appendix that is tacked on at the end of an ontological, ousiological and/or aetiological (to use Reale’s terms) treatise, but is the necessary conclusion to Aristotle’s First Philosophy.

⁹⁶⁶*Metaphysics*, 1069a31-34.

⁹⁶⁷*Metaphysics*, 1069a18-1069b3. The first two kinds belong to physics, one is changeable, and this can be seen to refer to all sensible things; the other is immovable, and it is a platitude to note that in Aristotle, the immovable divine things are the objects of astrology (planets, stars, comets, etc. cf. Merlan, 188.). What, then is this third kind? Aristotle doesn’t say anything about it except that it if its principle is different, then it belongs to another science (1069b1-3). I would suggest that he isn’t quite sure as he begins book *A*, but that, in examining his unmoved movers, he comes to the conclusion that this third thing is the ultimate unmoved mover (1071b3-1074b14). Note that his description of this third thing is almost entirely negative, is deduced from the first two types, and is other than the unmoved movers of the second type. (cf. Merlan.)

As we began our research into Aristotle's *Metaphysics* we intentionally rejected the notion that Aristotle's *Metaphysics* necessarily included a theological element. We have been forced, by an analysis of the way in which Aristotle develops his line of research in the *Metaphysics*, to conclude that not only does Aristotle intentionally conclude his *Metaphysics* with a theological treatise, but that he necessarily concludes his *Metaphysics* with a theological treatise. In other words, Aristotle is following the questions, on a journey of discovery; he is not stacking the odds with the hopes of arriving at some form of monotheism—though this is exactly the conclusion of his research. Let us conclude by looking at how exactly Aristotle arrives at his theological conclusions to his ontological, ousiological and aetiological adventure.

Conclusion: Aristotle's Response to the Question of Being

The question "What is Being?" seems to imply, at least, that Being has a *nature* or *essence* or *form*. Some philosophers would certainly agree. Stanley Rosen, for example, in his commentary on Plato's *Sophist*, declares, without any reservation, that Being not only has a nature, essence or form, but that Being *is a form*.⁹⁶⁸ One is tempted to think that if Being has a nature or essence, then it is, in principle, definable. This would seem to contradict the notion that is held by other thinkers, such as Aubenque, who says that Being is an unlimited and undetermined principle, and, therefore, that it is not possible to define Being. Aubenque tells us that "l'être, comme on va le voir, n'est pas un genre, c'est-à-dire une totalité définissable et différentiable."⁹⁶⁹

⁹⁶⁸Stanley Rosen, *PSDOI*, 43, 280. Is Rosen simply agreeing with one of the common translations of τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι – form?

⁹⁶⁹Aubenque, 73. "Being, as we will see, is not a genus, in other words a totality that can be defined or differentiated." My translation. Cf. *Ibid.*, 83. Heidegger, *BT*, 23[3].

If Aubenque is right, and Being is not definable, then it seems plausible to assert that the essence question, “What is being?”, is unanswerable. After all, if the question “What is being?” is asking for a limiting nature/essence, and if being is unlimited and undeterminable, then no positive answer can be given to the question “What is being?”, and, therefore, it is a nonsensical question that is based upon a misunderstanding.

There are a number of possible ways around this difficulty. First of all, one could deny that Being is unlimited and undeterminable. If it is possible to truly define being (which implies delimiting being by distinguishing it from all other things), then the question “What is Being?” makes sense. However, it does seem somewhat strange to distinguish between Being from everything else. It would appear that the only thing that Be-ing can be distinguished from is its polar opposite - not Being, nothing.

A second way of getting around the above conclusion would be to attempt to discover a way of defining a thing in such a way that it is *not* limited in any way. That is, to claim that a definition/essence/nature is not necessarily a limiting or determining principle. Of course, this also seems to run into certain problems. What would a definition that neither limits nor determines that which it is defining look like? Even negations seem, to some thinkers at least, to be limitations.⁹⁷⁰

Aristotle does not appear, however, to agree with Aubenque. That is, though Aristotle certainly agrees that Being is not a genus in the logical sense of genus, Aristotle attempts to answer the question of being by seeking to discover that which is common (one of the other meanings of genus) to all beings. In his consideration of sensible being, book Z, Aristotle arrives at the conclusion that that which is common to all Being is *ὄντῶν* – roughly put, the presence or

⁹⁷⁰Armstrong, *SSM*, 79-80.

actualization, in matter, of some essence. *Οὐσία* for Aristotle, is not simply essence, but, more properly, *substance*—understood as enmattered essence—and in books *Z-I*,⁹⁷¹ Aristotle considers just what it means to say that *οὐσία* is sensible.

One of the conclusions of book *Z* is that *οὐσία* is the answer to a number of important “why” questions, and is the cause of the being of sensible *οὐσία*. Why does Aristotle ask these questions? “For perhaps from this also the substance which is separate from sensible substances will be clear to us.”⁹⁷² Aristotle is not talking, here, about the essence of sensible *οὐσία*, as the essence (*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*) of sensible *οὐσία* is not separate from it. He is here hinting at the topic to be discussed in books *A*, *M*, and *N*. Thus *οὐσία* is found to be that which Aristotle has been seeking all along—the principle and cause of being—but *οὐσία* in which sense.

In book *H* Aristotle discusses the elements of sensible *οὐσία*, asking what is the cause of the unity of the elements of sensible *οὐσία*? The conclusion is, *οὐσία*. He concludes, as we saw above, book *H* by noting that aside from the essence of supra-sensible *οὐσία* there can be no other cause of the unity and actualization of the being of supra-sensible *οὐσία*.

In book *Θ* Aristotle considers what is meant by saying that sensible *οὐσία* is in act or in potency. He arrives at the following conclusion concerning supra-sensible *οὐσία*, “And so it is evident that the *substance* or the form is an *actuality*. According to this argument, then, it is evident that *actuality* is prior in substance to potency; and as we said, one *actuality* always precedes another in time, until we come to the *actuality* of the eternal prime mover.”⁹⁷³ From this he arrives at the conclusion, in what follows, aside from a number of important conclusions concerning sensible *οὐσία*, that that which is not, in any way, in potency, is pure act, and

⁹⁷¹See our analysis of these books above.

⁹⁷²*Metaphysics*, 1041a8-9, Apostle.

⁹⁷³*Metaphysics*, 1050b1-7, Apostle.

therefore eternal and indestructible.⁹⁷⁴ We can already predict Aristotle's conclusion that supra-sensible *οὐσία* must be pure form because pure act. Indeed, the question that must now be asked is, are the supra-sensible *οὐσίαι* truly beings, or, in other words, is there supra-sensible *οὐσία*? If *οὐσία* is, necessarily, enmattered essence, then the obvious answer is "No" (as has become obvious through Aristotle's analysis of sensible *οὐσία*). There can be no supra-sensible *οὐσία* if all *οὐσίαι* are necessarily enmattered.

In book *A*, chapters 1-5 Aristotle begins, by way of introduction to the question of supra-sensible *οὐσία*, by reminding us of the important truths that we have discovered concerning enmattered *οὐσίαι*. In chapters 4 and 5 Aristotle notes how the four causes are said of any sensible *οὐσία*, and, interestingly enough, that besides the 4 causes there is also the first unmoved mover which is also said to be the cause of every sensible *οὐσία*.⁹⁷⁵

Based upon the principles of sensible *οὐσία* that Aristotle has discovered in the previous books—form, matter, the composite and motion (understood through actuality and potentiality)—Aristotle feels obligated to conclude that there is some supra-sensible *οὐσία* that, quite simply, *is*, that is, as he has already noted in the previous books, a *οὐσία* that is pure actuality (which is not enmattered essence, and, therefore, a-temporal, and unchanging).⁹⁷⁶ Aristotle describes supra-sensible *οὐσία* in *Metaphysics A*, 1072b14-1073a13 "But, it is evident from what has been said, therefore, that some one *οὐσία* [which is a τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι – a *that which is Be-ing* - a pure form not instantiated in matter] is eternal and unmoving [or motionless] and is separated from [that which is] perceivable by the senses. But it has been shown [or brought to light] that it is not possible for this *οὐσίαν* to possess any vastness [or magnitude or massiveness – which would imply that it is

⁹⁷⁴*Metaphysics*, 1050b7-1051a3.

⁹⁷⁵*Metaphysics* 1070b34-35.

⁹⁷⁶*Metaphysics* 1071b4-23.

possible to delimit it by saying “it is this big”.] as it has no parts and is indivisible...But, truly [it is] impassable [or incapable of suffering] and immutable [or unchanging]. For all other movements follow upon locality [or place – and by implication this *οὐσία* cannot be localized].”

Aristotle has now answered the extension question: “What is *οὐσία*?” Sensible and Supra-Sensible *οὐσίαι*. Supra-sensible *οὐσία* necessarily is, because without it sensible *οὐσία* cannot be. What exactly is Supra-sensible *οὐσία*? Aristotle has described it above as pure form, pure act, eternal, immutable, insensible, immaterial (transcendent and immanent because everywhere and nowhere), impassible, etc. If such is the case, then there can only be one such supra-sensible *οὐσία*. It follows that other things that have been proposed as supra-sensible *οὐσία* are, quite simply, not supra-sensible *οὐσία* (at least not in the same sense as this unique and eternal prime unmoved mover). Aristotle goes on to show, in books *M* and *N*, that mathematical objects and separate ideas, which are also proposed as supra-sensible *οὐσία* are not, in the fullest sense, *οὐσία*.

Aristotle’s answer to the question of Being, then, is that Being is *οὐσία*, understood as existing essence (*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*)—or something that is. The principles and causes of *sensible being* are, in one sense, (1) its *οὐσία* understood as its essence (*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*), which is its formal and final cause; which is (2) instantiated in matter (its material cause), by (3) some other sensible being (its efficient cause) which shares its same *οὐσία* understood as its essence (*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*). But in another, deeper and more important, sense the principle and cause of sensible being, any and all sensible beings, is supra-sensible *οὐσία* whose very essence (*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*) is its *οὐσία*. No other cause for the existence and unity of supra-sensible *οὐσία* can be found, other than its very *οὐσία* understood as its essence (*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*). In the end, then, Aristotle’s answer to the question of Being, an answer that is truly said of all that is, is *οὐσία* understood as existing essence (*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*). It is important to note that Aristotle’s First Philosophy, his science of

Being *qua* Being found in the *Metaphysics*, is, most definitely, not *only* theology, though it necessarily is theological. Indeed, as Reale shows quite well,⁹⁷⁷ Aristotle's First Philosophy cannot be reduced to any one of the following sciences: ontology, ousiology, aetiology, or theology. Rather, Aristotle's First Philosophy is, at once, ontological, ousiological, aetiological and theological.

ARISTOTLE'S APPROACH TO THE QUESTION OF BEING

Aristotle's *answer* allows us to give a proper analysis of his *approach* to the question of Being. With Aristotle, as with Plato, we are able to draw out three approaches: The Existential Approach, the Ontological Approach, and the Literary (scientific or methodological approach). Note, first of all, the *Literary approach*. Aristotle begins by nothing other approaches to the question of Being, how other philosophers attempted to answer this question, and why they failed to answer it. He then moves to an examination of the common ways of saying Be-ing. That is, he starts by considering everything that is, commonly and generally, said *to be*. The ways of saying Being are compared with what *is*, and the ways of saying Be-ing that cannot be applied (in one way or another) to all beings are eliminated. He does this by comparing the ways of saying Be-ing with that which *is*. No one particular sensible being need be considered. The philosopher may study himself as a sensible being, or the other beings that present themselves to the philosophers' senses. As such, Aristotle's approach to the question of Being begins in a comparison of the ways of saying Being with the beings that present themselves to the senses. He continues by eliminating all of the possible meanings of Being that are not of themselves (*per se*), but of another (including accidental being, true and false being, and the nine categories that are said of

⁹⁷⁷Reale, *CFP*, 357-360.

οὐσία), so as to arrive at that one meaning which is the proper response to our question - *οὐσία*. He arrives at this response by considering how each possible meaning of being *is*. He arrives at the conclusion that *οὐσία*, understood as existing essence (*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*), is the only possible meaning of Being, of those that he considers, that truly is.⁹⁷⁸ The hypothesis is then posited, that *οὐσία* is Being. He then goes on to demonstrate his hypothesis through an examination of sensible and supra-sensible Being; showing how *οὐσία*, understood as existing essence (*τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*), *is*, necessarily, both sensible and supra-sensible. He finally refutes the most important previous attempts to answer the question of Being—Plato’s eternal essences.

Turning to the *Existential approach*, Aristotle, like Plato, claims that all philosophy begins in wonder. This amazement and intrigue is awakened by our experience of reality (including both the particular sensible beings and the ways in which we talk about them). As with Plato, the inquisitive mind is drawn, by the undying desire to know, to ask not only “what is X?”, but also, “what is is-ness?”

The *Ontological approach* is well-known. Beginning with sensible beings (that which is most easily known by human-be-ings) we are drawn to consider *what* they are—the question of essence. At this point we drawn, by what we might call the ontological leap, to ask the question of Being.

Does Aristotle’s approach to the question of Being leave us hanging? Has he actually answered the question of Being? Is there anything that can be added to Aristotle, or should we retreat from his position and start again? Is the question of Being answered? Before we attempt to

⁹⁷⁸This very exercise implies that he has not quite answered the question of Being, though it is the author’s opinion that all of the elements necessary to answer the question can be found, at least by implication, in Aristotle’s work.

answer these questions we will look at one more philosopher who has attempted to answer the question of Being—Martin Heidegger.

MARTIN HEIDEGGER AND THE QUESTION OF BEING

INTRODUCTION

It may be said, with relative certitude, that the primary occupation of Martin Heidegger's philosophical career (with the occasional detour) was a constant wrestling with the question of Being. In his *magnum opus*, *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger seeks to approach the Question of Being through an existential-phenomenological examination of what it means to be human—*Dasein* (being-there)—which we might call the analytic of *Dasein*. Thus, the question of Being, which for Aristotle and Plato was “What is Being?”, becomes, with Heidegger, “what does it mean to Be?” William Blattner notes that Heidegger “hoped to develop a ‘general ontology,’ that is, a thorough account of being and its several modes. He undertook to examine human being first, both because he argued that it is essential to have a clear understanding of our ‘point of access’ to being, before investigating being directly, and because he embraced ontological idealism, according to which being depends on the understanding of being, that is, upon human being.”⁹⁷⁹ To this we might add that Heidegger began with human-Being because if Being is ‘meaning’, then the only way to arrive at an understanding of the meaning (Being) of beings is through an understanding of human-Being (which is that Being which bestows meaning). In a paper published in 1940, before it became evident that Heidegger would never finish the project

⁹⁷⁹William Blattner, *Heidegger's Being and Time: A Reader's Guide* (2006; repr., London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 168. Hubert L. Dreyfus, whose commentary on division I of *Being and Time* is probably the most widely read commentary on Heidegger, notes, in a comment published prior to the publishing of the Blattner's work, that Blattner's work on division II of *Being and Time* is “an important contribution to an understanding of Heidegger on time and can be thought of as completing this [the commentary by Dreyfus on division I] commentary. (Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).)” The work to which Dreyfus is referring, which was published shortly after Dreyfus made this comment, is William Blattner, *Heidegger's Temporal Idealism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

that he began in *Being and Time*, Walter H. Cerf proposes that Heidegger's work (which, at the time this paper was published, was still relatively unknown in North America) "would be able to carry new life and greater depth into the shallow and insipid philosophy of today."⁹⁸⁰ One thing is certain, Heidegger's philosophical prowess, coupled with his political ignorance,⁹⁸¹ left a mark on contemporary philosophy. One of the things that we will be asking is, "what kind of mark did he leave?"

OVERVIEW OF SOURCES

Our consideration of Heidegger's approach to the question of Being will be concerned primarily with how he develops this question in *Being and Time*. This book is divided into two main divisions of the first part of what was to be a two-part work; each part was supposed to contain three divisions. In the first division Heidegger performs a foundational phenomenological analysis of the Being of *Dasein* (that is, what it means to be-there, or what it means to Be-Human).⁹⁸² In the second division Heidegger argues, and seeks to demonstrate by an existential-phenomenological analysis, that Temporality is the basis of the Being of *Dasein*.⁹⁸³ In other

⁹⁸⁰Walter H. Cerf, "An Approach to Heidegger's Ontology," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Dec., 1940), 177.

⁹⁸¹Harold Fromm notes that "Today's consensus is that Heidegger was politically an ignoramus, a bemused philosopher who failed to distinguish between an ideal world of thought and a real world of sordid politics that was light-years away from utopia. (Harold Fromm, "Wrestling with Heidegger," *The Hudson Review*, vol. 51, no. 4 (Winter 1999), 686.)" Fromm continues further on, noting that "Although for a while the Nazis were pleased with Heidegger's half-incomprehensible ravings, it was inevitable that they would soon regard him as a demented political naif...intellectuals outside Germany, like Benedetto Croce, saw him as 'stupid and servile...vacuous and general.' His colleagues at the university regarded him as a 'radical visionary gone wild' because of his inability to distinguish political from philosophical reality and his willingness to trash the very sort of serious scholarship that he himself had always produced. (Ibid.)"

⁹⁸²Blattner agrees, noting that, "*Being and Time* is a phenomenology of everyday human life and an exploration of the transformations of self that can take place in encounters with the most extreme existential challenges that we confront. Officially, however, the extent portion of the treatise is the first step on the path to a general ontology, an examination of the most rarified of philosophical questions, the 'question of being.' (Blattner, *HBTRG*, 9.)"

⁹⁸³Blattner summarizes the extent parts of *Being and Time* as follows: "Division I is the phenomenology of everyday life, division II the exploration of existential themes. (Blattner, *HBTRG*, 9.)" Concerning division I he later notes that "the bulk of division I of *Being and Time* is devoted to spelling out the phenomenology of this familiarity,

words, Heidegger wants to show that Time (or Temporality) is the horizon of Being in/by which we will be able to answer the question of the meaning of Being. To do this he begins, in the first part, with an initial phenomenological analysis of Dasein, showing Dasein to be the foundation of Being. The second part is the completion of his argument, in which he attempts to demonstrate (make evident or bring forth) that Time (Temporality) is the true horizon for any approach to Being. The book, *Being and Time* is, therefore, a complete argument for a renewed approach to the question of Being (which may be part of the reason why it became so important so quickly); this is its purpose, and every part of it is intended to lead the thinker closer to Being. The question, of course, is whether the argument succeeds.⁹⁸⁴ Heidegger does not, in this book, attempt to provide an answer to the question of Being, which was to be considered in the second part (which was never published),⁹⁸⁵ but he does attempt to provide an essential phenomenological ontology which lays the groundwork for an approach to the question of Being.

which Heidegger also calls ‘disclosedness’ and ‘being-in’...*being-in-the-world*. (Ibid., 12-13.)” Concerning division II Blattner later notes that “Heidegger’s analysis of time and temporality has been one of the least influential aspects of Being and Time, and not without reason. It is obscure, radical, and what is worse, the arguments for it do not work. (Ibid., 127.)” This statement, coming from a scholar who is considered as one of the foremost experts on division II of *Being and Time*, does not inspire confidence in the overall approach that Heidegger is proposing in *Being and Time* to the question of Being. This will not, however, stop us from pushing forward and from attempting to lay out Heidegger’s proposed approach to the question of Being. Dreyfus is somewhat more precise in his summary of the two extent parts of *Being and Time*: “It is in Division I that Heidegger works out his account of being-in-the-world and uses it to ground a profound critique of traditional ontology and epistemology. Division II of Part One, which makes up the rest of what we have of Heidegger’s proposed two-part book (Division III of Part One and all of Part Two were never published), divides into two somewhat independent enterprises. First, there is the ‘existentialist’ side of Heidegger’s thought...which...was, for good reasons, later abandoned by Heidegger himself. And second, there is the laying out of the temporality of human being and of the world, and the grounding of both of these in a more originary temporality whose past, present, and future dimensions are not to be thought of as successive. (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, vii-viii.)”

⁹⁸⁴Some would argue that the overall argument fails—*Being and Time* is a failure—in that Heidegger does not successfully show Temporality to be the horizon of Being. But there are two parts to this argument, and though the success of the second part is entirely dependant on the success of the first part, the inverse relationship is not true. As such, the two parts must be considered separately. Thus, though it is entirely possible that the second part is a complete failure, it is equally possible that the first part be a perfect success and that both of these states arrive at the same time.

⁹⁸⁵Perhaps Heidegger’s *Introduction to Metaphysics* could be proposed as a possible replacement for the unpublished second part of *Being and Time*? Heidegger himself seems to suggest, in the preface to the seventh German edition of *Being and Time*, that this is an appropriate conclusion (Cf. Heidegger, *BT*, xxvii.). Whenever I refer to *Introduction to Metaphysics* I will use the same conventional method of quotation as I will be using for *Being and Time*: English page number [page number in German Edition].

Being and Time was to be the preparatory work for the consideration of Being, not Heidegger's final thoughts on the question of Being, as can be seen from the final reflections of *Being and Time*: "The existential-ontological constitution of *Dasein*'s totality is grounded in temporality. Hence the ecstatic projection of Being must be made possible by some primordial way in which ecstatic temporality temporalizes. How is this mode of the temporalizing of temporality to be interpreted? Is there a way which leads from primordial time to the meaning of Being? Does time itself manifest itself as the horizon of Being?"⁹⁸⁶ Heidegger proposes that Being is grounded within the horizon of temporality, and sets out to prove it. Even if he fails, in his second section, to show that temporality is the horizon of Being, this does not mean that his entire enterprise has failed. On the contrary, there may be another horizon, or more than one horizon. It is important to note that he does not mean, by *temporality*, what the great majority of philosophers mean.⁹⁸⁷ As such, in order to truly get a grasp of Heidegger's proposal for an approach to the question of Being, we will need to begin our analysis with a brief, yet thorough,⁹⁸⁸ summary explanation of this major work, considering, as we move through this work, the basic definitions that Heidegger is working with. In this preliminary analysis of *Being and Time* we will *take time* to interact with the works of the most important commentators and Heideggerian scholars.⁹⁸⁹ We will then attempt to outline and analyse how Heidegger attempted to lay the groundwork for an approach

⁹⁸⁶Heidegger, *BT*, 488 [437]. Whenever I refer to *Being and Time*, the page numbers will follow the convention: English page numbers [page numbers in the German edition].

⁹⁸⁷Which means that pithy summarizations of Heidegger's approach to Being in which we are told that Being is Time, or is grounded in the horizon of time, though technically faithful to Heidegger's language, are useless and misleading.

⁹⁸⁸It is highly questionable that a brief, yet thorough, summary explanation of *Being and Time* is actually possible. I will let the reader decide as to whether I have succeeded in finding an equilibrium between the two that does not sacrifice a proper interpretation for brevity, but is not overly long. Indeed, as Harold Fromm has already noted, "*Being and Time* does not lend itself to a terse summary in its own often inscrutable vocabulary. (Fromm, *WH*, 684.)"

⁹⁸⁹In our consideration of Plato and Aristotle we took time to consider the different ways in which various philosophers have interpreted these thinkers, due to the sheer size and complexity of Heidegger's work we will be using a slightly different approach.

to the question of Being, his preliminary answer to the question of Being, and, finally, his overall approach to the question of Being.

Exegetical Difficulties

One of the things that makes Heidegger's thought so difficult is that he is constantly moving forward with complex propositions that are filled with concepts that are new to the uninitiated reader⁹⁹⁰. If one does not grasp what Heidegger is saying in one paragraph, the next

⁹⁹⁰The difficulty of Heidegger's work is notorious. Walter Cerf, for example, states that "His books belong indeed to the hardest reading in philosophy. (Cerf, *AHO*, 177.)" Dreyfus notes the difficulty of translating and interpreting Heidegger (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, ix-x.), and that some passages in *Being and Time* are "particularly dense (Ibid., 96.)". Theodore Kisiel also notes the infamous difficulty of *Being and Time*, quoting one commentator to the effect that interpreting *Being and Time* is "like swimming through wet sand. (Kisiel, *GHB*, 1.)" W. K. Werkmeister, in an article written a year after Cerf's, notes that "It is difficult to follow Heidegger's constructive arguments in detail; for his handling of terms is unique and often contrary to established usage even in German. Moreover, there is more than a suspicion that some of Heidegger's questions, or at least the manner in which he puts them, arise out of peculiarities of the German language rather than out of factual situations; and that his arguments often are linguistic rather than material. Heidegger's use of such words as *Was-sein*, *So-sein*, *Dass-sein*, *Da-sein*, *Wahr-sein*, *Gestimmt-sein*, *Seiendes*, and *Sein* make it almost impossible to discuss his philosophy in English. (W. K. Werkmeister, "An Introduction to Heidegger's 'Existential Philosophy'," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Sept., 1941), 84.)" This difficulty required the creation, in English (and other languages), of new terms (which are enigmatic and incomprehensible without an extensive glossary) just to be able to explain Heidegger's philosophy. The attempt to create these new terms has been the source of much debate (not only about which English words should translate the German words, but, also, about the exact meaning of the German terms), as can be seen from a superficial lecture of the commentaries that have been written in English in the last 50-60 years. Part of my purpose in this short summary of Heidegger's approach to Being is to attempt to make sense of some of these terms (noting, and commenting on, some of the debates). Commenting on Safranski's study of Heidegger, Harold Fromm notes that "In certain respects Safranski's book is as difficult as Heidegger himself, since the untangling and restatement of his major opus, *Being and Time*, is an unenviable task. Yet for a dedicated and serious reader, the travail is probably worth it. (Fromm, *WH*, 681.)" Lawrence Lynch, after noting some of the different ways in which Heidegger uses words (including some of the notorious creations of Heidegger), says, "Little wonder, then, that Heidegger's works are difficult to interpret and, in many cases, impossible to translate. (Lawrence Lynch, "Martin Heidegger: Language and Being," in *An Étienne Gilson Tribute*, ed. Charles J. O'Neil (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1959), 136.)" Frederick Copleston notes, in his brief explanation of Heidegger's work in *Being and Time*, that it is quite difficult to figure out just what Heidegger is trying to say. Concerning his approach to Being, Copleston says, "But is Being to be interpreted as a general concept contained by emptying out all determinations, so that in its vacuity it seems to glide into Nothingness, or is Being to be taken in the sense of the Transcendent? Or is it a mixture of both? The answer does not appear to me to be at all clear. And the ambiguities in Heidegger's philosophy are, of course, the reason why it is always possible for him to insist that nobody has understood him. Some of his ardent disciples, indeed, go so far as to suggest that any criticism of the Master manifests an incapacity to understand him. But if they themselves understand him clearly, it is a great pity that they do not have compassion on the weakness of the rest of us and reveal the secret in unambiguous terms. Or does ambiguity belong to the essence of Heidegger's philosophy? (Frederick Copleston, *Contemporary Philosophy: Studies of Logical Positivism and Existentialism*, 3rd ed. (1972; repr., London: Continuum, 2002), 184.)" It is my hope that through a careful analysis of Heidegger's definitions and descriptions we will be able to shed some light on his progression, through the twisted paths of the human understanding of Being, towards an answer to the question of Being.

paragraph will be a mystery for the reader. Each section builds upon, or compliments, the preceding sections; using the concepts established in the preceding sections to further Heidegger's analysis. It is altogether possible for a single paragraph, composed of a couple lines, to be filled with key terms that are not defined (nor used in their traditional, or normal, meanings), but which are simply proposed in a forward moving progression of his thought. As such, in explaining Heidegger's progressive thought, it is frequently necessary to quote a series of difficult lines, and to follow this quote with an equally difficult to understand explanation of what was just said. Another difficulty, in engaging Heidegger's philosophy (whether reading it in German, reading a translation, or reading the works of other philosophers who have also interacted with Heidegger) is that his terminology is obscure (and the meaning is often difficult to explain in terms that are easily understandable by those who have not read Heidegger in any depth), and difficult to translate (there is, indeed, little consensus about how to properly translate Heidegger's terms of art. Commentators frequently prefer different terms than those that are used by the "official" translations, and different terms from each other.) This makes engagement with Heidegger's works especially difficult. In what follows I will attempt to bring up, in each section, the main definitions that Heidegger is working with, how these terms are used in the progression of Heidegger's thought, and how each section fits into Heidegger's overall progressive argument, in his approach to the question of Being.

Heidegger's Philosophical Background

Before beginning our summary explanation of *Being and Time* it might be worth our while to rapidly situate Heidegger's work in relation to other thinkers. We may begin by noting the observation of two of Heidegger's most important commentators, John Haugeland and Hubert Dreyfus. Dreyfus notes that recent translations of Heidegger's lectures (from the period of time

when he was working on *Being and Time*), “confirmed a hypothesis John Haugeland and I had made in 1978 that *Being and Time* could be understood as a systematic critique of Husserl’s phenomenology, even though Husserl and his basic concept, intentionality, are hardly mentioned in the book.”⁹⁹¹ Dreyfus also notes the influence, on Heidegger’s approach in *Being and Time*, of Kierkegaard,⁹⁹² Wilhelm Dilthey,⁹⁹³ and others. The influence of Immanuel Kant on Heidegger’s *Being and Time* is obvious to anyone who is familiar with even the general outlines of Kant’s *Critique*. Indeed, it might even be posited that, on a number of points, Heidegger’s approach to the question of Being is altogether Kantian, for, whereas Kant tried to cut a middle road between Rationalism and Empiricism by proposing that there is a basic reality that is not mind-dependent, but which becomes what we see it to be by the “insertion” of the categories of the mind, Heidegger attempts to cut a middle road between Realism and Idealism (objectivism and subjectivism) by proposing that there is a basic reality (beings, things that are given Being when they receive their meaning from Dasein) that is not mind-dependent, but which becomes what we see it to be when it is interpreted understandingly in a mood of Dasein.⁹⁹⁴ Kant had man inserting the categories of the understanding, Heidegger has man (Dasein) inserting what we might call the

⁹⁹¹Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, ix. It should be noted that 37 years before Haugeland and Dreyfus had theorized that *Being and Time* might be a critique of Husserl’s phenomenology Werkmeister had already noted the dependence of Heidegger on Husserl (Werkmeister, *IHEP*, 79-82.), and, more importantly, the fact that Heidegger goes beyond Husserl (Ibid., 82.). Werkmeister notes that “Husserl’s basis of analysis has now been forsaken. Phenomenology becomes ontology and, more specifically, it becomes ‘existential philosophy.’ (Ibid.)” Inspired by Husserl, Heidegger so changes Husserl that one might say that his step beyond Husserl was the attempt to show that Husserl had failed. Cf. Fromm, *WH*, 682.

⁹⁹²Ibid., viii, 3. Fromm also notes Heidegger’s use of Kierkegaard by “reaffirming Kierkegaard’s notion that truth is subjectivity. (Fromm, *WH*, 689.)” Cf. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Jane Rubin, “Kierkegaard, Division II, and Later Heidegger,” in Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time, Division I*, 283-340 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991). Copleston, *CP*, 132.

⁹⁹³Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 2, 7. Kiesel, *GHB*, 70.

⁹⁹⁴Régis Jolivet appears to agree with our analysis of Heidegger, as he describes Heidegger’s philosophy as “‘un idéalisme de la signification s’appuyant sur un réalisme de l’existence brute’ (ce qui a les apparences d’une sorte de néo-kantisme). (Régis Jolivet, *Métaphysique*, vol. 3 of *Traité de Philosophie*, 4th ed. (Lyon-Paris : Émmanuel Vitte, 1950), 172.)”

categories of Significance and meaning (Being).⁹⁹⁵ That this claim is not too far off target is confirmed by the following comment from an article by Werkmeister, “It is Heidegger’s contention that his own philosophy is, in a sense, a completion of the task which Kant had originally set for himself.”⁹⁹⁶ Werkmeister goes on, in this article, to note some of the important similarities and differences that can be seen in a comparison of Heidegger and Kant, showing that Heidegger’s reformulation of Kant’s three essential problems becomes, for Heidegger, the starting place of all Ontology.⁹⁹⁷ Werkmeister also mentions the dependence of Heidegger on the work of Dilthey and Scheler.⁹⁹⁸ It is also a matter of common knowledge that the “Christian” theologians who were the primary theological influences on Heidegger were Augustine,⁹⁹⁹ Duns Scotus,¹⁰⁰⁰ and Martin Luther.¹⁰⁰¹ John Caputo also shows Heidegger’s dependence on the

⁹⁹⁵Cerf appears to confirm these observations with the following quote, “One may express this difference [the different categorial systems of Kant and Heidegger] by saying that Kant’s categories are constitutive, Heidegger’s Interpretative. Heidegger’s categories, though conditioning the possibility of experience, do not, for that matter, constitute the ‘beings.’ (Cerf, *AHO*, 188.)” Of course, with Heidegger, it is always more complicated than it appears, for man is thrown into a world of significance that is already meaningful, and he always interprets beings according to this world of significance in which he finds himself. Man can, of course, modify the meanings, and there is also the important notion that this ‘given’ world of significance is a ‘convention’-like phenomenon (something of a social construct that is not intentionally created by anyone person in particular, but somehow comes into being. It has not beginning, is always present, ever-changing, influencing and molding, changeable and mouldable, founding and being-founded—it sounds very much like the Parmenidian ‘One’ as found in Plato’s *Parmenides*.)

⁹⁹⁶Werkmeister, *IHEP*, 82. Cerf also notes the influence of Kant on Heidegger’s thought, as well as the fact that Heidegger’s appropriation of the Kantian task was not an uncritical appropriation (Cerf, *AHO*, 182-190).

⁹⁹⁷Werkmeister, *IHEP*, 83-84. It is also important to note Dreyfus’s caution against going too far in comparing Heidegger and Kant, “It is tempting to suppose that in *Being and Time* Heidegger is developing a transcendental (in Kant’s sense of the term) analytic, in which Dasein is the *condition of the possibility* of the experience of objects, and Heidegger does sometimes use this Kantian language. But this is too traditional, for it implies that Dasein as the condition of *possibility* can be understood apart from the question of whether any objects *actually* exist, and that the categorical structure that makes possible the experience of objects can be made totally explicit as in Kant’s transcendental deduction or Husserl’s eidetic reduction. (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 344n13.)”

⁹⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 80. Concerning Dilthey’s influence on Heidegger, Kisiel notes that « The influence of especially the hermeneutical Dilthey upon the young Heidegger’s reflections on Schleiermacher, on the hermeneutic character of the stream of experience, and so on is therefore a likely, but by and large still an undocumented, hypothesis. (Kisiel, *GHBT*, 100.) » Kisiel later notes that “The early Heidegger clearly stands in this tradition of Schleiermacher and Dilthey when he makes his breakthrough to his own lifelong topic in KNS 1919, to the ineffable ‘life in itself’ in which we already find ourselves. (*Ibid.*, 107.)”

⁹⁹⁹Cf. Sophie-Jan Arrien, “Penser sans Dieu, vivre avec Dieu: Heidegger lecture d’Augustin,” *Esprit*, (Jan., 2013). Ryan Coyne, “Review of S. J. McGrath’s *The Early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy: Phenomenology for the Godforsaken*,” *Journal of Religion*, vol. 89, no. 1 (Jan., 2009), 116.

¹⁰⁰⁰It is a matter of common knowledge that his habilitation was concerned with Scotist philosophy.

¹⁰⁰¹Coyne, *Review*, 116-117. Cf. Sean McGrath, “Heidegger’s Approach to Aquinas: Opposition,

Catholic mystic, Meister Eckhart.¹⁰⁰² There has been much discussion about the influence of scholastic thought on Heidegger, especially concerning his knowledge of, and interaction with, the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Concerning the influence of “the Scholastics” on Martin Heidegger it is important to note, that Heidegger was primarily influenced by neo-scholastic interpretations of some of the later Scholastics, such as Duns Scotus and Suarez, and not necessarily, as some would like us to believe, by his own informed reading (studying these authors in order to discover what they, themselves, are saying) of scholastics such as Thomas Aquinas.¹⁰⁰³ Fromm notes that “it was ‘haecceitas,’ the ‘thisness’ of lived experience, that formed the basis of all his subsequent thinking and served as the precursor to his key philosophical term, ‘Dasein,’ or ‘being there.’”¹⁰⁰⁴ One might also note, in reading *Being and Time*, the influence of Nietzsche,¹⁰⁰⁵ Hegel, and others (such as Schleiermacher who had a major influence in Heidegger’s approach to Christianity, and his conversion to Protestantism¹⁰⁰⁶). Before we continue it is worth noting that when Heidegger refers to “traditional” ontology, metaphysics, logic, or philosophy, he is sometimes referring to all metaphysical thought prior to himself, but, more often than not he is referring to all that metaphysical thought that took place during that period of philosophical thought that spans from Descartes to Hegel.¹⁰⁰⁷ It will be appropriate to

Destruktion, Unbelief,” in *Belief and Metaphysics*, ed. Peter M. Candler Jr. and Connor Cunningham (London: SCM Press, 2007), 275fn51.

¹⁰⁰²John Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1978). John Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982). Cf. Kisiel, *GHBT*, 71.

¹⁰⁰³It is a matter of some debate as to whether or not Heidegger actually possessed a working knowledge of the philosophical thought of Thomas Aquinas. This is partially a philosophical question, but a philosophical question that must be informed by historical elements. See Appendix 1 for more on this.

¹⁰⁰⁴Fromm, *WH*, 682. Thomas Joseph White concurs (White, *WFM*, 22.). Kisiel concurs (Kisiel, *GHBT*, 20, 30.). See also, Philip Tonner, “*Haecceitas* and the Question of Being: Heidegger and Duns Scotus,” *Kritike*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Dec., 2008), 146-154.

¹⁰⁰⁵Fromm notes the dependence of Heidegger on Nietzsche (Ibid., 683.).

¹⁰⁰⁶Kisiel, *GHBT*, 70, 72-73.

¹⁰⁰⁷Cf. Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 49, 108, 144. It might also be noted that even when he takes “traditional” to refer to philosophy prior to Descartes, he is understanding that philosophy not for what it is, but through the lenses of post-Cartesian and post-Kantian philosophy.

conclude with a comment by Kisiel to the effect that Heidegger is reading the Medievals through spectacles provided for him by Husserl, Lask, and Kant. Talking about Heidegger's Habilitation work Kisiel notes that, "This theme of scholastic logic and ontology is to be examined by the means of modern philosophy and its logic. For the young Heidegger, this means the focus provided by the confluence of neo-Kantianism and phenomenology in Lask's application of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* to the 'logic of Philosophy.'"¹⁰⁰⁸

INTERPRETING *BEING AND TIME*

Introduction

Being and Time is composed of an introduction to the project (composed of two chapters) and the first two divisions of the first part of the project (each division composed of six chapters). Some might wonder if, and some indeed argue that, in light of the event that has been called *the turning*, Heidegger had repudiated or abandoned the ideas and theories that he posits in *Being and Time*. William Blattner, for example, states that "By 1929 he was beginning to see that the philosophical project on which he had been at work did not hang together, and this led him to abandon it and turn in a new direction altogether. By 1936 or so, the complexion of Heidegger's writing had changed dramatically... This transformation of Heidegger's thought is generally called his 'turn.'"¹⁰⁰⁹ Later Blattner notes that it is due to Heidegger's basic claim that "Our most fundamental forms of 'sight,' or intelligence, reside at the practical, engaged, pre-conceptual, and hence pre-logical level of experience",¹⁰¹⁰ that "after about 1930, Heidegger turns from traditional philosophy to poetry, cultural criticism, mysticism, and philosophers like Nietzsche,

¹⁰⁰⁸Kisiel, *GGBT*, 26.

¹⁰⁰⁹Blattner, *HBTRG*, 6.

¹⁰¹⁰*Ibid.*, 175.

who are engaged in a rather different enterprise than were Aristotle, Kant, and Husserl.”¹⁰¹¹

Kisiel notes that “part of the Story is that BT itself is a failed project, and that Heidegger then returns to earlier insights left unpursued in order to begin again.”¹⁰¹² Kisiel notes that Heidegger proposed, in a work published in 1959, that “perhaps the fundamental flaw of the book BT is that I ventured forward too far too soon.”¹⁰¹³ Many philosophers see this “turn” as a turn away from philosophy, and, so, do not take the time to interact with Heidegger.

It is not, however, altogether certain that Heidegger’s view of Being changed with his turning. Heidegger certainly thought that parts of Being and Time were failures, but, there is also evidence that he saw parts of Being and Time as successful introductory or preliminary approaches to the question of Being. Indeed, given the size of Being and Time, and the amount of ground covered, that some parts were, from Heidegger’s perspective, failures, whereas other parts are always necessary for a proper approach to the question of Being. At least one reputable philosopher has argued that Heidegger’s turning was not a change of opinion concerning Being, but a shift of accent. Thomas Langan states that “What some commentators have considered a radical change of orientation in Heidegger’s works is, rather, a consistent development of the profoundest decisions founding the original Heideggerian phenomenology. It is perhaps justifiable to speak of *a shift of accent*: As the ultimate logical demands of the basic positions began to make themselves felt more and more, it was necessary to cede even some of the valid insights with which they could not be reconciled.”¹⁰¹⁴ In light of a comment that Heidegger made in the preface to the seventh German edition of *Being and Time* it is preferable to reject the

¹⁰¹¹Ibid.

¹⁰¹²Kisiel, *GHBT*, 3.

¹⁰¹³Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959), 97/3, cited in Kisiel, *GHBT*, 10.

¹⁰¹⁴Thomas Langan, *The Meaning of Heidegger: A Critical Study of an Existential Phenomenology* (1959; repr., New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 236.

notion that Heidegger gave up on the theories in *Being and Time*. Heidegger says that the second part which he had planned to write could not be accomplished without a new presentation of the first part, “Yet the road it has taken remains even today a necessary one, if our Dasein is to be stirred by the Question of Being. For the elucidation of this question the reader may refer to my *Einführung in die Metaphysik*.”¹⁰¹⁵ In light of these comments, published in 1953 (long after the proposed dates for the beginning of the *turning*), it is probably best to follow Langan’s interpretation of Heidegger’s approach to the question of Being, rather than Blattner’s. That is, Heidegger, as late as 1953 still saw interaction with at least some of the thoughts that he had proposed in *Being and Time* as necessary for a proper approach to the question of Being. Furthermore, in light of the fact that we find many of the same ideas as *Being and Time* in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, presented as a course in 1935 (near the end of the beginning of the so-called period of the turning), but not published until 1953 (nearly 20 years after the period that Blattner proposes as the end of the transitional period of the turning),¹⁰¹⁶ we are probably safe to assume that Heidegger’s basic comprehension of Being and its relationship with truth, time, etc. had not changed; all that had changed was his manner of expressing his philosophical ideas and, in Langan’s words, “a shift of accent”.¹⁰¹⁷ As such, and in Heidegger’s own understanding of the question of Being, we will not be able to approach the question of Being without first working through his thoughts as they are presented in *Being and Time*. This magnificent work is, so to say, the only door by which one can enter into the inner chambers of the true ontological

¹⁰¹⁵Heidegger, *BT*, xxvii.

¹⁰¹⁶Cf. Blattner, *HBTRG*, 6.

¹⁰¹⁷Dreyfus and Rubin seem to agree with our position, as they note that “later Heidegger never abandons the lasting contributions of *Being and Time*, namely the analysis of Dasein’s understanding of being and the world it opens up; rather he historicizes world disclosing as Dasein’s receiving of a succession of clearings. (Dreyfus and Rubin, “Kierkegaard, Division II, and Later Heidegger”, 337.)” Thus, we seem warranted to talk of a shift of accent.

research, and truly question Being. Some things may need to be left in the vestibule, but, for Heidegger at any case, *Being and Time* is still the entry to an authentic questioning of being.

Being and Time begins with a quote from Plato's *Sophist*, and a summary of what Heidegger seeks to accomplish. He begins by noting that we do not understand the meaning of Being, and that, apparently, we are not even perplexed by this inability.¹⁰¹⁸ As such, says Heidegger, "we must reawaken an understanding for the meaning of this question."¹⁰¹⁹ It is to this task that Heidegger directs his energies in *Being and Time*, "Our aim in the following treatise is to work out the question of the meaning of *Being* and to do so concretely. Our provisional aim is the Interpretation of *time* as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being."¹⁰²⁰ The ultimate purpose of *Being and Time* is to approach the question of the *meaning* of Being afresh, with the hopes of awakening a perplexity in the reader concerning the difficulty that is associated with understanding the meaning of Being. Blattner states that "The official project of *Being and Time* is to develop an explicit ontology, an account of Being. Ontological inquiry proceeds hermeneutically, by expressing in conceptually articulate form our preontological understanding of being. To do this we must dig down into our pre-reflective, practical forms of engagement with the world and express what is afoot in them. Doing this well will require a grasp of the nature of our pre-reflective, practical understanding. Thus, Heidegger sets as a preliminary goal developing an ontology of human being. Securing the 'point of access' to the object of our study is a recurring theme in *Being and Time*."¹⁰²¹ In the published parts of *Being and Time* Heidegger sets out to show that Being can only be understood within the constraints (the horizon) of *temporality*, but, as we shall see later, what Heidegger means by temporality, and

¹⁰¹⁸Heidegger, *BT*, 1.

¹⁰¹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰²⁰Ibid.

¹⁰²¹Blattner, *HBTRG*, 23.

what most people (including most philosophers) mean by temporality are two entirely different things.

Heidegger's Introduction to *Being and Time*

In the first chapter of the introduction to *Being and Time* Heidegger seeks to clear the way towards his first major part by making a number of important points. He notes, first of all, that in order to examine the meaning, or significance, of anything whatsoever, we must, first and foremost, have, at very least, a confused or primitive idea or notion, beforehand, of what it is we are asking about.¹⁰²² He says, "Inquiry, as a kind of seeking, must be guided beforehand by what is sought. So the meaning of Being must already be available to us in some way... We do not *know* what 'Being' means. But even if we ask, 'What is "Being"?' , we keep within an understanding of the 'is', though we are unable to fix conceptually what that 'is' signifies... *this vague understanding of Being is still a Fact.*"¹⁰²³ Secondly, the object of our questioning is the *meaning* of the Being of beings, which is not, itself a being.¹⁰²⁴ It is important to note that Heidegger accepts the notion, found in ancient and medieval philosophy, that Being could not be defined, but notes that "the indefinability of Being does not eliminate the question of its meaning; it demands that we look that question in the face."¹⁰²⁵ Now, states Heidegger, "The question of Being aims therefore at ascertaining the a priori conditions not only for the possibility of the sciences which examine entities as entities of such and such a type, and, in so doing, already operate with an understanding of Being, but also for the possibility of those ontologies themselves which are prior to the ontical sciences and which provide their foundations. *Basically,*

¹⁰²²Heidegger, *BT*, 25 [5-6].

¹⁰²³*Ibid.*, 25 [5].

¹⁰²⁴*Ibid.*, 25-26 [6].

¹⁰²⁵*Ibid.*, 23 [4].

all ontology, no matter how rich and firmly compacted a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains blind and perverted from its ownmost aim, if it has not first adequately clarified the meaning of Being, and conceived this clarification as its fundamental task."¹⁰²⁶

In order to arrive at an understanding of the meaning of Being we must question beings, or *entities*.¹⁰²⁷ Heidegger understands an "entity" as something that, in some way, "is".¹⁰²⁸ *Dasein* must question beings or entities in order to understand the meaning of Being because, says Heidegger, "to *Dasein*, Being in a world is something that belongs essentially. Thus *Dasein*'s understanding of Being pertains with equal primordially both to an understanding of something like a 'world', and to the understanding of the Being of those entities which become accessible within the world."¹⁰²⁹ That is, *Dasein* is essentially *in a world* which is composed of beings which are, in *Dasein*'s world, made accessible to *Dasein*. In order to understand Being, therefore, we must question the Being of those beings that are made accessible to *Dasein* only in the world in which *Dasein* is. Heidegger then goes on to ask, in our attempt to question the meaning of Being, which "entities" should we, primordially, question? His answer is: *Dasein* – the way of Being that might be described (at least in *Being and Time*) as *the Human way of Being*.¹⁰³⁰ The reason why *Dasein* must be analysed first, in any consideration of the question of Being, has to

¹⁰²⁶Ibid., 31[11]. It should be noted that this is already a deviation from the ancient and medieval questioning of Being. Aristotle and Plato both wanted to know what Being "is"—the essence of Being. Heidegger is not asking about the essence—or whatness—of Being, but about the 'meaning' or 'significance' of the Being of beings. In our consideration of Plato and Aristotle's approach to Being we was that two ask 'What is Being?' can be understood in 2 ways: (1) emphasis on the 'what' makes the question into, 'what are the things that are currently in the act of being?'; (2) emphasis on the 'is' turns the question into 'what is the nature/essence of Being?' Aristotle precises that he is asking about the Being qua Being (i.e.-not Being as something else, some way of being, or some particular being); what is common to all the things that in some way Be. Heidegger, however, is clearly asking not about Being itself, but about what it means to be some being—existentially; that is, what is the significance of the ways in which beings (whatnesses) Be what they are, for humans? That is, what makes beings significant for human Beings?

¹⁰²⁷Ibid., 26 [6-7].

¹⁰²⁸Ibid., 26-27 [6-7].

¹⁰²⁹Ibid., 33 [13].

¹⁰³⁰Ibid., 28 [8], 32-35 [12-15].

do with, says Heidegger, the fact that “any treatment of it [questioning about Being] in line with the elucidations we have given requires us to explain how Being is to be looked at, how its meaning is to be understood and conceptually grasped; it requires us to prepare the way for choosing the right entity for our example, and to work out the genuine way of access to it. Looking at something, understanding and conceiving it, choosing, access to it—all these ways of behaving are constitutive for our inquiry, and therefore are modes of Being for those particular entities which we, the inquirers, are ourselves. Thus to work out the question of Being adequately, we must make an entity—the inquirer—transparent in his own Being.”¹⁰³¹ In other words, we cannot properly approach the question of Being without first understanding the appropriate approach to the questioning of Being, which is learned by first analysing the Being of the being that is the questioner (and thus gives meaning both to the question and to that which is being questioned). That is, in order to properly approach the question of Being, we must first understand how Dasein provides meaning to beings, questions and understands that which Dasein questions.

It follows, then, that in the questioning of Being, Dasein “accordingly takes priority over all other entities in several ways.”¹⁰³² Dasein has *ontical* and *ontological* priority over all other beings in that it has “the determinate character of existence”,¹⁰³³ and it “possesses—as constitutive for its understanding of existence—an understanding of the Being of all entities of a character other than its own.”¹⁰³⁴ Dasein also has priority “as providing the ontico-ontological condition for the possibility of any ontologies.”¹⁰³⁵ In the remainder of this first chapter

¹⁰³¹Ibid., 26-27 [7]. Cf. Ibid., 35 [14].

¹⁰³²Ibid., 34 [13].

¹⁰³³Ibid.

¹⁰³⁴Ibid. On this point it should be noted that Heidegger thinks himself in agreement with the Aristotelian claim that, in some sense, the human is potentially all things. For Aristotle the human knower is, in potency, all things because by knowing some X the human knower becomes, intellectually, that X.

¹⁰³⁵Ibid.

Heidegger provides the reader with some introductory considerations about what he means by *Dasein*, and how a consideration of *Dasein* provides what is possibly the best possible access to the veritable meaning of Being.

It should be noted, before we continue, that we have already been forced to use a number of terms, that are commonly understood to have certain definitions, but, which Heidegger redefines in *Being and Time*, such as: definition, understanding, meaning, interpretation, horizon, existence, *Dasein* (which is the only term that is not commonly used in traditional philosophy), and, of course, Being. Three of these terms receive *preliminary* descriptions or definitions in this first chapter. *Existence* is said to be “that kind of Being towards which *Dasein* can comport itself in one way or another, and always does comport itself somehow.”¹⁰³⁶ Heidegger later adds that the term existence is said only of *Dasein*,¹⁰³⁷ of that which can be said to be a “who”.¹⁰³⁸ Heidegger later links Existence with *Dasein*’s Potentiality-for-Being, “We have defined the idea of existence as a potentiality-for-Being—a potentiality which understands, and for which its own Being is an issue. But this *potentiality-for-Being*, as one which is in each case *mine*, is free either for authenticity or for inauthenticity or for a mode in which neither of these has been differentiated.”¹⁰³⁹ *Existence*, then, is the very potentiality-for-Being of *Dasein*.¹⁰⁴⁰ William Blattner, in a 1996 article states that “Existence is, roughly, that feature of *Dasein* that its self-understanding is constitutive of its being what or who it is.”¹⁰⁴¹

¹⁰³⁶*Ibid.*, 32 [12].

¹⁰³⁷*Ibid.*, 67 [42].

¹⁰³⁸*Ibid.*, 71 [45].

¹⁰³⁹*Ibid.*, 275 [232].

¹⁰⁴⁰Blattner adds nothing helpful to this definition in his *Readers Guide* (Blattner, *HBTRG*, 24.).

¹⁰⁴¹William D. Blattner, “Existence and Self-Understanding in Being and Time,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. LVI, no. 1 (Mar. 1996), 97.

Dasein is said to be “This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being.”¹⁰⁴² Heidegger, a little later, says that, “*Dasein* is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it...*Dasein*, in its Being, has a relationship towards that Being—a relationship which itself is one of Being.”¹⁰⁴³ He adds that the essence of *Dasein* “lies rather in the fact that in each case it has its Being to be, and has it as its own.”¹⁰⁴⁴ Blattner does not so much provide a definition of *Dasein*,¹⁰⁴⁵ as an exposition of four descriptions that Heidegger provides of *Dasein*: (1) *Dasein*’s being is in each case mine. (2) *Dasein* comports itself towards its being. (3) *Dasein* is delivered over to its being. (4) Being is at issue for *Dasein*.¹⁰⁴⁶ The one element of his explanation of these descriptions that we need to bring out here is his exposition of the first characteristic, that “*Dasein* is a person”.¹⁰⁴⁷ Though he notes, rightly, that Heidegger does not understand *Dasein* to be a ‘subject’,¹⁰⁴⁸ or an individual center of consciousness, the very term ‘person’ is unfortunate because, although it brings out the “*mineness*” of *Dasein*,¹⁰⁴⁹ it leaves the reader with the idea that *Dasein* is an individual human person—a center of consciousness—a thinking, feeling, subject. It is best to stay away from the word *person*, when talking about *Dasein*. At this point it is worth asking, does the term *Dasein* refer to individual persons,¹⁰⁵⁰ or, as some have proposed, to cultures, societies, or races of

¹⁰⁴²Heidegger, *BT*, 27 [7].

¹⁰⁴³*Ibid.*, 32 [12].

¹⁰⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 32-32 [12].

¹⁰⁴⁵Blattner, in a small glossary on page 24 of his *Readers Guide*, says no more than, the very nebulous and ambiguous, “*Dasein*: we (we will discuss this more thoroughly in section iii). (Blattner, *HBTRG*, 24.)”.

¹⁰⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁰⁴⁹Cf. Heidegger, *BT*, 150 [114], where Heidegger says, “*Dasein* is an entity which is in each case I myself; its Being is in each case mine. This definition *indicates* an *ontologically* constitutive state...At the same time this tells us *ontically* (though in a rough and ready fashion) that in each case an ‘I’—not Others—is this entity.”

¹⁰⁵⁰“The most famous version of this mistake is Sartre’s brilliant but misguided reformulation of *Being and Time* into a theory of consciousness in *Being and Nothingness*. (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 13.)” Both Dreyfus (*Ibid.*, 13.) and John Haugeland (John Haugeland, “Heidegger on Being a Person,” *Nous*, vol. 16, no. 1 (1982), 19-20.) argue,

people.¹⁰⁵¹ There is a third option which is closer to what Heidegger means by Dasein: Human being (s), or, as Dreyfus proposes, “everyday human existence”.¹⁰⁵² *Human being* does not refer to human *nature* (for Heidegger there is no such thing, in the traditional sense, as a Human nature),¹⁰⁵³ but, rather, to that *way of being* which each of us is and can be.¹⁰⁵⁴ There is a sense in which Dasein is the *self*, understood in general terms—not necessarily the individual person, though certainly applicable to the individual person—but self as is applicable to any entity for whom its Being (way of existing) is an issue. Perhaps we could describe Dasein as the universal abstraction of personhood, or self-ness, from individual human persons and selves. It is that which is common to anything which is a human person or self. Such that every person is a Dasein, but Dasein is no one individual person. There is, as Heidegger constantly repeats, an ‘essential’ link between Dasein and its existence such that we can say that, “*The ‘essence’ of Dasein lies in its existence.*”¹⁰⁵⁵ There will be more to say about Dasein as we proceed, but these brief comments will allow us to better understand what Heidegger is proposing.

Being, finally, is said to be, always, the Being of beings,¹⁰⁵⁶ or “that which determines entities as entities, that on the basis of which [woraufhin] entities are already understood.”¹⁰⁵⁷ It is

convincingly, against interpreting Dasein as an individual person or center of consciousness.

¹⁰⁵¹Cf. Haugeland, “Heidegger on Being a Person”. Here, after a brief interpretation of elements of *Being and Time*, he suggests, on page 19, the following definition of Dasein: “We are at last in a position to address the fundamental question for any interpretation of *Being and Time*: What is *Dasein*? According to the text, the anyone (pp. 126-30), the world (pp. 64, 364, and 380), language (p. 166), and even the sciences (p. 11) all have ‘*Dasein’s* kind of being.’ We can make sense of this astonishing diversity if we understand *Dasein* to be the anyone and everything instituted by it: a vast intricate pattern-generated and maintained by conformism-of norms, normal dispositions, customs, sorts, roles, referral relations, public institutions, and so on. On this reading, the anyone, the (everyday) world, and language are different coherent ‘subpatterns’ within the grand pattern that is *Dasein*; they have *Dasein’s* kind of being because each of them is *Dasein* (though none of them is all of *Dasein*).” Dreyfus also argues, convincingly, against this interpretation of Dasein (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 14.).

¹⁰⁵²Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 13.

¹⁰⁵³Ibid., 25. Here Dreyfus says, “Being essentially self-interpreting, Dasein has not nature. Yet Dasein always understands itself as having some specific essential nature... Thus Dasein’s everyday preontological understanding of its own being necessarily involves a preontological misunderstanding.”

¹⁰⁵⁴Dreyfus understands Dasein in the same way that we have described it (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 14.).

¹⁰⁵⁵Heidegger, *BT*, 67 [42]. Cf. Ibid., 171 [133], 345 [298].

¹⁰⁵⁶Ibid., 26 [6], 29 [9].

¹⁰⁵⁷Ibid., 25-26 [6].

important to note that Being, the Being of beings, is ‘that on the basis of which entities are already understood.’ We might be tempted to see an allusion to the Aristotelian-thomistic idea that the essence of a being is what makes it intelligible for knowing-beings, and this may be the case. However, it is also important to note that Heidegger is here saying that the Being of beings is the foundation of their significance to human being (persons). We have, then, our first major indication of what Being ‘is’—meaning, or, rather, the ground of meanings. Note also the hint towards his claim concerning temporality as the horizon of Being—“already”. It is also important to note that Heidegger distinguishes between Being and beings (or, as some translate the German word *seiendes*, entities). Heidegger states that, “Any entity is either a ‘*who*’ (existence) or a ‘*what*’ (presence-at-hand in the broadest sense).”¹⁰⁵⁸ Entities are things that, can, in one way or another, Be. But what is Being? Heidegger gives a preliminary description of Being early on in *Being and Time*, where he states that “Everything we talk about, everything we have in view, everything towards which we comport ourselves in any way, is being; what we are is being, and so is how we are. Being lies in the fact that something is, and in its Being as it is; in Reality, in presence-at-hand; in subsistence; in validity; in Dasein; in the ‘there is’.”¹⁰⁵⁹ Heidegger notes, a little later, that “while Being is in every case the Being of some entity, we must first bring forward the entities themselves if it is our aim that Being should be laid bare.”¹⁰⁶⁰ We begin to see that Being, as the Being of entities, is not necessarily the same for each entity. As such, if we are to understand Being, we will need to examine the ways in which entities Be.¹⁰⁶¹

¹⁰⁵⁸Ibid., 71 [45].

¹⁰⁵⁹Ibid., 26 [6-7].

¹⁰⁶⁰Ibid., 61 [37]. Blattner notes that “being is not an entity. Since being is not an entity, it neither *is* nor *is not*. Rather, being determines entities as entities, as Heidegger puts it in chapter 1 of the Introduction to *Being and Time* (25-26/6). Being is the set of standards in terms of which entities make sense as entities. (Blattner, *HBTRG*, 116-117.)”

¹⁰⁶¹As we will see later, beings that do not have the character of Dasein can BE as either *present-at-hand* (or as un-present-at-hand), or as *ready-to-hand* (or unready-to-hand). Dasein, though its Being can be considered, in a certain sense, as present-at-hand (and even, in a “morally” depraved manner, as ready-to-hand), *IS* properly *Being-in-*

In the second chapter of the introduction Heidegger lays down the reasons why an analytic of *Dasein* must be the first step in any questioning of Being.¹⁰⁶² Heidegger notes that though *Dasein* is, on the level of its *ontical* being (what some would call its existence as a particular real being), that which is closest to us, it is, however, on the deeper *ontological* level which considers the *meaning* of the Being of beings, that which is furthest from us.¹⁰⁶³ At the ontological level *Dasein* runs into what we might call one of the problems of interpretation. That is, *Dasein* is always interpreting its ontological Being in terms of the way that *Dasein* understands the world.¹⁰⁶⁴ Blattner notes, importantly, that when Heidegger talks about understanding, he does not “just understand ideas, concepts and words, but rather (mostly)...things or phenomena...Understanding in this case is ability or know-how, competence.”¹⁰⁶⁵ *Dasein* understands the world not primarily through concepts and abstractions but, in the first place, in a situation of practical action and living. Blattner says, later, “We have a pre-ontological understanding of being, and our job as philosophers is to make that pre-ontology explicit in an ontological theory. Thus ontology is interpretative, or ‘hermeneutic.’ Because our pre-ontological understanding is embedded in our conduct and pre-reflective ways of going about our lives, ontology is an attempt to put our practical understanding of being into words.”¹⁰⁶⁶ Dreyfus explains that “the practices containing an interpretation of what it is to be a person, an object, and a society fit together. They are all aspects of what Heidegger calls an understanding

the (a)-world. We will come back to all of these concepts at the appropriate time.

¹⁰⁶²Heidegger, *BT*, 36-37 [15-16].

¹⁰⁶³*Ibid.*, 36 [15].

¹⁰⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 36-37 [15-16].

¹⁰⁶⁵Blattner, *HBTRG*, 17-18.

¹⁰⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 20. He later states that “by ‘understanding’ Heidegger means a form of competence or ability, a practical phenomenon, rather than a cognitive one. Our self-understanding is embodied in the way we live, rather than in how we think or talk about our lives...Heidegger is talking about a form of comportment or behavior. (*Ibid.*, 38.)” As such, whereas it has been common to say that we act based upon what we think (or that our actions betray our understanding of the world, or our moral living flows from our beliefs), for Heidegger this is to get things entirely backwards. Rather, for Heidegger, our thinking flows from our comportment or behaviour, our way of living our lives in our world.

of being. Such an understanding is contained in our knowing-how-to-cope in various domains rather than in a set of beliefs that such and such is the case.”¹⁰⁶⁷ This is what Heidegger calls a *pre-ontological interpretation*.¹⁰⁶⁸ Heidegger says that “In Dasein itself, and therefore in its own understanding of Being, the way the world is understood is, as we shall show, reflected back ontologically upon the way in which Dasein itself gets interpreted.”¹⁰⁶⁹ Thus, says Heidegger, in summary, “Dasein is ontically ‘closest’ to itself and ontologically farthest; but pre-ontologically it is surely not a stranger.”¹⁰⁷⁰ The interpretative problem is complicated by the fact that *Dasein*’s understanding of Being “develops or decays along with whatever kind of Being Dasein may possess at the time.”¹⁰⁷¹ This leads Heidegger to claim that before any worthwhile work can be done concerning the question of Being one must first proceed with an analytic of *Dasein*.¹⁰⁷² That is, we must come to an ontological (having to do with Being) theoretical understanding of how *Dasein is* in its pre-ontological *understanding of its world*.

In an appropriate analytic of *Dasein*, the *Dasein* must be accessed in the fundamental structures of its *average everydayness*.¹⁰⁷³ This preliminary analysis of *Dasein* will necessarily be provisional and preparatory (perhaps even somewhat superficial) as, states Heidegger, “this preparatory analytic of Dasein will have to be repeated on a higher and authentically ontological basis.”¹⁰⁷⁴ That is, the preparatory analytic will have to be repeated in the light of “Temporality”

¹⁰⁶⁷Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 18.

¹⁰⁶⁸Heidegger, *BT*, 36 [15]. Dreyfus notes that “Heidegger would differ from Bourdieu, however, in holding that Dasein’s shared ways of behaving are not mere facts to be studied *objectively* by a ‘scientific’ discipline...rather, because they contain an understanding of being they must be studied as an *interpretation*. Heidegger calls the shared agreement in our practices as to what entities can show up *as a preontological or pretheoretical* understanding of being. (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 19.)”

¹⁰⁶⁹Heidegger, *BT*, 36-37 [15-16].

¹⁰⁷⁰Ibid., 37 [16].

¹⁰⁷¹Ibid., 37 [16].

¹⁰⁷²Ibid., 37 [16].

¹⁰⁷³Ibid., 37-38 [16].

¹⁰⁷⁴Ibid., 38 [17].

which will be seen to be “the meaning of the Being of that entity which we call Dasein.”¹⁰⁷⁵ By interpreting *Dasein* as temporality “the ground will have been prepared” for an approach to a discussion of the question of the meaning of Being.¹⁰⁷⁶ Thus this preparatory step, and its repetition in light of temporality, which turns out to be the sum total of the published parts of *Being and Time*, is supposed to set us up for a proper approach to the question of the meaning of Being. We can, thus, conclude that in *Being and Time* we have what Heidegger takes to be, at very least, the necessary preliminary step for a proper approach to the question of Being.

Having explained the necessity of what is to follow in the two published divisions of the first part Heidegger goes on to provide a brief analysis of the bankruptcy of the traditional concept of time and temporality.¹⁰⁷⁷ That is, the meaning of Being must be understood on the *horizon* of temporality, which is the Being of Dasein, but (and this is a fairly big but), the traditional understanding of time and temporality is not what Heidegger has in mind. The traditional understanding of time and temporality, says Heidegger, looks upon time as something that is almost spatial; that is, things that are temporal are “in time”.¹⁰⁷⁸ This is precisely the problem with the traditional understanding of time, it has taken on the form of a receptacle (all that is temporal is in time and that which is not-temporal is outside of time), but no one has questioned why it should have this function.¹⁰⁷⁹ In order to understand time rightly, and to see it as the horizon of Being, one must put aside the traditional understanding of time and give a different meaning to the terms time and temporality (which is what will be done in this

¹⁰⁷⁵Ibid., 38 [17]. Cf. Ibid., 39 [17]. This is done in the second division of the first part. The preparatory analytic is done in the first division.

¹⁰⁷⁶Ibid., 38 [17].

¹⁰⁷⁷Ibid., 38-40 [17-19]. We have already noted that to which Heidegger refers when he talks about traditional philosophy—A Cartesian/Kantian/Hegelian interpretation of philosophy and the history of philosophy.

¹⁰⁷⁸Ibid., 39-40 [18].

¹⁰⁷⁹Ibid., 39 [18].

treatise).¹⁰⁸⁰ Rather than seeing Time as determinative of Being, one must see “Being itself (and not merely entities, let us say, as entities ‘in time’)...made visible in its ‘temporal’ character.”¹⁰⁸¹ In Blattner’s words, “The result of a successful general ontology would be a detailed conception and articulation of the temporal structure of being in general, what Heidegger calls ‘Temporality.’”¹⁰⁸²

In light of the bankruptcy of traditional ontology, Heidegger thinks that it is necessary, for the success of this project, to “destroy”¹⁰⁸³ the history of ontology.¹⁰⁸⁴ In this section he begins by explaining what is meant by the *historicality* of *Dasein* (a kind of Being of *Dasein* that is based in *Dasein*’s temporality), and how, if *Dasein* does not make its history its own, then the Being of *Dasein* is determined by tradition which becomes the master of *Dasein*.¹⁰⁸⁵ “Tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence; it blocks our access to those primordial ‘sources’ from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part quite genuinely drawn.”¹⁰⁸⁶ This analysis is followed by a very brief overview of some of the main historical periods of the history of metaphysics (Ancient Greek ontology, Medieval Scholastic ontology—and specifically Suarez, and Modern ontology—specifically Descartes and Hegel).¹⁰⁸⁷

He states that “If the question of Being is to have its own history made transparent, then this hardened tradition must be loosened up, and the concealments which it has brought about must be dissolved.”¹⁰⁸⁸ This “loosening up” and “making transparent” is what Heidegger means by a *destruction* of the history of ontology, “In thus demonstrating the origin of our basic

¹⁰⁸⁰Ibid., 40 [19]. That is, in a phenomenological/existential understanding.

¹⁰⁸¹Ibid., 40 [18].

¹⁰⁸²Blattner, *HBTRG*, 23.

¹⁰⁸³Cf. Heidegger, *BT*, 44 [22-23].

¹⁰⁸⁴Ibid., 41-49 [19-27].

¹⁰⁸⁵Ibid., 41-43 [20-21].

¹⁰⁸⁶Ibid., 43 [21].

¹⁰⁸⁷Ibid., 43-44 [22-23].

¹⁰⁸⁸Ibid., 44 [22].

ontological concepts by an investigation in which their ‘birth certificate’ is displayed, we have nothing to do with a vicious relativizing of ontological standpoints.”¹⁰⁸⁹ This destruction has a *positive* sense (staking out the limits of tradition and keeping it within those limits) and a *negative* sense (not remaining in the past, but looking to the present).¹⁰⁹⁰ Blattner notes that “This ‘destruction’ is a disassembly of the conceptual history of ontology, in which one analyzes the experiences that gave rise to the earliest philosophical attempts to say what being means.”¹⁰⁹¹

Heidegger then posits that the first question of a renewed look at the question of Being, on the positive side of the destruction, must be: Whether and how Being and Time have been related to each other in the history of ontology,¹⁰⁹² and “whether the problematic of Temporality required for this has ever been worked out in principle or ever could have been”¹⁰⁹³? Heidegger claims that Kant is the only thinker who ever really tried to answer this question, but that he didn’t go all the way.¹⁰⁹⁴ In considering Kant’s approach to time he notes that Kant took over Descartes basic ontology,¹⁰⁹⁵ but critiques Kant for not having provided “an ontology of Dasein”.¹⁰⁹⁶ This is followed by a short critique of Descartes’ own ontology,¹⁰⁹⁷ and some comments concerning the dependence of Descartes on Medieval scholasticism (in spite of Descartes’ own expressed desire

¹⁰⁸⁹Ibid., 44 [22].

¹⁰⁹⁰Ibid., 44 [22-23].

¹⁰⁹¹Blattner, *HBTRG*, 21.

¹⁰⁹²Heidegger, *BT*, 44-45 [23].

¹⁰⁹³Ibid., 45 [23].

¹⁰⁹⁴Ibid., 45-46 [23-24].

¹⁰⁹⁵Ibid., 45 [24].

¹⁰⁹⁶Ibid., 46 [24].

¹⁰⁹⁷Ibid., 46 [24-25].

to reject it entirely and to start afresh)¹⁰⁹⁸.¹⁰⁹⁹ This section concludes with an analysis of the thoughts of the ancient Greek philosophers.¹¹⁰⁰

Heidegger now explains the method and meaning of the main method to be used in this project, and, says Heidegger, by Ontology in general:¹¹⁰¹ *Phenomenology*.¹¹⁰² He says that “This expression does not characterize the *w h a t* of the objects of philosophical research as subject-matter, but rather the *how* of the research.”¹¹⁰³ His explanation of the method of phenomenology proceeds with an analysis of the meaning of “phenomena”, “*λόγος*”, and the preliminary concept of phenomenology. Heidegger says that the Greek expression *φαινόμενον* means “that which shows itself, the manifest... Thus we must *keep in mind* that the expression ‘*phenomenon*’ signifies *that which shows itself in itself*, the manifest.”¹¹⁰⁴ Heidegger, in a manner that reminds us of Plato’s *Sophist*, notes that it is possible that a being show itself, or presents itself, as something that it is not—this is called *seeming*.¹¹⁰⁵ Thus, phenomenon can either mean the *manifest* (that which presents itself as itself), or the *apparent* (that which presents itself as something that it is not). The former is the foundation of the latter. He goes on to analyse the

¹⁰⁹⁸Cf. René Descartes, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, in vol. 1 of *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. & ed. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (1911; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 3, 7. René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, in vol. 1 of *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. & ed. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (1911; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 85-6. René Descartes, *The Principles of Philosophy*, in vol. 1 of *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. & ed. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (1911; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 206-8, 209, 213, 214, 298-9. René Descartes, *The Search for Truth*, in vol. 1 of *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. & ed. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (1911; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 305, 317, 318. René Descartes, *Notes Directed Against a Certain Programme*, in vol. 1 of *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. & ed. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (1911; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 448.

¹⁰⁹⁹Heidegger, *BT*, 46-47 [25].

¹¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 45-49 [23-27].

¹¹⁰¹Does this contradict his later statement to the effect that his approach is not the only approach?

¹¹⁰²Heidegger, *BT*, 49-63 [27-39]. Much has been said about Heidegger’s modification of Husserl’s “phenomenology”. This is not a subject that we will approach here, but the reader is encouraged to consult, for more on this subject, Kisiel (*GHB*), as well as Franco Volpi, “L’appropriation ‘phénoménologique’ de l’histoire de la philosophie chez le jeune Heidegger,” dans *Phénoménologie et Herméneutique II Penser leurs Rappports*, ed. Emmanuel Mejia and Ingeborg Schussler (Lausanne: Éditions Payot, 2001), 69-97.

¹¹⁰³Heidegger, *BT*, 50 [27].

¹¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 51 [28].

¹¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 51 [28-29].

term appearance, thus drawing out four different meanings: (1) “announcing-itself, as not-showing-itself”;¹¹⁰⁶ (2) “that which does the announcing” of that which is not showing itself;¹¹⁰⁷ (3) “the genuine sense of ‘phenomenon’ as showing-itself”;¹¹⁰⁸ and (4) “that which emerges in what is itself non-manifest, and which emanates [ausstrahlt] from it in such a way indeed that the non-manifest gets thought of as something that is essentially *never* manifest.”¹¹⁰⁹ He concludes this analysis by noting that “‘*Phenomenon*’, the showing-itself-in-itself, signifies a distinctive way in which something can be encountered. ‘*Appearance*’, on the other hand, means a reference-relationship which is in an entity itself, and which is such that what *does the referring* (or the announcing) can fulfil its possible function only if it shows itself in itself and is thus a ‘phenomenon’.”¹¹¹⁰

Heidegger then seeks to set out the clear meaning on *λόγος* in order to make manifest just what is meant by the claim that phenomenology is the science of phenomena. In explaining just what *λόγος* is, Heidegger begins by tentatively saying that *λόγος* should be translated by discourse,¹¹¹¹ though it can be, and has been, translated in a number of other different ways. Rejecting the other possible translations Heidegger states that “*λόγος* as ‘discourse’ means rather the same as *δηλοῦν*: to make manifest what one is ‘talking about’ in one’s discourse...The *λόγος* lets something be seen (*φαίνεσθαι*), namely, what the discourse is about.”¹¹¹² Discourse is to make that which is being discussed accessible to the other person; it is, in a sense, to lift the hood of a car in order to let someone else see the engine. Heidegger thinks that in light of the definition of *λόγος* as a making apparent or letting something be seen, one must stay away from any

¹¹⁰⁶Ibid., 53 [30].

¹¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹¹⁰Ibid., 54 [31].

¹¹¹¹Ibid., 55 [32].

¹¹¹²Ibid., 56 [32].

conception of truth such as that proposed by what is known as the correspondence theory of truth.¹¹¹³ That is, the truth of a discourse is not, says Heidegger, primordially concerned with a relationship between the statements and the things that they are making known, but, rather, the “‘Being-true’ of the *λόγος*” just is the uncovering of that which is being talked about such that they can be seen.¹¹¹⁴ To *Be-False*, then, is to cover up and hide something so that it is either not seen, or not seen as it is.¹¹¹⁵ *Being-True* and *Being-False* are ways of Being of *Dasein*. *Being-True* is that way of Being in which *Dasein* discloses, reveals, or makes evident that which presents itself such that it is seen to be as it is. It should be noted that there are many different ways in which *Dasein* can Be-True, including discourse, moods, and actions (the ways in which *Dasein* is with, in, or present to others). *Being-False* is the opposite of Being-True. It is that way of Being in which *Dasein* covers over, hides or makes unavailable or non-evident, that which presents itself such that it is either not seen, or not seen to be as it is (it is seen as something that it is is not). In such an understanding of Being-True and Being-False, truth and falsity is not found in the judgement (assertive or negative), but, rather, in the way of Being of *Dasein*. In such a comprehension of True-Being and False-Being, then, it is evident that though the correspondence theory of truth may be applicable to certain ways of Being-True of *Dasein*, it is not applicable to the way of Being of *Dasein* that is Being-True. Heidegger, consistent with his interpretation of Being, rejects the theory of truth known as the correspondence theory,¹¹¹⁶ and claims that the traditional theories of Realism and Idealism are both beside the point.¹¹¹⁷ The term *λόγος*, then can mean reason, the ground or ratio, and relation or relationship.¹¹¹⁸

¹¹¹³Ibid., 56 [33].

¹¹¹⁴Ibid., 56-57 [33].

¹¹¹⁵Ibid., 57 [33].

¹¹¹⁶Ibid., 56-57 [33].

¹¹¹⁷Ibid., 57-58 [34].

¹¹¹⁸Ibid., 58 [34].

In light of his observations about the terms phenomenon and *λόγος*, Heidegger finishes his analysis of phenomenology with an analytical synthesis of the two terms, and what it means for ontological research. The formal meaning of phenomenology, says Heidegger, is “*ἀποφαίνεσθαι τὰ φαινόμενα*—to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself.”¹¹¹⁹ The *phenomenological* method, then, is simply to allow the phenomena to present themselves as themselves, to uncover the phenomena such that they are seen to be as they are, to not cover over something that is presenting itself, but to let everything be seen as it is. We must be careful, however, when discussing Heidegger’s phenomenology, to not see it as a “return” to the consideration of beings in themselves as beings¹¹²⁰ (which would be, in Kantian terminology, the *noumena*), but, rather, to the living human experience of beings as they interpreted by the Being-in-the-world of human-beings.¹¹²¹ But, says, Heidegger, the very Being of beings is itself covered up whenever beings are considered under some one, or another, aspect, or any aspect that is not explicitly letting the very Being of the beings come to light.¹¹²² A phenomena is *covered up* either when it is, as of yet, undiscovered, or, when it is only visible as an appearance or semblance.¹¹²³ As such, declares Heidegger quite dogmatically, “*Only as phenomenology, is ontology possible.*”¹¹²⁴ This is the case because “phenomenology is the science of the Being of entities—ontology.”¹¹²⁵ The question that we are asking is the meaning of Being, as such, the phenomenological method turns out to be a *hermeneutic* (a method of interpretation) of Being, and, primarily, a hermeneutic of that Being for which its Being is an

¹¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹¹²⁰Beings as they are even when they are unexperienced by some Dasein.

¹¹²¹Kisiel notes, for example, that “Phenomenology is the return to the origins of experience, and so a return to the original experience. (Kisiel, *GHB*, 112.)”

¹¹²²Heidegger, *BT*, 59 [35].

¹¹²³Ibid., 59 [36].

¹¹²⁴Ibid., 60 [35].

¹¹²⁵Ibid., 61 [37]. This only makes sense if we understand the Being of beings as something given to them in the understanding of Dasein—as the meaning given to them by Dasein.

issue—*Dasein*.¹¹²⁶ Heidegger's *point of departure*, therefore, for his attempt to answer the question of Being is the hermeneutic of *Dasein*;¹¹²⁷ that is, the attempt to discover the meaning of that Being which alone is able to consider the question of the Being of beings—*Dasein*. “Philosophy is universal phenomenological ontology, and takes its departure from the hermeneutic of *Dasein*, which, as an analytic of *existence*, has made fast the guiding-line for all philosophical inquiry at the point where it arises and to which it *returns*.”¹¹²⁸ Heidegger concludes this second chapter with a brief outline of the entire work to be done in *Being and Time*.¹¹²⁹ His purpose, plainly stated, is “We shall proceed towards the concept of Being by way of an Interpretation of a certain special entity, *Dasein*, in which we shall arrive at the horizon for the understanding of Being and for the possibility of interpreting it.”¹¹³⁰ That horizon, as we shall see, is temporality.¹¹³¹

Part One, Division One

In order to properly approach the question of Being we must first analyze the Being of *Dasein*. It is to this purpose that division 1 is dedicated. Division one is divided into six chapters which, beginning in the first chapter with an overview of the work that needs to be done in an analytic of *Dasein*, consider the primary elements that make up the fundamental structure of *Dasein* which is described as “Being-in-the-world”. The elements in question are, the worldhood of the world, Being-with and Being-one’s-self, Being-in, and care. In order to follow Heidegger in his approach to the question of Being, and to understand how he is attempting to get there, we

¹¹²⁶Ibid., 61-62 [37-38]. Blattner seems to agree with us here (Blattner, *HBTRG*, 30.).

¹¹²⁷Cf. Heidegger, *BT*, 37-38 [16-17].

¹¹²⁸Ibid., 62 [38].

¹¹²⁹Ibid., 63-64 [39-40].

¹¹³⁰Ibid., 63 [39].

¹¹³¹Ibid., 38 [17]; 39 [17].

will need to provide a brief overview of the main conclusions of each section that bring us closer to understanding the meaning of Being.

An Introduction to the Analytic of Dasein: I, 1

In this chapter Heidegger provides an introduction to the analytic of Dasein that will be carried out in Division I. This introduction begins with an overview of the main doctrines that are necessary for an analytic of Dasein: the essence of Dasein, the distinction between *essentia* and *existentia*, the distinction between presence-at-hand and existence, the distinction between *existentialia* and the categories, the “mineness” of Dasein, the authenticity or inauthenticity of Dasein, the possibility of Dasein, and Dasein’s average everydayness. Heidegger then distinguishes an analytic of Dasein from the “ontic” sciences known as Anthropology, Psychology, and Biology. This chapter concludes with a comparison between Average Everyday Dasein and Primitive Dasein, and a discussion of the difficulties related to arriving at a natural conception of the world.

Heidegger explains that to talk about the *essence* (or *essentia*) of Dasein is to talk about Dasein’s “Being-what-it-is”. The *essence* of Dasein, therefore, is its Being, that is, it is its Being-what-it-is, its existence.¹¹³² *Existence*, if we return to observations from an earlier chapter, is “That kind of Being towards which Dasein can comport itself in one way or another, and always does comport itself somehow.”¹¹³³ Heidegger seems to imply that to talk about existence is to talk about that which makes up “*who*” the individual Dasein, that is mine, is.¹¹³⁴ If existence refers to

¹¹³²Ibid., 67 [42]. A statement which, at first sight, will throw any self-respecting thomist into fits of rage. However, upon further examination, the thomist will realize that Heidegger is simply not saying the same thing as Aquinas, when it comes to explaining the terms essence and existence.

¹¹³³Ibid., 32 [12].

¹¹³⁴Ibid., 71 [45].

the “who” of Dasein, which is composed of the ways in which Dasein comports itself—the ways in which Dasein is what it is—then Heidegger seems to conclude rightly that the *essence* of Dasein is its *existence*. It is important to remember, as noted above, that Heidegger is not using “essence” in the traditional use of the term—that is, the “essence” of Dasein is not “human nature”, but Dasein’s individual ways of actualizing itself—one might say, Dasein’s character, personality, or self-identity.

Heidegger makes some other important distinctions in this section. We have already considered the distinction between essence and existence, but he also distinguishes between presence-at-hand and existence, and between *existentialia* and the categories. Heidegger defines *presence-at-hand* as follows:¹¹³⁵ presence-at-hand is “The Being of those entities which we can come across and whose nature we can determine if we discover them in their own right by going through the entities proximally encountered.”¹¹³⁶ That is, a being that is present-at-hand is a being that can be encountered in a world. It is present to Dasein, but is no more than present. We might say that it is part of Dasein’s surroundings and is perceived as such. Such as the walls, windows and tables that are surrounding you as you sit drinking your coffee and reading a paper in a coffee shop. They have all faded to the background as you concentrate on the article that you are reading. But, though they are in the background, they are still present. Blattner defines presence-

¹¹³⁵The translation of *vorhandenheit* as *presence-at-hand* is, as we quickly discover in the secondary literature, a highly debatable translation. John Wild, for example, though he is unable to provide a significantly improved translation, thinks the translation of *vorhandenheit* and *zuhandenheit* as ready-to-hand and presence-at-hand blurs the important distinction that Heidegger proposes between these two “ways of being” (John Wild, “An English Version of Martin Heidegger’s ‘Being and Time’,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 16, no. 2 (Dec., 1962), 301.). Hubert L. Dreyfus explains that “To convey a sense of the two modes of intelligibility that Heidegger is singling out, we have chosen *availableness* and *occurrentness*. The entities that have these ways of being are called *available* and *occurrent*. (Dreyfus, *BTCHBT*, xi.)” James Millikan does not see the difficulty with these translations, rather, he notes that though the terms are awkward, they succeed in getting Heidegger’s ideas across (James Millikan, “Wild’s Review of ‘Being and Time’,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 16, no. 4 (Jun., 1963), 782.). The terms suggested by Dreyfus are helpful, but do not significantly change our understanding of Heidegger’s terms. As such, in spite of contestations from John Wild, it will simply be easier, for the reader, to maintain the terms as they are translated in of the English *Being and Time*.

¹¹³⁶Heidegger, *BT*, 121 [88].

at-hand as “the kind of being of mere things, things that are not assigned to roles in human activity.”¹¹³⁷ *Presence-at-hand*, or *Being-Present-at-hand*,¹¹³⁸ is a way of Being that is not *properly* said of Dasein. Heidegger says that “Dasein does not have the kind of Being which belongs to something merely present-at-hand with in the world, nor does it ever have it.”¹¹³⁹ It is important to note, however, that Heidegger, in the next chapter does allow that Dasein, which is *never* present-at-hand, can be treated *as if* it were present-at-hand. He notes that “even entities which are not worldless—Dasein itself, for example—are present-at-hand ‘in’ the world, or, more exactly, *can* with some right and within certain limits be *taken* as merely present-at-hand.”¹¹⁴⁰ Perhaps one of the greatest evils of our age is that we are no longer shocked when people are treated as merely present-at-hand. Indeed, humans are notoriously good at treating other humans as simply Being-Present-at-hand, as may happen in a marriage, where a married couple may begin, if they are not careful, treating each other as only Present-at-hand. *Existence*, on the other hand, contrary to Being-Present-at-hand, is as we noted above, “that kind of Being towards which Dasein can comport itself in one way or another, and always does comport itself somehow.”¹¹⁴¹

¹¹³⁷Blattner, *HBTRG*, 64. He notes that the *present-at-hand* “is what it is independently of our lives and the roles that entities play in our lives. (Ibid., 55.)”

¹¹³⁸Also designated by the term “*existentia*” (cf. Heidegger, *BT*, 67 [42].)

¹¹³⁹Heidegger, *BT*, 68 [43]. The comment “nor does it ever have it” is probably a little over dogmatic, as Heidegger will note later that it is possible to take Dasein as present-at-hand, though it is not properly present-at-hand. This manner of talking is interesting, in light of Heidegger’s overall project, for, technically (if we follow Heidegger to the letter, entities only have Being in so much as they are interpreted by Dasein as either present-at-hand, ready-to-hand, or being-in-a-world. As such, we cannot *really* say that there is any one way of Being that is proper to any one entity. If Dasein can interpret other Dasein as either present-at-hand, or ready-to-hand, then that other Dasein IS either present-at-hand, or ready-to-hand. Perhaps they should not be interpreted that way, but the “should” implies a moral norm, which Heidegger notoriously shies away from in *Being and Time*. If Heidegger wants to say either (1) that Dasein cannot be interpreted, ever, as either present-at-hand or ready-to-hand, or (2) that there is only one *proper* way to interpret Dasein, and that is as Being-in-a-world (and not as either present-at-hand or ready-to-hand), then, or so it seems, we are forced into a way of talking that implies that there is something about Dasein that is common to ALL Dasein—which is basically what ancient and medieval philosophers would call a “nature” or “essence”. Heidegger would not want to allow this, so, he has to say that there is no proper way of interpreting the Being of Dasein, nor is there a way of Being of Dasein that is proper to all Dasein and to Dasein as Dasein.

¹¹⁴⁰Ibid., 82 [55].

¹¹⁴¹Ibid., 32 [12].

We might mention that when we talk about the *possibility* that is Dasein, this possibility is essentially Dasein's because Dasein is something that has existence: "Dasein has always made some sort of decision as to the way in which it is in each case mine [je meines]. That entity which in its Being has this very Being as an issue, comports itself towards its Being as its ownmost possibility. In each case Dasein *is* its possibility."¹¹⁴² Those beings (entities) that are merely-present-at-hand do not have *existence* (and, therefore, they also do not have possibilities), but, rather, *existentia*. There is no need to elaborate further on this for the time being as we have already explained this term above.

Heidegger notes that the *categories*, referring to the categories as outlined in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, are "characteristics of Being for entities whose character is not that of Dasein. Here we are taking the expression 'category' in its primary ontological signification, and abiding by it."¹¹⁴³ That is, the categories are the characteristics of those beings which are merely present-at-hand, but cannot be applied, in any way, to Dasein. *Existentialia* on the other hand, might be called the *Dasein counterpart* of the categories. They are the characters of Being of Dasein which are defined in terms of *existentiality* (the states of Being that are constitutive for the ontological structures of those Beings which have *existence*, not *existentia*).¹¹⁴⁴ We are already beginning to see an important theme in the thought of Martin Heidegger: Ancient ontology is not *necessarily* entirely wrong, it makes many valuable observations concerning the ontology of those things that are merely present-at-hand. However, one way in which ancient ontology went wrong is that it attempted to apply the ontological observations concerning Being-present-at-hand to Dasein. As such ancient ontology went astray, and a new ontology must be proposed in which the Being of

¹¹⁴²Ibid., 68 [42].

¹¹⁴³Ibid., 70 [44].

¹¹⁴⁴Ibid., 70 [44].

Dasein is recognized for what it is. This, of course, may require making significant changes to the ‘observations’ of ancient ontology. As Blattner so aptly observes, “An ontology (the result of such an inquiry [a theoretical inquiry into the meaning of beings], e.g., *Being and Time* itself) is an explicit and conceptually articulated account of the meaning of being. The very premise of *Being and Time* is that we do not possess a successful ontology of this sort.”¹¹⁴⁵

Before we move on to analyse the remaining chapters of the first division it will be worth our time to make some passing comments concerning the other key themes that are mentioned in this introductory chapter. When Heidegger talks about the “*mineness*” of Dasein he is referring to the fact that Dasein is always mine, it is owned by me—it is the personal existence of a personal Being that is concerned with its own Being.¹¹⁴⁶ “That Being which is an *issue* for this entity in its very Being, is in each case mine...Because Dasein has *in each case mineness* [*Jemeinigkeit*], one must always use a *personal* pronoun when one addresses it: ‘I am’, ‘you are’.”¹¹⁴⁷ Blattner notes that “Heidegger wants to identify a form of self-awareness more basic than cognitive apperception *or* moral self-consciousness. His proposal is that the most basic form of self-awareness is my awareness of *who I am to-be*.”¹¹⁴⁸ Dreyfus adds another element to the notion of mineness, “For Heidegger, Dasein’s mineness is the public stand it takes on itself—on what it is to be this Dasein—by way of its comportment.”¹¹⁴⁹ The *authenticity* or *inauthenticity* of Dasein (which are *modes* of existence of Dasein) is related to whether or not Dasein is, itself, its own Being—it is its ownself, or whether it has become other than itself (which can happen, as we will see later, when Dasein becomes, in a sense, the “They”—when Dasein gets swallowed up, in a

¹¹⁴⁵Blattner, *HBTRG*, 18.

¹¹⁴⁶It is important to stay away from the idea of a center of consciousness, or a personal individual that is a subject.

¹¹⁴⁷Heidegger, *BT*, 67-68 [42].

¹¹⁴⁸Blattner, *HBTRG*, 36.

¹¹⁴⁹Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 26.

sense, by the crowd). When Dasein is its ownself, it is *authentic*; when it is other than itself, in any way, it is *inauthentic*. Dasein is able to either determine itself (be authentic), remain undifferentiated, or let itself be determined by the others (be inauthentic). Based upon this idea of “Being-one’s-ownself” that is so important to authenticity, Blattner decides to translate “*die Eigentlichkeit*” as “ownedness”.¹¹⁵⁰

We will finish our analysis of this chapter with a couple of comments concerning Heidegger’s introductory analysis of Dasein’s *average everydayness*. Dasein’s average everydayness is described, provisionally, as a mode of Dasein’s Being which is “a positive phenomenal characteristic of this entity.”¹¹⁵¹ Blattner notes that “Averageness constitutes a background condition, a condition that is not only typical of human life, but a standard in terms of which exceptional conditions of human life make sense.”¹¹⁵² This everydayness is an *undifferentiated* character by which Dasein comports itself towards its Being in a definite way,¹¹⁵³ either as *fleeing* or as *forgetting*.¹¹⁵⁴ These comments have created some confusion for the reader of *Being and Time*, as it has seen as difficult to fit the everyday-being of Dasein into the apparent dichotomy between authentic-being and inauthentic-being. Both Blattner and Dreyfus suggest that Heidegger be interpreted as proposing three different ways of Being Dasein: *Authentic-Being, Undifferentiated-Being, or Inauthentic-Being*.¹¹⁵⁵

¹¹⁵⁰Ibid., 15. He states that he prefers this translation “because the phenomenon Heidegger is trying to capture with this language is not a matter of being true to anything, but rather of owning who and how one is.” Though there are good reasons to accept Blattner’s translation, due to the fact that the only English translation of *Being and Time* that is available uses the term ‘Authenticity’, we will continue to use this term, thus allowing the student of *Being and Time* to better follow the flow of Heidegger’s argument, and find the relevant sections of our interpretation of Heidegger.

¹¹⁵¹Heidegger, *BT*, 69 [43].

¹¹⁵²Blattner, *HBTRG*, 40.

¹¹⁵³Heidegger, *BT*, 69 [44].

¹¹⁵⁴Ibid., 69 [44].

¹¹⁵⁵Blattner suggests reading authentic as “owned”, undifferentiated as “unowned”, and differentiated as “disowned” (Blattner, *HBTRG*, 130.). Dreyfus suggests “choosing itself or owning up”, “not yet taking a stand on itself”, and “disowning” (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 25-28.).

Dasein as Being-in-the-World: I, 2

In this chapter Heidegger considers the basic state of Dasein which he calls “Being-in-the-World”. We have already come across this notion in the preceding chapters, where Heidegger proposed that Being-in-the-World is a fundamental structure¹¹⁵⁶ that belongs essentially to Dasein (belongs to Dasein as constitutive of what-it-is)^{1157, 1158}. He begins by noting that Dasein’s existence, mineness, and (in) authenticity, must be shown to be, *a priori*, grounded in the “state of Being” known as “Being-in-the-World” (they are possible ways of Being-in-the-world).¹¹⁵⁹ He points out that in order to properly analyze “Being-in-the-World” we must break this concept down into its constituent parts: “Being-in”, “in-the-World”, and “entity”. He notes that these three concepts will be subjected to deeper analysis in the following chapters (3, 4, & 5). Heidegger proposes that prior to embarking into these various subjects it might be worthwhile considering “Being-in” in greater detail,¹¹⁶⁰ which becomes the main subject of the rest of the chapter. In the process of analyzing “Being-in”, Heidegger introduces us to the notions of “in”, “Being-alongside”,¹¹⁶¹ “Facticity”, “Being-in-Space”, “Concern”, “Care”, and “Knowing”. His brief discussion of “Knowing” and contemporary epistemologies leads him into a deeper critique of what it means to “know the world” and what “knowledge” is. In this section Heidegger explains his approach to the question of Knowledge—that is, we might say that the end of this

¹¹⁵⁶Heidegger, *BT*, 65 [41].

¹¹⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 67 [42].

¹¹⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 33 [13].

¹¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 78 [53].

¹¹⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 79 [53].

¹¹⁶¹Blattner claims that the translation of “*Sein-bei*” as “being-alongside” is very unfortunate. He proposes that this term be translated as “being-amidst”. This is because “*Sein-bei* is our basic familiarity with the entities we encounter in our engaged activity in the world. (Blattner, *HBTRG*, 15.)” Dreyfus concurs with Blattner (Dreyfus, *BTCHBT*, xi.). John Wild also laments the translation of *Sein-bei* as being-alongside, but, rather than proposing being-amidst, suggests a translation that seems no better: to be with. He says, “To be with something or someone in this sense is sharply opposed to merely standing alongside. It is to be with the thing or the person...To be with ‘the world’ (*Sein bei der Welt*), therefore is to be absorbed in the things it offers, and to be lost in them. (Wild, *MHBT*, 302.)”

chapter introduces us to Heidegger's basic "epistemology".¹¹⁶² We are here introduced to the notion of "Being-already-alongside-the-world." One might say that this chapter is something of a secondary introduction that draws the reader deeper into Heidegger's analytic of Dasein.

Heidegger is attempting to lead us on with baby steps into a proper understanding of that Being whose Being is for it an issue. We need to understand what Heidegger is proposing in this chapter, and consider his preliminary approach to knowledge, before moving on.

In his analysis of *Being-in*, Heidegger notes that there are two ways of "Being-in" or, we might say, two types of *in-ness*. We have already seen that there are two entirely different approaches to the ontologies of beings which are present-at-hand and Dasein: the one has *existentia* the other existence, the one has categories the other *existentialia*, the one is essentially present-at-hand the other is essentially Being-in-the-World. Heidegger now explains that these two different types of beings also have different ways of Being-in or in-ness. Entities that are present-at-hand are "in" the world in a spatial sense—they occupy some space which itself could be said to occupy some other space. "By this 'in' we mean the relationship of Being which two entities extended 'in' space have to each other with regard to their location in that space."¹¹⁶³

Contrasted with the meaning of "in" when it is applied to entities that are only present-at-hand, Heidegger proposes a more primordial (one might call it *existential*) meaning for the word "in" which can be applied to Dasein, "'In' is derived from 'innan'—'to reside', 'habitare', 'to dwell' [sich auf halten]. 'An' signifies 'I am accustomed', 'I am familiar with', 'I look after

¹¹⁶²Heidegger, *BT*, 86-90 [59-62]. It is important to note that Heidegger is not concerned with 'theoretical' ways of knowing, but, rather, with 'practical knowing'. As such, he certainly is not proposing an epistemology in the traditional sense of the term. See the following two interesting articles on Heidegger and epistemological representationalism: Tom Rockmore, "Heidegger and Representationalism," *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, vol. 13, no. 3 (Jul., 1996). Carleton B. Christensen, "Heidegger's Representationalism," *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 51, no. 1 (Sep., 1997).

¹¹⁶³Heidegger, *BT*, 79 [54].

something’.”¹¹⁶⁴ The Being-in of Dasein is of an entirely different nature than the “in-ness” of beings that are present-at-hand. Heidegger contrasts “Being-in” with the “in-ness” of entities that are “present-at-hand” by noting, first of all, that “Being-in, on the other hand, is a state of Dasein’s Being’ it is an e x i s t e n t i a l e.”¹¹⁶⁵ Having traced the meaning of “in” back to the notions of “residing”, “dwelling”, and “looking after something”, Heidegger notes that “The entity to which Being-in in this signification belongs is one which we have characterized as that entity which in each case I myself am [bin]. The expression ‘bin’ is connected with ‘bei’, and so ‘ich bin’ [‘I am’] means in its turn ‘I reside’ or ‘dwell alongside’ the world, as that which is familiar to me in such and such a way. ‘Being’ [Sein], as the infinitive of ‘ich bin’ (that is to say when it is understood as an *existentiale*), signifies ‘to reside alongside...’, ‘to be familiar with...’. ‘Being-in’ is thus the formal existential expression for the Being of Dasein, which has Being-in-the-world as its essential state.”¹¹⁶⁶ Picking up on the expression “to be familiar with”, Blattner says that “The ‘being-in’ or ‘inhood’ that constitutes being-in-the-world is neither consciousness nor moral accountability, but rather *familiarity* (*Vertrautheit*).”¹¹⁶⁷ For Blattner, ‘familiarity’ is the most important element of Heidegger’s thought,¹¹⁶⁸ being the main subject of division I,¹¹⁶⁹ and is described, by Heidegger, in *Being and Time* as *Disclosedness*, and *Being-in*, which are constitutive for Being-in-the-world.¹¹⁷⁰ We might also add, though we will certainly come to these points later on, that Blattner also notes that Familiarity, or Being-in, is more basic than cognition (“traditional” knowing), the latter being derivative from familiarity.¹¹⁷¹ As such, our

¹¹⁶⁴Ibid., 80 [54].

¹¹⁶⁵Ibid., 79 [54].

¹¹⁶⁶Ibid., 80 [54].

¹¹⁶⁷Blattner, *HBTRG*, 41-42.

¹¹⁶⁸Ibid., 11-15.

¹¹⁶⁹Ibid., 12.

¹¹⁷⁰Ibid., 12-13, 41-42.

¹¹⁷¹Ibid., 46.

fundamental access to our world is familiarity.¹¹⁷² Blattner defines familiarity as follows, “To be familiar with a context, with a world, is to grasp the significance, the signifying, of the things that are located in it. Our ability to experience something as equipment in order to...or paraphernalia involved in...is based in our prior familiarity with the structure of significance, that is, with our understanding of the roles that things play in our world.”¹¹⁷³ Dasein’s *Being-in* is constituted of different ways of Being-towards the beings that are present-at-hand (as well as other Dasein’s) in the world of Dasein. The “multiplicity” of the definite ways of Dasein’s Being-in “is indicated by the following examples: having to do with something, producing something, attending to something and looking after it, making use of something, giving something up and letting it go, undertaking, accomplishing, evincing, interrogating, considering, discussing, determining....All these ways of Being-in have *concern* as their kind of Being.”¹¹⁷⁴ There are also some ways of Being-in which are deficient, “Leaving undone, neglecting, renouncing, taking a rest—these too are ways of concern; but these are all *deficient* modes, in which the possibilities of concern are kept to a ‘bare minimum’.”¹¹⁷⁵ *Concern* derives from *Care*,¹¹⁷⁶ which is itself the Being of Dasein.¹¹⁷⁷ Essential to Dasein’s particular way of Being-in is the *facticity* of Dasein, that is, that Dasein, as “an entity ‘within-the-world’ has Being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its ‘destiny’ with the Being of those entities which it encounters within its own world.”¹¹⁷⁸

¹¹⁷²Ibid., 51, 73.

¹¹⁷³Ibid., 62. Earlier he had described familiarity as follows: “We do not just occupy a location in a system of objects, but rather live in a world. To live in a world is to experience the place one lives as familiar, to know one’s way around it. (Ibid., 43.)”

¹¹⁷⁴Heidegger, *BT*, 83 [56-57].

¹¹⁷⁵Ibid., 83 [57].

¹¹⁷⁶Ibid., 84 [57]. Cf. Blattner, *HBTRG*, 44.

¹¹⁷⁷Heidegger, *BT*, 84 [57].

¹¹⁷⁸Ibid., 82 [56].

It should be noted that though Dasein is not “in” space in the same way as beings that are present-at-hand, Dasein does have a particular form of spatial in-ness. “Dasein has a ‘Being-in-space’ of its own; but this in turn is possible only *on the basis of Being-in-the-world in general*.”¹¹⁷⁹ Heidegger warns, however, that we must not understand Dasein’s spatiality, Being-in-space, as a corollary of Dasein’s physically determined nature, in contrast to Dasein’s Being-in as related to Dasein’s spiritual nature.¹¹⁸⁰ Whether or not this is the case cannot be determined prior to the completed ontology of Dasein. Heidegger notes that it is “not until we understand Being-in-the-world as an essential structure of Dasein can we have any insight into Dasein’s *existential spatiality*.”¹¹⁸¹

Heidegger notes how knowledge (or knowing) is one of the ways in which the concerned way of Being-in is possible for Dasein with by noting that, “When concern holds back [Sichenthalten] from any kind of producing, manipulating, and the like, it puts itself into what is now the sole remaining mode of Being-in, the mode of just tarrying alongside...[das Nur-noch-verweilen bei...] This kind of Being towards the world is one which lets us encounter entities within-the-world purely in the *way they look* (*εἶδος*), just that.”¹¹⁸² This comment will lead us into a consideration of what we might call, tentatively, Heidegger’s preliminary “theory of knowledge”—or, more accurately, his theory of “Being-in-the-world” or practical know-how. This particular section, spanning only a couple of pages is extremely dense and merits a much deeper analysis than that which we will be able to give it here. Heidegger’s “theory of knowledge” begins with a comment about “knowing the world” and a short critique of the *then* contemporary theories of knowledge. The purpose of this overview of what might be called

¹¹⁷⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁸⁰Ibid.

¹¹⁸¹Ibid., 83 [56].

¹¹⁸²Ibid., 88 [61].

Heidegger's theory of knowledge is not so much to propose a theory as to prove that before such a theory can be concretely posited one must first interpret Being-in-the-world.¹¹⁸³ We can, however, draw out some of the main points of Heidegger's approach to knowledge.

He begins by claiming that "Now if it is also to become known [erkannt], the *knowing* which such a task explicitly implies takes *itself* (as a knowing of the world [Welterkennen]) as the chief exemplification of the 'soul's' relationship to the world. Knowing the world (*νοεῖν*)—or rather addressing oneself to the 'world' and discussing it (*λόγος*)—thus functions as the primary mode of Being-in-the-world, even though Being-in-the-world does not as such get conceived."¹¹⁸⁴ This preliminary comment requires comment before we move on to the main section. The first line notes that knowing of the world presents itself as the primary, and perhaps the most important, way in which the "soul" is "related" to the world. Heidegger goes on to equate "Knowing the world (*νοεῖν*)" with "addressing oneself to the 'world' and discussing it (*λόγος*)" which is, says Heidegger, the primary mode of Being-in-the-world. In previous chapters Heidegger had described *νοεῖν* as follows: "Pure *νοεῖν* is the perception of the simplest determinate ways of Being which entities as such may possess, and it perceives them just by looking at them. This *νοεῖν* is what is 'true' in the purest and most primordial sense; that is to say, it merely discovers, and it does so in such a way that it can never cover up. This *νοεῖν* can never cover up; it can never be false."¹¹⁸⁵

One might think, at first glance,¹¹⁸⁶ that Heidegger is referring to what Aristotelian-thomists call *simple apprehension*, but Heidegger's explanation of "knowing the world" betrays

¹¹⁸³Ibid., 90 [62]. In other words, for Heidegger, before we can talk about theoretical knowledge, we must first understand Dasein's pre-theoretical understanding of the world, which is described as Being-in-the-world.

¹¹⁸⁴Ibid., 85 [59].

¹¹⁸⁵Ibid., 57 [33].

¹¹⁸⁶Assuming that one is familiar with the basic Aristotelian-thomistic approach to the act of knowing which outlines three acts of the intellect: simple apprehension, judgement and reasoning.

his position as being quite far from this ancient approach to knowledge. Rather, says Heidegger, *νοεῖν* just is *λόγος*; that is, to know the world just is to address oneself to it and to discuss it. To better understand what Heidegger is saying here we must remind ourselves of what Heidegger has already said concerning *λόγος*. In his earlier discussion of *λόγος*, Heidegger began by tentatively saying that *λόγος* should be translated by discourse,¹¹⁸⁷ though it can be, and has been, translated in a number of other different ways. Rejecting the other possible translations Heidegger states that “*λόγος* as ‘discourse’ means rather the same as *δηλοῦν*: to make manifest what one is ‘talking about’ in one’s discourse... The *λόγος* lets something be seen (*φαίνεσθαι*), namely, what the discourse is about.”¹¹⁸⁸ Discourse is to make that which is being discussed accessible to the other person; it is, in a sense, to lift the hood of a car in order to let another see the engine. *Λόγος*, then, making known the world through discourse, just is what it means to know the world. Though it is obvious, from even a cursory glance at *Being and Time*, that Heidegger is attempting to engage in what might be called, *superficially*, “traditional ontology”, it is now becoming obvious that the influence of Immanuel Kant and Edmund Husserl is significantly affecting Heidegger’s understanding of the task and substance of ontology. As Blattner rightly observes, and as is becoming strikingly obvious, “Heidegger applied Kant’s transcendental turn to ontology and converted it into a study of the structure and rules of our *understanding* of Being... [such that] Ontology, as the science of the meaning of being, is the ‘analytic of pure understanding.’ Phenomenology, as the study of intentionality, will be the method of Heidegger’s inquiries.”¹¹⁸⁹

¹¹⁸⁷Ibid., 55 [32].

¹¹⁸⁸Ibid., 56 [32].

¹¹⁸⁹Blattner, *HBTRG*, 3.

Heidegger notes that the major difficulty with most, if not all, contemporary epistemologies is that they wrongly interpreted Dasein's Being-in (and towards)-the-world as an opposition between subject and object. In order to avoid this error Heidegger notes that we must begin with the notion that "knowing is a phenomenal character of a Being which is in and towards the world...[Indeed] If knowing 'is' at all, it belongs solely to those entities which know."¹¹⁹⁰ That is, "*knowing is a kind of Being which belongs to Being-in-the-world.*"¹¹⁹¹ Knowing, as a way of Being-in-the-world, is a determining of the nature of that which is known. In this section Heidegger not only seeks to show that Being-in-the-world needs to be explained before any positive theory of knowledge can be articulated, but he also seeks to show (1) how it is that knowing is a *making-determinate*,¹¹⁹² and (2) why epistemologies that create the object-subject chasm are misled.¹¹⁹³ Heidegger begins by noting that knowing is "a way of determining the nature of the present-at-hand by observing it."¹¹⁹⁴ He later notes that in knowing "Dasein dwells alongside the entity to be known, and determines its character."¹¹⁹⁵ This, of course, raises two very important question, which will only be answered once the Being-in-the-world of Dasein has been properly elaborated: First of all, what is meant by "determining the nature"? We can think of at least two possible ways of understanding this phrase: (1) "determining the nature" may mean "the act of setting out to discover the nature", or (2) "determining the nature" may mean making concrete (or perhaps even bringing into being) the nature of that which did not already have a nature (or which had the "material" for a nature which was as yet "unformed"). Unfortunately, Heidegger has not yet given us any hints as to how we should understand this

¹¹⁹⁰Heidegger, *BT*, 87 [60].

¹¹⁹¹Ibid., 88 [61].

¹¹⁹²Ibid., 88-89 [61-62].

¹¹⁹³Ibid., 89-90 [62].

¹¹⁹⁴Ibid., 88 [61].

¹¹⁹⁵Ibid., 89 [62].

notion, so we will leave this question as it is, with the intention of returning to it if Heidegger provides us with the conceptual material that would be necessary to answer this question.

Secondly, what does Heidegger mean when he talks about the “nature” or “character” of the entity that is known?

Continuing with our analysis of Heidegger’s approach to knowledge, and entering into a rather dense and continuous discussion of Heidegger’s Interpretation of knowledge, we note that Heidegger claims that this knowing as determining is only possible due to “a *deficiency* in our having-to-do with the world concernfully.”¹¹⁹⁶ We already know, because Heidegger has already briefly discussed the deficient modes of concern, that concern slips into its deficient modes when the are “the possibilities of concern are kept to a ‘bare minimum’.”¹¹⁹⁷ The translators of the english translation of *Being and Time* note that Heidegger’s point is “that in these cases concern is *just barely* (‘nur noch’) involved.”¹¹⁹⁸ By holding itself back from certain forms of concern Dasein finds itself, says Heidegger, in the only remaining mode of concern that is possible for Dasein: “tarrying-alongside”.¹¹⁹⁹ This deficient mode of concern, *Tarrying-alongside*, allows us to encounter entities in the world “purely in the *way they look* (*εἶδος*).”¹²⁰⁰ In other words, this Tarrying-alongside is the basis for “looking at” that which is encountered as present-at-hand in the world.¹²⁰¹ This “looking-at” can become a way of taking up a direction towards what is present-at-hand, or taking over a ‘view-point’.¹²⁰² A looking-at that takes up a direction towards the present-at-hand, or takes up a view-point, enters into what Heidegger calls a “mode of

¹¹⁹⁶Ibid., 88 [61].

¹¹⁹⁷Ibid., 83 [57].

¹¹⁹⁸Ibid., 83fn2.

¹¹⁹⁹Ibid., 88 [61].

¹²⁰⁰Ibid.

¹²⁰¹Ibid.

¹²⁰²Ibid.

dwelling autonomously alongside entities within-the-world.”¹²⁰³ In other words, the so-called theoretical knowledge that is so important to other Epistemological systems is not only secondary to practical familiarity, but, also, a deficient form of familiarity. Rather than the practical familiarity with beings that gives to these beings their very Being, Dasein ‘contemplates’, in a detached and disinterested way, beings, thus depriving them of their Being (the meaning they have in a practical pre-theoretical understanding context).

This leads us into a brief section in which Dasein engages in the qualification or description of what he takes to be knowing. He says, “In this kind of ‘*dwelling*’ as a holding-oneself-back from any manipulation or utilization, the *perception* of the present-at-hand is consummated. Perception is consummated when one *addresses* oneself to something as something and *discusses* it as such. This amounts to *interpretation* in the broadest sense; and on the basis of such interpretation, perception becomes an act of *making determinate*. What is thus perceived and made determinate can be expressed in propositions, and can be retained and preserved as what has thus been asserted.”¹²⁰⁴ The gist of this dense section is that when Dasein is in the mode of dwelling alongside the entities within-the-world its perception of these entities is brought into being by the addressing of some entity as itself and the discussing of that entity. As such, the act of perception just is the act of interpretation, and as interpretation perception is a making-determinate of the nature of that which is looked-at. The first point has been, so it would seem, proved. Knowing is a making determinate because knowing, in the act of perceiving, which is an interpreting, is a making-determinate. It is to be noted that two key terms, that we are starting to become familiar with, show up in our discussion of knowing as making-determinate: addressing and discussing. We have already learned that *λόγος* is an addressing and discussing—

¹²⁰³Ibid., 89 [61].

¹²⁰⁴Ibid., 89 [62].

discourse, and that *νοεῖν* (knowing the world) just is *λόγος*. So, in a sense, we have not discovered anything new as concerns what knowing is, we have only learned that knowing is a making-determinate, through the interpretation that is the *λόγος* that brings about perception when Dasein is dwelling within-the-world. In other words, we *know* as making determinate when we address ourselves “to something as something” and discuss it as it is. *Knowing is interpreting*.

Based upon the interpretation and making determinate of what is known we express our interpretation in propositions which are retained, not as a representation,¹²⁰⁵ but as Being-alongside that preserves the entity as it is interpreted. This leads us into Heidegger’s approach to the subject-object distinction. Heidegger notes that in this perceiving which makes determinate Dasein “is always ‘outside’ alongside entities which it encounters and which belong to a world already discovered.”¹²⁰⁶ That is, speaking of the interior Dasein which goes out of itself into the world to grasp the nature of some entity and to bring it back into itself misunderstands the fact, claims Heidegger, that the Dasein is never outside of the world, as it is essentially Being-in-the-world; nor is it ever inside of itself, unless we understand this being-inside as Being-in the World. We are reminded, in considering these comments, that Heidegger is approaching the question of Being as a question that is primarily dealing with Dasein’s understanding of Being—that is, the question of Being is “how does Dasein interpret its own existence?” It is, therefore, pointless to talk about some “mind-exterior reality” as if there was some meaning of Being that was exterior to Dasein. On the contrary, all meaning is given by Dasein in its *λόγος*, and, therefore, Dasein determines the meaning of Being by interpreting it through *λόγος*.

¹²⁰⁵Ibid.

¹²⁰⁶Ibid.

The World and its World-hood: I, 3

In this chapter Heidegger discusses the first of three key elements that must be explained in order to understand what is meant by “Being-in-the-world”: the world, and in-the-world. In this chapter we find a discussion of a number of key terms, such as: environment, ready-to-hand, signs, involvement, presence-to hand, etc. This discussion is followed by interaction with Descartes ontology, which Heidegger takes to represent the ontological tradition in general, of the *res extensa*, and concludes with a discussion of what is meant by the spatiality of Dasein and the “Being-of-Space”. In his introduction to this section of *Being and Time*, Heidegger lays out four different uses of the word ‘world’. He notes that he will be using world primarily in the third sense, unless there are single quotation marks around the word (in which case he is using this word in the first sense). Both the first and the third uses of the term ‘world’ are *ontical*. The first use of the term ‘world’, “signifies the totality of those entities which can be present-at-hand within the world.”¹²⁰⁷ Blattner proposes, following Dreyfus, to understand this first sense of the term world as “the system or set of things that are...*the universe of things*.”¹²⁰⁸ The third sense of the term ‘world’, which is the sense that Heidegger will be primarily using, can be understood “as that ‘*wherein*’ a factual Dasein as such can be said to ‘live’. ‘World’ has here a pre-ontological existentiell signification.”¹²⁰⁹ Blattner describes the third sense as follows, “the world is a concrete experiential context or milieu.”¹²¹⁰ The fourth use of the word ‘world’ is ‘worldhood’, and Heidegger simply uses the term ‘worldhood’, rather than complicate things. Blattner sums up, what he sees as Heidegger’s primary point concerning the world, as follows: “The world is not just a ‘universe’ of objects,’ but rather a social milieu. Although you are physically located in

¹²⁰⁷Ibid., 93 [64].

¹²⁰⁸Blattner, *HBTRG*, 43.

¹²⁰⁹Heidegger, *BT*, 93 [65].

¹²¹⁰Blattner, *HBTRG*, 43.

a system of things, your fundamental experience of yourself discloses to you the locale in which you live.”¹²¹¹

Heidegger contrasts the word “Nature” with “world”, noting that “If one understands Nature ontologico-categorially, one finds that Nature is a limiting case of the Being of possible entities within-the-world. Only in some definite mode of its own Being-in-the-world can Dasein discover entities as Nature... ‘Nature’, as the categorial aggregate of those structures of Being which a definite entity encountered within-the-world may possess, can never make *worldhood* intelligible. But even the phenomenon of ‘Nature’, as it is conceived, for instance, in romanticism, can be grasped ontologically only in terms of the concept of the world—that is to say, in terms of the analytic of Dasein.”¹²¹² The term ‘Nature’, then, can only be properly understood once one has grasped the concept of world, and it is only a limiting and limited approach to possible entities within-the-world. It should be noted that Heidegger is, in this case, only referring to one possible meaning of the term ‘Nature’—that meaning which is commonly understood to refer to the totality of finitely existing beings. There are other meanings of the word ‘nature’.

Now, what we are seeking to grasp is the worldhood of the world which is an essential structure of Dasein as Being-in-the-world. “‘Worldhood’ is an ontological concept, and stands for the structure of one of the constitutive items of Being-in-the-World. But we know Being-in-the-world as a way in which Dasein’s character is defined existentially. Thus worldhood itself is an *existentiale*.”¹²¹³ As such, if we are to understand the worldhood of Dasein, then “we must show *why* the kind of Being of with which Dasein knows the world is such that it passes over the

¹²¹¹Ibid., 48.

¹²¹²Heidegger, *BT*, 94 [65].

¹²¹³Ibid., 92 [64].

phenomenon of the worldhood both ontically and ontologically.”¹²¹⁴ In order to give a proper analysis of the worldhood of Dasein one must consider Being-in-the-world and the world itself “within the horizon of average everydayness—the kind of Being which is *closest* to Dasein.”¹²¹⁵ Heidegger has already discussed the average everydayness of Dasein, noting that “We call this everyday undifferentiated character of Dasein ‘*averageness*’ [*Durchschnittlichkeit*]. And because this average everydayness makes up what is ontically proximal for this entity, it has again and again been passed over in explicating Dasein.”¹²¹⁶ This average everydayness “however, is not to be taken as a mere ‘aspect’. Here too, and even in the mode of inauthenticity, the structure of existentiality lies *a priori*. And here too Dasein’s Being is an issue for it in a definite way; and Dasein comports itself towards it in the mode of average everydayness, even if this is only the mode of fleeing *in the face of it* and forgetfulness *thereof*.”¹²¹⁷ Heidegger notes that “That world of everyday Dasein which is closest to it, is the *environment*.”¹²¹⁸ As such, the analysis of the world of everyday Dasein, by which we will discover its worldliness, must begin with an analysis of the environment of Dasein, and the worldly structure of this environment.

Heidegger begins his analysis of the worldhood of the world of average everyday Dasein with an analysis of the environment of Dasein. The *environment* of Dasein is, basically, that which is immediately present-at-hand or un-present-at-hand to Dasein—what some might call the immediate surroundings of Dasein,¹²¹⁹ both what presents itself as equipment for Dasein, and that which is discovered to not be there when it is needed (so to say). In order to grasp the

¹²¹⁴Ibid., 94 [65-66].

¹²¹⁵Ibid., 94 [66].

¹²¹⁶Ibid., 69 [43].

¹²¹⁷Ibid., 69 [44].

¹²¹⁸Ibid., 94 [66].

¹²¹⁹Blattner essentially agrees with our explanation here, and, a comment that he makes, in his own explanation of these very concepts, might be of some help. He notes that “by ‘surrounded’ here we do not mean spatially surrounded, but existentially surrounded: the immediate world in which we are immersed and absorbed. (Blattner, *HBTRG*, 49.)”

environment of Dasein we must first understand how Dasein understands the entities that present themselves to Dasein in his environment. Heidegger calls the interactions that Dasein has with the entities that it encounters in its environment the ‘*dealings*’ of Dasein.¹²²⁰ These dealings are manifested, in a sense, in the different ways of Being of Dasein’s concern, “Such dealings”, says Heidegger, “have already dispersed themselves into manifold ways of concern.”¹²²¹ He qualifies this statement by noting that “The kind of dealing which is closest to us is as we have shown, not a bare perceptual cognition, but rather that kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use; and this has its own kind of ‘knowledge’.”¹²²² In our dealings with “Things” (yes, this is a technical term for most philosophers, which Heidegger argues should, rather, be called “equipment”), the entities that we encounter present themselves to us as things that are for something else. This line requires some elaboration.

“*Equipment*”, for Heidegger, refers to those entities that “we encounter in concern.”¹²²³ He notes that “Equipment is essentially ‘something in-order-to...’ [‘etwas um-zu...’]. A totality of equipment is constituted by various ways of the ‘in-order-to’, such as serviceability, conduciveness, usability, manipulability. In the ‘in-order-to’ as a structure there lies an *assignment or reference* of something to something.”¹²²⁴ And again, “Equipment—in accordance with its equipmentality—always is *in terms of* [aus] its belonging to other equipment: ink-stand, pen, ink, paper, blotting pad, table, lamp, furniture, windows, doors, room.”¹²²⁵ So, things, for Heidegger, are always encountered by Dasein as things that have some use for something, or that are for something.

¹²²⁰Heidegger, *BT*, 95 [66-67].

¹²²¹Ibid.

¹²²²Ibid., 95 [67].

¹²²³Ibid., 96-97 [68].

¹²²⁴Ibid., 97 [68].

¹²²⁵Ibid.

A second point that is important is the notion of *encountering*. Heidegger notes, and we have already highlighted this point in an earlier section, that something is “encounterable” when it can be “touched” by another entity. But this is only possible for an entity that is present-at-hand if the entity that is touching it has “Being-in” as its kind of Being. In other words, present-at-hand entities can only be touched, and therefore, encountered by Dasein, not by another present-at-hand entity.¹²²⁶ Heidegger goes on, in this chapter of *Being and Time* to note that a thing is encountered as a something for something only in the context of work, “That with which our everyday dealings proximally dwell is not the tools themselves [die Werkzeuge selbst]. On the contrary, that with which we concern ourselves primarily is the work—that which is to be produced at the time; and this is accordingly ready-to-hand too. The work bears with it that referential totality within which the equipment is encountered.”¹²²⁷ So, encountering is not just a coming up against something that is for something else, but, to be more precise, it is a coming up against a something that is for something else in the context of some task that Dasein is performing. Indeed, says Heidegger, “The work bears with it that referential totality within which the equipment is encountered.”¹²²⁸ We might say that equipment only finds its ultimate sense in the context of Dasein’s work.

Some clarifications also need to be made about *work*, or that which is produced. First of all, this task, or work, that is produced by Dasein has the same kind of Being that belongs to equipment¹²²⁹—it is “a using of something for something”.¹²³⁰ Secondly, and consequently, work, like equipment, is only encountered in some purposeful context of some intended end. Heidegger

¹²²⁶Ibid., 81 [55].

¹²²⁷Ibid., 99 [69-70].

¹²²⁸Ibid., 99 [70]. Blattner agrees with our assessment, noting that “to encounter a piece of equipment is to use it. To use it, moreover, is to use it for some task, and typically in such use we are immersed in what we are doing and paying little or no attention to the equipment itself. (Blattner, *HBTRG*, 52.)”

¹²²⁹Heidegger, *BT*, 99 [70].

¹²³⁰Ibid., 100 [70].

notes that, “A work that someone has ordered [das bestellte Werk] is only by reason of its use and the assignment-context of entities which is discovered in using it.”¹²³¹ In other words, neither equipment nor work ‘are’, except insofar as they ‘are’ grasped in the context of their purpose and existential context. This is what Heidegger means when he says that “Taken strictly, there ‘is’ no such thing as *an* equipment”,¹²³² nor, we might add, a work. Thirdly, work is dependent on materials, that is, the work is a manipulating of materials (that which is present-at-hand) with equipment (that which is ready-to-hand) for the production of something else (which is also ready-to-hand).¹²³³ At this point Heidegger discusses “Nature” noting that it can be construed as the pure Present-at-hand which is manipulated by the equipment (the ready-to-hand).¹²³⁴ This, however, does not allow Nature to Be as it is, but keeps it hidden.¹²³⁵ Concerning the work of Dasein Heidegger notes that “The work produced refers not only to the ‘towards-which’ of its usability and the ‘whereof’ of which it consists: under simple craft conditions it also has an assignment to the person who is to use it or wear it... Thus along with the work, we encounter not only entities ready-to-hand but also entities with Dasein’s kind of Being—entities for which, in their concern, the product becomes ready-to-hand; and together with these we encounter the world in which wearers and users live, which is at the same time ours.”¹²³⁶ This world that is discovered is the public world. As such, working Dasein discovers both the “*enviroming Nature [die Umweltnatur]*”, and the public world.¹²³⁷ Heidegger therefore concludes that the Being of equipment is *readiness-to-hand*, “The kind of Being which equipment possesses—in which it

¹²³¹Ibid., 99 [70].

¹²³²Ibid., 97 [68].

¹²³³Ibid., 100 [70-71].

¹²³⁴Ibid., 100 [70].

¹²³⁵Ibid.

¹²³⁶Ibid., 100 [71].

¹²³⁷Ibid.

manifests itself in its own right—we call ‘*readiness-to-hand*’ [*Zuhandenheit*].”¹²³⁸ It is important to note that Dasein cannot be, technically, ready-to-hand. Blattner notes that “If we saw someone treat another person as a piece of equipment, such behavior would stand out, in fact, shock us...So, if Jones treated Smith as a piece of equipment, not merely take advantage of him or mislead him, but rather pick him up and put him at the corner of a door, as if Smith just *were* a door-stop, this would shock us. It would represent a misunderstanding of *what sort of entity Smith is*.”¹²³⁹ We see, unfortunately, that humans do indeed treat each other as merely ready-to-hand, as is evident with all kinds of slavery (including sex slaves), abortion, and pornography (in which the human body becomes a piece of equipment that is only ready-at-hand, to be used for one’s own pleasure and then set aside when the pursuit of pleasure is finished).

Another way in which equipment is encountered in Dasein’s dealings with things is as something that is *un-ready-to-hand*—that is, as Dasein is attempting to accomplish its work it reaches out for some equipment only to discover that it is not there. Heidegger says that “to miss something in this way [to “find things which are missing—which not only are not ‘handy’ [‘handlich’] but are not ‘to hand’ [‘zur Hand’] at all.”¹²⁴⁰] amounts to coming across something un-ready-to-hand....The more urgently [Je dringlicher] we need what is missing, and the more authentically it is encountered in its un-readiness-to-hand, all the more obtrusive [um so aufdringlicher] does that which is ready-to-hand become.”¹²⁴¹ It is interesting to note that Heidegger describes the un-ready-to-hand not only as (1) that equipment which is missing, but also as (2) that “thing” which “‘stands in the way’ of our concern”¹²⁴² (that is, that present-at-

¹²³⁸Ibid., 98 [69]. Cf. Ibid., 101 [71]. Blattner agrees with us, stating that “Heidegger’s thesis is, then, that what it is for a typical entity in our environment *to be* is for it to be available, at our disposal, for use. (Blattner, *HBTRG*, 52.)”

¹²³⁹Blattner, *HBTRG*, 19.

¹²⁴⁰Heidegger, *BT*, 103 [73].

¹²⁴¹Ibid.

¹²⁴²Ibid.

hand entity that keeps us from accomplishing our work), and (3) as that present-at-hand entity “for which it [Dasein] has ‘no time’”¹²⁴³ (which is described as that which “does not belong here, or what has not as yet been attended to”¹²⁴⁴). That which presents itself as un-ready-to-hand is almost more “intrusive” than the ready-to-hand, for Dasein is forced to take notice of it. Indeed Heidegger describes it as follows, “Our circumspection comes up against emptiness, and now sees for the first time *what* the missing article was ready-to-hand *with*, and *what* it was ready-to-hand *for*. The environment announces itself afresh.”¹²⁴⁵

One might think of someone who has sat down to write a letter to a friend. They have set out their paper, made a cup of coffee and are ready to write. Reaching for their pen, their hand finds nothing where the pen is supposed to be. This emptiness makes the person pay attention to their surroundings. All of a sudden the ready-to-hand (the pen) is un-ready-to-hand (missing), and this forces the Dasein to take notice. Heidegger says that “With this obstinacy, the presence-at-hand of the ready-to-hand makes itself known in a new way as the Being of that which still lies before us and calls for us attending to it.”¹²⁴⁶ And this is the case whether or not the entity is ready-to-hand or un-ready-to-hand.

This “making itself known”, “lying before us”, and “calling us to attend to it” is what Heidegger calls the “disclosedness” of beings.¹²⁴⁷ Concerning *disclosedness*, Heidegger notes that this term, which is a technical term in *Being and Time*, means “‘to lay open’ and the character of having been laid open.’ Thus ‘to disclose’ never means anything like ‘to obtain indirectly by inference’.”¹²⁴⁸ The environment is always already disclosed¹²⁴⁹ for *circumspection*

¹²⁴³Ibid.

¹²⁴⁴Ibid., 103 [74].

¹²⁴⁵Ibid., 105 [75].

¹²⁴⁶Ibid., 103-104 [74].

¹²⁴⁷Ibid., 105 [75].

¹²⁴⁸Ibid.

¹²⁴⁹Ibid., 105-106 [75-76].

(which is essentially the way in which Dasein deals with equipment such that it is seen as a being something for something else—a form of practical knowledge or seeing¹²⁵⁰). The world, says Heidegger, “has already been disclosed beforehand whenever what is ready-to-hand within-the-world is accessible for circumspective concern.”¹²⁵¹ This leads Heidegger to note that Dasein is always already in the world, that it can “exit” the world and that it always come back to this world.¹²⁵²

This leads Heidegger to summarize his preliminary interpretation of Being-in-the-world as follows, “Being-in-the-world, according to our Interpretation hitherto, amounts to a non-thematic circumspective absorption in references or assignments constitutive for the readiness-to-hand of a totality of equipment.”¹²⁵³ This summary, worded as such, is so opaque as to be almost impenetrable. In light of what we have explained thus far, perhaps we could elaborate on this preliminary interpretation as follows: *Being-in-the-world is the practical, non-theoretical, way [non-thematic circumspective absorption] in which Dasein deals with its environment such that it sees the ready-to-hand entities [the readiness to hand of a totality of equipment] that surround it already in the context [in references] of some work that it is performing, and as useful [or assignments] for [constitutive for] the accomplishment of that work.*

Having proposed a preliminary understanding of Being-in-the-world Heidegger turns to a further elaboration of his notion of the *referential totality* and *assignments* that are constitutive of the ready-to-hand. These are seen to be important, as, notes Heidegger, “It became plain, moreover, that assignments and referential totalities could in some sense become constitutive for

¹²⁵⁰Blattner, *HBTRG*, 49.

¹²⁵¹Heidegger, *BT*, 106 [76].

¹²⁵²*Ibid.*, 106-107 [76].

¹²⁵³*Ibid.*, 107 [76].

worldhood itself.”¹²⁵⁴ In order to better understand the notions of reference and assignment Heidegger proposes that we consider the notion of *signs*. He begins by noting that “The word ‘signs’ designates many kinds of things: not only may it stand for different *kinds* of signs, but Being-a-sign-for can itself be formalized as a *universal kind of relation*, so that the sign-structure itself provides an ontological clue for ‘characterizing’ any entity whatsoever.”¹²⁵⁵ A preliminary analysis of the nature of signs sets up that which will be considered in the following section,

Signs, in the first instance, are themselves items of equipment whose specific character as equipment consists in *showing* or *indicating*. . . . Indicating can be defined as a ‘kind’ of referring. Referring is, if we take it as formally as possible, a *relating*. But relation does not function as a genus for ‘kinds’ or ‘species’ of references which may somehow become differentiated as sign, symbol, expression, or signification. A relation is something quite formal which may be read off directly by way of ‘formalization’ from any kind of context, whatever its subject-matter or its way of Being. Every reference is a relation, but not every relation is a reference. Every ‘indication’ is a reference, but not every referring is an indicating. This implies at the same time that every ‘indication is a relation, but not every relation is an indicating.’¹²⁵⁶

In light of these various relations Heidegger proceeds to analyse signs inasmuch as they are kinds of referring or relating. Heidegger notes that there are, at least, two distinct ways of referring: the reference of serviceability—that for which, and the reference of indicating.¹²⁵⁷ It is important to note that the former has already been found to be the foundation of the latter.¹²⁵⁸ The first is also found to be a “constitutive state of equipment”,¹²⁵⁹ but the latter needs to be submitted to a more rigorous analysis. “Indicating, as a ‘reference’, is a way in which the ‘towards-which’ of a service-ability becomes ontically concrete; it determines an item of equipment as f o r this ‘towards-which’ [und bestimmt ein Zeug zu diesem].”¹²⁶⁰ Other ways in which signs indicate,

¹²⁵⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵⁵Ibid., 707-108 [77].

¹²⁵⁶Ibid., 108 [77].

¹²⁵⁷Ibid., 109 [78].

¹²⁵⁸Ibid.

¹²⁵⁹Ibid., 109 [79].

¹²⁶⁰Ibid., 109 [78].

aside from serviceability-for-, include “detrimentality [Abtraglichkeit], usability, and the like.”¹²⁶¹ Signs, as referential indicating, lets that which is ready-to-hand be encountered in the environment of Dasein; that is, indicating signs open up the environment of Dasein such that it comes into Dasein’s concerned circumspection. “Signs of the kind we have described let what is ready-to-hand be encountered; more precisely, they let some context of it become accessible in such a way that our concerned dealings take on an orientation and hold it secure.”¹²⁶² Heidegger discusses how signs come to be established. One of the ways is by the production of equipment that will serve as a sign. Another way that he proposes is that “Signs also arise when one *takes as a sign* [Zum-Zeichen-nehmen] something that is ready-to-hand already.”¹²⁶³ When something is interpreted as a sign it is established “in a sense which is even more primordial.”¹²⁶⁴ Heidegger works, out, based upon these observations, and a consideration of the understanding of signs that is held by primitive man,¹²⁶⁵ a three-fold relationship between signs and reference “1. Indicating, as a way whereby the ‘towards-which’ of a serviceability can become concrete, is founded upon the equipment-structure as such, upon the ‘in-order-to’ (assignment). 2. The indicating which the sign does is an equipmental character of something ready-to-hand, and as such it belongs to a totality of equipment, to a context of assignments or references. 3. The sign is not only ready-to-hand with other equipment, but in its readiness-to-hand the environment becomes in each case explicitly accessible for circumspection.”¹²⁶⁶

Heidegger gives a form of preliminary definition of what a sign is: “A sign is not a Thing which stands to another Thing in the relationship of indicating; it is rather an item of equipment

¹²⁶¹Ibid., 114 [83].

¹²⁶²Ibid., 110 [79-80].

¹²⁶³Ibid., 111 [80].

¹²⁶⁴Ibid.

¹²⁶⁵Ibid., 113 [82].

¹²⁶⁶Ibid., 113-114 [82].

which explicitly raises a totality of equipment into our circumspection so that together with it the worldly character of the ready-to-hand announces itself.”¹²⁶⁷ Heidegger later completes this definition as follows: “A sign is something ontically ready-to-hand, which functions both as this definite equipment and as something indicative of [was...anzeigt] the ontological structure of readiness-to-hand, of referential totalities, and of worldhood. Here is rooted the special status of the sign as something ready-to-hand in that environment with which we concern ourselves circumspectively.”¹²⁶⁸ It follows, then, that if reference is foundational for signs, and signs are things that are ready-to-hand in Dasein’s environment which indicate or bring to light “*the ontological structure of readiness-to-hand, of referential totalities, and of worldhood*”, then in order to better understand worldhood, we will have to delve deeper into the notions of reference, referential totalities and worldhood. His discussion of references and indicative signs leads him to the conclusion that though signs are references or assignments, these latter (references or assignments) are not signs, but, rather, the ontological foundations of signs, and that “the state which is constitutive for the ready-to-hand as equipment is one of reference or assignment.”¹²⁶⁹ Reference, therefore, is ontologically presupposed in the ready-to-hand.¹²⁷⁰ This brings us to the final section of Heidegger’s analysis of worldhood.

Indeed, a proper understanding, according to Heidegger, of reference and assignment forces us to take *involvement* into consideration. He begins by laying out just what the meaning of *reference* and *assignment* is, “To say that the Being of the ready-to-hand has the structure of assignment or reference means that it has in itself the character of *having been assigned or referred* [*Verwiesenheit*]. An entity is discovered when it has been assigned or referred to

¹²⁶⁷Ibid., 110 [80].

¹²⁶⁸Ibid., 114 [82].

¹²⁶⁹Ibid., 114 [83].

¹²⁷⁰Ibid.

something, and referred as that entity which it is. *With* any such entity there is an involvement which it has *in* something.”¹²⁷¹ Blattner, discussing assignment, notes that “The paraphernalia of human life is ontologically distinguished by being what it is assigned to be by our practices; its being is involvement.”¹²⁷² In his explanation of *involvement* Heidegger seeks to reveal “Dasein’s very Being as the sole authentic ‘for-the-sake-of-which’”.¹²⁷³

To arrive at this conclusion Heidegger takes the reader through a dizzying analysis of involvement in terms of reference and assignment. He notes that when an entity—ready to hand—has been assigned or referred to something in a particular situation and as it is in itself, that entity is said to be involved as a “towards-which”. “If something has an involvement”, says Heidegger, “this implies letting it be involved in something.”¹²⁷⁴ We see here the next concept to be analyzed by Heidegger—“letting something be involved”—but we have not yet arrived at this question. First Heidegger notes that “That in which it [the being] is involved is the ‘towards-which’ of serviceability, and the ‘for-which’ of usability.”¹²⁷⁵ Each ‘towards-which’ of serviceability points towards another ‘towards-which’, which, says Heidegger, must ultimately point towards some ‘for-which’ which is the ultimate grounding of the entire series of ‘towards-which’.¹²⁷⁶ “But the totality of involvements itself goes back ultimately to a ‘towards-which’ in which there is *no* further involvement: this ‘towards-which’ is not an entity with the kind of Being that belongs to what is ready-to-hand within a world; it is rather an entity whose Being is defined as Being-in-the-world, and to whose state of Being, worldhood itself belongs.”¹²⁷⁷

¹²⁷¹Ibid., 115 [83-84].

¹²⁷²Blattner, *HBTRG*, 55.

¹²⁷³Heidegger, *BT*, 116-117 [84].

¹²⁷⁴Ibid., 115 [84].

¹²⁷⁵Ibid., 116 [84].

¹²⁷⁶The resemblance between this particular claim, and the claims concerning the various modes and kinds of Being that are found in Aquinas’s five ways is astonishing. Heidegger’s argument here seems to be based upon the very same principle which drives Aquinas’s arguments.

¹²⁷⁷Ibid., 116 [84].

Heidegger has already shown, and we are now quite familiar with this notion, that that Being whose very Being is Being-in-the-World, just is Dasein. As such, it should come as no surprise that Heidegger goes on to say “But the ‘for-the-sake-of’ always pertains to the Being of *Dasein*, for which, in its Being, that very Being is essentially an *issue*. We have thus indicated the interconnection by which the structure of an involvement leads to Dasein’s very Being as the sole authentic ‘for-the-sake-of which’”.¹²⁷⁸ It seems, then, that Dasein just is the very foundation of the involvement of the present-at-hand in a world, as it is the ultimate ‘for-the-sake-of-which’, which is the ground of the ‘towards-which’ of any equipment that is ready (or un-ready)-to-hand for the production of some work. That is, if there were no Dasein, then there would be nothing present-at-hand, no involvement, nothing ‘for-the-sake-of-which’, and nothing ‘towards-which’. That is not to say that entities that do not have the character of Dasein would not “exist”, but, that they would not be understood—they would have no meaning or significance. It is Dasein that gives meaning and significance to things. On this note, Heidegger leads us on to discuss the next concept that has presented itself in our discussion: “letting something be involved”, which will ultimately lead to an understanding of the worldhood of the world.

The key passage in this section, and one might say, of Heidegger’s entire analysis of the worldhood of the world, is a difficult paragraph in which Heidegger brings together everything that he has been proposing from the very beginning of this section, and one might argue, from the beginning of *Being and Time*. He says,

In understanding a context of relations such as we have mentioned, Dasein assigned itself to an ‘in-order-to’ [Um-zu], and it has done so in terms of a potentiality-for-Being for the sake of which it itself is... This ‘in-order-to’ prescribes a ‘towards-this’ as a possible ‘in-which’ for letting something be involved; and the structure of letting it be involved implies that this is an involvement which something *has*—an involvement which is *with* something. Dasein always assigns itself from a ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ to the ‘with-which’ of an involvement; that is to say, to the extent that it is, it always lets entities

¹²⁷⁸Ibid., 116-117 [84].

be encountered as ready-to-hand. *That wherein* [Worin] Dasein understands itself beforehand in the mode of assigning itself is *that for which* [das Woraufhin] it has let entities be encountered beforehand. *The ‘wherein’ of an act of understanding which assigns or refers itself, is that for which one lets entities be encountered in the kind of Being that belongs to involvements; and this ‘wherein’ is the phenomenon of the world.* And the structure of that to which [woraufhin] Dasein assigns itself is what makes up the *worldhood* of the world.¹²⁷⁹

We will take some time to unpack this dense section.¹²⁸⁰ First, note why this section is so important. Heidegger notes that by unpacking this flurry of relations of the Dasein’s understanding of the world we put ourselves in position to understand Being and the meaning of Being in general. This is the case because, “the possibility of giving these relations an explicit ontologico-existential Interpretation is grounded in this familiarity with the world; and this familiarity, in turn, is constitutive for Dasein, and goes to make up Dasein’s understanding of Being.”¹²⁸¹ This possibility, says Heidegger, “is one which can be seized upon explicitly in so far as Dasein has set itself the task of giving a primordial Interpretation for its own Being and for the possibilities of that Being, or indeed for the meaning of Being in general.”¹²⁸² So, if we succeed in giving these relations an explicit ontologico-existential Interpretation, says Heidegger, then we will be able to answer the question of Being, of Dasein’s Being in particular and of the meaning of Being in general. The relations explained in the dense text quoted above turn out to be that with which Dasein is primordially familiar, therefore, we might suppose, we have before us that which will help us discover the meaning of Being in general. What, then, is Heidegger proposing in this text?

¹²⁷⁹Ibid., 119 [86].

¹²⁸⁰In describing the section just preceding this dense section Blattner states that “Heidegger wants to draw attention to the way in which equipment, materials, tasks, and so on become significant or important in virtue of their roles in our activity, and how in virtue of those roles, they also point to one another. (Blattner, *HBTRG*, 61.)”

¹²⁸¹Heidegger, *BT*, 119 [86].

¹²⁸²Ibid.

We have spent most of this chapter considering what we might call the relationships of assignment to involvement.¹²⁸³ These relationships are bound up together, says Heidegger, in “a primordial totality”.¹²⁸⁴ Heidegger notes that “The relational character which these relationships of assigning possess, we take as one of signifying...The relational totality of this signifying we call significance. This is what makes up the structure of the world—the structure of that wherein Dasein as such already is.”¹²⁸⁵ Dasein, therefore, already finds itself in a world that has relational structure of relationships of assigning which by the totality of their signifying are significance.¹²⁸⁶ In other words, Dasein already finds itself thrown into a world that is significance and this significance is understood by Dasein as such.

The relationships of assigning are “for-the-sake-of-which” (usability of equipment), “in-order-to”, “towards-which” (serviability of equipment), “in-which”, and “with-which”. Heidegger notes that each of these finds its significance in the previous relationship,¹²⁸⁷ such that the relationship of “with-which” is where the ready-to-hand is understood to be when discovered in the relationship of “in-which” which is a letting it be involved in Dasein’s environment. Heidegger has already shown, and we have already noted, that the “towards-which” finds its ground in the “for-the-sake-of-which”, which is assigned by Dasein. With these notions in mind we can return to the passage quoted above.

In understanding a context of relations in relation to some entity that is ready-at-hand (a hammer or pencil, for example), Dasein first finds itself in a significant environment of relations. That is, Dasein discovers the hammer as ready-to-hand in the process of producing a shed; or

¹²⁸³Ibid., 120 [87].

¹²⁸⁴Ibid.

¹²⁸⁵Ibid.

¹²⁸⁶In his *Reader’s Guide* Blattner notes that, that which Heidegger calls *significance* is “the structure of the practical contexts in which we operate. (Blattner, *HBTRG*, 61.)”

¹²⁸⁷Heidegger, *BT*, 120 [87].

Dasein discovers the pencil as ready-to-hand as Dasein sits down to write a letter. The ready-to-hand entity (hammer or pencil) is assigned (given significance) to a potentiality of Dasein (that-for-the-sake-of-which). In other words, the hammer or pencil presents itself as significant as an *in-order-to* that which Dasein has assigned itself to (build a shed or write a letter). This in-order-to prescribes a possible towards-which which is made possible when Dasein lets the ready-to-hand entity be involved (in-which) in the relationship of with-which (“the structure of letting it be involved implies that this is an involvement which something *has*—an involvement which is *with* something.”¹²⁸⁸). This allows Heidegger to conclude that Dasein is always assigning itself from a “for-the-sake-of-which” to a “with-which”—that is, Dasein, as Dasein, is always letting entities be encountered as ready-to-hand in a world of significance. The “wherein” in which Dasein finds itself already, and in which he finds the ready-to-hand which is assigned to work, is the *World* of Dasein. Blattner defines the world as “a horizon of understanding, a space of possibilities, on the background of which we understand both paraphernalia and ourselves...The world is a unitary horizon for making sense of both human life and the paraphernalia with which we surround ourselves.”¹²⁸⁹ The potentiality of Dasein (for-the-sake-of-which) to which Dasein assigns itself, and the relational structure of significance in which Dasein finds himself, just is the *worldhood* of the world.¹²⁹⁰

This leads us to a brief analysis of *signification*. It is in the act of understanding that Dasein discloses these relationships of assigning and allows itself to make assignments in these relationships.¹²⁹¹ “The relational character which these relationships of assigning possess, we take

¹²⁸⁸Ibid., 119 [86].

¹²⁸⁹Blattner, *HBTRG*, 63. Cf. Ibid., 65.

¹²⁹⁰Blattner defines worldhood as “the being of the world. Significance is the thing of the world, hence worldhood. *To be* a world is to be a horizon characterized by significance. (Ibid., 65.)”

¹²⁹¹Heidegger, *BT*, 120 [87].

as one of *signifying*.”¹²⁹² This signifying takes place in the act of the understanding such that “In its familiarity with these relationships, Dasein ‘signifies’ to itself: in a primordial manner it gives itself both its Being and its potentiality-for-Being as something which it is to understand with regard to its Being-in-the-world.”¹²⁹³ That is, “Dasein gives itself beforehand its Being-in-the-world as something to be understood.”¹²⁹⁴ The character of the relationships between these relations is a relation of signifying. Dasein signifies to itself by understanding itself as already in this complex of relations in their structural relationship (Dasein’s world), and in so doing Dasein is the source of its own Being and its own potentialities for Being. Here *Dasein’s Being* is understood as Dasein’s manner of relating to the structure of relationships in which Dasein is, and *Dasein’s potentiality for Being* is understood as that for-which Dasein assigns the ready-to-hand in a relationship of towards-which. That is, the writing of the letter is Dasein’s potentiality for Being for which Dasein assigns the pencil such that the pencil is for the writing. The *act of understanding*, then, is that act by which Dasein creates a ‘world’ (a significant structure of relationships) in which the ready-to-hand has meaning for Dasein as equipment for the accomplishing of some work which Dasein will produce (which is the potentiality-for-Being of Dasein).¹²⁹⁵ This seems to be what Heidegger is saying when he states that “The relational totality of this signifying we call ‘*significance*’. This is what makes up the structure of the world—the structure of that wherein Dasein as such already is. *Dasein, in its familiarity with significance, is the ontical condition for the possibility of discovering entities which are encountered in a world with involvement (readiness-to-hand) as their kind of Being, and which*

¹²⁹²Ibid.

¹²⁹³Ibid.

¹²⁹⁴Ibid.

¹²⁹⁵It is important to note that Heidegger emphatically denies that this means that these relationships are only the products of thinking, “nor are they merely something thought, first posited in an ‘act of thinking.’ (Ibid., 122 [88].)”

can thus makes themselves known as they are in themselves [in seinem An-sich]. Dasein as such is always something of this sort; along with its Being, a context of the ready-to-hand is already essentially discovered: Dasein, in so far as it *is*, has always submitted itself already to a ‘world’ which it encounters, and this *submission* belongs essentially to its Being.”¹²⁹⁶ The beings that Dasein encounters present themselves as present-at-hand and ready-to-hand within some interpretative schema that is given to them by Dasein. Dasein finds itself already thrown into an understanding of the complex of relations which give significance to the beings which present themselves to Dasein in these relations. Heidegger notes that “the phenomenal content of these ‘Relations’ and ‘Relata’...are rather relationships in which concerned circumspection as such already dwells.”¹²⁹⁷

This signifying is, says Heidegger, the basis or foundation of words and language. “But in significance itself, with which Dasein is always familiar, there lurks the ontological condition which makes it possible for Dasein, as something which understands and interprets, to disclose such things as ‘significations’; upon these, in turn, is founded the Being of words and of language.”¹²⁹⁸ Heidegger will come back to this later, as will we.

Heidegger goes on to distinguish the three important ontological structures that have come to the fore in his approach to the Being of Dasein: readiness-to-hand, presence-at-hand and the worldhood of the world. The first two, says Heidegger, are “categories”, that is, they are essential states or ways of Being of those beings that do not have the essential character of Dasein.¹²⁹⁹ The latter is “an existential way of determining the nature of Being-in-the-world, that

¹²⁹⁶Ibid., 120-121 [87].

¹²⁹⁷Ibid., 121-122 [88].

¹²⁹⁸Ibid., 121 [87].

¹²⁹⁹Ibid., 121 [88].

is, of Dasein.”¹³⁰⁰ These three ontological structures are described as follows: “1. The Being of those entities within-the-world which we proximally encounter—readiness-to-hand; 2. The Being of those entities which we can come across and whose nature we can determine if we discover them in their own right by going through the entities proximally encountered—presence-at-hand; 3. The Being of that ontical condition which makes it possible for entities within-the-world to be discovered at all—the worldhood of the world.”¹³⁰¹

In order to clarify his explanation of the worldhood of the world Heidegger contrasts it with Descartes’ interpretation of the world as “*res extensa*”. Having presented a critique of Dasein’s interpretation Heidegger notes that part of it may be saved through an examination of spatiality. As such, he enters into an analysis of Spatiality, with which he will conclude this chapter, in which he considers the spatiality of the ready-to-hand, the spatiality of Being-in-the-world and the relationship between space and the spatiality of Dasein.¹³⁰²

Heidegger begins by analysing the spatiality of the ready-to-hand. In general, we might say that the spatiality of the ready-to-hand is constituted by its directionality, that it has been directed towards that which is to be used for as equipment.¹³⁰³ The ready-to-hand contains, already, the conception of closeness, but it is important to note that this concept of closeness is not something that is measurable. “What is ready-to-hand in our everyday dealings has the character of *closeness*. To be exact, this closeness of equipment has already been intimated in the term ‘readiness-to-hand’, which expresses the Being of equipment. Every entity that is ‘to hand’ has a different closeness, which is not to be ascertained by measuring distances.”¹³⁰⁴ Later

¹³⁰⁰Ibid.

¹³⁰¹Ibid.

¹³⁰²Ibid., 135[102].

¹³⁰³Ibid., 135-136 [102].

¹³⁰⁴Ibid., 135 [102].

Heidegger says that “all ‘wheres’ are discovered and circumspectively interpreted as we go our ways in everyday dealings; they are not ascertained and catalogued by the observational measurement of space.”¹³⁰⁵ The spatiality of the ready-to-hand is always determined by the significance in which the ready-to-hand is discovered as equipment which is directed towards some possibility of Dasein. In other words, the spatiality of the ready-to-hand is only discovered in Dasein’s concern for its own possibilities of Being-in-the-world. The ready-to-hand is close when it is interpreted, through its presentation of itself to Dasein, as equipment for Dasein’s work, and, perhaps we could say that a being is far off when it is not seen as ready-to-hand equipment.¹³⁰⁶ Heidegger moves on to an analysis of the spatiality of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world because it is only in light of this that the ready-to-hand is discovered in its’ spatiality.¹³⁰⁷

Heidegger notes that Dasein is in the world, in a sense, but not in the same sense as the beings in the world that are characterized as *ready-to-hand* and *present-at-hand*.¹³⁰⁸ Dasein, explains Heidegger, “is ‘in’ the world in the sense that it deals with entities encountered within-the-world, and does so concernfully and with familiarity.”¹³⁰⁹ Dasein’s spatiality is characterized by “*de-severance* and *directionality*.”¹³¹⁰ De-severance is an *existentiale*: a character of the Being of Dasein that is described existentially.¹³¹¹ Heidegger defines deseverance as follows,

¹³⁰⁵Ibid., 137 [103].

¹³⁰⁶Ibid., 140 [105-106].

¹³⁰⁷Dreyfus notes, concerning this section of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, that “The discussion of spatiality is one of the most difficult in *Being and Time*, not because it is deeper than any other discussion but because it is fundamentally confused. (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 129.)”

¹³⁰⁸Heidegger, *BT*, 138 [104].

¹³⁰⁹Ibid.

¹³¹⁰Ibid., 138 [105].

¹³¹¹Ibid., 70 [44]. Dreyfus, in his glossary of terms, proposes that the translation of *Ent-fernung* by “de-severance” is “unnecessarily strange (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, x.)”, and, therefore, proposes to use the more common term “distance”, with the appropriate hyphenation (mirroring Heidegger’s adjustment), thus “dis-stance” (Ibid., xi.). The term is supposed to mean “the *abolishing* of distance. He uses it this way to mean *the establishing and overcoming of distance*, that is, the opening up of a space in which things can be near and far. (Ibid., 130.)” Wild is much more animated than Dreyfus in his contempt of the English translation of this term, “To the English reader, this strange concoction suggests pictures of carcasses whose amputated heads or limbs are being somehow reconnected. But whatever the picture may be, the meaning is lost, and Heidegger’s penetrating account of human spatiality (pp.

“Proximally and for the most part, de-severing is a circumspective bringing-close—bringing something close by, in the sense of procuring it, putting it in readiness, having it to hand.”¹³¹² Heidegger mentions the way in which the invention of the radio has made the world so much “closer to hand” as a way in which Dasein *deseveres* the world. Today we might talk about the way in which the internet has made the world so much smaller and closer to hand—the internet and the television have brought the world to our doorstep, in a sense, and this is Dasein’s way of *desevering*. The point of de-severing is not that *everything* is brought, in a *measurable* sense, close to hand, but, rather, that an object of concern for Dasein is *existentially* brought close—under circumspective consideration. Dreyfus puts it this way, “Dasein brings things close in the sense of bringing them within the range of its concern, so that they can be experienced as near to or remote from a particular Dasein.”¹³¹³ Today, in our “modern” world, the entire world is, in some sense, de-severed through technology, as Heidegger notes in his examples. Heidegger notes that “bringing-close or de-severance is always a kind of concerned Being towards what is brought close and de-severed.”¹³¹⁴ The best example of what Heidegger is getting at in this description is found in the following page, “When, for instance, a man wears a pair of spectacles which are so close to him distantly that they are ‘sitting on his nose’, they are environmentally more remote from him than the picture on the opposite wall.”¹³¹⁵ In walking down an alley-way at night, the silhouette of a man at the other end of the alley-way is much closer to Dasein than

134ff, et passim) is plunged into a wholly unnecessary and baffling obscurity. (Wild, *MHBT*, 299.)” James Millikan, in a short article criticizing Wild’s overly critical attack on the English translation, agrees with Wild that *de-sever* is not a favorable translation (Millikan, “Wild’s Review of ‘Being and Time’”, 782.). As usual, I accept that Dreyfus is most likely right in suggesting this change of terminology, but, in order to allow the reader to follow along in the current English translation of *Being and Time* with greater ease, I will continue to use the awkward term *de-severance*. I must admit that, despite of the strangeness of this term, I find that it gets across the idea that Heidegger is attempting to portray—the removal (de-severance) of *existential* distance between Dasein and the being with which it is concerned.

¹³¹²Heidegger, *BT*, 139-140 [105].

¹³¹³Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 130-131.

¹³¹⁴Heidegger, *BT*, 140 [106].

¹³¹⁵*Ibid.*, 141 [107].

the buildings beside Dasein, the street beneath Dasein's feet, and even Dasein's very clothing. This is, we must remember, a phenomenological-existential analysis of the way in which Dasein is in the world. In just about every circumstance something is the immediate 'object'¹³¹⁶ of Dasein's concerned circumspection, which brings that thing closer to Dasein than anything else. What is being described here is that which happens when, in concentration, it seems as if the surrounding world fades into the background as Dasein's attention is brought to bear on just one thing. Heidegger notes that Dasein is essentially *desevering*,¹³¹⁷ that is, this is a way of Being of Dasein in which Dasein frequently finds itself.

This 'bringing close' that is an essential way of Being of Dasein is an important element in Heidegger's analysis of subjectivity and objectivity. He notes, first of all, that "*only in thus coming before us is the current world authentically ready-to-hand.*"¹³¹⁸ But, someone might argue, this is an entirely subjective phenomenon. The being that is brought before Dasein in *desevering* is not an "objective" analysis of the being, but a subjective giving of meaning to the being. Heidegger responds that "this 'subjectivity' perhaps uncovers the 'Reality' of the world at its most Real; it has nothing to do with 'subjective' arbitrariness or subjectivistic 'ways of taking' an entity which 'in itself' is otherwise. *The circumspective de-severing of Dasein's everydayness reveals the Being-in-itself of the 'true world'—of that entity which Dasein, as something existing, is already alongside.*"¹³¹⁹ Another way of putting this is that in *desevering* Dasein is making the world known as it truly is—Dasein is uncovering reality as it truly is. I do not think that we should understand Heidegger as proposing some form of *Perspectivism* in which we *make* our

¹³¹⁶Heidegger would certainly not be happy with my use of the term "object". However, I am afraid that he will just have to put up with my awkward attempts at explaining his obscure thought.

¹³¹⁷Cf. *Ibid.*, 143 [108].

¹³¹⁸*Ibid.*, 141 [106].

¹³¹⁹*Ibid.*

own realities, but, rather, as proposing that this “world” is such that it presents itself to us differently as we interpret the worldhood of the world in light of our very possibilities of Being, and this out of the world of significance in which we already find ourselves. That is, the world presents itself to us in different ways of being inasmuch as the beings that are in the world are given significance within the possibilities towards-which Dasein directs itself, and for which Dasein discovers equipment. This significance is already given to Dasein, Dasein discovers itself in this significance and Dasein “actualizes” itself by either submitting itself to this significance, or by projecting itself into its own potentialities out of, but from with-in, this significance. As such, Dasein’s de-severing of entities is nothing other than a discovering of the meaning of the world. This does not mean, of course, that Heidegger is not proposing a different form of *Perspectivism*, one in which we do not “make our own realities”, but rather, where we discover ourselves already in significant relations which determine how we “see” and “interpret” ourselves, others, and the things with which we are related. This is certainly a *form* of *Perspectivism*, but one in which, though our perspective is given to us already, we can affirm ourselves in this perspective, modify it, etc.

One sees, in the above quote, what could be arguably interpreted as the claim that the “world”, in some sense, is *already* “existing”, in some sense, and that in Dasein’s de-severing of the world Dasein discovers that this world is something that is already existing alongside Dasein. The *world* is, of course (we must keep this ever before our mind), the *wherein* in which Dasein discovers itself as already being in relation to beings which are seen as a “that which is for” some possibility of Being of Dasein. It is a complex of relations of beings which serves a purpose for some possible way in which Dasein can be. In de-severing some being Dasein discovers that it is already in some way of Being that is towards a way of Being.

As mentioned above, Dasein the other character of Dasein's spatiality is *directionality*.¹³²⁰ Dasein is direction because in the bringing close of anything there is a direction "towards a region out of which what is de-severed brings itself close [sich nahert], so that one can come across it with regard to its place."¹³²¹ The directionality of Dasein is the source of the notions of what we might call ontical directionality: left, right, front, back, up, down.¹³²² It is the directionality of Dasein that gives ontical directionality to beings that are ready-at-hand. "Left and right are not something 'subjective' for which the subject has a feeling; they are directions of one's directedness into a world that is ready-to-hand already."¹³²³ Heidegger concludes that "De-severance and directionality, as constitutive characteristics of Being-in, are determinative for Dasein's spatiality—for its being concernfully and circumspectively in space, in a space discovered and within-the-world."¹³²⁴

This brings us to Heidegger's concluding section on the worldhood of the world: an analysis of space and Dasein's spatiality. Here Heidegger sums up the ground that has been covered thus far arriving at the conclusion that the phenomenon of space is not going to help us discover the "primary ontological character of the Being of entities within-the-world."¹³²⁵ Rather, though space is one of constitutive element of the world, it is only accessible "if the environment is deprived of its world-hood."¹³²⁶ In other words, we only come to the notion of space by considering beings in a way that is not their primarily ontological way of Being. Space is, therefore, a secondary consideration, for, "With Being-in-the-world, space is proximally discovered in this spatiality. On the basis of the spatiality thus discovered, space itself becomes

¹³²⁰Ibid., 138 [105], 143 [108].

¹³²¹Ibid., 143 [108].

¹³²²Ibid., 143 [108-109].

¹³²³Ibid., 143 [109].

¹³²⁴Ibid., 144 [110].

¹³²⁵Ibid., 148 [113].

¹³²⁶Ibid.

accessible for cognition. *Space is not in the subject, nor is the world in space.* Space is rather ‘in’ the world in so far as space has been disclosed by that Being-in-the-world which is constitutive for Dasein.”¹³²⁷ Heidegger concludes that Space cannot possibly be foundational for Being, as it is only because of Dasein’s way of Being-in-the-world that space is itself discovered. As such, Dasein’s way of Being-in-the-world is the foundation and horizon, we might say, of space; not the other way around. It seems to follow that any consideration of Time or Temporality which portrays it as essentially spatial is inherently flawed. Time is prior to space, essentially other than space, and that upon which space is founded. As such, we should not approach the question of Being in terms of space, “If we are to understand the ontological problem of space, it is of decisive importance that the question of Being must be liberated from the narrowness of those concepts of Being which merely chance to be available and which are for the most part rather rough.”¹³²⁸ This brings us to the next chapter.

Being-with and Being-one’s-self: I, 4

Having worked through the previous section we are already expecting Heidegger to approach this question. Heidegger has just demonstrated that the Being of all beings is founded in Dasein. But, we want to know (and we have already hinted at this), is the individual or particular Dasein, therefore, the cause and ground of its own “world”? Dreyfus, in his interpretation of this section, notes that it is one of the most important sections of *Being and Time*, explaining, indeed, Heidegger’s most central idea.¹³²⁹ It is unfortunate, says Dreyfus, that this chapter “is not only one of the most basic in the book, it is also the most confused.”¹³³⁰ The main claim that

¹³²⁷Ibid., 146 [111].

¹³²⁸Ibid., 148 [113].

¹³²⁹Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 144.

¹³³⁰Ibid., 143.

Heidegger must make, and support, is that, according to Dreyfus, “the source of meaning does not reside in each particular Dasein”,¹³³¹ but, rather, that the source of meaning resides in Daseins Being-with other Daseins such that particular Dasein uncovers beings as what they are by learning from other particular Daseins what these beings are, and what they are for.¹³³² In this section, Heidegger looks at the relationships that are formed between the “who”, the “they” [*das man*] and Dasein. He notes that Dasein is essentially a “being-with-one-another”, but that because of this the “they” tends to absorb and dominate Dasein, forcing Dasein to conform to it, thus oppressing the way of Being of Dasein which Heidegger calls “Being-one’s-self”. Blattner, in his guide to *Being and Time*, notes that he does not think it proper to translate “*das Man*” as the “They”. Blattner notes that “Heidegger is quite clear in his descriptions of *das Man* that it is not ‘them,’ others from whom I am to be distinguished, but rather something more like everyone and no one. I will interpret *das Man* as the phenomenon of social normativity, and in order to avoid the incorrect suggestions of the phrase ‘the ‘They’,’ I will use ‘the Anyone.’”¹³³³ Blattner’s understanding of the notion that Heidegger is attempting to portray through the term *das Man* is accurate. Blattner is no doubt right to emphasize that by *das Man* Heidegger is articulating a concept that includes the ‘I’, but Heidegger is also attempting to convey the notion that the ‘I’ loses itself in the They, which is a degenerate way of Being of that Dasein who is overwhelmed and loses its identity to social pressures. The ‘I’ is indeed the they, but it is also absorbed by the

¹³³¹Ibid., 142.

¹³³²Ibid., 143. Cf. Frederick A. Olafson, *Heidegger and the Philosophy of Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 147.

¹³³³Blattner, *HBTRG*, 15. Dreyfus proposes, rather than the Anyone, “*the one* (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, xi.)”, and this for the same reasons as those mentioned by Blattner (cf. Ibid., 151-152.). John Wild concurs, in part, with Dreyfus, though he notes that “it is not normal in English, as in German, to speak of *the one* with the definite article. (Wild, *MHBT*, 303.)” He thus provides compelling reasons to use the term “one”, rather than either “the one” or the “they”. He notes that there is a link between Heidegger’s notion of *das man* and Kierkegaard’s explanation of “the impersonal modes of speaking and acting which dominate the public life of everyday. (Ibid.)” he then goes on to say, “Instead of saying in my own way what I really think, the anonymous one (*das Man*) in me says merely the kind of thing that one says on such occasions. (Ibid.)” Haugeland uses the same translation as Blattner, perhaps not without reason, as Haugeland was Blattner’s dissertation director (Haugeland, *Heidegger on Being a Person*, 17.).

‘they’ which must always be held in opposition to the ‘I’ at the same time as being identified with the way in which Dasein inauthentically is. It is, therefore, my humble opinion that though MacQuarrie and Robinsons’ interpretation of *das Man* as the *They*, is both awkward and grammatically incorrect, it conveys, much more adequately than Blattner’s suggestion of “the Anyone”, the experienced phenomenon that Heidegger is discussing, and has the added effect of being so out of place that the reader is forced to pay attention to what Heidegger is saying.¹³³⁴

There are some other reasons to maintain the use of the term “they”. Heidegger portrays *das Man* as something in which Dasein finds itself, as an integral part, but with which Dasein is also in relation (one might think of one piece of a pie, or one blotch of paint in a painting) such that Dasein can either be absorbed by *das Man*, thus losing its identity, or Dasein can free itself from *das Man* and Be authentically. It seems, that in such a perspective the translation “the They”, though not perfect, portrays an important element of the notion of *das Man*, whereas “the Anyone” removes the element of involvement and inter-relational conflicts and pressures that seem to be necessary parts of the notion of *das Man*. The “They” also portrays that lived phenomenon that most people are able to recognize, as they seek to discover just who they really are and as they seek to form their own identity, in the “oppression” of those that surround them (i.e., social norms,¹³³⁵ familial expectations, peer pressure, academic or work-related

¹³³⁴Furthermore, as usual, it is so much easier, for comparing a commentary on Heidegger’s *Being and Time* with the current English translation, to use the same terms as the translation—even if one is forced to note some qualifications. Until a “better (?)” translation is made available, it seems best to use the terminology that is proposed by the current translation.

¹³³⁵Blattner seems to restrain the notion of the “They” to “what we today would call patterns of *social normativity* (Blattner, *HBTRG*, 69.)” That is, “There is a way one does things. (Ibid.)” This seems to fit quite well with Dreyfus’s translation as “the one”. I, personally, don’t like the term “social normativity” as used to describe the “They”, because it commonly carries notions of *morality*. Heidegger is most certainly not talking about what should be done on a *moral* level (right or wrong), but, rather, about the way one interacts with beings on a practical level (usage)—how we understand the practical use of the beings (ready or present to hand) which surround us in our environment. This understanding is given to us by the They. I honestly don’t know if there is a better descriptive term for this phenomenon, though one might propose “custom” or “tradition”, or, as Blattner notes later, social “expectations (Ibid., 70.)”.

expectations, etc.).¹³³⁶ Dreyfus notes that most of the time we don't even notice ourselves being moulded into the norms of society, we just conform automatically.¹³³⁷ As such, we will use "the They" throughout this section to convey Heidegger's *das Man*. Though the "they" have this oppressive tendency to oblige conformity, the Dasein need not become a "they-self", says Heidegger, but can be an authentic self by modifying the "they".

The purpose of this chapter is to answer the question of the "who" of the everydayness of Dasein in such a way as to shed light on Dasein's Being-in-the-world. Heidegger notes, in introducing this chapter, that "Dasein is thus absorbed in the world; the kind of Being which it thus possesses, and in general the Being-in which underlies it, are essential in determining the character of a phenomenon which we are now about to study. We shall approach this phenomenon by asking *who* it is that Dasein is in its everydayness."¹³³⁸ We will here note how Heidegger goes about answering the question of the "who" in light of the "they" with which Dasein is, and which Dasein must modify by Being-authentic. In the first section of this chapter, which is divided into three sections, Heidegger outlines the proper, and, indeed, only, approach to the question of the "We", arguing that the question must be approached existentially and ontologically. "Dasein's 'Essence' is grounded in its existence. *If the 'I' is an Essential characteristic of Dasein, then it is one which must be Interpreted existentially.* In that case the 'Who?' is to be answered only by exhibiting phenomenally a definite kind of Being which Dasein possesses. If, in each case, Dasein is its Self only in *existing*, then the constancy of the Self no less than the possibility of its 'failure to stand by itself' requires that we formulate the question

¹³³⁶Haugeland defines the "They" (the Anyone, in his terminology), as follows: "The total assemblage of norms for a conforming community largely determines the behavioral dispositions of each non-deviant member; in effect, it defines-what it is to *be* a 'normal' member of the community. (Haugeland, *Heidegger on Being a Person*, 17.)"

¹³³⁷Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 152.

¹³³⁸Heidegger, *BT*, 148 [113-114].

existentially and ontologically as the sole appropriate way of access to its problematic.”¹³³⁹ From these claims about the method that is proper, to answering the question of the Who, in light of the Essential characteristics of Dasein, it follows that the ‘I’ must be interpreted existentially, and ontologically.

In the second section of this chapter Heidegger analyses how Dasein comes into contact with the Others. “By ‘Others’ we do not mean everyone else but me—those over against the ‘I’ stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does *not* distinguish oneself—those among whom one is too.”¹³⁴⁰ Indeed, the Others, it might be said, share the very same ontological status as Dasein. “These entities [entities that have their own kind of Being as Dasein which are encountered in Dasein’s world as that for which things are made] are neither present-at-hand nor ready-to-hand; on the contrary, they are *like* the very Dasein which frees them, in that *they are there too, and there with it.*”¹³⁴¹ It is important to note that Heidegger, in discussing Dasein’s relation to the Others, does not understand the Others to be essentially different from Dasein, or Dasein to be separate from, or not a part of, the Others. On the contrary, though Dasein is distinct from the Others, as a separate “self”, it is also always the case that Dasein is a part of the Others, and like the Others. He begins by noting that Dasein encounters the Others in its proximate environment. That is, “The Others who are thus ‘encountered’ in a ready-to-hand, environmental context of equipment, are not somehow added on in thought to some Thing which is proximally just present-at-hand; such ‘Things’ are encountered from out of the world in which they are ready-to-hand for Others—a world which is always mine too in advance.”¹³⁴² The Others are, as we have already seen, encountered as the for-which towards-

¹³³⁹Ibid., 152-153 [117].

¹³⁴⁰Ibid., 154-155 [118].

¹³⁴¹Ibid., 154 [118].

¹³⁴²Ibid. Cf. Ibid., 155 [119].

which the work produced by Dasein is directed. Dasein encounters the Others because Dasein is essentially a Being-with.¹³⁴³ Heidegger goes on to show the different ways of Being that characterize Dasein's encountering and Being-with-the Others (such as Being-alone). Heidegger distinguishes Being-with from Dasein-with as follows: "Being-in is *Being-with* Others. Their Being-in-themselves within-the-world is *Dasein-with* [*Mit-dasein*]."¹³⁴⁴ He further notes that "one must not fail to notice that we use the term 'Dasein-with' to designate that Being for which the Others who are [die seienden Anderen] are freed within-the-world. This Dasein-with of the Others is disclosed within-the-world for a Dasein, and so too for those who are Daseins with us [die Middaseienden], only because Dasein in itself is essentially Being-with."¹³⁴⁵ Heidegger goes on to note that it is due to the fact that Dasein is essentially Being-with that it is also Dasein-with "as encounterable for Others."¹³⁴⁶ He notes that the character of Being of Being-with is *solicitude*.¹³⁴⁷ Solicitude is a state of Dasein's Being which "is bound up with its Being towards the world of its concern, and likewise with its authentic Being towards itself."¹³⁴⁸ There are a number of deficient modes of Solicitude and a number of positive modes of solicitude. The deficient modes are: "Being for, against, or without one another, passing one another by, not 'mattering' to one another—these are possible ways of solicitude...that characterize everyday, average Being-with-one-another."¹³⁴⁹ The positive modes include two extreme possibilities: leaping in and leaping ahead.¹³⁵⁰ *Leaping in* "takes over for the Other that with which he is to concern himself. The Other is thus thrown out of his own position; he steps back so that

¹³⁴³Ibid., 156 [120].

¹³⁴⁴Ibid., 155 [118].

¹³⁴⁵Ibid., 156 [120].

¹³⁴⁶Ibid., 157 [121].

¹³⁴⁷Ibid.

¹³⁴⁸Ibid., 159 [122].

¹³⁴⁹Ibid., 158 [121].

¹³⁵⁰Ibid., 158 [122].

afterwards, when the matter has been attended to, he can either take it over as something finished and at his disposal, or disburden himself of it completely.”¹³⁵¹ *Leaping ahead* is characterized as leaping ahead “of him [ihm *vorausspringt*] in his existentiell potentiality-for-Being, not in order to take away his ‘care’ but rather to give it back to him authentically as such for the first time.”¹³⁵² Solicitude, more often than not, dwells in its deficient modes, which means that, in order to know oneself Dasein must Be with others in an understanding way (making “itself transparent” and not disguising itself¹³⁵³) which we might call Being-towards-others or empathy.¹³⁵⁴ Heidegger concludes that it is only as Dasein is already in the world with Others that it can be known and know itself.¹³⁵⁵ In fact, “Dasein-with has proved to be a kind of Being which entities encountered within-the-world have as their own. So far as Dasein *is* at all, it has Being-with-one-another as its kind of Being.”¹³⁵⁶ But, states Heidegger, Dasein is not itself when it is absorbed in the world of its concern. In being absorbed in this way its very own everyday being-with-one-another has been taken over by something else—the *They* [das Man].¹³⁵⁷

In the last section of this chapter Heidegger explores how Dasein is taken over by the They, and absorbed into the They. He makes two comments, at the start, which are important for understanding this section. First of all, an *existential definition* is one in which X is described in terms of certain ways in which it may be.¹³⁵⁸ Secondly, we encounter the Others as what they do, “the Others are encountered as what they are; they *are* what they do.”¹³⁵⁹ Heidegger claims that if Dasein notices, as regards those things that Dasein holds to be important, that Dasein is falling

¹³⁵¹Ibid.

¹³⁵²Ibid., 158-159 [122].

¹³⁵³Ibid., 162 [125].

¹³⁵⁴Ibid., 161-162 [124].

¹³⁵⁵Ibid., 162 [124-125].

¹³⁵⁶Ibid., 163 [125].

¹³⁵⁷Ibid., 163 [126].

¹³⁵⁸Ibid.

¹³⁵⁹Ibid.

behind (or is not quite as good as) those that surround it, then Dasein becomes enslaved to the Others (as Dasein becomes fixated with the ‘distance’ between itself and the Others) and loses its very identity.¹³⁶⁰ In this way Dasein’s Being-itself is absorbed by the They and Dasein no longer is itself. Indeed, if Dasein takes on the character of distanciality, then Dasein stands in subjection to the Others.¹³⁶¹ “‘The Others’ whom one thus designates in order to cover up the fact of one’s belonging to them essentially oneself, are those who proximally and for the most part ‘*are there*’ in everyday Being-with-one-another.”¹³⁶² This statement is interesting in that Heidegger seems to be saying that Dasein portrays the Others as other than Dasein, perhaps in a relationship of distinction, difference or opposition, in order to attempt to cover up the fact that Dasein is actually submitted to these Others, and, indeed, a part of them. In this case the identity of Dasein, the ‘who’, just is the They, “The ‘who’ is not this one, not that one, not oneself [man selbst], not some people [einige], and not the sum of them all. The ‘who’ is the neuter, *the ‘they’* [*das Man*].”¹³⁶³ Dasein simply becomes indistinguishable from the Others,¹³⁶⁴ “Everyone is the other, and no one is himself. The ‘*they*’, which supplies the answer to the question of the ‘*who*’ of everyday Dasein, is the ‘*nobody*’ to whom every Dasein has already surrendered itself in Being-among-one-another [Untereinandersein].”¹³⁶⁵

The ways of Being of the They are distanciality, averageness, and levelling down.¹³⁶⁶ These ways of Being constitute what Heidegger calls “publicness”.¹³⁶⁷ He goes on to say, confirming what we have already noted, that “Publicness proximally controls every way in which

¹³⁶⁰Ibid., 164 [126].

¹³⁶¹Ibid.

¹³⁶²Ibid.

¹³⁶³Ibid.

¹³⁶⁴Ibid.

¹³⁶⁵Ibid., 165-166 [128].

¹³⁶⁶Ibid., 165 [127].

¹³⁶⁷Ibid.

the world and Dasein get interpreted, and it is always right—not because there is some distinctive and primary relationship-of-Being in which it is related to ‘Things’, or because it avails itself of some transparency on the part of Dasein which it has explicitly appropriated, but because it is insensitive to every difference of level and of genuineness and thus never gets to the ‘heart of the matter’ [‘auf die Sachen’].”¹³⁶⁸ When Dasein is submitted to and absorbed by the *They* it adopts the interpretation of the world of the *They*,¹³⁶⁹ and is interpreted by the *They*. The Dasein, in this way, loses its identity by becoming the *They*. Heidegger condemns this way of Being as an inauthentic way of Being of Dasein, “In these modes one’s way of Being is that of inauthenticity and failure to stand by one’s Self.”¹³⁷⁰ Or, again, “The Self of everyday Dasein is the *they-self*, which we distinguish from the *authentic Self*—that is, from the Self which has been taken hold of in its own way [eigens ergriffenen].”¹³⁷¹

One might wonder how one can authentically Be-oneself, if one is constantly absorbed in, and submitted by, the *They*. One might think that one must liberate oneself from the *They*, but this is not what Heidegger proposes. On the contrary, one cannot authentically be-one’s-self by escaping from the *They*, but, rather, only by modifying the *They*. Says Heidegger, “*Authentic Being-one’s Self* does not rest upon an exceptional condition of the subject, a condition that has been detached from the ‘they’; *it is rather an existentiell modification of the ‘they’—of the ‘they’ as an essential e x i s t e n t i a l e.*”¹³⁷² How does Dasein modify the ‘they’? There is, perhaps, a hint at how this is done in an important comment concerning how Dasein clears away

¹³⁶⁸Ibid.

¹³⁶⁹Note these comments by Heidegger, “If Dasein is familiar with itself as they-self, this means at the same time that the ‘they’ itself prescribes that way of interpreting the world and Being-in-the-world which lies closest. Dasein is for the sake of the ‘they’ in an everyday manner, and the ‘they’ itself articulates the referential context of significance. (Ibid., 167 [129].)”

¹³⁷⁰Ibid., 166 [128].

¹³⁷¹Ibid., 167 [129].

¹³⁷²Ibid., 168 [130].

concealments and obscurities. Heidegger states that “If Dasein discovers the world in its own way [eigens] and brings it close, if it discloses to itself its own authentic Being, then this discovery of the ‘world’ and this disclosure of Dasein are always accomplished as a clearing-away of concealments and obscurities,¹³⁷³ as a breaking up of the disguises with which Dasein bars its own way.”¹³⁷⁴ Dasein is its own self when it modifies the ‘They’ by (1) discovering the world in its own way, and (2) and discloses itself in its own authentic Being. This is a modification of the ‘They’ in the same way that adding spice to a meal changes the taste of the meal. The spice brings something of its own to the overall flavour of the meal. In the same way, Dasein does not turn away from the They, but changes the They by becoming authentically itself. It can only authentically be itself within the They, but by distinguishing itself from the They, and interpreting the world in its own way.

Before moving on to the next section we need to point out an important observation that is brought out by Dreyfus; namely, that the They is the source, or, we might say, the ever-changing ground of all Being¹³⁷⁵: Intelligibility and Meaning (Significance).¹³⁷⁶ Dreyfus notes that “the constant control the one exerts over each Dasein makes a coherent referential whole, shared for-the-sake-of-whichs, and thus, ultimately, significance and intelligibility possible.”¹³⁷⁷ Dreyfus quotes, as support for this point, Heidegger’s comment, made almost in passing, to the effect that

¹³⁷³Blattner notes that the metaphor of the *clearing* is very important for Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein. He explains that “Heidegger offers the metaphor of a clearing in the forest to make the point that we experience ourselves as situated *here* along with things around us, *yonder*, situated together, rather than as standing over against objects apart from us to which we must reach out by means of a mysterious capacity of intentional transcendence. (Blattner, *HBTRG*, 76.)”

¹³⁷⁴Heidegger, *BT*, 167 [129].

¹³⁷⁵For Dreyfus, the Being of all beings just is intelligibility, and this intelligibility “depends upon a fundamental way of being, namely, existence (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 28.)”. Note, especially, his comment, “A perfect instance of what is concealed but can be revealed is ‘not just this being or that, but rather the *being* of beings’ (59) [35], ‘that which determines beings as beings, that on the basis of which beings are already understood’ (25-26) [6]. That is, the phenomenon par excellence is the modes of intelligibility of entities and the background understanding on the basis of which each sort of being can show up as what it is. (Ibid., 32.)” Cf. Ibid., 10, 12.

¹³⁷⁶Cf. Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 161-162.

¹³⁷⁷Ibid., 161.

“the ‘one’ itself articulates the referential nexus of significance.”¹³⁷⁸ This is what allows Heidegger, and Dreyfus with him, to claim talk about the groundlessness of the ground. That is, “What gets covered up in everyday understanding is not some deep intelligibility as the tradition has always held; it is that the ultimate ‘ground’ of intelligibility is simply shared practices. There is no *right* interpretation. Average intelligibility is not inferior intelligibility; it simply obscures its own groundlessness... The only deep interpretation left is that there is no deep interpretation.”¹³⁷⁹ There is not “subjectivism” proper, as interpretation is not left up to the individual subject which is an “I” *contra mundum*, but neither can we talk about some objectively unchanging ground of all interpretations. The reality of the world is that the ground of all interpretations is a constantly changing, never-staying-the-same, groundless ground.

Being-in: I, 5

Heidegger notes that he has now laid out the primary relations of Being-in-the-world: Being alongside the world (concern), Being-with (solicitude), and Being-one’s-Self (‘who’).¹³⁸⁰ Here Heidegger will attempt to characterize Being-in *phenomenologically*, which requires him to lay out the “existential constitution of the ‘there’”.¹³⁸¹ He notes that “the entity which is essentially constituted by Being-in-the-world *is* itself in every case its ‘there’”.¹³⁸² Talk of a “there” implies a spatiality. We have already considered Dasein’s essential spatiality as not so much a being in some physical space as a being in relation to that which reveals itself to it. Indeed, we saw that the traditional notion of spatiality is only possible if Dasein understands

¹³⁷⁸Ibid. Italics are Dreyfus’s. This quote is taken from Heidegger, *BT*, 167 [129].

¹³⁷⁹Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 157.

¹³⁸⁰Heidegger, *BT*, 169 [131].

¹³⁸¹Ibid., 170-171 [132].

¹³⁸²Ibid., 171 [132].

itself in its existential spatiality. So, “‘Here’ and ‘yonder’ are possible only in a ‘there’—that is to say, only if there is an entity which has made a disclosure of spatiality as the Being of the ‘there’.”¹³⁸³ Dasein, then, is essentially a disclosing, a clearing away. It is, says Heidegger, that which we refer to when we talk about illumination or the *lumen naturale* in man, by which we mean “the existential-ontological structure of this entity, that it *is* in such a way as to be its ‘there’.” To say that it is ‘illuminated’ [‘erleuchtet’] means that *as* Being-in-the-world it is cleared [gelichtet] in itself, not through any other entity, but in such a way that it *is* itself the clearing...*Dasein is its disclosedness.*”¹³⁸⁴ From this statement Heidegger, and the oft repeated claim that the essence of Dasein is existence,¹³⁸⁵ he deduces that “the existential proposition, ‘Dasein is its disclosedness’ means at the same time that the Being which is an issue for this entity in its very Being is to be its ‘there’.”¹³⁸⁶ In this chapter Heidegger seeks to explain Being-in as the Being of the there.¹³⁸⁷ In order to accomplish this task he must explain the two constitutional and equiprimordial ways of “Being-there”, which are both characterized by discourse: Understanding and States of Mind (Moods or Humours).¹³⁸⁸ He will give some space to a consideration of “fear” as a typical state of mind.

¹³⁸³Ibid.

¹³⁸⁴Ibid., 171 [133].

¹³⁸⁵Ibid.

¹³⁸⁶Ibid.

¹³⁸⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸⁸Ibid., 171-172 [133]. Almost none of the most prominent commentators on Heidegger’s *Being and Time* really like how MacQuarrie and Robinson have translated the German term “*Befindlichkeit*”, and almost all of them propose other translations: “*affectedness* (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, x. Cf. Dreyfus’s discussion of how to translate this term at: Ibid., 168-169.)”, “*disposedness* (Blattner, *HBTRG*, 15.)”, “*feeling* (Wild, *MHBT*, 306.)”. Wild states that “to translate *Befindlichkeit* by ‘state of mind’ is not only misleading but contrary to the clearly expressed intention of the author. (Wild, *MHBT*, 301.)” Millikan, however, thinks that it is difficult to posit a term that will truly portray what Heidegger is getting at without being theory-laden, and thus confusing (Millikan, *WRBT*, 783.). He concludes that, “‘State’ for *Verfassung*, as well as in ‘state of mind’ for *Befindlichkeit*, is quite a shock at first. Perhaps it cannot be rejuvenated, but the hope is comprehensible. (Ibid., 784.)” We maintain the use of State-of-mind for reasons that we have already mentioned repeatedly. Also, some later comments made by Blattner concerning the German word ‘*Befindlichkeit*’, makes us think that this translation is not as bad as it is frequently made out to be. Blattner notes that, in one sense of the phrase state-of-mind, “The phrase ‘state of mind’ means something very much like ‘mood,’ with an emphasis on one’s well-being or ‘how one is faring.’ This connotation of ‘state of mind,’...is very close to what Heidegger means by ‘*Befindlichkeit*.’ (Ibid., 79.)” He notes that Heidegger is, essentially, referring to a

In his explanation of States-of-minds or Moods, he notes that “What we indicate *ontologically* by the term ‘state-of-mind’ is *ontically* the most familiar and everyday sort of thing; our mood, our Being-attuned.”¹³⁸⁹ Dasein always has some mood, which “makes manifest ‘how one is, and how one is faring’ [‘wie einem ist und wird’]. In this ‘how one is’, having a mood brings Being to its ‘there’.”¹³⁹⁰ Blattner defines a State-of-mind (disposedness in his terms), as “our always being attuned to the way things matter to us, primarily by way of our moods.”¹³⁹¹ Later he notes that “Phenomenologically, moods are atmospheres in which we are steeped, not interior conditions. Heidegger is thinking of the way in which a person’s mood sets the tone for her environment.”¹³⁹² Dreyfus, notes the difficulty of translating a term which, for Heidegger, “conveys *being found in a situation where things and options already matter*.”¹³⁹³ The importance of states-of-mind is found in their first essential characteristic, “that *they disclose Dasein in its thrownness, and—proximally and for the most part—in the manner of an evasive turning-away*.”¹³⁹⁴ By “thrownness” Heidegger means “the *facticity of its being delivered over*.”¹³⁹⁵ What he means by “Being delivered over” is that which happens when Dasein has a mood in relation to some Being, “In having a mood, Dasein is always disclosed moodwise as that entity to which it has been delivered over in its Being; and in this way it has been delivered over to the Being which, in existing, it has to be.”¹³⁹⁶ In other words, to be delivered over is to become

condition or state of existential Being (Ibid., 79-80.). It would, therefore, be an existential-ontological category of Dasein.

¹³⁸⁹Heidegger, *BT*, 172 [134].

¹³⁹⁰Ibid., 173 [134].

¹³⁹¹Blattner, *HBTRG*, 15.

¹³⁹²Ibid., 77.

¹³⁹³Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 168.

¹³⁹⁴Heidegger, *BT*, 175 [136].

¹³⁹⁵Ibid., 174 [135]. Blattner says that, “by ‘thrownness’ Heidegger means that we are ‘subject to’ life, that it ‘burdens’ us in the sense that we cannot extricate ourselves from caring about it. Indeed, at any moment we are always already attuned to and disposed in the world. (Blattner, *HBTRG*, 78.)” We will see Blattner’s description confirmed through our analysis of Heidegger’s explanation.

¹³⁹⁶Heidegger, *BT*, 173 [134].

that which it is disclosed, through its mood, as being. By “Facticity”, as we have already seen, Heidegger is referring to “the factuality¹³⁹⁷ of such a Fact...This is a definite way of Being [Seinsbestimmtheit], and it has a complicated structure which cannot even be grasped as a problem until Dasein’s basic existential states have been worked out.”¹³⁹⁸ Indeed, “The concept of ‘facticity’ implies that an entity ‘within-the-world’ has Being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its ‘destiny’ with the Being of those entities which it encounters within its own world.”¹³⁹⁹ In the chapter that we are considering Heidegger maintains that “*Facticity is not the factuality of the f a c t u m b r u t u m of something present-at-hand, but a characteristic of Dasein’s Being—one which has been taken up into existence, even if proximally it has been thrust aside.*”¹⁴⁰⁰ With these definitions before us we can translate Heidegger’s statement above about the importance of states of mind as follows: “that *they disclose* [lay open,¹⁴⁰¹ make evident, or unveil] *Dasein in its thrownness* [the existential Being-in-the-world fact that Dasein has become that which it is disclosed, through its mood, as being], *and—proximally and for the most part—in the manner of an evasive turning-away.*”¹⁴⁰²

Heidegger outlines two other essential characteristics of States of Minds. The first of these is that moods are already disclosive as a directing towards something.¹⁴⁰³ The latter is a letting something be encountered, and openness to the world.¹⁴⁰⁴ Heidegger also states that a Dasein, or, one might say, anything in particular, can only have states of minds if it has senses (that is, if it can be affected by something in the world).¹⁴⁰⁵ The only way in which it is possible

¹³⁹⁷*Factuality* seems to refer to the “act” (?) of “being a fact. (Ibid., 82 [56].)”

¹³⁹⁸Ibid., 82 [56].

¹³⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁴⁰⁰Ibid., 174 [135].

¹⁴⁰¹Ibid., 105 [75].

¹⁴⁰²Ibid., 175 [136].

¹⁴⁰³Ibid., 176 [137].

¹⁴⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁰⁵Ibid., 176-177 [137].

for Dasein to not be affected is if it has “not already submitted itself [sich schon angewiesen] to having entities within-the-world ‘matter’ to it in a way which its moods have outlined in advance. *Existentially, a state-of-mind implies a disclosive submission to the world, out of which we can encounter something that matters to us.*”¹⁴⁰⁶ But this is simply not possible, as Dasein is always, already in some state of mind or mood and, thus, always, already affected. This explains why Dasein’s moods are always fluctuating, “It is precisely when we see the ‘world’ unsteadily and fitfully in accordance with our moods, that the ready-to-hand shows itself in its specific worldhood, which is never the same from day to day.”¹⁴⁰⁷ This is a key element of Heidegger’s approach to Being. The world itself [“*The ‘wherein’ of an act of understanding which assigns or refers itself*” such that “*one lets entities be encountered in the kind of Being that belongs to involvements*”,¹⁴⁰⁸] when viewed in accordance with our moods [that which “makes manifest ‘how one is, and how one is faring’ [‘wie einem ist und wird’].”¹⁴⁰⁹] is never the same—the world itself is, for Dasein, constantly changing. This is, of course, of immense importance for our “theoretical” knowledge of the world,¹⁴¹⁰ for, says Heidegger, “even the purest *θεωρία* [theory] has not left all moods behind it.”¹⁴¹¹ It is not possible, even in a non-circumspective looking at the world, to leave all states-of-mind behind, and these states-of-mind determine how the world appears to us—how we interpret the world. We are not talking here about what some would call

¹⁴⁰⁶Ibid., 177 [137-138]. These statements would imply that if there is a God of some sort, either that the world and nothing in it would “matter” to this God, or that, if anything in the world “mattered” to this God, then this God would have moods, be affected, and be submitted to the world, in such a way that the traditional doctrine of impassibility could not be affirmed of this God. One is inclined to see in Heidegger’s philosophical positions here, the beginnings of the recent movement in Christian theology towards a suffering God who is highly concerned with the world, and submits himself to the conditions of the world in order to encounter us.

¹⁴⁰⁷Ibid., 177 [138].

¹⁴⁰⁸Ibid., 119 [86].

¹⁴⁰⁹Ibid., 173 [134].

¹⁴¹⁰“Theoretical behaviour is just looking, without circumspection. (Ibid., 99 [69].)” *Circumspection* is the sight with which the dealings with equipment accommodate themselves to the assignments of the ‘in-order-to’ (cf. Ibid., 98 [69].). So, theoretical behaviour is just looking at the present-at-hand in the world without giving an assignment of ‘in-order-to’ to the equipment that is seen.

¹⁴¹¹Ibid., 177 [138].

objective or subjective ways of viewing the world, for, in Heidegger's understanding this is a false dichotomy; but, rather, Heidegger seems to be saying that there is no possible way of looking at the world such that it is not already interpreted according to way of Being-in-the-world. All that appears to Dasein, appears as already interpreted, as already in a schema of relations.¹⁴¹² Blattner using the example of what happens when we meet a dog that we do not know, puts it this way, "the would be affectively neutral cognitive content of the experience, that is, *what you see*, is in part a function of your fear or comfort. The dog *looks different*, now that you no longer fear him. The content of experience is shot through with import 'all the way down.'"¹⁴¹³ In other words, how we "see" some being is, in part, affected by our mood—beings present themselves to us differently based upon our state-of-mind or disposition towards them. Heidegger concludes this preliminary examination of states-of-mind with the statement "A state-of-mind not only discloses Dasein in its thrownness and its submission to the world which is already disclosed with its own Being; it is itself the existential kind of Being in which Dasein constantly surrenders itself to the 'world' and lets the 'world' 'matter' to it in such a way that somehow Dasein evades its very self."¹⁴¹⁴ This point is of great importance for our understanding of Being, and therefore, for our elaboration of Heidegger's approach to the question of Being. Heidegger goes on to provide an analysis of fear as one mode of State of mind, as a mood or emotion.¹⁴¹⁵

Turning to the second equiprimordial structure of the Being of the 'there'—*understanding*—Heidegger reminds us what he means by 'equiprimordial', namely that these two

¹⁴¹²Heidegger here provides an interesting application of this theory to the notion of rhetoric as found in Aristotle (Ibid., 178 [138-139]).

¹⁴¹³Blattner, *HBTRG*, 82.

¹⁴¹⁴Heidegger, *BT*, 178 [139].

¹⁴¹⁵Ibid., 179-182 [140-142].

structures always accompany each other, “A state-of-mind always has its understanding, even if it merely keeps it suppressed. Understanding always has its mood.”¹⁴¹⁶ He begins by noting that “‘understanding’ in the sense of *one* possible kind of cognizing among others (as distinguished, for instance, from ‘explaining’), must, like explaining, be interpreted as an existential derivative of that primary understanding which is one of the constituents of the Being of the ‘there’ in general.”¹⁴¹⁷ But just what is meant by “understanding”? Certainly not what traditional philosophy has proposed. Heidegger begins by noting some of the possible ontical meanings of understanding, “When we are talking ontically we sometimes use the expression ‘understanding something’ with the signification of ‘being able to manage something’, ‘being a match for it’, ‘being competent to do something’.”¹⁴¹⁸ He concludes, from this, that understanding, as an *existential* [by which we mean a character of the Being of Dasein which is defined in terms of existentiality.¹⁴¹⁹], is *having a competence over something*. He qualifies this statement by noting that “that which we have such competence over is not a ‘what’, but Being as existing.”¹⁴²⁰ So, *understanding*, for Heidegger, should be understood as Dasein’s competence for Being as existing [by existing he means the comportment of Dasein towards some way of Being¹⁴²¹]. Blattner seems to come to a similar conclusion in his commentary on the first part of *Being and Time*, for he says that “In Heidegger’s use of the verb ‘to understand,’ we do not just understand ideas, concepts, and words, but rather (mostly) understand things or phenomena... Understanding in this case is ability or know-how, competence.”¹⁴²² Dreyfus puts it quite well when,

¹⁴¹⁶Ibid., 182 [142-143].

¹⁴¹⁷Ibid., 182 [143].

¹⁴¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁴¹⁹Ibid., 70 [44].

¹⁴²⁰Ibid., 183 [143].

¹⁴²¹Ibid., 32 [12].

¹⁴²²Blattner, *HBTRG*, 17-18. Blattner later notes that “In Heidegger’s everyday use of the word, to understand something is to be able to do or manage or master it. (Ibid., 85.)” In his 1996 article he states that “Heidegger makes clear that by ‘understanding’ he does not have in mind some form of awareness or

distinguishing understanding from States-of-mind, he says that understanding refers to that fact that “*I know how* to go about what I am doing, I am able to do what is appropriate in each situation.”¹⁴²³ This is an important concept to grasp if we truly wish to “understand (traditional understanding of understand)” Heidegger. Understanding is “*the existential Being of Dasein’s own potentiality-for-Being; and it is so in such a way that this Being discloses in itself what its Being is capable of.*”¹⁴²⁴ Understanding is Dasein’s capacity [a potential] for comporting itself towards some possible way of Being-in-the-world; and therefore, declares Heidegger, Understanding is a form of projection [a being-thrown into its possibilities] by which Dasein is its potentiality-for-Being in some way towards its world. Understanding, as projecting, is “the kind of Being of Dasein in which it *is* its possibilities as possibilities.”¹⁴²⁵ Before continuing it is worth mentioning that there are both authentic and inauthentic ways of Being understanding, and there are both genuine and not-genuine ways of being authentically or inauthentically understanding.¹⁴²⁶ Understanding, as *projective*, is what is meant when we talk about Dasein’s existential *sight*.¹⁴²⁷ It is important to note that “The sight which is related primarily and on the whole to existence we call ‘*transparency*’ [*Durchsichtigkeit*]. We choose this term to designate ‘knowledge of the Self’...so as to indicate that here it is...a matter of...seizing upon the full disclosedness of Being-in-the-world *throughout all* the constitutive items which are essential to it, and doing so with understanding.”¹⁴²⁸ *Pure intuition*, in Ancient and Medieval philosophy, was that unmediated intellectual sight in which the nature of that which was perceived was

cognition...Rather, he uses the term to pick out competences, capability. (Blattner, *ESBT*, 98-99.)” Cf. Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 184-185.

¹⁴²³Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 185.

¹⁴²⁴Heidegger, *BT*, 184 [144].

¹⁴²⁵Ibid., 185 [145].

¹⁴²⁶Ibid., 186 [146].

¹⁴²⁷Ibid.

¹⁴²⁸Ibid., 186-187 [146].

immediately grasped. It could be described as the immaterial presence to the intellect of the nature of that which was perceived by the senses. It was this pure intuition that allowed philosophers of the Aristotelian school to say that man could intellectually be, in potency, all things.¹⁴²⁹ Medieval and Ancient metaphysicians used to propose pure intuition as the beginning of knowledge, and that from which the understanding flowed. Josef Pieper notes that “it was the opinion of the ancient philosophers, both of the Greeks (and not just Plato but of Aristotle as well!) and of the great medieval thinkers, that there is an element of purely receptive vision—or, as Heraclitus says, of ‘listening to things’—not only in sense perception but also in man’s intellectual knowing. Medieval philosophy distinguishes between reason as *ratio* and reason as *intellectus*, whereby *ratio* is understood in terms of the ability of discursive thought to search, investigate, abstract, specify, and infer, whereas *intellectus* signifies the capacity for straightforward intuition, the *simplex intuitus*, to which the true offers itself up the way a landscape offers itself up to the eye. The ancients, then, understood man’s faculty for knowing as a unity of *ratio* and *intellectus* and the act of knowledge itself as a simultaneous functioning of the two. Active discursive thought is accompanied by, and suffused with, the effortlessly perceiving gaze of the *intellectus*, which is a nonactive, that is, a passive or receptive—albeit an actively receptive—faculty of the soul. Discursive thought is work; intuition is not.”¹⁴³⁰

Heidegger turns ancient and medieval metaphysics on its head with his approach to understanding, as can be seen in the following statement to the effect that “By showing how all sight is grounded primarily in understanding...we have deprived pure intuition [Anschauung] of its

¹⁴²⁹Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s De Anima*, trans. Kenelm Foster and Silvester Humphries (Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books, 1994), 206§681, 221§739, 235§789.

¹⁴³⁰Josef Pieper, “Philosophical Education and Intellectual Labor,” in *For the Love of Wisdom: Essays on the Nature of Philosophy*, trans. Roger Wasserman, Ed. Berthold Wald (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 14-15. Cf. Aquinas, *CADA*, 229§767.

priority, which corresponds noetically to the priority of the present-at-hand in traditional ontology. ‘Intuition’ and ‘thinking’ are both derivatives of understanding, and already rather remote ones. Even the phenomenological ‘intuition of essences’ [‘Wesensschau’] is grounded in existential understanding.”¹⁴³¹ The primary meaning of the understanding of Being is Dasein’s projection¹⁴³² of itself in its potentiality-for-Being towards the world (significance).¹⁴³³

Having explained what he means by “understanding” Heidegger goes on to explain the relationship between “understanding” and “interpretation”, “meaning”, “assertion”, “discourse”, and “language”. Briefly, *Interpretation* is “appropriating what is understood.”¹⁴³⁴ That is, the understanding, as a projection of Dasein’s possibilities, has the possibility of “developing itself [sich auszubilden]. This development of the understanding we call ‘interpretation’. In it the understanding appropriates understandingly that which is understood by it. In interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself.”¹⁴³⁵ Heidegger qualifies

¹⁴³¹Heidegger, *BT*, 187 [147].

¹⁴³²Blattner defines projection as follows: “To project is to throw or cast forth...In this act of projection we can identify what is understood...and that in terms of which it is understood. (Blattner, *HBTRG*, 87.)” This is notion is explained by Blattner elsewhere as “‘pressing ahead into’ a possibility, an ability. (Blattner, *ESBT*, 105.)” One might say that it is that way of Being that is experienced by the person who throws themselves into a project such that their very possibilities are developed, and they become that which they are capable of becoming. Blattner notes, however, that this notion of projection poses a possible difficulty, where Dasein in projection throws its possibilities ahead of itself and “lets it be”, but, that Dasein is, as we have just seen, through projection, its very possibilities (Ibid.). He attempts to resolve this difficulty by stating that though “there are two functions here: opening up the range of possibilities, and pressing ahead into one of them...There is good reason to believe, however, that ‘projection’ refers only to the second phenomenon, namely, determining oneself as someone by pressing ahead into a possible way to be. (Ibid., 106.)”

¹⁴³³I would want to know how it is that Dasein can even *understand*, in Heidegger’s sense of the term, without a preliminary grasping of the very essence (pure intuition) of those beings-present-at-hand towards which Dasein’s possibility for Being is projected. Heidegger, as we have already seen, allows that it is not because Dasein “understand” beings as present-at-hand or as ready-to-hand that they are; beings are prior to Dasein being thrown into the world (significance). What Dasein brings to these beings is their very meaning (significance) in Dasein’s world. The question, I repeat, is how it is possible for Dasein to “understand” those beings that already are in some sense, as present-at-hand or as ready-to-hand, if Dasein has not already grasped their very essence through some form of pure intuition. That is, how can I interpret this being as a chair unless I already have a general idea of what a chair is, and make the judgement that this being that presents itself to me has the essence of “chairness”? Or, how can I interpret this being as another Dasein, and not as a chair, unless I already have a general idea of what a Dasein is, and make the *judgement* that this being that presents itself to me has the essence of “Dasein”, and not “chairness”, “catness”, or “dogness”?

¹⁴³⁴Heidegger, *BT*, 203 [160].

¹⁴³⁵Ibid., 188 [148].

this statement as follows, “Nor is interpretation the acquiring of information about what is understood; it is rather the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding.”¹⁴³⁶ We have already shown that understanding is Dasein’s capacity [a potential] for comporting itself towards some possible way of Being-in-the-world; and, therefore, a form of projection [a being-thrown into its possibilities] by which Dasein is its potentiality-for-Being in some way towards its world. As such, interpretation is, in some sense, the *actualization* of Dasein’s potentiality for Being some way towards the world. Interpretation is the appropriation of a way of Being.¹⁴³⁷ He notes that “‘circumspection discovers’ means that the ‘world’ which has already been understood comes to be interpreted.”¹⁴³⁸ In other words, in circumspective discovery, the world [“*The ‘wherein’ of an act of understanding which assigns or refers itself*” such that “*one lets entities be encountered in the kind of Being that belongs to involvements*”,¹⁴³⁹] which has already been understood [projected as the possible ways of Dasein’s Being towards the world] comes to be interpreted [one of Dasein’s possible ways of Being towards the world is appropriated as a way of Being]. This allows us to say that the world of Dasein is that ‘wherein’ Dasein discovers itself as appropriating the projection of one of Dasein’s possible ways of Being. *Understanding* is the projection of potentialities-of-Being (Heidegger later defines Understanding as “self-projective Being towards its ownmost potentiality-for-Being.”¹⁴⁴⁰), and *Interpretation* the appropriation of a potentiality-of-Being.

¹⁴³⁶Ibid., 188-189 [148].

¹⁴³⁷Blattner agrees with our explanation of interpretation, as can be seen from his own comments on the subject, “He uses the word ‘interpretation’ to name a specific mode of understanding, a mode in which the possibilities disclosed in understanding are ‘worked out. By ‘working the possibilities out’ he means making them explicit... An interpretation is, thus, an act of understanding in which we make what we understand explicit by understanding it *as* something. (Blattner, *HBTRG*, 92.)” Dreyfus puts it this way, “*Interpretation*...denotes any activity in which Dasein points out the ‘as structure’ already manifest in everyday Articulation (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 224.)”

¹⁴³⁸Heidegger, *BT*, 189 [148].

¹⁴³⁹Ibid., 119 [86].

¹⁴⁴⁰Ibid., 236 [191].

From this point Heidegger moves on to *Articulation*. “That”, says Heidegger, “which is understood [projected as the possible ways of Dasein’s Being] gets Articulated when the entity to be understood is brought close interpretatively [in an appropriation of a way of Being] by taking as our clue the ‘something as something’; and this Articulation lies *before* [liegt vor] our making any thematic assertion about it.”¹⁴⁴¹ Articulation is the taking of something *as* something.¹⁴⁴² The key word here is ‘as’, which we have already come across on the preceding page, “In dealing with what is environmentally ready-to-hand by interpreting it circumspectively, we ‘see’ it *as* a table, a door, a carriage, or a bridge; but what we have thus interpreted [Ausgelegte] need not necessarily be also taken apart [auseinander zu legen] by making an assertion which definitely characterizes it.”¹⁴⁴³ This *seeing as* happens, for Heidegger prior to any assertion about that which is encountered. Something presents itself to Dasein, and Dasein takes it *as* a table, a laptop, a coffee, a pencil, etc.; but, not necessarily for something. Heidegger describes this as a “mere seeing of the Things”,¹⁴⁴⁴ a grasping of “something *free*, as it were, *of the ‘as’*.”¹⁴⁴⁵ This is what Heidegger calls *Articulation*, or an “Articulative interpretation”.¹⁴⁴⁶ This Articulation is, says Heidegger, “a constitutive state for understanding, existential and *a priori*.”¹⁴⁴⁷ Not wanting to belabour the point, and in opposition to Heidegger’s protests to the contrary, this Articulative interpretation sounds very much like the medieval epistemological category of *simple vision*, in which the operation of abstraction (total or partial) is accomplished, bringing that which is “seen” before Dasein “as” something. There is, however, a major distinction between these two notions.

¹⁴⁴¹Ibid., 190 [149].

¹⁴⁴²Dreyfus explains *articulation* as the picking out one of the significations, of something, in my use of that thing for something (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 215.). Grasping, one might say, something as something within its context of relations with other things.

¹⁴⁴³Heidegger, *BT*, 189 [149].

¹⁴⁴⁴Ibid., 190 [149].

¹⁴⁴⁵Ibid.

¹⁴⁴⁶Ibid.

¹⁴⁴⁷Ibid.

In the medieval understanding of simple vision, the intellect passively receives, through the senses, the very essence of that which presents itself to “Dasein”.¹⁴⁴⁸ This is received without the interpretative “seeing-as”. Immediately, or almost immediately, the intellect makes a judgement about that which is presented to it, which could, in Heidegger’s theory, be understood as the interpretative element of the Articulative interpretation—not just seeing X, but seeing X as something, or seeing x as meaningful/significant. For Heidegger, the *seeing is already an interpreting*. Blattner confirms our interpretation of Heidegger by noting that “all seeing is seeing-as, that perception is mediated by concepts, and that the content of any act of perception is, implicitly, a judgment. To see a cat is to see, say, that this is a cat, or that there is a cat on the mat, or what have you.”¹⁴⁴⁹ This interpreting is a disclosure, an unveiling of that which presents itself so that it is seen *as* something that is already significant.¹⁴⁵⁰ “In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw a ‘signification’ over some naked thing which is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world, and this involvement is one which gets laid out by interpretation.”¹⁴⁵¹

Heidegger’s notion of interpretation must not be put aside too quickly, as it must be completed with Heidegger’s proposal of the three-fold ground of Interpretation. Heidegger proposes that every interpretation is grounded in a: (1) fore-having, (2) fore-sight, (3) fore-

¹⁴⁴⁸See, for a Medieval approach to simple vision or apprehension, Aquinas, *CADA*, 54§164, 96§301, 197§639, 199§648, 205§672-206§681, 211-215. Étienne Gilson notes that “Intellection is the simple apprehension of an intelligible truth; reasoning is the process of the mind proceeding from one object of knowledge to another in order to reach an intelligible truth. (Étienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Edward Bullough, ed. G. A. Elrington (New York: Dorset Press, 1948), 239.)” Cf. Jacques Maritain, *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Imelda C. Byrne (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1951). H. D. Gardeil, *Introduction et Logique*, vol. 1 of *Initiation à la Philosophie de Saint Thomas d’Aquin*, 3rd ed. (Paris : Les Éditions du Cerf, 1964), 61.

¹⁴⁴⁹Blattner, *HBTRG*, 94.

¹⁴⁵⁰Heidegger, *BT*, 190 [150].

¹⁴⁵¹*Ibid.*, 190-191 [150].

conception. *Fore-having* is described as “*something we have in advance...a totality of involvements which is already understood.*”¹⁴⁵² Blattner describes fore-having as “the understanding of the background *context* in terms of which any concrete interpretation takes place.”¹⁴⁵³ *Fore-sight* is described as a “point of view” which guides our understanding as it appropriates a possibility by fixing “that with regard to which what is understood is to be interpreted...*something we see in advance.*”¹⁴⁵⁴ In Blattner’s terms, “the fore-sight introduces the *as-which* into the experience.”¹⁴⁵⁵ A *fore-conception* is the term that refers to the idea that in any interpretation “the interpretation has already decided for a definite way of conceiving it [the entity interpreted], either with finality or with reservations...[it is] *something we grasp in advance.*”¹⁴⁵⁶ It follows, then, that “An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us.”¹⁴⁵⁷ Whenever we are presented with an entity, we always interpret (give it meaning), in a structure of relations, through the interpretative structures of fore-having, fore-sight, and fore conception. Thus, everyone necessarily “sees” every entity differently, and gives different meanings to each entity, as the entity is interpreted in light of one’s mastery of the situation and the being—that is, in light of one’s practical know-how; and this in light of the interpretative schema given to one’s self by one’s interpretative community—the *They*. Thus, to quote Blattner, “Practice is more basic or ‘primordial’ than cognition.”¹⁴⁵⁸

This (our understanding of Heidegger’s notion of interpretation) sounds very much, if I may permit a brief critical comment at this point, like a form of what might be labelled “epistemological/hermeneutical reductionism”. That is, by not allowing for the possibility (nor

¹⁴⁵²Heidegger, *BT*, 191 [150].

¹⁴⁵³Blattner, *HBTRG*, 95.

¹⁴⁵⁴Heidegger, *BT*, 191 [150].

¹⁴⁵⁵Blattner, *HBTRG*, 96.

¹⁴⁵⁶Heidegger, *BT*, 191 [150].

¹⁴⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 191-192 [150].

¹⁴⁵⁸Blattner, *HBTRG*, 97.

adequately arguing against the possibility) that prior to seeing-something-as-something there is, first, the passive action of the being on the senses (sense perception), which is not a seeing-something-as-something, but a simple sensing—a being-appeared-to-sensorially. That there is, secondly, what some might call (as noted above), “simple vision”,¹⁴⁵⁹ where the essence of that which acts upon the senses is “abstracted”, by a first act of the intellect, from the sensed being so as to “be-as-it-is”, but in an immaterial mode of Being. This is still not a “seeing-as”,¹⁴⁶⁰ but, rather, a “being-appeared-to-immaterially”. Finally, in the second act of the intellect there is a first “seeing-as”, where that which is immaterially present to the knower is “seen-as-something” (followed, frequently, by the judgement “This is a that.”, or, perhaps, by the statement, “I don’t know what that is.”, or the question, “what is that?”). Following this second act of the intellect (or, perhaps, even co-temporal) there is a second “seeing-as” which is a result of a reasoning process (conscious or sub-conscious), the third act of the intellect. It is in (or, perhaps, co-extensively with) this third act where Heideggerian ‘Interpretations’, ‘States-of-mind’, ‘understandings’, etc., take place. By reducing the entire “epistemological process” to the final act, and saying that “this” is all there is (it is nothing but this), and this is preceded by a pre-theoretical seeing-as, it seems that Heidegger is guilty of a form of epistemological reductionism (or, perhaps, just a major misunderstanding both of the order of knowledge and the epistemological process, and of Ancient and Medieval epistemology). Even Blattner acknowledges that Heidegger has not adequately understood the “as”. He notes that Heidegger acknowledges the “as” of interpretation and the “as” of predication, but notes that “Heidegger does not have a special name for the *as* of pre-interpretative understanding; he does not in fact

¹⁴⁵⁹Kisiel notes that Heidegger shifts “the locus of truth from judgment to simple apprehension [or simple vision]. (Kisiel, *GHBT*, 35. Cf. *Ibid.*, 33.)” Kisiel notes, briefly, the medieval notion of simple apprehension and judgement in an endnote (*Ibid.*, 515-516n6.).

¹⁴⁶⁰In Heidegger’s sense of the phrase “seeing-as”.

seem to have seen clearly that he needs one. It should be there, however.”¹⁴⁶¹ I wonder if an “as” of a pre-pre-interpretative understanding (traditional sense) should also be added?

Kisiel, in his work on the pre-*Sein und Zeit* thought of Heidegger, shows that these thoughts did not originate with *Sein und Zeit* but, rather, that Heidegger was already expressing himself this way in a 1919 course. Kisiel notes that as early as 1919 Heidegger is already explaining that humans find themselves already in a world with meaning.¹⁴⁶² He here notes an example that Heidegger provides, in his 1919 course, to support his approach to the pre-theoretical world of meaning: walking into a classroom and seeing a student's desk.¹⁴⁶³ The student, walking into the class, does not see blotches of colour, but, rather, a desk to be used in the situation of a class. What will stick out to the student is any thing that might have changed (such as the arrangement of the desks). But, and this is the gist of the example, “an African aborigine suddenly transplanted into this classroom, will not see ‘a something which is simply given’ (reflexive category) but perhaps something to do with magic or a good defense against arrows or, at the very minimum, a something ‘which he does not know what to make of or do with.’ ... All these things (books, pens, cars, campus, trees, shade, etc., etc.) give themselves directly out of the immediate context of meaning encompassing us which we tend to call the ‘world.’”¹⁴⁶⁴ Kisiel is here explaining how Heidegger approached the question of meaning and a meaningful context, in an early 1919 course, in the very same way (or close enough to be almost indistinguishable on a number of levels) as he approaches it in *Being and Time*. Heidegger's earlier approach, and example, does not help him get out of the problem that we are noting here, but, rather, accentuates the problem. In this example, the “what” (in this case a desk in a

¹⁴⁶¹Blattner, *HBTRG*, 97.

¹⁴⁶²Kisiel, *GHBT*, 45.

¹⁴⁶³Ibid.

¹⁴⁶⁴Ibid.

classroom) which is “seen” is the same for each of the agents that “interpret it”; what is different is the “significance” that each agent gives to the “what” such that it is “seen” differently. This difference of “given significance” is based not upon the changing nature of the “what”, but upon the background knowledge that each of the agents possesses concerning the nature of the “what”, it’s appropriate context, etc. In other words, the difference in the “given significance” is based upon a “seeing-as” which comes prior to the interpretative (and pre-theoretical) “seeing-as”, which we call the “as” of simple vision—the “seeing-as” in which the intellect passively receives the immaterial form¹⁴⁶⁵ of that which is seen. This passive seeing of x as an x is not a complete knowledge of the form which is seen, but an originary grasp which will be expanded through primitive experimentation, through dialogue with others who may already know more about what x is, etc.

Dreyfus, discussing a similar subject notes that one might try to argue against Heidegger’s proposal (that Dasein understands or interprets things, primordially, in a context of work, and only derivatively and even deficiently in contemplation) by arguing that “even in everyday transparent, skillful coping a person is following unconscious rules, and that our everyday background practices are generated by an unconscious or tacit belief system.”¹⁴⁶⁶ It should be noted, immediately, that this is, quite simply, not what we have proposed above. Indeed, it should be noted that I am not arguing anything like what Dreyfus takes Leibniz, Aristotle and traditional philosophy to hold.¹⁴⁶⁷ Dreyfus goes on to note how he thinks Heidegger might respond to such an argument, “Against this claim Heidegger can give no knock-down argument, if an argument

¹⁴⁶⁵It is important to note that even here the terminology of Heidegger, though nominally the same as the Medievals, is essentially different. We cannot understand form and matter, in Heidegger, in the same way as we understand it in the works of the scholastic philosophers. (cf. Kisiel, *GHB*, 33-34.)

¹⁴⁶⁶Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 85.

¹⁴⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 85-86.

has to deduce conclusions from agreed upon premises; but Heidegger can and does claim to have given a concrete demonstration of his position, by showing that when we carefully describe everyday ongoing coping activity we do not find any mental states.”¹⁴⁶⁸ I think that my comments, above, sufficiently show (if I am not required to provide an argument that “has to deduce conclusions from agreed upon premises”) that Dreyfus and Heidegger have not shown that there are no “mental states” in our “everyday ongoing coping activity”, but, rather, that they have failed to adequately take the very nature of cognition (from sensation to reasoning) into consideration, nor to give it an adequate and profound analysis.

We can illustrate our contention by way of the three-fold grounding of interpretation that we just finished discussing. For example, prior to the ‘fore-having’ one must have a knowledge of the separate elements of the background situation which implies the 3 acts of the intellect in relation to each of these elements. Furthermore, in order for a ‘fore-seeing’ to take place the being that is understood, yet veiled, must already be “known” (according to the first 2 acts of the intellect mentioned above), but must ‘stand out’ as (1) not functioning according to its ‘nature’ in the background context, (2) functioning according to its nature, but in an in appropriate background context, or (3) not functioning according to its nature and in an inappropriate background context. (4) Is it possible that there might be a fourth possibility? An unknown being presents itself (in one of the 3 options just mentioned) to us in our already known background context. Either way, none of these 4 options could ever occur to Dasein without sense perception and, at very least, the first 2 acts of the intellect concerning the background context (the surrounding in which Dasein is immersed). Finally, even so called “pre-cognitive comportment” implies, at very least, sense-perception and the first 2 acts of the intellect. Indeed, “pre-cognitive

¹⁴⁶⁸Ibid., 86.

comportment” is nothing other than instinctive action based upon sense-perception and the first to acts of the intellect (as described above).¹⁴⁶⁹

This discussion of interpretation brings us to the notion of *Meaning*.¹⁴⁷⁰ This is an important concept to understand (in the traditional sense of the term) in order to grasp Heidegger’s approach to the question of Being. This is the case because, in his own words, “if we are inquiring about the meaning of Being, our investigation does not then become a ‘deep’ one [tiefsinnig], nor does it puzzle out what stands behind Being. It asks about Being itself in so far as Being enters into the intelligibility of Dasein. The meaning of Being can never be contrasted with entities, or with Being as the ‘ground’ which gives entities support; for a ‘ground’ becomes accessible only as meaning, even if it is itself the abyss of meaninglessness.”¹⁴⁷¹ But what, for Heidegger, is Meaning? Heidegger has this to say about meaning, “When entities within-the-world are discovered along with the Being of Dasein—that is, when they have come to be understood—we say that they have *meaning* [Sinn]. But that which is understood, taken strictly, is not the meaning but the entity, or alternatively, Being. Meaning is that wherein the intelligibility [Verstandlichkeit] of something maintains itself. That which can be Articulated in a disclosure by which we understand, we call ‘meaning’ ... *Meaning is the ‘upon-which’ of a projection in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something; it gets its structure from a fore-having, a fore-sight, and a fore-conception.*”¹⁴⁷² He later notes that “All interpretation [appropriation of a projection] is grounded on understanding [projection of possibilities]. That [the entity] which has been articulated as [seen as...] such in interpretation

¹⁴⁶⁹My critical assesement of Heidegger’s discussion of “seeing-as”, if it hits its mark, brings with it some important consequences for Heideggers approach to Realism and Idealism—namely, that his approach to Realism and Idealism is flawed, as are his attempts to ‘dissolve’ (to use Blattner’s terminology, Blattner, *HBTRG*, 108-117.) the epistemological problems raised by the sceptic.

¹⁴⁷⁰Or “Sense” (cf. Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 221-223.).

¹⁴⁷¹Heidegger, *BT*, 193-194 [152].

¹⁴⁷²*Ibid.* 192-193 [151].

[the appropriation of a projected possibility] and sketched out beforehand in the understanding [projected in Dasein's possible-Being] in general as something articulable [which can be seen as...], is the meaning.”¹⁴⁷³ *Meaning*, then, is the appropriation of a projection of a possible way of Being, of Dasein, towards an entity present-at-hand, in which that entity is discovered as something, by Dasein, and this discovering as occurs within the preconceived, pre-possessed, and pre-seen ‘where-in’ (world) of relations that Dasein finds itself in.¹⁴⁷⁴ “Meaning is an *existentiale* of Dasein...Hence only Dasein can be meaningful [*sinnvoll*] or meaningless [*sinnlos*].”¹⁴⁷⁵ Only Dasein can project the relations of significance onto the entities that it discovers in its Being-possible. All meaning, therefore, finds its roots, so to say, in Dasein. This throws us into what might be called a *vicious hermeneutical circle*: “Any interpretation [the appropriation of one of the possible ways of Being Dasein] which is to contribute understanding [projecting the possible ways of Dasein's Being towards the world], must have already understood [projected the possible ways of Dasein's Being towards the world] what is to be interpreted [the entity that is to be appropriated in one of the possible ways of Dasein's Being towards the world].”¹⁴⁷⁶ Heidegger argues that to attempt to avoid this vicious circle (his own descriptive label) is to misunderstand the act of understanding.¹⁴⁷⁷ “What is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way. This circle of understanding is not an orbit in which any random kind of knowledge may move; it is the expression of the existential *fore-structure* of Dasein itself. It is

¹⁴⁷³Ibid., 195 [153].

¹⁴⁷⁴Dreyfus explains “sense” as follows, “Sense, then is that on the basis of which we can make sense of something. It is a name for our background familiarity with each domain of being—a familiarity that enables us to cope with beings in that domain. (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 222.)” A little later he gives the following description, “Sense is the background practices *on the basis of which* all activities and objects are intelligible or make sense. It is also the name for the general structure of that background, *in terms of which* the ontologist makes sense of being. (Ibid., 223.)”

¹⁴⁷⁵Heidegger, *BT*, 193 [151].

¹⁴⁷⁶Ibid., 194 [152].

¹⁴⁷⁷Ibid., 194 [153].

not to be reduced to the level of a vicious circle, or even of a circle which is merely tolerated. In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing.”¹⁴⁷⁸

The Articulative interpretation need not, necessarily, but, more often than not, leads to Assertion. *Assertion*, in essence, is a judgement,¹⁴⁷⁹ that “is grounded on understanding [projection of Dasein’s possible being] and presents us with a derivative form in which an interpretation [the appropriation of Dasein’s projected possible-being] has been carried out, it *too* ‘has’ meaning.”¹⁴⁸⁰ Heidegger outlines three meanings of “assertion”: (1) pointing out or “letting an entity be seen from itself”;¹⁴⁸¹ (2) predication, which is founded upon pointing out;¹⁴⁸² and (3) Communication, which means, for Heidegger, “speaking forth”,¹⁴⁸³ and is directly related to the first two meanings. Communication is, for Heidegger, “letting someone see with us what we have pointed out by way of giving it a definite character. Letting someone see with us shares with [teilt...mit] the Other that entity which has been pointed out in its definite character.”¹⁴⁸⁴ It follows, then, that Assertion is necessarily “derived from interpretation, and is an extreme case of it.”¹⁴⁸⁵ Heidegger proposes that the primary way meaning of Assertion is *pointing out*, but proposes that it is best to define assertion by bringing all three meanings together such that assertion is “a *pointing-out which gives something a definite character and which communicates*”.¹⁴⁸⁶ In light of the fact that “the pointing-out which assertion does is performed on the basis of what has already been disclosed in understanding [the projection of Daseins

¹⁴⁷⁸Ibid., 195 [153].

¹⁴⁷⁹Ibid., 195 [154].

¹⁴⁸⁰Ibid. Dreyfus describes this term as follows, “*Assertions...*are what result when we put significances into words. (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 224.)”

¹⁴⁸¹Heidegger, *BT*, 196 [154].

¹⁴⁸²Ibid., 197 [155].

¹⁴⁸³Ibid.

¹⁴⁸⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁸⁵Ibid., 203 [160].

¹⁴⁸⁶Ibid., 199 [156].

possible-being] or discovered circumspectively [an previously understood world comes to be interpreted¹⁴⁸⁷].”¹⁴⁸⁸ As such, all assertion is founded existentially upon the Fore-structure, such that assertion presupposes an understanding and an interpretation.¹⁴⁸⁹ In other words, every assertion only receives meaning in its existential-ontological context—the context of Dasein’s appropriation of a projected way of Being.¹⁴⁹⁰ It follows, then, that all judgement (assertion—as the pointing out such that some entity is given meaning and this meaning is communicated to others) is rooted in Dasein’s Being,¹⁴⁹¹ not in the superficial “binding or separating of representations and concepts.”¹⁴⁹² This leads him to the “concepts of ‘saying’ and ‘speaking’”,¹⁴⁹³ which requires him to discuss language. He goes on, therefore, to propose that “*the existential-ontological foundation of language is discourse or talk.*”¹⁴⁹⁴ This leads us into a dense, but highly important discussion of *Discourse* in which Heidegger proposes that,

Discourse is the Articulation of intelligibility. Therefore it underlies both interpretation and assertion. That which can be Articulated in interpretation, and thus even more primordially in discourse, is what we have called ‘meaning’. That which gets articulated as such in discursive Articulation, we call the ‘totality-of-significations’ [Bedeutungsganze]. This can be dissolved or broken up into significations. Significations, as what has been Articulated from that which can be Articulated, always carry meaning [...sind...sinnhaft]. If discourse, as the Articulation of the intelligibility of the ‘there’, is a primordial *existentiale* of disclosedness, and if disclosedness is primarily constituted by Being-in-the-world, then discourse too must have essentially a kind of Being which is specifically *worldly*. The intelligibility of Being-in-the-world—and intelligibility which goes with a state-of-mind—*expresses itself as discourse*. The totality-of-significations of intelligibility is *put into words*. To significations, words accrue. But word-Things do not get supplied with significations. The way in which discourse gets expressed is language. Language is a totality of words—a totality in which discourse has a ‘worldly’ Being of its own...Language can be broken up into word-Things which are present-at-hand.¹⁴⁹⁵

¹⁴⁸⁷Ibid., 189 [148].

¹⁴⁸⁸Ibid., 199 [156].

¹⁴⁸⁹Ibid., 199 [156-157].

¹⁴⁹⁰Ibid., 200 [157-158].

¹⁴⁹¹Ibid., 203 [160].

¹⁴⁹²Ibid., 201 [159].

¹⁴⁹³Ibid., 203 [160].

¹⁴⁹⁴Ibid., 203 [160-161].

¹⁴⁹⁵Ibid., 203-204 [161].

Let us look at this section in light of what we have already examined above. *Language*, of course, is “a totality of words”, as Heidegger notes in the quote above. *Words* are verbal entities that are present-at-hand.¹⁴⁹⁶ This means that words can be understood and interpreted, by Dasein, in a context of relations; and that they can also be seen as ready-to-hand. *Discourse* is the seeing of some being *as* present-to-hand, ready-to-hand, etc. But, “Meaning is that wherein the intelligibility [Verstandlichkeit] of something maintains itself...[it is] *the ‘upon-which’ of a projection in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something.*”¹⁴⁹⁷ In other words, an entity maintains its presence-at-hand or readiness-to-hand within meaning. Meaning is the basis of the understanding of Dasein in terms of which some being is seen as a ready-at-hand or present-to-hand, something. Discourse, again, is the articulation of intelligibility, therefore, Discourse is the ground of meaning, interpretation and assertion. Now, *signification* is what has been seen as something from that which can be seen as something, or, as he says elsewhere, the assigning of an entity to a relational totality, wherein Dasein already is projected, and which discloses Dasein’s world.¹⁴⁹⁸ *Signification*, then, is the seeing of something as something from within an assigned understanding, which is the world of Dasein.¹⁴⁹⁹ The *totality-of-significations*, says, Heidegger, is “that which gets articulated as such in discursive Articulation.”¹⁵⁰⁰ That is, it is the totality of things that are seen as present-at-hand, ready-to-hand, being-in-the-world, etc. within Dasein’s understanding. “Discoursing or talking is the way in which we articulate ‘significantly’ the intelligibility of Being-in-the-world.”¹⁵⁰¹ That is, “in discourse the intelligibility of Being-in-the-world (an intelligibility) which goes with a state-of-mind) is

¹⁴⁹⁶Ibid., 201 [159].

¹⁴⁹⁷Ibid., 193 [151].

¹⁴⁹⁸Ibid., 120 [87].

¹⁴⁹⁹Dreyfus describes significations as follows, “*Significations* are particular reference relations...that are picked out in coping and point out in language when necessary (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 224.)”

¹⁵⁰⁰Heidegger, *BT*, 204 [161].

¹⁵⁰¹Ibid., 204 [161].

articulated according to significations; and discourse is this articulation. The items constitutive for discourse are: what the discourse is about (what is talked about); what is said-in-the-talk, as such; the communication; and the making-known.”¹⁵⁰² This is what makes language possible.¹⁵⁰³

In discussing discourse and language he considers one of the constitutive elements of discourse—“hearing” or “listening to”. *Listening to*, says Heidegger, “is Dasein’s existential way of Being-open as Being-with for Others. Indeed, hearing constitutes the primary and authentic way in which Dasein is open for its ownmost potentiality-for-Being.”¹⁵⁰⁴ He goes on to consider the different modes of listening-to, which are “following, going along with, and the privative modes of not-hearing, resisting, defying, and turning away.”¹⁵⁰⁵ He also discusses hearkening,¹⁵⁰⁶ and keeping silent,¹⁵⁰⁷ as other essential possibilities of discourse. This examination of discourse and language allows Heidegger to declare that though it is not false that Man is a rational animal (as the ancient and medieval philosophers proposed), it is more precise to say that “Man shows himself as the entity which talks...he is the entity which is such as to discover the world and Dasein itself.”¹⁵⁰⁸ Man is the discoursing being—Man (Dasein) is as discourse, and discovers itself and its world in and through discourse.

Heidegger finishes this section by characterizing the “falling” of Dasein, which is Dasein’s “everyday kind of Being” as it is maintained in submission to and absorption by the *They*, by considering “Idle Talk”, “curiosity”, and “ambiguity”, which are inauthentic ways of Being Dasein. Says Heidegger, concerning Dasein’s Fallenness, “This term does not express any negative evaluation, but is used to signify that Dasein is proximally and for the most part

¹⁵⁰²Ibid., 206 [162].

¹⁵⁰³Ibid., 206 [163].

¹⁵⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁵⁰⁵Ibid., 206-107 [163].

¹⁵⁰⁶Ibid., 207-208 [163-164].

¹⁵⁰⁷Ibid., 208 [164-165].

¹⁵⁰⁸Ibid., 208-209 [165].

alongside the ‘world’ of its concern. This ‘absorption in...’ [Aufgehen bei...] has mostly the character of Being-lost in the publicness of the ‘they’. Dasein has, in the first instance, fallen away [abgefallen] from itself as an authentic potentiality for Being its Self, and has fallen into the ‘world’. ‘Falleness’ into the ‘world’ means an absorption in Being-with-one-another, in so far as the latter is guided by idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity.”¹⁵⁰⁹

Concerning these latter “guides” of Dasein’s Falleness Heidegger says, first of all, that “Idle talk is constituted by just such gossiping and passing the word along—a process by which its initial lack of grounds to stand on [Bodenständigkeit] becomes aggravated to complete groundlessness [Bodenlosigkeit].”¹⁵¹⁰ Discourse is an essential state of Dasein’s Being that can become Idle talk.¹⁵¹¹ “Idle talk is a closing-off” by its very nature.¹⁵¹² Turning to curiosity, we find that it is “the basic state of sight [which] shows itself in a peculiar tendency-of-Being which belongs to everydayness—the tendency towards ‘seeing’...which characteristically is not confined to seeing, but expresses the tendency towards a peculiar way of letting the world be encountered by us in perception.”¹⁵¹³ *Curiosity* is a mode of sight which “is concerned with the constant possibility of distraction...it concerns itself with a kind of knowing, but just in order to have known.”¹⁵¹⁴ It is characterized by not tarrying, distraction and never dwelling anywhere.¹⁵¹⁵ *Ambiguity* is what happens “when, in our everyday Being-with-one-another, we encounter the sort of thing which is accessible to everyone, and about which anyone can say anything.”¹⁵¹⁶ When this happens, “it soon becomes impossible to decide what is disclosed in a genuine

¹⁵⁰⁹Ibid., 220 [175].

¹⁵¹⁰Ibid., 212 [168].

¹⁵¹¹Ibid., 213 [169].

¹⁵¹²Ibid.

¹⁵¹³Ibid., 214 [170].

¹⁵¹⁴Ibid., 216-217 [172].

¹⁵¹⁵Ibid., 217 [172-173].

¹⁵¹⁶Ibid., 217 [173].

understanding, and what is not...Everything looks as if it were genuinely understood, genuinely taken hold of, genuinely spoken, though at bottom it is not; or else it does not look so, and yet at bottom it is.”¹⁵¹⁷

In relation to *Fallenness*, Being-in-the-world can be characterized as:¹⁵¹⁸ (1) *tempting*—as Dasein “presents to itself the possibility of losing itself in the ‘they’ and falling into groundlessness... [preparing itself for] a constant temptation towards falling”;¹⁵¹⁹ (2) *tranquilizing*—“the supposition of the ‘they’ that one is leading and sustaining a full and genuine ‘life’”;¹⁵²⁰ (3) *alienating*—which is what happens “when Dasein, tranquilized, and ‘understanding’ everything, thus compares itself with everything...[thus putting it into a state in which] its ownmost potentiality-for-Being is hidden from it”;¹⁵²¹ (4) *self-entangling*—the forcing of Dasein “into its inauthenticity”¹⁵²²; and (5) the movement of falling-being-in-the-world is *turbulent*—which is the character of the fall of Dasein into groundlessness of inauthenticity, having “a kind of motion which constantly tears the understanding away from the projecting of authentic possibilities, and into the tranquilized supposition that it possesses everything, or that everything is within its reach.”¹⁵²³ Heidegger proposes that this analysis of Dasein’s falling has provided us with what we need in order to complete our analysis of Dasein as *Care*.¹⁵²⁴

¹⁵¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁵¹⁸For a deeper consideration of Heidegger’s doctrine of falling and fallenness, see Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 225-237.

¹⁵¹⁹Heidegger, *BT*, 221 [177].

¹⁵²⁰Ibid., 222 [177].

¹⁵²¹Ibid., 222 [178].

¹⁵²²Ibid., 222-223 [178].

¹⁵²³Ibid., 223 [178].

¹⁵²⁴Ibid., 224 [180].

Care as the Being of Dasein: I, 6

Here Heidegger seeks to bring together all of the analyses of the preceding chapters in order to show Dasein's Being as Care. Dreyfus introduces his commentary on this section by noting that "Care unifies the various structural aspects of Dasein's way of being."¹⁵²⁵ The purpose of our analytic of Dasein, Heidegger reminds us, "is to prepare the way for the problematic of fundamental ontology—the *question of the meaning of Being in general*."¹⁵²⁶ Being can only be understood in an understanding of those Beings that have an understanding of Being—Dasein, therefore it is necessary to proceed to an understanding of Dasein in order to answer the question of Being.¹⁵²⁷ The Being-in-the-world of Dasein is a structural whole,¹⁵²⁸ says Heidegger, but this creates the difficulty of trying to define the whole in an existential-ontological manner. He will later ask whether it is even possible to 'define' Dasein as a whole. Summarizing the points that he has already raised he provides us with a definition of Dasein's average everydayness, "*Being-in-the-world which is falling and disclosed, thrown and projecting, and for which its ownmost potentiality-for-Being is an issue, both in its Being alongside the 'world' and in its Being-with Others*."¹⁵²⁹ Having posed this definition he proceeds by asking how one would go about grasping the structural whole of Dasein. He notes that it cannot be grasped either by giving a list of structural elements, or by deducing it from the idea of man.¹⁵³⁰ He proposes that in order to grasp Dasein in its structural whole one needs to begin with the discovery of some disclosure of Dasein which is an understanding state-of-mind, or mood,¹⁵³¹ and which is the most

¹⁵²⁵Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 238.

¹⁵²⁶Heidegger, *BT*, 227 [183].

¹⁵²⁷*Ibid.*, 228 [183].

¹⁵²⁸*Ibid.*, 225 [180].

¹⁵²⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁵³⁰*Ibid.*, 226 [181-182].

¹⁵³¹*Ibid.*, 226 [182].

far-reaching and most primordial of Dasein's possibilities of disclosure.¹⁵³² Within these parameters Heidegger proposes that "the phenomenon [sic] of anxiety will be made basic for our analysis."¹⁵³³ *Anxiety*, which could also be translated as *Malaise* or uneasiness, is, thus, used as the way to discover that Dasein is *Care*. Heidegger begins by giving Anxiety, as a state-of-mind, an in-depth analysis, noting that (1) Being-anxious "discloses, primordially and directly, the world as world";¹⁵³⁴ (2) Anxiety is always about something;¹⁵³⁵ (3) Anxiety discloses Dasein by throwing it "back upon that which it is anxious about—its authentic potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world."¹⁵³⁶ (4) Anxiety essentially awakens Dasein from its worldly slumber;¹⁵³⁷ and (5) importantly, "anxiety individualizes. This individualization brings Dasein back from its falling, and makes manifest to it that authenticity and inauthenticity are possibilities of its Being."¹⁵³⁸ Heidegger sums this all up as follows: "anxiousness as a state-of-mind is a way of Being-in-the-world; that in the face of which we have anxiety is thrown Being-in-the-world; that which we have anxiety about is our potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world."¹⁵³⁹

This discovery is followed by an articulation, and proof of, the claim that Dasein is *Care*. Heidegger's train of thought begins with the note that the unity which is Dasein, "is an entity for which, in its Being, that Being is an issue."¹⁵⁴⁰ Heidegger reminds us that this being-an-issue for oneself is essentially a state-of-mind of the understanding—*anxiety*.¹⁵⁴¹ Heidegger draws a preliminary conclusion, "But ontologically, Being towards one's ownmost potentiality-for-Being

¹⁵³²Ibid.

¹⁵³³Ibid., 227 [182].

¹⁵³⁴Ibid., 232 [187].

¹⁵³⁵Ibid.

¹⁵³⁶Ibid.

¹⁵³⁷Ibid., 233 [188].

¹⁵³⁸Ibid., 235 [191].

¹⁵³⁹Ibid.

¹⁵⁴⁰Ibid., 236 [191].

¹⁵⁴¹Ibid.

means that in each case Dasein is already *ahead* of itself [ihm selbst...*vorweg*] in its Being. Dasein is always ‘beyond itself’ [‘*uber sich hinaus*’].”¹⁵⁴² This is the structure of Being-an-issue which Dasein calls “Being-ahead-of-itself”. He continues by noting that, ““Being-ahead-of-itself” means, if we grasp it more fully, ‘*ahead-of-itself-in-already-being-in-a-world*.’”¹⁵⁴³ Dasein’s “Ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in-a-world essentially includes one’s falling and one’s *Being alongside* those things ready-to-hand within-the-world with which one concerns oneself.”¹⁵⁴⁴ This leads Heidegger to the conclusion that “The formally existential totality of Dasein’s ontological structural whole must therefore be grasped in the following structure: the Being of Dasein means ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in-(the-world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world). This Being fills in the signification of the term ‘*care*’ [*Sorge*].”¹⁵⁴⁵ Care, says Heidegger, is prior to all willing and wishing, urges or addiction,¹⁵⁴⁶ and these find their foundation in Care.¹⁵⁴⁷ Indeed, “Care is always concern and solicitude, even if only privatively.”¹⁵⁴⁸ Care, then, is “a basic existential-ontological phenomenon, which all the same is not simple in its structure.”¹⁵⁴⁹ This is supported by a section that analyses Dasein’s pre-ontological understanding of itself (in which its Being is characterized by historicity¹⁵⁵⁰) as Care. This analysis is accomplished through the ontological-existential interpretation of an ancient fable.¹⁵⁵¹

¹⁵⁴²Ibid., 236 [191-192].

¹⁵⁴³Ibid., 236 [192].

¹⁵⁴⁴Ibid., 237 [192]. Here we are already seeing the elements to which Heidegger will be referring when he discusses temporality as the horizon of Being.

¹⁵⁴⁵Ibid., 237 [192].

¹⁵⁴⁶Ibid., 238 [194].

¹⁵⁴⁷Ibid., 238-240 [194-196].

¹⁵⁴⁸Ibid., 238-239 [194].

¹⁵⁴⁹Ibid., 240 [196].

¹⁵⁵⁰Ibid., 241 [197].

¹⁵⁵¹Ibid., 242 [197-198].

Heidegger then discusses, in some very important sections, the relationship between Dasein and Reality, and between Dasein and Truth. The reason for this is that, “In ontological problematics *Being and truth* have, from time immemorial, been brought together if not entirely identified...If we are to give an adequate preparation for the question of Being, the phenomenon of *truth* must be ontologically clarified.”¹⁵⁵² In the section concerning Reality Heidegger begins by describing how it is that Being comes to be described as “Reality”.¹⁵⁵³ This leads to a discussion of three questions: (1) Can the reality of the mind-external world be proved? (2) To what extent, if it is at all possible, can something be known as real? (3) What is the general signification of the meaning of Reality? Consider, briefly, Heidegger’s interaction with each of these questions.

His ultimate answer to the *first question* is, “no”, and to think that it can is to misunderstand Reality. Blattner notes that Heidegger’s approach to this question should be read as “a direct retort to Kant”.¹⁵⁵⁴ After a brief examination of Kant’s refutation of Idealism Heidegger declares, rightly, that “The ‘scandal of philosophy’ is not that this proof [a proof that there is a mind-exterior world] has yet to be given, but that such proofs are expected and attempted again and again.”¹⁵⁵⁵ Though many philosophers from many different philosophical traditions may tend to agree with this statement, one should not be overly hasty to applaud Heidegger’s frankness. The “reality” “is” that Heidegger probably does not mean the same thing as most of these philosophers. Says Heidegger, “If Dasein is understood correctly, it defies such proofs, because, in its Being, it already is what subsequent proofs deem necessary to demonstrate

¹⁵⁵²Ibid., 228 [183].

¹⁵⁵³Ibid., 245 [200-201].

¹⁵⁵⁴Blattner, *HBTRG*, 110.

¹⁵⁵⁵Heidegger, *BT*, 249 [205].

for it.”¹⁵⁵⁶ In other words, attempting to prove the existence of a mind-exterior world is doomed from the beginning because it understands (in the traditional sense of “understand”) neither Dasein, nor the world. As we have already noted, *Dasein’s world* is that ‘wherein’ Dasein discovers itself as appropriating the projection of one of Dasein’s possible ways of Being, in which Dasein finds itself to be already. It makes now sense, therefore, to try to prove the existence of some mind-exterior world. He explains that there are three possible stances that one might have towards the reality of the ‘external world’: (1) Faith, (2) Proving, (3) Presupposing. Regardless of which stance one takes, says Heidegger, Dasein must already be in the world.¹⁵⁵⁷ Blattner’s summary of Heidegger’s response is to the point, for Heidegger, “epistemological skepticism is not that interesting. Maybe clever epistemological arguments can get skeptical concerns about knowledge of the ground, but those concerns do not touch our basic modes of access to and familiarity with the world.”¹⁵⁵⁸

He goes on to argue that the Idealism/Realism debate is entirely beside the point. There have been some very different interpretations of Heidegger’s position concerning Realism and Idealism. Blattner, for example, proposes (and argues fairly convincingly) that Heidegger’s philosophy is actually a form of Idealism.¹⁵⁵⁹ On the other hand, Taylor Carmon argues, in *Heidegger’s Analytic: Interpretation, Discourse and Authenticity in Being and Time*, that Heidegger’s philosophy is actually a form of Realism.¹⁵⁶⁰ Dreyfus notes that some see Heidegger

¹⁵⁵⁶Ibid., 249 [205].

¹⁵⁵⁷Ibid.

¹⁵⁵⁸Blattner, *HBTRG*, 113.

¹⁵⁵⁹Cf. Blattner, *HBTRG*, 117. For the specific arguments see: William Blattner, *Heidegger’s Temporal Idealism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹⁵⁶⁰Taylor Carman, *Heidegger’s Analytic: Interpretation, Discourse and Authenticity in Being and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Jolivet interprets this section of *Being and Time* as proof that Heidegger sees his position as a form of Realism, “HEIDEGGER précise (Ibid., p. 202-208) que cette position est très éloignée de l’idéalisme et qu’elle devrait plutôt être définie comme réaliste. (Jolivet, *Métaphysique*, 172-173.)” Jolivet is, however, dubious as to whether or not Heidegger actually succeeds in ultimately escaping Idealism, “Sans doute, le Dasein ‘existe hors de soi’, mais le malheur est que cet ‘exister hors de soi’ est, chez HEIDEGGER, la définition du soi. HEIDEGGER ne réussit donc pas à s’évader de l’idéalisme. (Ibid., 173.)” Fernand Van

as a form of “*internal realist*”,¹⁵⁶¹ but, himself, argues that Heidegger is (1) “a minimal hermeneutic realist about nature”;¹⁵⁶² (2) categorically against “*metaphysical realism*”,¹⁵⁶³ by which Dreyfus seems to be referring to that form of metaphysical realism following Descartes which could be described as Metaphysical Materialism or Naturalism; and, concerning ultimate reality, (3) a “*plural realist*”,¹⁵⁶⁴ by which Dreyfus means a person for whom “there is no point of view from which one can ask and answer the metaphysical question concerning the one true nature of ultimate reality.”¹⁵⁶⁵ Blattner, in spite of his argued position that Heidegger’s is an Idealistic philosophy, notes that Heidegger essentially rejects the entire debate.¹⁵⁶⁶ Dreyfus explains why in his articulation of Heidegger as a plural realist, “But for Heidegger different understandings of being reveal different sorts of entities, and since no one way of revealing is exclusively true, accepting one does not commit us to rejecting the others.”¹⁵⁶⁷ In his interaction with this debate Heidegger briefly, all too briefly, interacts with both of these philosophical positions. Heidegger critiques Realism on two levels. He holds, first, that though his existential-ontological analysis of Dasein seems to agree with Realism, “it differs in principle from every kind of realism; for realism holds that the Reality of the ‘world’ not only needs to be proved but also is capable of proof.”¹⁵⁶⁸ Not wanting to take more time than is necessary, it seems we like we should, at this point, call out Heidegger on this universal dogmatic statement which is, for

Steenberghen also sees Heidegger’s philosophy as a form of Realism, as we see in his introductory comments about different approaches to ontology, “Mais plusieurs penseurs contemporains étrangers à l’école thomiste par leur formation ont travaillé ou travaillent encore à l’élaboration d’une métaphysique réaliste. Citons Blondel et Lavelle en France, N. Hartmann et Heidegger en Allemagne. Souvent ces métaphysiciens rejoignent, par des voies nouvelles, les positions classiques de la métaphysique thomiste. (Fernand Van Steenberghen, *Ontologie*, 4th ed. (Louvain-Paris : Éditions Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1966), 30.)”

¹⁵⁶¹Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 252.

¹⁵⁶²Ibid., 253.

¹⁵⁶³Ibid., 261.

¹⁵⁶⁴Ibid., 262. Cf. Ibid., 279-280.

¹⁵⁶⁵Ibid.

¹⁵⁶⁶Blattner, *HBTRG*, 114.

¹⁵⁶⁷Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 263.

¹⁵⁶⁸Heidegger, *BT*, 251 [207].

anybody familiar with ancient and medieval philosophy, evidently false. It simply is not the case that “every kind of realism... holds that the Reality of the ‘world’ not only needs to be proved but also is capable of proof.”¹⁵⁶⁹ If this is a position that Heidegger considers as one of the constitutive elements of Realism, then we must find some other title for the philosophical approach of Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas, for none of these thinkers would agree either that the Reality of the world needs to be proved or that it is even capable of proof.¹⁵⁷⁰ As such, this first critique, as a dogmatic universal description of all forms of Realism, is, quite simply, false.

The second critique that Heidegger levels against Realism (not taking into account the different forms of Realism),¹⁵⁷¹ in this section, is that “in realism there is a lack of ontological understanding. Indeed realism tries to explain Reality ontically by Real connections of interaction between things that are Real.”¹⁵⁷² In order to understand this critique we must remind ourselves of what Heidegger means by “ontical” and “ontological”. *Ontical*, though it is never explicitly defined by Heidegger, is taken to refer to beings that are not Dasein and facts about these beings.¹⁵⁷³ *Ontological* refers to Being, and the meaning of Being. This, of course, must be understood in terms of Heidegger’s definition of “Meaning” in which *Meaning* is the

¹⁵⁶⁹Ibid.

¹⁵⁷⁰Jolivet seems to agree with our critique of Heidegger on this point, as he also notes, “Son procedure est finalement le même que celui du pseudo-réalisme (car le réalisme authentique est autre chose que ce que conçoit HEIDEGGER) : il veut *prouver* la ‘réalité’ du monde et n’y parvient pas. (Jolivet, *Métaphysique*, 173.)”

¹⁵⁷¹Plato’s Realism is entirely different from Aristotle’s Realism, and their Realism’s are both entirely different from Descartes form (and the many modern forms) of Realism. In effect, one of the major differences between Ancient-Medieval Realisms (even taking into account the many different forms of Realism that are found in Ancient and Medieval literature) and Modern Realisms (accounting for the different forms) is that the Ancient-Medieval Realisms did not think it was either necessary, or even possible, to demonstrate that there was some mind-exterior Reality, whereas, for the Moderns, this demonstration was both necessary and possible. As such, we are inclined to believe that Heidegger is either (1) not taking Ancient and medieval forms of Realism into account, or (2) reading Modern forms of Realism back into the Ancient and Medieval forms. Either way, this cannot possibly taken as a serious critique of Realism.

¹⁵⁷²Heidegger, *BT*, 251 [207].

¹⁵⁷³Cf. Ibid., 31 [11]. The editors note, in a footnote on this page, that “while the terms ‘ontisch’ (‘ontical’) and ‘ontologisch’ (‘ontological’) are not explicitly defined, their meanings will emerge rather clearly. Ontological inquiry is concerned primarily with Being; ontical inquiry is concerned primarily with entities and the facts about them. (Ibid., 31fn3.)”

appropriation of a projection of a possible way of Being, of Dasein, towards an entity present-at-hand, in which that entity is discovered as something, by Dasein, and this discovering occurs within the preconceived, pre-possessed, and pre-seen ‘where-in’ (world) of relations that Dasein finds itself in. If we understand Heidegger in this way, then, it might be said, that it is simply not the case that Realism has failed to attempt an ontological explanation of Reality. On the contrary, and especially in light of my critical assessment of Heidegger’s understanding of Interpretation, it simply is the case that there are a number of important Ancient and Medieval philosophers who sought to go beyond the beings of the everyday world in order to discover Being, not as something ontical, but as something ontological. We have already seen, in our expositions of the approaches to the question of Being of Plato and Aristotle, that both of these philosophers were looking, explicitly, to explain reality in terms, not of beings (which would be an ontical explanation), but of Being (an ontological explanation).¹⁵⁷⁴ Whether or not they were successful is an entirely different matter, but *try* they did. Étienne Gilson and Josef Pieper argue (as do numerous Thomists), in fact, that Thomas Aquinas not only tried to explain reality ontologically (in terms of its Being), but that he, in fact succeeded where many before and after him (such as

¹⁵⁷⁴Now it is certainly the case that Aristotle, Plato, and Aquinas portrayed “Dasein’s” understanding of Being differently, but it is not the case, as Heidegger so frequently claims, that their approach was “ontical”. All of these great thinkers were seeking to “get behind” beings in order to understand what is “Being” (that which is common to them all). For Heidegger, as is becoming clearer, “Being” refers to Dasein’s “practical”, pre-theoretical, interpretation of beings (He frequently notes that something “is”, inasmuch as it is “seen as” Ready-to-hand, present-at-hand, etc.). Aristotle and Aquinas both refer, as anyone who is familiar with thomistic philosophy would know, to a pre-theoretical understanding of Being, and they both seek to lay out what it is. It seems to me, as I have been hinting at throughout this exposition of *Being and Time*, that their understanding of the pre-theoretical understanding of Being is actually prior (in every sense) to Heidegger’s understanding of the pre-theoretical understanding of Being. As such, they would actually have a better approach to Being. This being said, my point is only to note that it is false to say that they did not approach Being “ontologically”, in any sense of the term. Concerning the pre-theoretical notion of being, see Gilson, *UPE*, 251-252. Gilson, *BSP*, 205. Étienne Gilson, *Réalisme Thomiste et Critique de la Connaissance* (Paris : Librairie Philosophique J. VRIN, 1947), 214-239. Étienne Gilson, *Le Réalisme Méthodique*, 2e ed. (Paris : Chez Pierre Téqui, 1937), 81-82.

Heidegger) failed.¹⁵⁷⁵ As such, it seems that Heidegger's two dogmatic universal critiques of Realism in general are entirely beside the point.

Heidegger then turns towards Idealism, which, for Heidegger, has an advantage over Realism. This, says Heidegger, is due to the fact that "If idealism emphasizes that Being and Reality are only 'in the consciousness', this expresses an understanding of the fact that Being cannot be explained through entities."¹⁵⁷⁶ This is one of the most important statements, for a proper understanding of Heidegger's approach to the question of the meaning of Being, in *Being and Time*. For Heidegger it is important to understand that "Being cannot be explained through entities and that Reality is possible only in the understanding of Being."¹⁵⁷⁷ This statement certainly inclines one to think that Heidegger, if not explicitly idealistic, at least leaned towards Idealism. Blattner notes that "As Heidegger's thought went into flux after the publication of *Being and Time*, he maintained his commitment to something like ontological idealism and devoted considerable space to ruminations on the subject."¹⁵⁷⁸

His ultimate answer to the *second question* is "If the term 'reality' is meant to stand for the Being of entities present-at-hand within-the-world (*res*) (and nothing else is understood thereby), then when it comes to analysing this mode of Being, this signifies that entities *within-the-world* are ontologically conceivable only if the phenomenon of within-the-world-ness has been clarified."¹⁵⁷⁹ It follows, then, that something can be known as real only to the extent that we have a complete understanding of the essential constitution of Dasein as Being-in-the-

¹⁵⁷⁵Cf. Gilson, *UPE*, 49ff.

¹⁵⁷⁶Heidegger, *BT*, 251 [207].

¹⁵⁷⁷Ibid.

¹⁵⁷⁸Blattner, *HBTRG*, 117.

¹⁵⁷⁹Heidegger, *BT*, 252 [209].

world.¹⁵⁸⁰ This is because Dasein's Being-in-the-world is foundational for a consciousness of reality, "'Consciousness of Reality' is itself a way of Being-in-the-world."¹⁵⁸¹

His answer to the *third question* (what is the general signification of the meaning of Reality?) is that Reality, regardless of how we consider it, is dependent on Dasein. If it is considered ontologically, then "readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand function as modes of Reality."¹⁵⁸² As such, Reality could be considered as a way of Dasein's Being-in-the-world. If, however, Reality is taken in its traditional meaning, then it stands "for Being in the sense of the pure presence-at-hand of Things."¹⁵⁸³ But, "no matter how this Being of 'Nature' may be Interpreted, all the modes of Being of entities within-the-world are founded ontologically upon the worldhood of the world, and accordingly upon the phenomenon of Being-in-the-world."¹⁵⁸⁴ It follows, then, that Reality has no priority, but, rather, "is ontologically grounded in the Being of Dasein."¹⁵⁸⁵ In what follows Heidegger draws a number of important conclusions that we will point out before moving on to the next section.

Heidegger notes, first of all, that it follows that "only as long as Dasein *is* (that is, only as long as an understanding of Being is ontically possible), 'is there' Being."¹⁵⁸⁶ Only inasmuch as there is an understanding of Being can entities be understood as present-at-hand.

Secondly, "Being (not entities) is dependent upon the understanding of Being; that is to say, Reality (not the Real) is dependent upon care."¹⁵⁸⁷ Note the distinction between *Being* which is dependent upon Dasein, but *beings* which are not; *Reality*, which is dependent upon Dasein,

¹⁵⁸⁰Ibid.

¹⁵⁸¹Ibid., 254 [211].

¹⁵⁸²Ibid.

¹⁵⁸³Ibid.

¹⁵⁸⁴Ibid.

¹⁵⁸⁵Ibid., 255 [212].

¹⁵⁸⁶Ibid.

¹⁵⁸⁷Ibid.

but *the Real* which is not. It would appear that Heidegger is saying that things exist independently of Dasein, but that they do not have Being (whatever that is—we still have no idea what Being could possibly Be), nor Reality, unless they are understood by Dasein.¹⁵⁸⁸ This may not be significant for most readers, but this particular reader is intrigued by the claim that a being can be without Being. It seems to me that the only way that we can make sense of this claim, in the light of everything that we have seen, so far, in *Being and Time*, is that a being can *be*, in some sense, but without any *Being* (significance or meaning) as it is not understood as within-a-world. This would seem to imply, first of all, that there are “mind”, or shall we say “meaning”, external (independent) beings which are worldless (they are not interpreted by any Dasein); and, secondly, that these beings only “Be-come” by being understood by Dasein as within some world.¹⁵⁸⁹ This interpretation seems to be appropriate, but runs into Heidegger’s claim that if there is no Dasein interpreting beings in a world, then “it cannot be said that entities are, nor can it be said that they are not.”¹⁵⁹⁰ If a tree falls in the forest, but nobody is there to either hear it or see it fall, did it fall? Heidegger might say that unless there is some Dasein to understand the falling tree within the forest, then it makes no sense to even say that there is a tree falling in the forest, though it may indeed “be” falling, or fallen.

Thirdly, “Entities with Dasein’s kind of Being cannot be conceived in terms of Reality and substantiality; we have expressed this by the thesis that *the substance of man is existence.*”¹⁵⁹¹ In other words, Dasein cannot be understood as presence-at-hand or as readiness-

¹⁵⁸⁸Dreyfus also recognizes this element in Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 255.); and also points out that Heidegger discusses this in his *Basic Problems*, “In *Basic Problems* Heidegger makes an ontological place for the realistic view that besides the way nature shows up in our world there is a way nature is in itself whether or not Dasein exists (Ibid.)” Dreyfus concludes, “It seems that while natural entities are independent of us, *the being of nature* depends upon us. (Ibid.)” Cf. Ibid., 264.

¹⁵⁸⁹Is this not a form of Realism? Dreyfus, as I have shown above, seems to think so.

¹⁵⁹⁰Heidegger, *BT*, 255 [212].

¹⁵⁹¹Ibid.

to-hand; Dasein just is existence (“That kind of Being towards which Dasein can comport itself in one way or another, and always does comport itself somehow.”¹⁵⁹²).

Finally, “only if the understanding of Being *is*, do entities as entities become accessible; only if entities are of Dasein’s kind of Being is the understanding of Being possible as an entity.”¹⁵⁹³ This final statement puts the cherry on Heidegger’s black forest cake. As we noted above, it seems like we are forced to say that beings are in some way, but they are without Being; from which it follows that beings only become by being understood, as noted above, by Dasein; that only Beings that are Dasein can understand beings, and, thus, bring beings into Being. Dasein, then, is the cause of the Being of beings, even though beings in some way *are*, regardless of whether or not Dasein understands them. The nagging question, that the thorough thinker is left with, is “granted that beings ‘Are-not’ in the sense of having no meaning or world, from whence these meaningless and world-less things?” In other words, that question which Heidegger calls the principal question of Metaphysics,¹⁵⁹⁴ “why are there beings rather than nothing?”, continually throws itself at our feet like a puppy who is seeking the affection of its beloved owner. Responding that these things just are, without Being, or that this question means nothing of these things because as soon as we ask the question of these beings they all of a sudden “Are” in some sense, is not an answer, but a strategy of avoiding the question through dogmatically affirmed and unsupported claims, or by pushing the question away for the time being. Go hide in your study, when you finally emerge your puppy is still there waiting for you to play with it. Let us leave this difficulty alone for the ‘time’ ‘being’; it will, after all, still be there when we are ready to come back to it.

¹⁵⁹²Ibid., 32 [12].

¹⁵⁹³Ibid., 255-256 [212].

¹⁵⁹⁴Heidegger, *IM*, 1[1].

In the final section of this chapter, Heidegger engages the “traditional” notion of Truth. Blattner notes that, in analysing the traditional notion of Truth, Heidegger’s purpose is not so much to deny the traditional theory, as to show that the traditional theory is meaningless because it has been detached from its grounding in Aristotle’s metaphysical-epistemological-anthropological philosophy. He says, “Essentially the language [of the theory] is untethered from its original source of meaning in the Aristotelian theory of mind and is now just verbiage. When we are confronted with empty words, what should we do? Heidegger’s answer is always, ‘return to the phenomena.’ He offers a phenomenology of truth to replace the Correspondence Theory.”¹⁵⁹⁵ Blattner notes that “During the Scientific Revolution the entire scheme of Aristotle’s theory was tossed out in favor of a new mechanical model of physics.”¹⁵⁹⁶ This, of course, is seen as Blattner as a good thing, in light of the fact that these elements of Aristotle’s theory of mind are so *passé*, “Both their antiquity and the association with a now-defunct vision of the world make them highly suspect.”¹⁵⁹⁷ Aristotle’s philosophy of mind no longer tenable, “philosophers of the modern era had no scientific theory of mind (and still have none) with which to replace Aristotle’s.”¹⁵⁹⁸ In light of this major lacuna, Heidegger proposes a phenomenological

¹⁵⁹⁵Blattner, *HBTRG*, 121. Cf. *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁵⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁵⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 47. It is my humble opinion, in spite of naysayers, and those who would provide all kinds of derogatory labels, and this after my engagement with Heidegger’s approach to Being, that it is not only possible, but worthwhile and necessary, to return to Aristotle, as interpreted by Thomas Aquinas, in order to discover an entirely tenable (ancient but true) philosophy of mind which is grounded in a metaphysics that can not only explain the errors of Heidegger’s approach, but also explain why he is right on so many things. The modern rejection of Aristotle was superficial, and has been sufficiently answered by modern and contemporary Aristotelian-thomists. As such, there is no longer any reason to think that Aristotle’s philosophical approach should be rejected, or that Aquinas was essentially wrong. In any case, those who would like to reject the Aristotelian-thomistic approach to philosophy will need to deal with the growing hoard of Aristotelian-thomistic philosophers who are responding to the modern and contemporary critiques of Aristotelian-thomism, and advancing a positive theory that is well worth considering. Interestingly enough, Dreyfus’s explanation of Heidegger’s objections against the so-called “traditional definition of truth” shows that Heidegger understanding the traditional approach to truth within a post-Cartesian ontology (cf. Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 266-270.), and is not adequately interacting with ancient and medieval approaches to ontology and philosophy of mind and human nature. One indeed wonders if Heidegger actually understood Ancient and medieval philosophy for itself, or if he was reading (and interpreting) it through the philosophical spectacles provided for him by post-Cartesian philosophy.

¹⁵⁹⁸Blattner, *HBTRG*, 120.

account of truth that does not so much deny the correspondence theory of truth as provide it with its “primordial” foundations. “The phenomenology is not intended to build another theory, but more to support us in our effort to stick with the basic intuition [of the correspondence theory of truth] and *not* offer a theory of truth.”¹⁵⁹⁹ Heidegger goes on, therefore, to lay out the primordial meaning of Being-True.¹⁶⁰⁰ He then seeks to show how the traditional notion of Truth depends upon the primordial meaning of Being-True. In analysing the traditional approach to truth Heidegger quotes Aristotle and Aquinas as the primary proponents of the traditional view.¹⁶⁰¹ He then notes that though Kant explicitly rejects the traditional notion, he actually held to the traditional notion of truth.¹⁶⁰² Heidegger then states that “this characterization of truth as ‘agreement’, *adaequatio*, *ὁμοίωσις*, is very general and empty.”¹⁶⁰³ He goes on, in this section, to show that Being-in-the-world is foundational to the traditional understanding of truth, in that one can only say that this assertion is true if “it uncovers the entity as it is in itself.”¹⁶⁰⁴ But, “Being-true as Being-uncovering, is a way of Being for Dasein.”¹⁶⁰⁵ From which it follows, that, “What is primarily ‘true’—that is, uncovering—is Dasein.”¹⁶⁰⁶ Therefore, the traditional notion of truth, which Heidegger described as Being-uncovered, is rooted, therefore, in Dasein as the uncovering Being. Truth is disclosedness or uncoveredness, and “To Dasein’s state of Being, *disclosedness in general* essentially belongs.”¹⁶⁰⁷ Thus, “In so far as Dasein *is* its disclosedness essentially, and

¹⁵⁹⁹Ibid., 121. Dreyfus concurs with this analysis by which Heidegger is not so much denying the correspondence theory, as proposing a new ontological foundation for the common sense idea that can be found behind the correspondence theory (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 267.).

¹⁶⁰⁰Dreyfus notes that “Heidegger often uses the term ‘*primordial X*’ to name that which is *the condition of the possibility of X* (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 271.).”

¹⁶⁰¹Heidegger, *BT*, 257 [214].

¹⁶⁰²Ibid., 258 [215].

¹⁶⁰³Ibid.

¹⁶⁰⁴Ibid., 261 [218-219]. “Being-true as Being-uncovering, is in turn ontologically possible only on the basis of Being-in-the-world. This latter phenomenon, which we have known as a basic state of Dasein, is the *foundation* for the primordial phenomenon of truth. (Ibid., 261 [219].)”

¹⁶⁰⁵Ibid., 263 [220].

¹⁶⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁶⁰⁷Ibid., 264 [221].

discloses and uncovers as something disclosed to this extent it is essentially ‘true’. *Dasein is ‘in the truth’.*”¹⁶⁰⁸ Heidegger comes to the conclusion that truth, uncoveredness, is the present-at-hand conformity of the present-at-hand assertion and the present-at-hand entity under discussion. Uncoveredness is grounded in Dasein’s disclosedness. All of this means that “‘*There is’ truth only in so far as Dasein is and so long as Dasein is.* Entities are uncovered only *when Dasein is*; and only as long as *Dasein is*, are they disclosed. Newton’s laws, the principle of contradiction, any truth whatever—these are true only as long as *Dasein is*. Before there was any Dasein, there was no truth; nor will there be any after Dasein is no more.”¹⁶⁰⁹ In other words, prior to Newton’s discovery of the so-called laws of nature, the phenomena described by the laws already were, in a sense. There were beings, and they acted as Newton described them, but the laws discovered by Newton were not yet true, as the laws were not. They became true with their “uncovering”, and through their uncovering they unveiled the Being of the phenomena that they described as always having been in this way. This means, for Heidegger, that unless some Dasein is, eternally, then there are no “eternal truths”.¹⁶¹⁰ This also means that the Being of truth is uncovering. From this Heidegger arrives at the conclusion that “*Because the kind of Being that is essential to truth is of the character of Dasein, all truth is relative to Dasein’s Being.*”¹⁶¹¹ This does not mean, however, that truth is subjective, “if one interprets ‘subjective’ as ‘left to the subject’s discretion’.”¹⁶¹² This brings Heidegger to the final element of his analysis of truth, in which he considers the *presupposition* of truth. To presuppose, for Heidegger, “is to understand something as the ground for the Being of some other entity.”¹⁶¹³ Dasein must always presuppose the truth

¹⁶⁰⁸Ibid., 263 [221].

¹⁶⁰⁹Ibid., 269 [226].

¹⁶¹⁰Ibid., 269-270 [227].

¹⁶¹¹Ibid., 270 [227].

¹⁶¹²Ibid.

¹⁶¹³Ibid., 270 [228].

(as uncoveredness) because “To Dasein its potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world is an issue, and this includes concerning itself with entities within-the-world and uncovering them circumspetively.”¹⁶¹⁴ From this Heidegger concludes that there can be no true sceptics, because to be sceptical is, in a sense, to commit existential suicide.¹⁶¹⁵

Heidegger arrives, therefore, at two conclusions that are of great importance for our explanation of Heidegger’s approach to the question of Being: (1) Being is truth, and truth is dependent on Dasein, therefore, Being finds its ground in Dasein. “Being (not entities) is something which ‘there is’ only in so far as truth is. And truth is only in so far as and as long as Dasein is. Being and truth ‘are’ equiprimordially.”¹⁶¹⁶ (2) We have not, as of yet, answered the question of Being, but the groundwork has been laid for an approach to answering this question.¹⁶¹⁷ The way has been prepared for the understanding of the meaning of Being, but we are still left with some important questions, not least of all, “Has our investigation up to this point ever brought Dasein into view *as a whole*?”¹⁶¹⁸ This question concludes the first division of Part One of *Being and Time*, and introduces the second division in which Heidegger will attempt to show that Time is the horizon (or, as the editors of this edition of *Being and Time* note, “something which we can neither widen nor go beyond, but which provides the limits for certain intellectual activities performed ‘within’ it.”¹⁶¹⁹) for the explanation of the meaning of Being. Most commentaries on *Being and Time* stop here, or, at best, only consider the following section rapidly.¹⁶²⁰

¹⁶¹⁴Ibid., 271 [228].

¹⁶¹⁵Ibid., 271 [229].

¹⁶¹⁶Ibid., 272 [230].

¹⁶¹⁷Ibid., 273 [230].

¹⁶¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁶¹⁹Ibid., 19fn4.

¹⁶²⁰Cf. Blattner, *HBTRG*. Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*.

Part One, Division Two

“Time must be brought to light—and genuinely conceived—as the horizon for all understanding of Being and for any way of interpreting it. In order for us to discern this, *time* needs to be *explicated primordially as the horizon for the understanding of Being, and in terms of temporality as the Being of Dasein, which understands Being.*”¹⁶²¹

Dasein and Temporality: An Introduction

This short introduction to the second division begins with a summary of what was achieved in the first division and explains that in order to truly grasp the meaning of the Being of Dasein it must be understood within the horizon of Time.¹⁶²² This will require Heidegger to return back through all that was achieved in the first division, and explain these elements in the horizon of Time.¹⁶²³ Division two is, as Division one, divided into six chapters.

Being-a-whole and Being-towards-death: II, 1

In order for the analysis of Dasein to lead us onwards to a proper understanding of the meaning of the Being of Dasein, Dasein must be grasped as a whole (which shows the importance of providing a positive answer to the final question with which Heidegger concludes division one). Heidegger here notes the difficulty of ever grasping Dasein as a whole, as it is always tending towards its possibilities which are never fully obtained (insomuch as the essence of Dasein is “constituted in part by potentiality-for-Being, ... [it follows that] as long as Dasein exists, it must in each case, as such a potentiality, *not yet be* something.”¹⁶²⁴ He proposes, however, that it may be possible, through a consideration of Dasein’s Being-towards-death, to

¹⁶²¹Heidegger, *BT*, 39 [17].

¹⁶²²*Ibid.*, 278 [235].

¹⁶²³*Ibid.*, 277 [234].

¹⁶²⁴*Ibid.*, 276 [233].

grasp Dasein as a whole (which will be necessary if we wish this analysis of Dasein to be primordial¹⁶²⁵). This analysis is forced to deal with, however, the fact that “if it [Dasein] gains such ‘wholeness’, this gain becomes the utter loss of Being-in-the-world. In such a case, it can never again be experienced *as an entity*.”¹⁶²⁶ In other words, Heidegger *would* define death as the cessation of Being-in-the-world. But the problem for having a complete, or whole, view of Dasein is that insomuch as it is Being-in-the-world it is incomplete—it has neither attained its end nor totality.¹⁶²⁷ These considerations lead Heidegger to consider Dasein’s Being-towards-the-death of others (considering the Being of Dasein as Mourning, the notion of death as a loss, the distinction between dying and perishing, and the fact that every Dasein must die), and discusses the concept of “end” as “totality”. The “ending” of Dasein signifies, according to Heidegger, first of all, a “stopping” as “either ‘passing over into non-presence-at-hand’ or else ‘Being-present-at-hand only when the end comes’.”¹⁶²⁸ Ending can also signify: getting finished, fulfilling, and disappearing.¹⁶²⁹ But, says Heidegger, “*by none of these modes of ending can death be suitably characterized as the ‘end’ of Dasein.*”¹⁶³⁰ No, says Heidegger, “The ‘ending’ which we have in view when we speak of death, does not signify Dasein’s Being-at-an-end [Zu-Ende-sein], but a *Being-towards-the-end* [Sein zum Ende] of this entity. Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is.”¹⁶³¹ Some scholars have entirely misunderstood Heidegger’s “doctrine” of death, such as the Reformed theologian John Frame, who, in his recently published *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, interprets death, in Heidegger, as the physical end of life of a

¹⁶²⁵Ibid.

¹⁶²⁶Ibid., 280 [236].

¹⁶²⁷Ibid.

¹⁶²⁸Ibid., 289 [245].

¹⁶²⁹Ibid.

¹⁶³⁰Ibid.

¹⁶³¹Ibid.

human being.¹⁶³² It is important, however, to note that Death, for Heidegger, in Dasein's Being-towards-death, is not the physical end of Dasein, nor anything close to that; but, rather, the existential anticipation of, and projection into, Dasein's ownmost potentialities-for-Being. Dasein as Being-towards-death is shown to be, in a certain sense, its end, "The full existential-ontological conception of death may now be defined as follows: *death, as the end of Dasein, is Dasein's ownmost possibility—non-relational, certain and as such indefinite, not to be outstripped. Death is, as Dasein's end, in the Being of this entity towards its end.*"¹⁶³³ Being-towards-death is "the anticipation of a potentiality-for-Being of the entity whose kind of Being is anticipation itself."¹⁶³⁴ "Anticipation turns out to be the possibility of understanding one's ownmost and uttermost potentiality-for-Being—that is to say, the possibility of *authentic existence.*"¹⁶³⁵ *Understanding* means projecting ones ownmost potentialities-of-Being. *Being-towards-death*, therefore, means projecting one's ownmost potentialities for Being such that they become an issue for Dasein. Death is always Dasein's own death. It belongs to Dasein alone, and to none other, and, therefore, death individualizes Dasein.¹⁶³⁶ Heidegger notes that, "Dasein is authentically itself only to the extent that, as concerned Being-alongside and solicitous Being-with, it projects itself upon its ownmost potentiality-for-Being rather than upon the possibility of the they-self."¹⁶³⁷ In other words, inasmuch as Dasein is Being-towards-death, Dasein is authentic. It is, therefore, this way of seeing Dasein as its whole which allows the analytic of Dasein to continue. Dasein, considered as *Being-towards-death*, is seen as a whole.

¹⁶³²John Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Books, 2015), 349-350.

¹⁶³³Heidegger, *BT*, 303 [258-259].

¹⁶³⁴*Ibid.*, 307 [262].

¹⁶³⁵*Ibid.*, 307 [263].

¹⁶³⁶*Ibid.*, 308 [263].

¹⁶³⁷*Ibid.*

Authentic Potentiality-for-Being and Resoluteness: II, 2

Here Heidegger provides an analysis of *conscience* (a calling which is a mode of discourse¹⁶³⁸) and “Being-guilty” which leads to an explanation of “Resoluteness”, which is a necessary existential preparation for Anxiety (and we have already seen the important role that Anxiety, or *malaise*, plays in the analytic of Dasein—as an understanding state-of-mind of Dasein). He explains that the purpose of this existential interpretation is “to exhibit an attestation of Dasein’s ownmost potentiality-for-Being.”¹⁶³⁹ *Conscience*, as Heidegger defines it later in this chapter, is said to be “the call of care from the uncanniness of Being-in-the-world—the call which summons Dasein to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-guilty.”¹⁶⁴⁰ Heidegger notes that the *call of conscience* has nothing to say, but is a calling forth of Dasein “into its ownmost possibilities”.¹⁶⁴¹ He repeats this same point, a bit later, as follows, “the call ‘says’ *nothing* which might be talked about, gives no information about events. The call points *forward to* Dasein’s potentiality-for-Being, and it does this as a call which comes *from* uncanniness.”¹⁶⁴² The *call* comes from Dasein itself, and, yet, from beyond and over Dasein.¹⁶⁴³ To be more precise we might quote a later comment to the effect that “the ‘whence’ from which it calls does not remain a matter of indifference for the calling. This ‘whence’—the uncanniness of thrown individualization—gets called too [migerufen] in the calling; that is, it too gets disclosed [miterschlossen]...the ‘whence’ of the calling is the ‘whither’ to which we are called back.”¹⁶⁴⁴ This brings out a very important for the current analysis of the meaning of Being, “We have not fully determined the character of the call as disclosure until we understand it as one which calls

¹⁶³⁸Ibid., 314 [269].

¹⁶³⁹Ibid., 341 [295].

¹⁶⁴⁰Ibid., 335 [289].

¹⁶⁴¹Ibid., 318 [273].

¹⁶⁴²Ibid., 325 [280].

¹⁶⁴³Ibid., 320 [275].

¹⁶⁴⁴Ibid., 325-326 [280].

us back in calling us forth [als vorrufender Ruckruf].”¹⁶⁴⁵ We already see, here, a temporal element of the Being of Dasein. The caller “is definable in a ‘worldly’ way by *nothing* at all. The caller is Dasein in its uncanniness.”¹⁶⁴⁶ The nature of the call could be described, according to Heidegger, as “*keeping silent*”.¹⁶⁴⁷ It turns out that conscience is the call of care that makes known only “that uncanniness pursues Dasein and is a threat to the lostness in which it has forgotten itself.”¹⁶⁴⁸ In light of this understanding of conscience, Heidegger proposes, it is now possible to conceive of the conscience’s call of “guilty”.¹⁶⁴⁹ The conscience calls out Dasein as Being in one of a number of conditions: Guilty, possibly guilty (a warning), or not guilty (that is, at least, conscious of no guilt).¹⁶⁵⁰ Heidegger goes on to provide the reader with an analysis of what is meant by Being-guilty.¹⁶⁵¹ Heidegger’s analysis of Being-guilty creates a problem, it confronts us with the character of the not, as a not.¹⁶⁵² He therefore states that “we define the formally existential idea of the ‘Guilty!’ as “Being-the-basis for a Being which has been defined by a ‘not’”—that is to say, as ‘*Being-the-basis of a nullity*’.”¹⁶⁵³ That is, the call “guilty!” is the existential basis for the possibility of Being-*not*-guilty. This brings up, claims Heidegger, the age-old problem of *not-Being*. In order to better understand the “not” Heidegger explains, in a somewhat dense paragraph, what is meant by the claim that Dasein is the basis for its own potentiality for Being. This paragraph is quite important for Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein, as such we will briefly comment on some of its more salient features.

Dasein’s Being is care. It comprises in itself facticity (thrownness), existence (projection), and falling. As being, Dasein is something that has been thrown; it has been

¹⁶⁴⁵Ibid., 326 [280].

¹⁶⁴⁶Ibid., 321 [276].

¹⁶⁴⁷Ibid., 322 [277].

¹⁶⁴⁸Ibid.

¹⁶⁴⁹Ibid., 324-325 [280]. Again, what Heidegger means by “guilt” is not what most people mean by guilt.

¹⁶⁵⁰Ibid., 326 [281].

¹⁶⁵¹Ibid., 327-329 [281-283].

¹⁶⁵²Ibid., 329 [283].

¹⁶⁵³Ibid., 329 [283]. Cf. Ibid., 331 [285].

brought into its 'there', but *not* of its own accord. As being, it has taken the definite form of a potentiality-for-Being which has heard itself and has devoted itself to itself, but *not* as itself. As existent, it never comes back behind its thrownness in such a way that it might first release this 'that-it-is-and-has-to-be' from *its Being-its-Self* and lead it into the 'there'. Thrownness, however, does not lie behind it as some event which has happened to Dasein, which has factually befallen and fallen loose from Dasein again; on the contrary, as long as Dasein is, *Dasein*, as care, *is* constantly its 'that-it-is'. To this entity it has been delivered over, and as such it can exist solely as the entity which it is; and *as this entity* to which it has been thus delivered over, it *is, in its existing*, the basis of its potentiality-for-Being. . . In being a basis—that is, in existing as thrown—Dasein constantly lags behind its possibilities. It is never existent *before* its basis, but only *from it* and *as this basis*. Thus 'Being-a-basis' means *never* to have power over one's ownmost Being from the ground up."¹⁶⁵⁴

Heidegger begins by reminding us that the Being of Dasein is care. As Being, Dasein has been thrown, and has taken a form of potentiality-for-Being. As existent—that is, as thrown—Dasein cannot determine its thrownness such that it brings itself into the "there". "To this entity it has been delivered over, and as such it can exist solely as the entity which it is."¹⁶⁵⁵ As this thrown Being, existing as it is—and, perhaps, we might add, in its own way, it is the basis of its own potentiality-for-Being. We learn that Dasein is, or rather becomes, its own Basis because it exists as thrown, and determines its own possibilities for Being. It seems that Heidegger is saying that Dasein is not the ground, cause, or basis of the fact that it exists (Dasein is not the ground of its ownmost potentialities), but that in existing (by having this potentiality-for-being), and determining itself in its own possibilities for Being it becomes the basis for its very Being. "Dasein is its basis existentially—that is, in such a manner that it understands itself in terms of possibilities, and, as so understanding itself, is that entity which has been thrown."¹⁶⁵⁶ But, notes Heidegger, this understanding of itself in some one possibility implies the constant refusing, negating, or not understanding oneself in other possibilities. "But this implies that in having a

¹⁶⁵⁴Ibid., 329-330 [284].

¹⁶⁵⁵Ibid., 330 [284].

¹⁶⁵⁶Ibid., 331 [285].

potentiality-for-Being it always stands in one possibility or another: it constantly is *not* other possibilities, and it has waived these in its existentiell projection.”¹⁶⁵⁷ As such, Dasein, as the basis for its own potentiality-for-Being, confronts us with the “not”.

Dasein concludes that “‘care’—Dasein’s Being—means, as thrown projection, Being-the-basis of a nullity (and this Being-the-basis is itself null). This means that *Dasein as such is guilty*, if our formally existential definition of ‘guilt’ as ‘Being-the-basis of a nullity’ is indeed correct.”¹⁶⁵⁸ Heidegger analyses the “not” existentially, but notes that we cannot answer the question of the “not”, or even seek the conditions upon which this question can be raised, “*except by taking the meaning of Being in general as a theme and clarifying it*”.¹⁶⁵⁹ So, it would seem, at least at this point, clarification of the question and problem of the “not” depends upon clarifying Being. Our discussion of the guilt allows us to elaborate on what Heidegger means when he says that the “appeal calls back by calling forth”,¹⁶⁶⁰ “it calls Dasein *forth* to the possibility of taking over, in existing, even that thrown entity which it is; it calls Dasein *back* to its thrownness so as to understand this thrownness as the null basis which it has to take up into existence.”¹⁶⁶¹

Heidegger’s analysis of the call is the horizon in which he develops his ontological-existential notion of freedom and choosing. We find a preliminary comment concerning freedom in Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein as its own basis, “Freedom, however, *is* only in the choice of one possibility—that is, in tolerating one’s not having chosen the others and one’s not being able to choose them.”¹⁶⁶² Freedom, then, is Dasein’s projection of itself into one possibility for Being or another. He later discusses choosing, noting that “Understanding the call is choosing; but it is not

¹⁶⁵⁷Ibid.

¹⁶⁵⁸Ibid.

¹⁶⁵⁹Ibid., 332 [286].

¹⁶⁶⁰Ibid., 333 [287].

¹⁶⁶¹Ibid.

¹⁶⁶²Ibid., 331 [285].

a choosing of conscience, which as such cannot be chosen. What is chosen is *having-a-conscience* as Being-free for one's ownmost Being-guilty. '*Understanding the appeal*' means '*wanting to have a conscience*'.¹⁶⁶³ Heidegger goes on to point out, and respond to, 4 objections, brought by those who hold to the ordinary interpretation of conscience, against Heidegger's interpretation of conscience.¹⁶⁶⁴

Resoluteness is the "*reticent self-projection upon one's ownmost Being-guilty, in which one is ready for anxiety*",¹⁶⁶⁵ that is, the "distinctive and authentic disclosedness, which is attested in Dasein itself by its conscience."¹⁶⁶⁶ Later he states that "Resoluteness 'exists' only as a resolution [Entschluss] which understandingly projects itself...*The resolution is precisely the disclosive projection and determination of what is factually possible at the time.*"¹⁶⁶⁷ We might add one other important claim, "'Resoluteness' signifies letting oneself be summoned out of one's lostness in the 'they'."¹⁶⁶⁸ But, as we already noticed, Heidegger has "Interpreted disclosedness existentially as the *primordial truth*."¹⁶⁶⁹ Heidegger concludes, therefore, that "In resoluteness we have now arrived at that truth of Dasein which is most primordial because it is *authentic*."¹⁶⁷⁰

We learned, above, that Dasein is not the ground, cause, or basis of the fact that it exists, but that in existing (that potentiality of Dasein towards which Dasein determines itself, and is Dasein's own), and determining itself in its own possibilities for Being it becomes the basis for its very Being, not only does Dasein's thrownness determine its existence as it is, but it also

¹⁶⁶³Ibid., 334 [288].

¹⁶⁶⁴Ibid., 336-341 [290-295].

¹⁶⁶⁵Ibid., 343 [297].

¹⁶⁶⁶Ibid.

¹⁶⁶⁷Ibid., 345 [298].

¹⁶⁶⁸Ibid., 345 [299].

¹⁶⁶⁹Ibid., 343 [297].

¹⁶⁷⁰Ibid.

determines Dasein to a definite world: “Thrown into its ‘there’, every Dasein has been factually submitted to a definite ‘world’—its ‘world’.”¹⁶⁷¹ In our earlier discussion of the relationship between the They (and the Others) we noted that Dasein, in order to authentically Be itself, must, in a certain sense, distinguish itself from the Others, but within the context of the Others.

Heidegger notes that Dasein cannot even authentically be with others unless it distinguishes itself by authentically being-itself. “Only by authentically Being-their-Selves in resoluteness can people authentically be with one another—not by ambiguous and jealous stipulations and talkative fraternizing in the ‘they’ and in what ‘they’ want to undertake.”¹⁶⁷²

Heidegger’s consideration of Resoluteness brings out what he calls the “Situation”.¹⁶⁷³ Heidegger explains that “the Situation has its foundations in resoluteness. The Situation is the ‘there’ which is disclosed in resoluteness—the ‘there’ as which the existent entity is there. It is not a framework present-at-hand in which Dasein occurs, or into which it might even just bring itself...the Situation *is* only t h r o u g h resoluteness and in it.”¹⁶⁷⁴ The call of consciousness “*calls us forth into the Situation.*”¹⁶⁷⁵ Resoluteness, says Heidegger, does not first come to know the situation, and then put the situation before itself, but, on the contrary, has already put itself into the Situation.¹⁶⁷⁶ “As resolute, Dasein is already *taking action.*”¹⁶⁷⁷ To be *resolute* is determine oneself towards one of the many possibilities of Being which Dasein could Be, as such, Dasein has already found itself thrown into a situation in which Dasein is already Being-towards the things that reveal themselves to Dasein in the context of relations which is Dasein’s

¹⁶⁷¹Ibid., 344 [297].

¹⁶⁷²Ibid., 344-345 [298].

¹⁶⁷³Ibid., 346 [299].

¹⁶⁷⁴Ibid., 346 [299-300].

¹⁶⁷⁵Ibid., 347 [300].

¹⁶⁷⁶Ibid.

¹⁶⁷⁷Ibid.

world. This study puts Heidegger into position for being able to define Dasein's "*authentic potentiality-for-being-a-whole*."¹⁶⁷⁸

Authentic Potentiality-for-Being-a-whole and Temporality as Care: II, 3

In this chapter Heidegger brings out what it means to say that Care is the totality of Dasein's Being. *Care* seems to be equivalent to *Anticipatory Resoluteness* which just is *Temporality* (the future of Dasein which is Dasein's Being-towards-death, Being-Guilty as having been—what is seen as Past, and Making-Present Resolutely that which is present-to-hand). Therefore, Dasein is based or founded on Temporality (which is the meaning of Dasein). Says Heidegger, "*Temporality gets experienced in a phenomenally primordial way in Dasein's authentic Being-a-whole, in the phenomenon of anticipatory resoluteness*. If temporality makes itself known primordially in this, then we may suppose that the temporality of anticipatory resoluteness is a distinctive mode of temporality. Temporality has different possibilities and different ways of *temporalizing* itself. The basic possibilities of existence, the authenticity and inauthenticity of Dasein, are grounded ontologically on possible temporalizations of temporality."¹⁶⁷⁹ We have already seen hints of what is to be exposed in this section. Dasein's Being, in its whole, is directed towards its *future* as Being-towards-death. Dasein's Being is also *past* through its guilt which is a taking over of its thrownness (as we saw in the preceding chapter). Dasein's Being is entirely *present* in that it is only authentically itself in being Resolute in a situation. So, Heidegger states, "Coming back to itself futurally, resoluteness brings itself into the Situation by making present."¹⁶⁸⁰ What is meant by futural is "the coming [Kunft] in which

¹⁶⁷⁸Ibid., 348 [302].

¹⁶⁷⁹Ibid., 351-352 [304].

¹⁶⁸⁰Ibid., 374 [326].

Dasein, in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being, comes towards itself. Anticipation makes Dasein *authentically* futural, and in such a way that the anticipation itself is possible only in so far as Dasein, *as being*, is always coming towards itself.”¹⁶⁸¹ In order to understand the temporality of Dasein we will need to give a brief explanation of what is meant by *Anticipatory Resoluteness* and what it implies.

That Dasein is *Anticipatory Resoluteness* is revealed through an analysis of what has already been seen in Heidegger's Ontological-existential analytic of Dasein. It has already been shown that Dasein is, in authentic Being-towards-death, anticipating. “Being-towards-death is the anticipation of a potentiality-for-Being of the entity whose kind of Being is anticipation itself.”¹⁶⁸² Furthermore, “Dasein’s authentic potentiality-for-Being, in its existentiell attestation, has been exhibited, and at the same time existentially Interpreted, as *resoluteness*.”¹⁶⁸³ The question, states Heidegger, is how do we bring these two elements, anticipation and resoluteness, together.¹⁶⁸⁴ Heidegger reminds us that “every step in our Interpretation must be guided by the idea of *existence*.”¹⁶⁸⁵ He explains, and in so doing shows how to bring anticipation and resoluteness together, that “What this signifies for the question of the possible connection between anticipation and resoluteness, is nothing less than the demand that we should project these existential phenomena upon the existentiell possibilities which have been delineated in them, and ‘think these possibilities through to the end’ in an existential manner. If we do this, the working-out of anticipatory resoluteness as a potentiality-for-Being-a-whole such that this potentiality is authentic and is possible in an existentiell way, will lose the character of an

¹⁶⁸¹Ibid., 373 [325].

¹⁶⁸²Ibid., 307 [262]. Cf. Ibid., 349 [301-302].

¹⁶⁸³Ibid., 349 [302].

¹⁶⁸⁴Ibid.

¹⁶⁸⁵Ibid., 350 [302].

arbitrary construction. It will have become a way of Interpreting whereby Dasein is liberated for its uttermost possibility of existence.”¹⁶⁸⁶ This is exactly what Heidegger proposes to do in this chapter. Heidegger begins by reminding us of the connection between Resoluteness and Being-towards-death, “Existentially, however, Dasein’s ‘*Being-at-an-end*’ implies *Being-towards-the-end*. As *Being-towards-the-end which understands*—that is to say, as anticipation of death—resoluteness becomes authentically what it can be. Resoluteness does not just ‘have’ a connection with anticipation as with something other than itself. *It harbours in itself authentic Being-towards-death, as the possible existentiell modality of its own authenticity.*”¹⁶⁸⁷ It is seen, therefore, that Resoluteness is only authentic resoluteness when it is authentic Being-towards-death, and, therefore, when it is “anticipation of death”. Now, Heidegger describes Anticipation as follows, “Anticipation ‘is’ not some kind of free-floating behaviour, but must be conceived as *the possibility of the authenticity of that resoluteness which has been attested in an existentiell way—a possibility hidden in such resoluteness, and thus attested therewith.*”¹⁶⁸⁸ It follows, then, that, “only *as anticipating* does resoluteness become a primordial Being towards Dasein’s ownmost potentiality-for-Being. Only when it ‘qualifies’ itself as Being-towards-death does resoluteness understand the ‘can’ of its potentiality-for-Being-guilty.”¹⁶⁸⁹ We cannot, therefore, separate anticipation and resoluteness without becoming inauthentic. In light of what has been seen, Heidegger describes *Anticipatory Resoluteness* as follows, “Anticipatory resoluteness is not a way of escape, fabricated for the ‘overcoming’ of death; it is rather that understanding which follows the call of conscience and which frees for death the possibility of acquiring *power over*

¹⁶⁸⁶Ibid., 350 [302-302].

¹⁶⁸⁷Ibid., 353 [305].

¹⁶⁸⁸Ibid., 357 [309].

¹⁶⁸⁹Ibid., 354 [306].

Dasein's *existence* and of basically dispersing all fugitive Self-concealments."¹⁶⁹⁰ Through an existential analysis of the Self, or the 'I', of Dasein, Heidegger arrives at the conclusion that "Existentially, 'Self-constancy' signifies nothing other than anticipatory resoluteness. The ontological structure of such resoluteness reveals the existentiality of the Self's Selfhood."¹⁶⁹¹ Indeed, "Dasein is *authentically itself* in the primordial individualization of the reticent resoluteness which exacts anxiety of itself. *As something that keeps silent*, authentic *Being-one's-Self* is just the sort of thing that does not keep on saying 'I'; but in its reticence it '*is*' that thrown entity as which it can authentically be."¹⁶⁹² Dasein, then, is authentically itself when it maintains itself in Anticipatory Resoluteness. In so doing it is not absorbed by the They, but, rather, modifies the They. "Dasein becomes 'essentially' Dasein in that authentic existence which constitutes itself as anticipatory resoluteness. Such resoluteness, as a mode of the authenticity of care, contains Dasein's primordial Self-constancy and totality."¹⁶⁹³

Heidegger then distinguishes the notion of Temporality from the common conception of "Time", and explains the finitude of Dasein's Temporality. If we are to understand how Heidegger approaches the question of Being within the Horizon of temporality we will need to give a brief explanation of just what Heidegger means by Temporality, and how it is different from the traditional understanding of Time. Heidegger noted near the very beginning of *Being and Time* that this is what he was aiming at. He said, "Time must be brought to light—and genuinely conceived—as the horizon for all understanding of Being and for any way of interpreting it. In order for us to discern this, *time* needs to be *explicated primordially as the horizon for the understanding of Being, and in terms of temporality as the Being of Dasein, which*

¹⁶⁹⁰Ibid., 357 [310].

¹⁶⁹¹Ibid., 369 [322].

¹⁶⁹²Ibid., 369-370 [323].

¹⁶⁹³Ibid., 370 [323].

understands Being.”¹⁶⁹⁴ We are now coming to Heidegger’s explanation of Time and Temporality, from which he thing we will be able to get a better understanding of Being. Heidegger’s analysis of Care which brings him to conclude that Dasein is authentically it’s own self when it maintains itself in anticipatory resoluteness leads into an analysis of Dasein’s temporality. “Anticipatory resoluteness, when taken formally and existentially, without our constantly designating its full structural content, is *Being towards* one’s ownmost, distinctive potentiality-for-Being. This sort of thing is possible only in that Dasein *can, indeed, come towards* itself in its ownmost possibility, and that it can put up with this possibility as a possibility in thus letting itself come towards itself—in other words, that it exists. This letting-itself-*come-towards*-itself in that distinctive possibility which it puts up with is the primordial phenomenon of the *future as coming towards.*”¹⁶⁹⁵ Dasein’s Being-towards-death, whether it be authentic or inauthentic, is only possible “as something *futural.*”¹⁶⁹⁶ As such, Dasein’s anticipatory resoluteness contains an aspect which is yet to come—future. But Dasein’s anticipatory resoluteness is also past, that is. “Anticipatory resoluteness understands Dasein in its own essential Being-guilty. This understanding means that in existing one takes over Being-guilty; it means *being* the thrown basis of nullity. But taking over thrownness signifies *being* Dasein authentically *as it already was.*”¹⁶⁹⁷ As such, Dasein is, in Heidegger’s terms, an “‘I-am-as-having-been’.”¹⁶⁹⁸ He notes that “As authentically futural, Dasein *is* authentically as ‘*having been.*’”¹⁶⁹⁹ But it is not only the case that Dasein is both futural and past in its anticipatory resoluteness, but, Dasein is also present because, “Anticipatory resoluteness discloses the current

¹⁶⁹⁴Ibid., 39 [17].

¹⁶⁹⁵Ibid., 372 [325].

¹⁶⁹⁶Ibid., 373 [325].

¹⁶⁹⁷Ibid.

¹⁶⁹⁸Ibid., 373 [326].

¹⁶⁹⁹Ibid.

Situation of the ‘there’ in such a way that existence, in taking action, is circumspectively concerned with what is factually ready-to-hand environmentally. Resolute Being-alongside what is ready-to-hand in the Situation—that is to say, taking action in such a way as to let one encounter what *has presence* environmentally—is possible only by *making* such an entity *present*. Only as the *Present* [*Gegenwart*] in the sense of making present, can resoluteness be what it is: namely letting itself be encountered undisguisedly by that which it seizes upon in taking action.”¹⁷⁰⁰ As such, Dasein is temporal in its Anticipatory Resoluteness, or, we might say, Dasein as care is temporal.¹⁷⁰¹

Heidegger describes the phenomenon of Temporality as follows: “Coming back to itself futurally, resoluteness brings itself into the Situation by making present. The character of ‘having been’ arises from the future, and in such a way that the future which ‘has been’ (or better, which ‘is in the process of having been’) releases from itself the Present. This phenomenon has the unity of a future which makes present in the process of having been; we designate it as ‘temporality’.”¹⁷⁰² Dasein can maintain itself in anticipatory resoluteness because of its temporality. Now it is immediately obvious that this does not bear any resemblance to the traditional notions of time (that notion of time that began with Aristotle and persists even today),¹⁷⁰³ and temporality (by which the philosophers meant being “in” time—in the traditional interpretation)¹⁷⁰⁴. Heidegger states that in light of his definition of temporality it is evident that the traditional understanding of time is a derivation that arises from inauthentic temporality.¹⁷⁰⁵ This inauthentic, everyday, understanding of time and temporality sees time as a series of “nows”

¹⁷⁰⁰Ibid., 373-374 [326].

¹⁷⁰¹Ibid., 374 [326].

¹⁷⁰²Ibid.

¹⁷⁰³Ibid., 39 [18].

¹⁷⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁷⁰⁵Ibid., 374 [326-327].

and that which is temporal as being “in” or “passing through” these “nows.”¹⁷⁰⁶ The primordial, and, therefore, ontologically basic meaning of temporality can be expressed as follows: “its essence is a process of temporalizing in the unity of the ecstases.” The *ecstases* (“*primordial ‘outside-of-itself’ in and for itself*”¹⁷⁰⁷) of temporality are “The future, the character of having been, and the Present”, which “show the phenomenal characteristics of the ‘towards-oneself’, the ‘back-to’, and the ‘letting-oneself-be-encountered-by.’”¹⁷⁰⁸

Heidegger must, now that he has discovered what temporality “is”, must now return through his analysis of Dasein, and illuminate it in the horizon of Temporality.

Temporality and Everydayness: II, 4

Heidegger, here, leads up to some comments about everydayness and its temporality through a discussion of the constitutional structure of Care: a consideration of the temporal character of understanding, states-of-mind, falling and discourse. This consideration reflects, therefore, on the *temporal* nature of the ways of understanding; of the Moods (or States-of-mind) of Fear,¹⁷⁰⁹ Anxiety,¹⁷¹⁰ and even Hope.¹⁷¹¹ *Understanding* is seen to be futural in character, whereas *states-of-mind* have the character of “having been”.¹⁷¹² He continues with discussions of the temporal significance of each of the elements of Dasein that have already been considered: Falling, in its constitutive elements such as Curiosity and awareness;¹⁷¹³ of discourse;¹⁷¹⁴ of

¹⁷⁰⁶Ibid., 377 [329]. Heidegger comes back to the traditional conception of time and temporality in the final chapter.

¹⁷⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁷⁰⁸Ibid., 377 [328].

¹⁷⁰⁹Ibid., 391-393 [341-342].

¹⁷¹⁰Ibid., 393-395 [342-344].

¹⁷¹¹Ibid., 395-396 [345].

¹⁷¹²Ibid., 390 [340].

¹⁷¹³Ibid., 396-400 [346-349].

¹⁷¹⁴Ibid., 400-401 [349-350].

Circumspective concern,¹⁷¹⁵ and how circumspective concern is transformed bringing about the genesis and nature of theoretical discovery (science);¹⁷¹⁶ of the world of Dasein (to which we will return later);¹⁷¹⁷ and of the spatiality of Dasein as grounded in Temporality.¹⁷¹⁸ The chapter ends with some concluding remarks concerning the temporal significance of Dasein's everydayness.¹⁷¹⁹ There are three important sections that we will consider before moving on to the next chapter: his short discussion of the temporality of discourse, a short excerpt where he discusses how things present themselves to us, and his discussion of the temporal constitution of the world.

In his brief discussion of the temporality of discourse Heidegger proposes that “only in terms of the temporality of discourse—that is, of Dasein in general—can we clarify how ‘signification’ ‘arises’ and make the possibility of concept-formation ontologically intelligible”.¹⁷²⁰ He says,

Understanding is grounded primarily in the future (whether in anticipation or in awaiting). States-of-mind temporalize themselves primarily in having been (whether in repetition or in having forgotten). Falling has its temporal roots primarily in the Present (whether in making-present or in the moment of vision). All the same, understanding is in every case a Present which ‘is in the process of having been’. All the same, one’s state-of-mind temporalizes itself as a future which is ‘making present’. And all the same, the Present ‘leaps away’ from a future that is in the process of having been, or else it is held on to by such a future. Thus we can see that *in every ecstasis, temporality temporalizes itself as a whole; and this means that in the ecstatical unity with which temporality has fully temporalized itself currently, is grounded the totality of the structural whole of existence, facticity, and falling—that is, the unity of the care-structure...* Temporality temporalizes itself as a future which makes present in the process of having been.¹⁷²¹

¹⁷¹⁵Ibid., 403-408 [352-356].

¹⁷¹⁶Ibid., 408-415 [356-364].

¹⁷¹⁷Ibid., 415-418 [364-366].

¹⁷¹⁸Ibid., 418-421 [367-369].

¹⁷¹⁹Ibid., 421-423 [370-372].

¹⁷²⁰Ibid., 401 [349].

¹⁷²¹Ibid., 401 [350].

In the second section that I would like to consider, Heidegger discusses the temporality of the sciences and theoretical approaches to the world. Here he says,

Why is it that what we are talking about—the heavy hammer—shows itself differently when our way of talking is thus modified? Not because we are keeping our distance from manipulation, nor because we are just looking *away* [*absehen*] from the equipmental character of this entity, but rather because we are looking *at* [*ansehen*] the ready-to-hand thing which we encounter, and looking at it ‘in a new way’ as something present-at-hand. *The understanding of Being* by which our concerned dealings with entities within-the-world have been guided *has changed over*... A modification of our understanding of Being does not seem to be necessarily constitutive for the genesis of the theoretical attitude ‘towards Things’. Certainly not, if this ‘modification’ is to imply a change in the kind of Being which, in understanding the entity before us, we understand it to possess.¹⁷²²

This is a key quote for our present purposes. Here Heidegger notes that the being shows itself to us in differently, based upon how we see it (not based upon how we talk about it—our talking about it is based upon our seeing it—“looking *at* [*ansehen*]” it). By looking at a being in some way, as a some-thing, it shows itself to us differently. We might say that when we change our perspective (our way of being-towards x) we see the being in a different light, and in seeing that being in a different light, the being is showing itself to us differently.

The third important section of this chapter is found in Heidegger’s discussion of the ontological constitution of Dasein’s ‘World’. We are reminded that the *world* is made up of the unity of relationships (the ‘in-order-to’, the ‘towards-which’, the ‘towards-this’, and the ‘for-the-sake-of’) which, by their interactions make up ‘significance’.¹⁷²³ This reminder is followed by an important claim concerning Dasein’s relation to Dasein’s world.

Dasein exists for the sake of a potentiality-for-Being of itself. In existing, it has been thrown; and as something thrown, it has been delivered over to entities which it needs *in order to* be able to be as it is—namely, *for the sake of* itself. In so far as Dasein exists factually, it understands itself in the way its ‘for-the-sake-of-itself’ is thus connected with some current ‘in-order-to’. *That inside which* existing Dasein understands

¹⁷²²Ibid., 412-413 [361].

¹⁷²³Ibid., 415 [364].

itself, is ‘there’ along with its factual existence. That inside which one primarily understands oneself has Dasein’s kind of Being. Dasein *is* its world existingly.¹⁷²⁴

Heidegger goes on to lead us through a number of conclusions that seem to follow from what we have seen so far. Dasein’s world just is Dasein’s understanding of it. Dasein is care. Care is temporality. Temporality is the disclosedness of the ‘there’. The world is disclosed along with the disclosedness of the ‘there’. It seems to follow, then, that the unity of Significance (the relation of the relations) is grounded in temporality. But the ontological constitution of the world is Significance. Therefore, the ontological constitution of the world is grounded in Temporality. Therefore, the possibility of the world is grounded in the horizon of Temporality. In Heidegger’s own words, “*The existential-temporal condition for the possibility of the world lies in the fact that temporality, as an ecstatical unity, has something like a horizon.*”¹⁷²⁵ But, as Heidegger has already shown, “temporality makes up the primordial meaning of Dasein’s Being”,¹⁷²⁶ that is, the very meaning of Dasein’s Being is constituted of temporality. Heidegger also concludes this chapter with the comment, “at bottom we mean by the term ‘everydayness’ nothing else than temporality, while temporality is made possible by Dasein’s *Being*.”¹⁷²⁷ It follows, then, that “in so far as Dasein temporalizes itself, a world *is* too. In temporalizing itself with regard to its Being as temporality, Dasein *is* essentially ‘in a world’, by reason of the ecstatico-horizonal constitution of that temporality...It [the world] ‘is’, with the ‘outside-of-itself’ of the ecstases, ‘there’. If no *Dasein* exists, no world is ‘there’ either.”¹⁷²⁸ If this is the case, that is, if the very Being-there of the world is dependent on the existence of Dasein, then it also follows that if some Dasein is, in some way, Being-in-the-world, then “*the world is already presupposed.*”¹⁷²⁹

¹⁷²⁴Ibid., 416 [364].

¹⁷²⁵Ibid., 416 [365].

¹⁷²⁶Ibid., 278 [235].

¹⁷²⁷Ibid., 423 [372].

¹⁷²⁸Ibid., 417 [365].

¹⁷²⁹Ibid., 417 [365].

Temporality and Historicality: II, 5

In this chapter Heidegger seeks to show that Dasein exists historically only because temporality is the very basis of its Being. To do so, Heidegger explains the ordinary meaning of history and explains that Dasein is not, indeed never is, *Past*. Dasein that no longer exists still “is” as “having-being-there”. Heidegger distinguishes between what is other than Dasein (world-historical) and Dasein (which is primarily historical). Authentic historicality is possible only on the basis of authentic temporality. Authentic and inauthentic historicality are then explained and compared. Heidegger then explains what is meant by historiology and that historiology is based upon Dasein’s Historicality. It is important to note both the mention of the hermeneutical situation,¹⁷³⁰ and hermeneutics in historiology.¹⁷³¹ Though the majority of the contents of this particular chapter does not further our understanding of Heidegger’s approach to the question of Being, he concludes this chapter with a comment that should be noted: “the question of the ontical is the *ontological* question of the state of Being of entities other than Dasein—of what is present-at-hand in the widest sense...the ontical is only *one* domain of entities. The idea of Being embraces both the ‘ontical’ and the ‘Historical’ [Dasein]. It is *this idea* which must let itself be ‘generically differentiated’.”¹⁷³²

The Source of the Ordinary Conception of Time: II, 6

In this, the final section of the extant parts of *Being and Time*, Heidegger notes that our analysis of Dasein is incomplete because he has not yet explained what it means for Dasein to ‘reckon with time’, or to take time into account. ‘Reckoning with time’ is not, notes Heidegger in

¹⁷³⁰Ibid., 449 [397].

¹⁷³¹Ibid., 450 [398-399].

¹⁷³²Ibid., 455 [403].

the introduction to this chapter, an action that is done primarily with measuring equipment, but, rather, is prior to such equipment.¹⁷³³ He notes that “All Dasein’s behaviour is to be Interpreted in terms of its Being—that is, in terms of temporality.”¹⁷³⁴ If all of Dasein’s behaviour—ways of Being—are to be Interpreted in terms of the Being of Dasein (which is care as temporality), then even Dasein’s way of Being towards time—reckoning with time—must be examined. This will be one of the themes of this final chapter. It is also important for his analysis of the temporality of Dasein, to be able to show not only that Dasein is temporal (as Heidegger understands temporality), but also where the traditional concept of time comes from. As he himself notes, “By demonstrating that this is the source of the ordinary conception, we shall justify our earlier Interpretation of temporality as *primordial time*.”¹⁷³⁵ He, therefore, analyzes the ordinary understanding and measuring of Time, showing it to be an inauthentic way of Being of Dasein that is constituted by Dasein’s thrownness and Falling. The ordinary understanding, even that of Hegel, is constituted by the “Now” and an uninterrupted succession of “Nows”. The entire purpose of this section could be summarized in the following phrase: “The question of whether and how time has any ‘Being’, and of why and in what sense we designate it as ‘being’, cannot be answered until we have shown to what extent temporality itself, in the totality of its temporalizing makes it possible for us somehow to have an understanding of Being and address ourselves to entities.”¹⁷³⁶

¹⁷³³Ibid., 456 [404].

¹⁷³⁴Ibid., 456-457 [404-405].

¹⁷³⁵Ibid., 457 [405]. It is important to note that Heidegger is not, here, attempting to show that the traditional conception of time and temporality is false by showing that it finds its basis in “primordial” time (which would be an informal fallacy—the Genetic fallacy). On the contrary, he is trying to show what might be loosely portrayed as causality, that is, the traditional conception of time comes from primordial time—it is not wrong or false, it is inauthentic temporality.

¹⁷³⁶Ibid., 458 [406].

He begins by noting how Dasein, by being in the mode of making-present, an inauthentic mode of Being towards the present.¹⁷³⁷ It is in this inauthentic mode of Making-Present, which does not have the Moment of Vision, that Dasein becomes concerned with factual time: before's, now's and after's. Indeed, as he will point out later, As Dasein, as being thrown and falling, loses itself in that which concerns it, its Being becomes the very ground of the levelling off of time and the covering up of temporality.¹⁷³⁸ He calls the relational structure between these 'moments', *datability*.¹⁷³⁹ When Dasein is in the inauthentic mode of making-present it interprets itself in relation to datability.¹⁷⁴⁰ This is what Heidegger says is commonly called time, "The making-present which interprets itself—in other words, that which has been interpreted and is addressed in the 'now'—is what we call 'time'."¹⁷⁴¹ Or, as he says a bit later, interpreting, in an existential-ontological manner, Aristotle's definition of time, "*Time is what shows itself in such a making-present... This time is that which is **counted** and which shows itself when one follows the travelling pointer, counting and making present in such a way that this making-present temporalizes itself in an ecstatical unity with the retaining and awaiting which are horizontally open according to the 'earlier' and 'later'.*"¹⁷⁴² He goes on to consider the ways in which Dasein relates itself to time, so conceived.¹⁷⁴³ In the following section he sets out to outline the phenomenal character of time—considered as *public time*,¹⁷⁴⁴ and discover the source of the

¹⁷³⁷Cf. Ibid., 388 [338-339]. Here Heidegger points out that Dasein can be present authentically (as waiting-towards, through the moment of vision which "permits us to encounter for the first time what can be 'in a time' as ready-to-hand or present-at-hand (Ibid.)"), or inauthentically (as "making present). He notes that "Formally understood, every Present is one which makes present, but not every Present has the character of a 'moment of vision'. [What follows is important for the interpretation of this final chapter] When we use the expression 'making present' without adding anything further, we always have in mind the inauthentic kind, which is irresolute and does not have the character of a moment of vision. (Ibid.)"

¹⁷³⁸Ibid., 476 [424].

¹⁷³⁹Ibid., 459 [407].

¹⁷⁴⁰Ibid., 460 [408].

¹⁷⁴¹Ibid.

¹⁷⁴²Ibid., 473 [421].

¹⁷⁴³Ibid., 461-464 [408-411].

¹⁷⁴⁴Ibid., 464-472 [411-420].

ordinary characterisation of time. He reiterates the purpose of the section, by noting that “the sense in which time ‘*is*’ if it is of the kind which is public and has been expressed, remains completely undefined, if indeed such time can be considered as *being* at all.”¹⁷⁴⁵ Public time exists because of Dasein’s *thrownness*,¹⁷⁴⁶ and, “turns out to be the kind of time ‘in which’ the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand within-the-world are encountered.”¹⁷⁴⁷ As such, all beings that do not have the character of Dasein are beings within-time.¹⁷⁴⁸ Heidegger goes on to consider the ways of measuring public time.¹⁷⁴⁹ This leads Heidegger to the conclusion that public time is both objective because objectified,¹⁷⁵⁰ and subjective because it is the cause of the possibility of the Being of factual Dasein.¹⁷⁵¹ Both objective and subjective Heidegger cautions that “it can neither be volatilized ‘subjectivistically’ nor ‘reified’ by a vicious ‘Objectification’.”¹⁷⁵² He proposes that this ordinary way of understanding time comes from, as we have already seen, Dasein’s thrown fallenness. Says Heidegger, “The ordinary way of characterizing time as an endless, irreversible sequence of ‘nows’ which passes away, arises from the temporality of falling Dasein. *The ordinary representation of time has its natural justification.* It belongs to Dasein’s average kind of Being, and to that understanding of Being which proximally prevails. Thus proximally and for the most part, even *history* gets understood *publicly* as happening *within-time*.”¹⁷⁵³ As belonging to Dasein’s Being, even the common understanding of time is rooted in Temporality which is Dasein’s very Being. This section concludes with a consideration of

¹⁷⁴⁵Ibid., 464 [411].

¹⁷⁴⁶Ibid., 464 [412].

¹⁷⁴⁷Ibid., 465 [412].

¹⁷⁴⁸Ibid.

¹⁷⁴⁹Ibid., 465-471 [412-418].

¹⁷⁵⁰Ibid., 471 [419].

¹⁷⁵¹Ibid.

¹⁷⁵²Ibid., 471 [420].

¹⁷⁵³Ibid., 478 [426].

Hegel's approach to time, and a brief section applying the preceding observations to the question of the meaning of Being in general. It is this last section that interests us.

This final section provides a short critical look back at what has been accomplished. Heidegger seems to think that very little has actually been accomplished, if one's purpose is to answer the question of the meaning of Being in general. He has arrived at the conclusion that Temporality is the very Being of Dasein., but this is nothing but the first step on the way. Heidegger has only laid a couple logs in the fireplace, but has not even lit a match yet, "The conflict as to the Interpretation of Being cannot be allayed, *because it has not yet been enkindled*. And in the end this is not the kind of conflict one can 'bluster into'; it is of the kind which cannot get enkindled unless preparations are made for it. Towards this alone the foregoing investigation is *on the way*."¹⁷⁵⁴ Heidegger is even less optimistic about what he has accomplished than I am, for him he has just started the preparations for the fire. He has brought the wood in beside the fireplace, and is getting ready to place them. He sums up his achievements thus far as follows, "Something like 'Being' has been disclosed in the understanding-of-Being which belongs to existent Dasein as a way in which it understands. Being has been disclosed in a preliminary way, though non-conceptually; and this makes it possible for Dasein as existent Being-in-the-world to comport itself *towards entities*—towards those which it encounters within-the-world as well as towards itself as existent."¹⁷⁵⁵ This leaves us with more questions than answers. Heidegger concludes *Being and Time* wondering if Time, in his understanding of the notion, may be the Horizon of Being: "Is there a way which leads from primordial *time* to the meaning of *Being*? Does *time* itself manifest itself as the horizon of *Being*?"¹⁷⁵⁶

¹⁷⁵⁴Ibid., 487-488 [437].

¹⁷⁵⁵Ibid., 488 [437].

¹⁷⁵⁶Ibid., 488 [437].

We have now laid out Heidegger's work in *Being and Time* with the hopes that we will be able to draw out of our exegesis just how Heidegger proposes to approach the question of Being. Before we attempt to explain Heidegger's approach to the question of Being, let us take some time to verify our findings in *Being and Time* with an earlier work. The work that we will be considering, written some 6 years, or so, before *Being and Time*, is a lecture that Heidegger gave in Aristotle. This particular course should add to our current work, as we have, in this lecture, Heidegger's proposal to give a phenomenological foundation for properly interpreting Aristotle. Now, we have already considered Aristotle's approach to Being, so, let us see what Heidegger has to say about the question of Being, and Aristotle, in this early lecture.

SOME THOUGHTS ON *PHENOMENOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF ARISTOTLE*

In this book, which is “a translation of the text of a lecture course Martin Heidegger offered in the winter semester 1921-22 at the University of Freiburg”,¹⁷⁵⁷ Heidegger attempts to lay the phenomenological groundwork for a proper interpretation of Aristotle. He does not, in this short text, proceed to interpret Aristotle, rather, his primary purpose is to outline the “philosophical problematic”,¹⁷⁵⁸ that is, to answer the question, “What is Philosophy?”¹⁷⁵⁹ Heidegger's approach to this question provides us with the opportunity to further examine his approach to the question of Being, and this, about 6 years prior to the publication of *Being and Time*.

¹⁷⁵⁷Martin Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Initiation into Phenomenological Research*, trans. by Richard Rojcewicz (2001; repr., Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), xiii. The translator also mentions that this work comes from his “first period of teaching at Freiburg (Ibid.)”.

¹⁷⁵⁸Ibid., 11.

¹⁷⁵⁹Ibid.

Heidegger's lectures are usually very well outlined, and this lecture is no different. In the first part of the lecture Heidegger begins by discussing the nature of the History of Philosophy, and then discusses how Aristotle was received by philosophers throughout History. In Part 2 of his lecture series he attempts to phenomenologically interpret philosophy. Philosophy, however, as a comportment of Caring cannot be properly analysed unless one first looks at Caring. This leads, in Part 3, to the phenomenological interpretation of the factual life. The conclusion of the lecture is that the only way to escape the ruination of the factual life is to remain in a constant state of questioning, which is what Philosophy phenomenologically is. The translator of this lecture course includes 2 appendices in which we are given Heidegger's extra documents and thoughts that were included within the notes that he used for the lectures. The translator states, in the translator's forward, that "the main theme of the lectures is human life as such, 'factual life'".¹⁷⁶⁰ You should always be cautious when disagreeing with someone who knows a lot more than you. However, after examining this work, though I agree that the main theme, as far as the amount of time that is dedicated to this theme is concerned, is the "factual life"; I think that one must be careful to note that Heidegger's analysis of the factual life is secondary to the main purpose of these lectures, which is to phenomenologically answer the question, "What is Philosophy?" Heidegger discusses the factual life in order to explain what philosophy is. As such, though Heidegger dedicates a great amount of time to explaining the factual life, this is not the main theme (as far as the purpose of these lectures is concerned). It seems as if everything that Heidegger says in these lectures is advanced with the goal of discovering what philosophy phenomenologically is.¹⁷⁶¹

¹⁷⁶⁰Ibid., xiii.

¹⁷⁶¹Heidegger, in fact, in considering the categories of relationality of the comportment of the factual life avoids taking too long in considering those categories that are not important for the question « What is philosophy? »

Almost all of the themes that Heidegger would later emphasize, and almost all of the terms that he would later use in his philosophy of Being can be found in this small lecture series, if not explicitly, at least implicitly. As such, this is a fortunate choice for an brief glance at Heidegger's early approach to the question of Being. Our purpose, here, is to discuss Heidegger's approach to the question of Being in this lecture series. That being said, in order to understand Heidegger's discussion of Being in this book, we will first give a brief overview of Heidegger's project, in this book.

In outlining Heidegger's project in this lecture series, I would like to attempt to follow his line of reasoning from beginning to end. Heidegger did not, necessarily, begin his lecture series with the true beginning of phenomenological research. Rather, in a sense, Heidegger begins by posing the problematic, which raises the line of questioning that we must follow. Once the line of questioning is raised Heidegger then takes time to explain a number of important points. A lot of the themes that Heidegger covers in this book are touched on as Heidegger moves through his questioning of the problematic of philosophy.

Heidegger wishes to discover what philosophy *is* – what is the *meaning*, or *sense* of, or *mode of Being* of Philosophy?¹⁷⁶² In seeking to discover what philosophy *is*, Heidegger thinks, we must understand it as a way or mode of Being of humans-beings. This is because philosophy is a being that is *possessed* by man.¹⁷⁶³ What kind of being is philosophy? If philosophy is a

¹⁷⁶²Ibid., 11. This is not how the lecture series begins. The questioning of philosophy does not actually begin until part 2 of the lecture series. The questioning of philosophy is raised by the problematic of the interpretation and reception of Aristotle, as Heidegger covered it in part 1. As Heidegger says, "If it is genuine, a concretely determined problematic of philosophical research will run in its own directedness to the end, an end philosophy as such must have made fast for itself. (Ibid.)" But, in order for this to happen we must first know what Philosophy is, "That question must be posed with sufficient clarity, sufficient for the situation and the problematic in which the question is posed, if indeed every concrete investigation is to have a secure direction, a corresponding methodological integrity, and a genuine pertinence. (Ibid.)"

¹⁷⁶³The notion of possession is important in this lecture series. There are different modes of possession (Ibid., 15-16, 19, 22-23, 27, 40, 44, 87, 129, 135.), some of which are authentic (Ibid., 27, 29, 44.), comportments are possessed (Ibid., 46, 47, 48.), objects are possessed (in fact, objectivity just is to be in possession of an objective life, which is a life that is filled with possessions. Cf. Ibid., 68.), and, possessing, itself, is a being (Ibid., 85.).

being that is possessed by man, then Heidegger, in order to understand what kind of being philosophy is, must first consider the ways or modes of the Being of man. Heidegger proposes that man *exists*¹⁷⁶⁴ “in the mode of the world (‘life’).”¹⁷⁶⁵ Though Heidegger seems, sometimes, to equate *life* with *world*, these two concepts are not equivalent. Heidegger describes life, in different places, as a being,¹⁷⁶⁶ as possibility,¹⁷⁶⁷ as existence,¹⁷⁶⁸ and, most importantly, as ways of being in relation to the world.¹⁷⁶⁹ We may perhaps understand Heidegger’s term “life” as, quite simply, Dasein’s existence, which, as we saw in our analysis of Being and time, is Dasein’s potentiality-for-Being. This will allow us to make sense of Heidegger’s descriptions of life. This also allows us to take the next step into Heidegger’s thought. *Life* is a way of *being-related* to the world.¹⁷⁷⁰ The ways of being related to the world are referred to as Compartments. Compartments can be either genuine (authentic) or ruinant deviations. These compartments would later be described as Dasein’s ways of Being-in-the-world/familiarity/Disclosing. Heidegger notes that, as concerns philosophy, there are “two basic phenomenological compartments; one the genuine, the other a misunderstanding, insofar as philosophy is at issue and not some other aspirations.”¹⁷⁷¹ One is either a perpetual questionableness, the other is “the empty ‘whence and whither’ of forsakenness.”¹⁷⁷² We have not, however, in following

¹⁷⁶⁴*Existence*, in this lecture series, is roughly equivalent to *life*. After discussing three different senses of ‘life’, Heidegger declares that “a peculiar prevailing sense now resounds: life = existence, “*being*” in and through life. (Ibid., 64. Cf. Ibid., 96, 105.)”

¹⁷⁶⁵Ibid., 126.

¹⁷⁶⁶Ibid., 87.

¹⁷⁶⁷Ibid., 64, 78.

¹⁷⁶⁸Ibid., 64, 96, 105.

¹⁷⁶⁹Ibid., 65, 73.

¹⁷⁷⁰Heidegger’s description of world is quite elaborate. He explains that there are a number of different worlds. He discusses the world in which caring (the factual life) lives (Ibid., 71, 95, 96, 111, 129, 130, 131.), and then three basic worlds: the surrounding world (Ibid., 71-74, 95-96, 99, 107, 109-110.), the shared world (Ibid., 71-73, 136.), and one’s own world (Ibid., 71-73, 131.). He also notes that the shared world and one’s own world can both be characterized as a surrounding world (Ibid., 96.). See Kisiel, who takes time to analyse Heidegger’s different types of world, as described in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (Kisiel, *GHBT*, 118.).

¹⁷⁷¹Heidegger, *PIA*, 146.

¹⁷⁷²Ibid., 146.

Heidegger's trajectory, arrived at this conclusion. We must first note that Comportment can be understood in three ways: in the sense of relation,¹⁷⁷³ in the sense of actualization,¹⁷⁷⁴ and in the sense of maturation.¹⁷⁷⁵ Though Heidegger frequently discusses actualization, and occasionally mentions maturation, he is primarily interested in Comportment understood as relation. This is because, life is essentially a way of Being in relation to the World.¹⁷⁷⁶ This relation of life to the world is encountered as motion – the *movedness* of life.¹⁷⁷⁷ This movedness is understood as *direction*.¹⁷⁷⁸ The question of the movedness of life is fully discussed when considering the relation of life to the world – that is, the *categories* of the *relationality* of life (or caring).¹⁷⁷⁹ There are three basic categories of life, Inclination,¹⁷⁸⁰ Distance,¹⁷⁸¹ and Sequestration,¹⁷⁸² which leads into the “easy”.¹⁷⁸³ The “easy” is characterized by “carefreeness”.¹⁷⁸⁴ The movedness of life is seen in each of the three categories of the relationality of life in two basic categories:¹⁷⁸⁵ Relucence¹⁷⁸⁶ and Prestruction.¹⁷⁸⁷ The movedness which leads directly to ruinance,¹⁷⁸⁸ is a collapse,¹⁷⁸⁹ which is characterized by 4 formal indicational characters.¹⁷⁹⁰ The collapse into ruinance leads to a nothingness¹⁷⁹¹—a privation of being.¹⁷⁹² Though the terms are not quite the

¹⁷⁷³Ibid., 40, 93, 135.

¹⁷⁷⁴Ibid., 40, 45-46, 93, 102, 104-105, 110, 135, 138, 146.

¹⁷⁷⁵Ibid., 40, 42, 46, 135, 146.

¹⁷⁷⁶Ibid., 65, 73. Life is, in fact, always held together, or related, to the world (Ibid., 65, 88.).

¹⁷⁷⁷Ibid., 85, 87, 95, 96, 98, 100.

¹⁷⁷⁸Ibid., 70, 73, 74, 86, 87, 92, 95, 107.

¹⁷⁷⁹Ibid., 75-82, 88, 90, 92, 94, 95, 101, 105, 106.

¹⁷⁸⁰Ibid., 75-77, 81, 82, 88-90, 93, 94, 101-102, 106.

¹⁷⁸¹Ibid., 77-78, 82, 90-91, 93, 94, 101-102, 106, 107.

¹⁷⁸²Ibid., 78-81, 82, 91-94, 101-102, 106.

¹⁷⁸³Ibid., 81-82.

¹⁷⁸⁴Ibid., 81.

¹⁷⁸⁵Ibid., 87-94, 97, 129, 132.

¹⁷⁸⁶Ibid., 88-99, 106, 114.

¹⁷⁸⁷Ibid., 88-99, 106.

¹⁷⁸⁸Ibid., 90, 98-115, 121, 138, 139.

¹⁷⁸⁹Ibid., 98.

¹⁷⁹⁰Ibid., 104-115, 138.

¹⁷⁹¹Ibid., 108-110. Heidegger argues that the collapse cannot fall onto itself, nor can it fall onto something unlike itself, therefore, it necessarily falls onto nothing (Ibid., 108, 109-110.).

¹⁷⁹²Ibid., 109.

same as those we have been using in our analysis of *Being and Time*, we are seeing a number of similar ideas.

Having come this far we want to know, how do we avoid the nothingness of ruinance? Is it to avoid the movedness of life altogether? Is this even possible? The only way to avoid ruinance is to live the factual life.¹⁷⁹³ The factual life exists in the actualizing of *Caring*.¹⁷⁹⁴ This factual life is gained through questioning.¹⁷⁹⁵ It is, however, possible to become set in a way of living, and to fall into ruinance, so it is necessary that one remain in perpetual questioning.¹⁷⁹⁶ This perpetual questioning just is philosophy.¹⁷⁹⁷ Therefore, in order to counter the ruinant movement of life, one must actualize the philosophical interpretation and this is actualized by the appropriation of the mode of access to questionability.¹⁷⁹⁸ Philosophy is “a basic mode of life itself, in such a way that it authentically ‘brings back,’ i.e., brings life back from its downward fall into decadence, and this ‘bring-ing back’ [or re-petition, ‘re-seeking’], as radical re-search, is life itself.”¹⁷⁹⁹ The formally indicative definition of philosophy is described as follows, “philosophy is cognitive comportment, at the level of principle, toward beings in terms of Being (sense of Being), specifically such that what is decisively at issue in the comportment and for it is the respective Being (sense of Being) of the possessing of the comportment.”¹⁸⁰⁰ Philosophy, as a radical perpetual comportment of questioning, is, necessarily skeptical, “the authentic foundation of philosophy is a radical, existentiell grasp of and maturation of questionableness; to pose in

¹⁷⁹³The factual life is one of the most important concepts in the entire lecture series, and is discussed, alluded to, described, or otherwise mentioned throughout (Ibid., 61, 66-68, 70, 71, 80, 81, 84, 89, 91-95, 97, 98, 100-115, 122, 127, 130-134, 138.).

¹⁷⁹⁴Ibid., 94.

¹⁷⁹⁵Ibid., 113, 133.

¹⁷⁹⁶Ibid., 94-95, 114, 134.

¹⁷⁹⁷Ibid., 4.

¹⁷⁹⁸Ibid., 113.

¹⁷⁹⁹Ibid., 62.

¹⁸⁰⁰Ibid., 46.

questionableness oneself and life and the decisive actualizations is the basic stance of all—including the most radical—clarification. Skepticism, so understood, is the beginning of philosophy, and as the genuine beginning it is also the end of philosophy.”¹⁸⁰¹ It is due to what precedes that Heidegger is able to claim that philosophy is necessarily Atheistic—that is, if philosophy is an existentiell comportement of man which is a perpetual questioning of the Being of beings, then one must always begin with Atheism and end with Atheism. “Philosophy, in its radical, self-posing questionability, must be a-theistic as a matter of principle. Precisely on account of its basic intention, philosophy must not presume to possess or determine God. The more radical philosophy is, the more determinately is it on a path away from God; yet, precisely in the radical actualization of the ‘away,’ it has its own difficult proximity to God.”¹⁸⁰² This brings us back to what we noted earlier, that, as concerns philosophy, there are “two basic phenomenological comportments; one the genuine, the other a misunderstanding, insofar as philosophy is at issue and not some other aspirations.”¹⁸⁰³ One is either a perpetual questionableness, the other is “the empty ‘whence and whither’ of forsakenness.”¹⁸⁰⁴ The authentic mode of possession of philosophy, that which philosophy phenomenologically (and Heidegger would surely say in its most profound sense) is, is a reposing in a state of perpetual questionableness.

¹⁸⁰¹Ibid., 28.

¹⁸⁰²Ibid., 148. This quote reminds one of Heidegger’s claim, at the end of his concluding lecture in the Seminar on Hegel, *The Onto-theo-logical constitution of Metaphysics*, « The god-less thinking which must abandon the god of philosophy, god as causa sui, is thus perhaps closer to the divine God. Here this means only: god-less thinking is more open to Him than onto-theo-logic would like to admit. (Martin Heidegger, *The Onto-theo-logical constitution of Metaphysics*, in *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (1969; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 72.)” One is also reminded of his claim, in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, that in order to authentically ask a question one must take a leap, one must not pose an answer to the question prior to the asking, as such, “A ‘Christian philosophy’ is a round square and a misunderstanding...Philosophy, for originally Christian faith, is foolishness. (Heidegger, *IM*, 8 [6]. The number in the square brackets refers to the pagination in the german edition.)”

¹⁸⁰³Heidegger, *PIA*, 146.

¹⁸⁰⁴Ibid., 146.

We have now come full circle. We set out to find out what philosophy is, and we have discovered that philosophy is a reposing in questioning, the only way in which one can keep from falling into the ruinance of a life of nothingness.

How, then, does Being fit into all of this? Being, in this lecture series is both primordial, and secondary. In order to discuss the question of philosophy, he must absolutely refer to Being and beings. Comportments, possessions,¹⁸⁰⁵ possession of comportments,¹⁸⁰⁶ life,¹⁸⁰⁷ and understanding¹⁸⁰⁸ are all beings. On the other side of the picture you have the notion of Being, the sense of which he is constantly referring to. He mentions, alludes to, or discusses the Being (or sense of Being) of man,¹⁸⁰⁹ the Being (or sense of Being) of the sciences,¹⁸¹⁰ the Being (or sense of Being) of the possession of a comportment,¹⁸¹¹ the Being (or sense of Being) of life,¹⁸¹² and the Being (or sense of Being) of research.¹⁸¹³ This discussion of beings and of Being or the sense of Being, forces us to ask three questions: (1) How does Heidegger understand “beings”?, (2) What does Heidegger mean by “Being” and the “sense of Being”? and (3) How does Heidegger perceive the relationship between beings and Being?

Heidegger answers the first question as follows, “A being: an object, this object, in what and how it is.”¹⁸¹⁴ As we mention above, types of beings, for Heidegger, include, comportments, possessions, possessions of comportments, life, and understanding.¹⁸¹⁵ As such, a being is something that can be possessed.

¹⁸⁰⁵Ibid., 85.

¹⁸⁰⁶Ibid., 47, 48.

¹⁸⁰⁷Ibid., 87.

¹⁸⁰⁸Ibid., 85.

¹⁸⁰⁹Ibid., 49, 57, 126.

¹⁸¹⁰Ibid., 141.

¹⁸¹¹Ibid., 45-46.

¹⁸¹²Ibid., 85, 87, 102, 105, 106, 127, 141, 142.

¹⁸¹³Ibid., 127.

¹⁸¹⁴Ibid., 41.

¹⁸¹⁵It should be noted, that according to Heidegger’s own terms, anything that is not capable of posing itself in a stance towards things does not exist, if it does not exist, to not exist is to not possess life (Ibid., 64, 68, 96, 105.).

The second question is a little bit more difficult for Heidegger to answer. Perhaps the best way to begin explaining Heidegger's answer is to note what he says concerning what Being is not. Being, according to Heidegger, is not: (a) the universal of all things,¹⁸¹⁶ (b) the highest genus,¹⁸¹⁷ and (c) that which particular beings fall under.¹⁸¹⁸ What then is Being, or the sense of Being? The answer to this question, for Heidegger, turns out to be the answer to the third question, as such, we will turn, immediately, to the third question.

In regards to the final question, Heidegger notes that Being is related to beings in that Being is the principle (cause or founding) of all beings. In explaining that philosophy just is the *comportmental* relationship of holding on to something as a being, just as beings, and as definite sorts of beings,¹⁸¹⁹ is not simply seeking to question beings, but is in fact, seeking to question "Being, or more determinately, in respect to the way such 'Being' is graspable, the '*sense of Being*.' We need to keep in mind explicitly that Being, the sense of Being, is, philosophically, the principle of every being."¹⁸²⁰ A little later Heidegger adds that "At issue is Being, i.e., that it 'is,' the *sense of Being*, that Being 'is,' i.e., is there as Being genuinely and according to its

This does not, however mean that it is not a being, as life is, itself, a being (Ibid., 87.).

¹⁸¹⁶Ibid., 44. This answer, of course, raises the question of what Heidegger means by « universal ». Heidegger, in this lecture series, does not appear to articulate his understanding of what he means by universal. He uses this term very rarely. He uses it twice in explaining what he considers to be the mistaken purpose of "definition", where he first says that, "Here the principle is the *universal*, the most general, that which holds 'for' everything, 'in every case,' that on which all the particular instances depend, whence they receive their essential determination. (Ibid., 18.)" He later says that "where a comprehensive universal resides in the grasping tendency precisely qua universal, functioning as a principle, there that for which the intended principle can be a principle is necessarily a matter of fact, and that toward which the principle points is a particular case. (Ibid. 20.)" I would propose that we are warranted to claim that when Heidegger says that Being is not a universal, he is basically claiming that Being is not "the most general, that which holds 'for' everything, 'in every case,' that on which all the particular instances depend, whence they receive their essential determination. (Ibid., 18.)" This may cause difficulties for Heidegger later, however, given the context of the surrounding discussion I see no other way to understand this claim for the time being. We will consider, later, Heidegger's understanding of *principle*.

¹⁸¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸¹⁸Ibid. In light of our previous conclusions, this third claim may simply be the repetition or emphasis of the first point.

¹⁸¹⁹Cf. Ibid., 41, 44, 48.

¹⁸²⁰Ibid., 44. Cf. 45.

import.”¹⁸²¹ At a later point, in discussing the question of the sense of Being, Heidegger says, “The question of the sense of Being, specifically the sense of Being of this peculiar objectivity, is one of principle in the philosophical sense.”¹⁸²² Being, therefore, according to Heidegger, is the principle of beings, of all beings.¹⁸²³ What then does he mean by principle?

Heidegger begins interacting with the notion of *principle* by explaining the mistaken, or false, understanding of principle. Upon the false view, principle is “that on the basis of which something ‘is’ in its own proper way, that on which everything depends....Here the principle is the *universal*, the most general, that which holds ‘for’ everything, ‘in every case,’ that on which all the particular instances depend, whence they receive their essential determination.”¹⁸²⁴ So, principle is falsely understood as *universal*— that which is the basis of the is-ness of a being.¹⁸²⁵ In order to correct this error Heidegger proposes that we seek to truly understand how something is a principle.¹⁸²⁶ In introducing this endeavour he says, “Just as every object has its own way of being possessed, its mode of being accessed and preserved, and its mode of becoming lost, so at the same time, in this possession and for it, it is always in some sense a principle, something which is at issue and which, with respect to and for something, has ‘something to say.’”¹⁸²⁷ We may, tentatively, say that a *principle* is a thing, an object, is a principle in so much as, by its possession and for its possession, it “is at issue and...has ‘something to say.’”¹⁸²⁸ A principle, then is that which presents itself to a caring being such that it is possessed and speaks to the caring being—the principle is that which presents itself to Dasein as *Meaningful!*

¹⁸²¹Ibid., 46.

¹⁸²²Ibid., 129.

¹⁸²³Ibid., 44-46.

¹⁸²⁴Ibid., 18.

¹⁸²⁵It should immediately be noted that this is not the only understanding of universal, nor of principle, in the history of philosophical thought.

¹⁸²⁶Note that the principle is a ‘thing’ – an object – not an ‘idea’ or ‘law’.

¹⁸²⁷Ibid., 19.

¹⁸²⁸Ibid.

Heidegger continues by noting that in order to grasp something at the level of principle one must determine the *how* and *what* of the object in regards to its principle.¹⁸²⁹ In order to see *how* the object functions as a principle one must first determine its proper *what*.¹⁸³⁰ What all of this shows us is that any object can be a principle, not always in the same way, and always dependent on the openness of the caring being that receives it as principle.¹⁸³¹ Therefore, a principle is any object that opens itself up, presents itself, reveals itself, to the caring being.

Being, therefore, would appear to be the openness of the object – that is, Being is that which opens itself/or presents itself as meaningful to man. It would appear, therefore, that for Heidegger, Being is not a thing, but a state of beings. Being is the meaningfulness of beings to Dasein. Are beings always Being? One would have to respond in the negative, in the sense that, any being that is hidden, not present, not open, or not manifest—not meaningful to Dasein—is not Being.

Before we can finish our explanation of Being, however, we must ask one last question: “what is the relation of Being and beings to particular interpretations?” In other words, what do we do with beings that present themselves to different people with different meanings? This, of course, brings up the question of interpretation. In the first appendix, where Heidegger discusses his understanding of presuppositions, he notes that “This consideration of the presupposition is meant to call attention to the *conditionality* of the interpretation.”¹⁸³² Many philosophers rightly get up in arms when they hear a claim such as this, and Heidegger is fully aware of why. He claims that interpretations are conditional, which is meant “to prevent taking the interpretations dogmatically, as if they were expounded from some sort of dogmatic tendency. The rejection of

¹⁸²⁹Ibid.

¹⁸³⁰Ibid.

¹⁸³¹Ibid., 19-20.

¹⁸³²Ibid., 122.

such claims to validity brings us, especially in philosophy, under the rubric of ‘relativism’ – ‘skepticism.’”¹⁸³³ Heidegger is not worried so much about being called a skeptic, as he has already claimed that skepticism is the essence of philosophy.¹⁸³⁴ However, Heidegger is thoroughly against equating his views with relativism as he views the terms relativism and skepticism, as they refer to the question of knowledge, to be invalid labels.¹⁸³⁵ Relativism and skepticism can only be properly used when discussing the question of absolute truth. Heidegger, however, has stated that Being is that which is meaningful to man, thus, Being is, necessarily, conditional to different people, as beings present themselves as meaningful or meaningless to different people in different ways and at different times. When walking in the forest an indentation on a forest floor might not “Be” for the city person who is not used to walking in the forest, and who wouldn’t recognize a hoof print from the mark made by a falling branch. Yet, for the experienced hunter, wildlife photographer, or even just someone who has spent a lot of time in the forest, the indentation on the forest floor “is”, and has more “Being”, than the rays of sunlight that are filtering through the branches of the surrounding trees. Being, as meaningfulness, presents beings to different people in different ways, and this openness of beings to people is, according to Heidegger, primordial Being.

If Heidegger does not think that his view equates to relativism or skepticism, then what could he possibly mean when he talks about the conditionality of interpretations? The question of what Heidegger means by interpretation becomes even more important when we consider that by asking not “What is Being?”, but, “what is the sense/meaning of being?”, he is asking for the *interpretational* meaning of Being. As such, the question of interpretation and the question of

¹⁸³³Ibid.

¹⁸³⁴Ibid., 28.

¹⁸³⁵Ibid., 122-125.

Being are intricately intertwined in Heidegger's lectures. As such, he could be understood as claiming that either, (a) the traditional understanding of Being is flawed or incomplete and needs to be completed by a different interpretation of the sense of Being,¹⁸³⁶ or, (b) that the traditional understanding of Being is but a false interpretation of the sense of Being and needs to be replaced, or (c) that the traditional interpretation of Being is, quite simply, one interpretation of Being among many, none of which can be dogmatically proposed as true. In light of the comments above about the conditionality of interpretation and the invalidity of a dogmatic tendency, it would seem that Heidegger is claiming the latter – (c).

This notion should be rejected, however, in light of the following considerations. When we consider his discussion of absolute truth, he claims, first of all, that philosophy is simply incapable of obtaining absolutely valid truth,¹⁸³⁷ and, secondly, that “the ideal possibility of absolute knowledge is but a dream. As historiological knowledge, philosophy not only *can* not, but also *must* not, entertain any such dream.”¹⁸³⁸ There is, for Heidegger, no such thing as absolute knowledge, and no such thing as an objective order of determinate knowledge, “As long as philosophy cannot provide this certification, as long as we do not childishly close our eyes to the *changes* to which even the strongest philosophical positions are subject... then we have, as a matter of principle, no right to assign philosophy the standard of absolute truth.”¹⁸³⁹ Philosophy, is, in its most profound essence, a perpetual questioning, as such, it cannot dream of obtaining truth, which would be the end of questioning. To posit proposition x as true is, according to Heidegger, to end all questioning, and, therefore, to bring philosophy to an end. As such, to think

¹⁸³⁶It should be noted that Heidegger is diametrically opposed to all tradition (religious, scientific and philosophical), because, by definition, tradition is a dogmatic posing of an answer to the question, and, as such, a falling into nothingness. Cf. *Ibid.*, 18-19, 33, 35, 56-58, 84, 91, 125, 126, 134, 135.

¹⁸³⁷*Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁸³⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁸³⁹*Ibid.*

that we are able to dogmatically talk about Being is to be misled. Being is always different because it always presents itself to different people in different ways, in different circumstances, and at different times. As such, the question of Being is always an open question. Therefore, Heidegger is actually proposing option (b) that the traditional understanding of Being is but a false interpretation of the sense of Being and needs to be replaced. The traditional understanding of Being poses dogmas, and, as such, is anti-philosophical. It is an interpretation of Being that proposes itself as THE only interpretation of Being.

Heidegger is proposing that, (i) due to the sense of Being, in which it is the openness or manifestation of beings as meaningful to the caring being (which is, itself, open or manifest when it receives the openness of open beings), and due to the (ii) proper understanding of philosophy, as a perpetual questioning of the Being of beings, therefore, (iii) there is no neutral position from which one may determine dogmatically just what Being is, and, in so doing, provide an absolutely true description of the way things are. We are always in our own world of meaningful beings, enveloped by our own interpretations of the way things are. This is not *relativism*, for Heidegger, because this is not an epistemological theory. This is a fundamental ontological theory. It is not a claim about what we know or can know, but about the way things Be for humans. This theory is, therefore, a hermeneutical theory of Being, that requires innumerable interpretative schemes, none of which can claim absolute truth, all of which truly encounter Being in beings. Not every interpretative scheme, however, is valid. Any interpretative scheme that steps out of perpetual questioning of Being by posing dogmas that are held to be absolutely true has fallen out of the factual life into nothingness.

We have now laid out Heidegger's approach to Being in *Being and Time*, and in *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, with the hopes that we will be able to draw out of our exegesis just how Heidegger proposes to approach the question of Being. We will now turn to

the task of explaining what Heidegger's answer might be to the question of Being, based upon our observations above, and, then, to an analysis and explanation of Heidegger's approach to the question of Being.

HEIDEGGER'S TRANSFORMATION OF, AND ANSWER TO, THE QUESTION OF BEING

Here we will consider how Heidegger appears to answer the question of Being.¹⁸⁴⁰ It is tempting to say that he did not answer the question of Being. However, when one considers his numerous comments on Being, we realize that though he does not explicitly claim to answer the question—concluding *Being and Time* with the claim to have only laid the foundation for an approach to the question of the meaning of Being—he does, however, provide us with a number of elements, explicit and implicit, which will allow us to propose what we think he sees as the only possible answer to the question of the meaning of Being. As we have already noted, Heidegger transforms the question of Being “τί τὸ ὄν” (what is Being?) into the question “What is the meaning of Being?” This transformation is of the utmost importance, for, according to Heidegger, the Being that, alone, gives meaning to beings is Dasein. Thus, in order to understand the meaning of Being, one must understand the meaning-giving Being—the Being that is always in a world of meaning and who is concerned with its own Being. This transformation of the question signifies a difference both in the response that Heidegger gives to the question of Being, and a difference in his approach to the question of Being.

Before we provide our final analysis of what we think Heidegger proposes as the answer to the question of Being (and, yes, we think he does answer the question of Being, at least partially, though not necessarily to our satisfaction), we will provide a brief outline of some

¹⁸⁴⁰Everything that we will say here can either be found referenced in the preceding section, or, so we think, is implied by what was said in the previous section.

important points. First of all, there are, in Heidegger's *Being and Time*, traces of what I would like to call a "deeper" notion of Being.¹⁸⁴¹ Though Heidegger claims that a being does not have Being unless it be interpreted and "seen-as" something (therefore, being involved in the complex of meaningful relations that constitute the structure of relations which is Dasein's world), he still allows that the "things" that receive Being from Dasein still have some sort of "Being" or "Existence", even when they "are not" given meaning by Dasein. Put more concisely, even when beings "are not" they "are"; though they have not Being, they Be, in some way. It is as if Heidegger has painted a gorgeous picture, on an enormous canvas (which occupies our entire field of vision), of a clearing. However, through a small hole that has formed in the material of the canvas, we are able to see, beyond the canvas, something else. Of course, as soon as we see this something else, it is immediately interpreted as something, and becomes, in a sense, part of the canvas (our world). Yet, Heidegger does seem to leave, intentionally, this magic hole in his gorgeous canvas.

Secondly, Heidegger proposes that Time (Temporality), according to his interpretation of Time, is the "Horizon" of Being. That is, time is the limit within which Being is understood and the horizon in which beings are given meaning. This proposition is supported through an enormous amount of phenomenological and existential observations, propositions and "deductions". Now, if Being is understood in the horizon of time, then there is no Being outside of Time (no Being can be a-temporal, this does not, of course, imply anything concerning the temporality or a-temporality of beings).¹⁸⁴² This implies that if there is no Dasein, then there is no

¹⁸⁴¹John Wild also seems to have noticed this phenomenon on Heidegger, saying that "what we may call *the wide horizon of being*, even though it is not verbally defined, is present in Heidegger's procedure, and underlies the whole book. (Wild, *MHBT*, 305.)" He later notes that Heidegger fails to pay attention to these things that are, but are not, according to Heidegger's definition of Being, "Human space lies around him, and primordial time is the moving pattern of his existence. While it is admitted that beings may be revealed out of themselves as they are, independent of man, little attention is paid to this independent being. (Ibid., 310.)"

¹⁸⁴²We must not forget that we are not talking about the traditional notion of time, which is, for Heidegger, a

Being (which is a conclusion that Heidegger states frequently in *Being and Time*). This observation brings us closer to Heidegger's response to the question of Being. Some think that if Heidegger succeeds (in the second part of *Being and Time*), then Being is Time or Temporality.¹⁸⁴³ I would propose, on the contrary, that Time or Temporality can only be seen to be the horizon of Being if Being is something other than Time or Temporality. Being is not, for Heidegger, its own horizon or limiting condition.

Thirdly, we see the influence of Kantian, and Post-Kantian, philosophy in that Heidegger discovers Being in the *understanding* (not the Heideggerian description of understanding). That is, Heidegger discovers the Being of beings (yes the distinction is made) in the different ways of Being of that one type of Being (Dasein) which can truly be said to Be because its very Being is, for it, an issue. The ways of Being (comportements) of Dasein include, but are certainly not limited to, Fallenness, Moods or Affections, and Understanding. These are Dasein's ways of Being-with and Being-in-the-world. Being is discovered by Dasein in its ways of Being. Thus, though Heidegger's approach to the question of Being cannot be called a pure Idealism (he seems to allow for the "existence" of things that are not world-ing, but which *are*, in some, un-interpreted, sense), Being is still found in the ways of Being of Dasein (ways which could be

deficient understanding of time which is based on inauthentic temporality. Rather, we are talking of time and temporality as a way in which Dasein understands itself authentically (Dasein's Be-ing is its making-present its future Being-towards-its-own-death out of its Past). Now, it seems to me that we can certainly allow Being, understood in Heidegger's terms, to be limited to "time", but there are two questions that must be asked, why think that Time as Heidegger understands it, is fundamentally basic? and what do we do with the things, "worldless", that "exist" without any Dasein given meaning, and, therefore, without Being? Are they, therefore, a-temporal? Heidegger's approach to the question of Being seems to create an artificial limitation that leaves out things that even he agrees "are" in some sense of being. It should be noted that Thomas Aquinas says, some 700 years prior to Heidegger's Be-ing, something along the same lines: "Esse autem nostrum habet aliquid sui extra se: deest enim aliquid quod jam de ipso praeterit, et quod futurum est. (Thomas Aquinas, *Super Sent.*, lib. 1, d. 8, q.1, a. 1, Respondeo. My translation is: 'But our being has something of itself outside of itself: for it lacks something of itself that has already gone, and that which is future.')

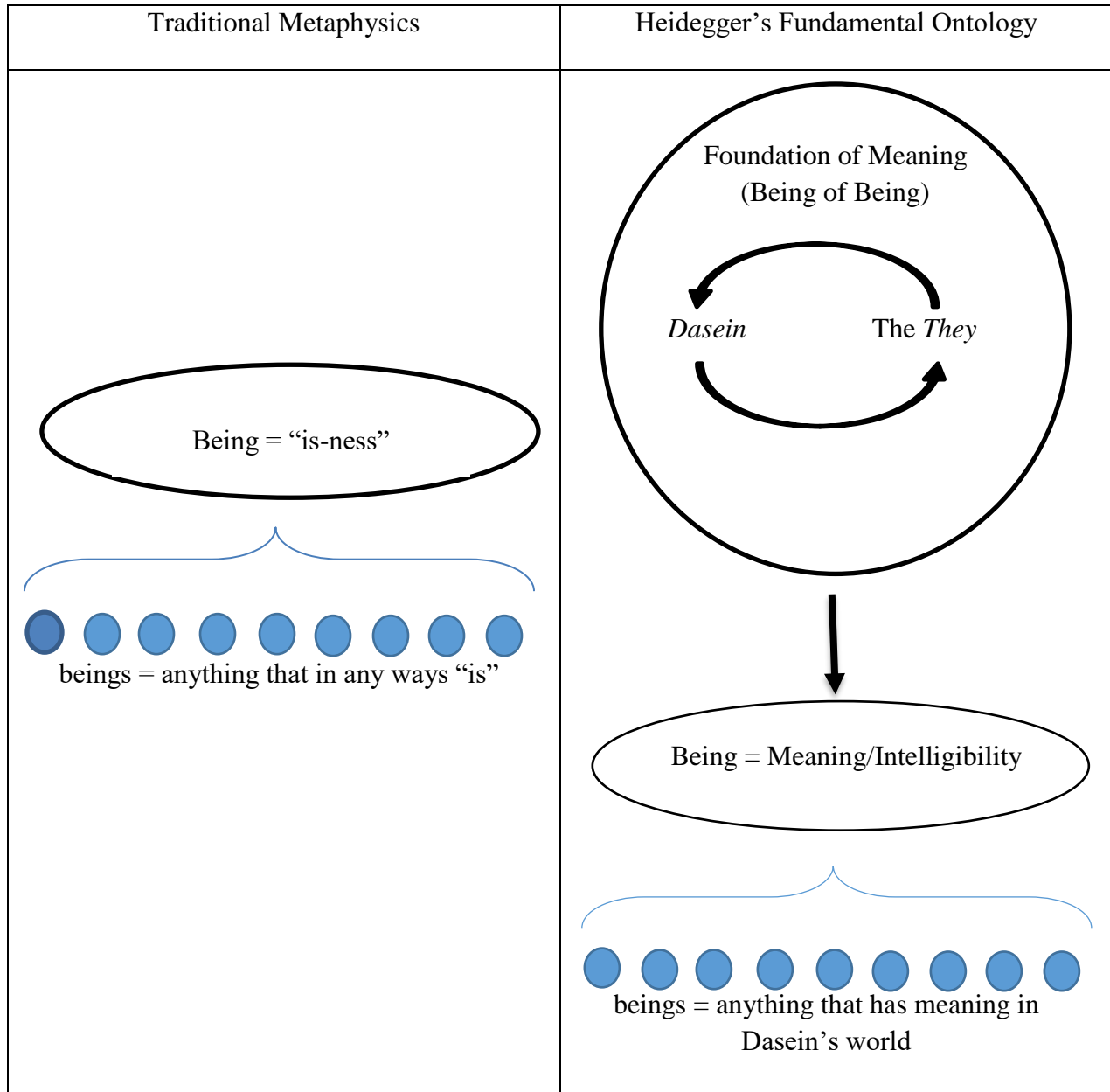
¹⁸⁴³Cf. Fromm, *WH*, 684. Fromm suggest this is Heidegger's understanding of Being in *Being and Time*. I humbly disagree.

described as altogether “spiritual”—having the characteristic of belonging to, coming out of, or being derived from, that which, not being material, can only be described as spirit)—That is, things “Be-come” because Dasein gives them a meaning in Dasein’s world. From this it follows that “Being” is meaning, and “To Be” is to possess some meaning. Now the argument of *Being and Time* is that things only have meaning because they receive it by being a part of Dasein’s world, this world is only given meaning because Dasein interprets it temporally, therefore, Being is grounded in temporality.¹⁸⁴⁴

From these observations, it seems to me that we can outline Heidegger’s answer to the question of Being in, at least, two different ways. First of all, we might illustrate Heidegger’s answer by comparing it, as follows, with Heidegger’s interpretation of the traditional approach.¹⁸⁴⁵

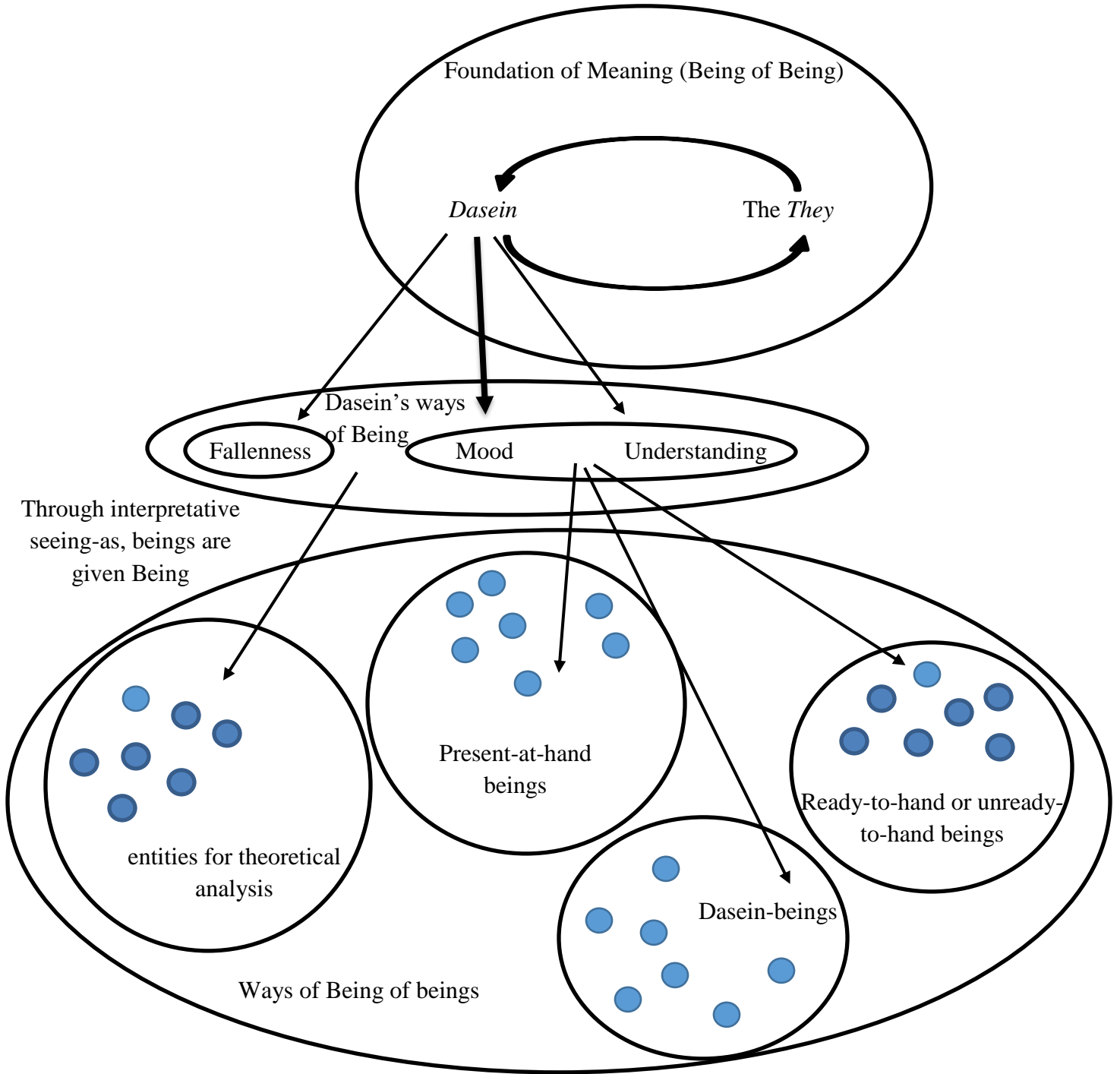
¹⁸⁴⁴Cf. Lynch, “Martin Heidegger: Language and Being”, 140-141.

¹⁸⁴⁵Cf. Thomas Sheehan, “What, after all, was Heidegger about?,” *Continental Philosophy Review*, 47, 3-4 (2014), 260-261.



A second way of explaining Heidegger's answer to the question of Being is to note that Heidegger sees different ways of Being (Ready-to-hand, present-at-hand, and Dasein), different ways of Being of Dasein (Fallenness, Affectedness or Moods, and Understanding), and that he even distinguishes between the meaningful (Being) and the meaningless (non-Being). Being, ultimately, is Meaning. All of the "ways of Being" are ways in which beings (even Dasein's own

being) take on Meaning for Dasein. Dasein, therefore, is the foundation of Being. We can illustrate this as follows:



The reality is that Heidegger's approach to the question of the Meaning of Being is much more complicated than I can hope to illustrate with this image, but the main elements are present. What comes out, then, as Heidegger's ultimate answer to the question of Being is that Being just is meaning,¹⁸⁴⁶ whatever meaning entities have for Dasein. The different ways or types of Being are the different ways in which those beings which present themselves to Dasein take on meaning for Dasein. It should be noted that this is something of an open-ended answer, an answer that leaves the questioner with an infinitely long, and unending, pursuit of the meaning of Being. The question is answered, but is also forever unanswered. How could we ever succeed in providing a complete list of all the ways in which beings can present themselves to Dasein as meaningful? The answer is, we can't. Thus fundamental ontology is forever unfinished, for Being is forever changing.

HEIDEGGER'S APPROACH TO THE QUESTION OF BEING

Now that we know where Heidegger is going, approximately, we can attempt to show just how he approaches the question of Being. The first step in Heidegger's approach to the question of Being is the transformation of the question "What is Being?" into the question "What is the meaning of Being?" This, in light of what we have seen above, is an important development.

¹⁸⁴⁶Dreyfus seems to prefer the term "intelligibility" to "meaning" (Dreyfus, *BWCHBT*, 10, 12, 28, 32, 257.), however I find this to be an infelicitous term, as it carries too much baggage from Ancient and Medieval philosophy which simply does not help to understand what Heidegger is saying here. Though Sheehan adopts Dreyfus's term "intelligibility", he also notes that his understanding of intelligibility makes this term synonymous with "meaningfulness (cf. Sheehan, "What, after all, was Heidegger about?")" or, as he proposes in this paper, Being is the "meaningful presence of things to man (Ibid.)". Fromm suggests that as Heidegger progresses in his thought on Being, from *Being and Time*, through his turning, into his later works, that Being and Time becomes something else altogether. Something that might be described as follows, "Purest being (if you're looking for such a thing) lies in the squelching of the ratiocinative, calculating, purposeful, alienating self. (Fromm, *WF*, 689.)" This description is, unfortunately, not very helpful. Looking at the examples that Fromm provides after this description we might articulate his understanding of Heidegger's mature position on Being as follows: Purest Being is an overwhelming experience that is indescribable without, at the same time, destroying the experience. Interestingly enough, this description sounds very much like C. S. Lewis's description of Joy (Cf. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of my Early Life* (New York: Harcourt, 1955), 17-18, 217-222, 238).

Heidegger is essentially asking, “what is the meaning of meaning?” Having turned our regard from what might be called the “nature/essence” of Being to the “meaning” of Being, he points out (and then supports this claim) that the starting point for any response to the question of the meaning of Being must be a questioning of that Being for which beings Be (have meaning): Dasein. He provides many reasons why it is necessary to begin with Dasein, but, an indepth reading of *Being and Time* reveals that the primary reason for this starting point is that Dasein is the Being that gives meaning, somehow, to beings. Thus, in order to understand the meaning of the Being of beings we must begin by understanding the meaning of the Being of Dasein (the meaning giving Being to whom beings mean something), and by understanding how it gives meaning to beings. Another way of putting this might be that we need to understanding how beings come to have meaning for Dasein. Now, Dasein is always “interpreting” its own Being in terms of its “understanding” of its world (the complex of meaningful relationships, influenced by the They, in which Dasein already finds itself). This is what could be called a hermeneutical circle. The approach to an understanding of Dasein is through its “average everyday Being” (its average everyday meaningful presentation of itself to itself in the way that it realizes its Being within the world of relations in which it finds itself already thrown). Finally, the Being of Dasein is essentially mine; that is, Heidegger is looking at that which is “common” to anything which can be said in any way to be a human person or self. The point of departure is, thus, what we might call universal human personhood or self-ness. This preliminary approach to the Being of beings will reveal that beings “are” in different ways, and that the Being of beings is intimately linked to how Dasein interprets, or gives meaning to, the beings. Thus, the proposed starting point is Dasein.

The proposed method is *phenomenology*, modified in order to approach the Being of beings. It is important to note that Heidegger is not talking about Being in the same way as

Aristotle and Plato, but, rather, of the meaning that is given in Dasein's lived experience. There can be no subject/object dichotomy in lived experience, at least according to Heidegger, for this entire analysis of Being is taking place within a Kantian scheme of reality. That is, when Heidegger rallies the troops to return to the *phenomena*, we are not talking about the things as they are (noumenal world), but to the things as they are experienced by man (the phenomenal world of Kant). It follows, then, that there can be no question of a mind-exterior world.

With this starting point and this method, the rest of *Being and Time* becomes the phenomenological analysis of Dasein, with the purpose of opening a horizon from (or in?) which we can approach the Being of beings. In order understand Heidegger's approach to Being, therefore, one must engage the entire work which is *Being and Time*.

With the foundation (starting point and method), for his query into the Being of beings laid, Heidegger proceeds to show that one way of Being a being (of having meaning for Dasein) is to be present-at-hand. That is, beings "are" seen, by Dasein, as being part of his immediate surroundings. We can, therefore, distinguish between two different Beings of beings: Presence-at-hand and Dasein. We then discover that the "Being-in" of Dasein is entirely different from the "Being-in" of the merely present-at-hand. Dasein's "Being-in" is a familiarity (or disclosing Being) with Dasein's environment—that is, it is a practical understanding of Dasein in which its environment is interpreted and meaningfully embraced by Dasein. Though Dasein can be said to be "in" a world in a physical sense, this "in-ness" is based upon a non-spatial "in-ness" which is proper to Dasein, and based upon Dasein's familiarity. Theoretical knowledge is (1) secondary to "Being-in", which is practical knowledge, and (2) founded upon, but a degenerate form of, "Being-in" as concern. Thus, the theoretical approach to Being qua Being is a degeneration and secondary way of Being-in. It, and its conclusions, are, thus, dependant upon one's way of Being-in. This theoretical way of knowing is already an interpretation of (or giving of meaning to)

beings, such that theoretical knowing determines beings under some light—not as they “are”, but as one “takes them to be”. Heidegger also finds a relationship between the transmission and determination of meaning and *λογος*, such that meaning is given in language, and Dasein’s language determines the Being of being.¹⁸⁴⁷

Pushing forward we discover that Dasein’s world is a form of social milieu in which Dasein finds itself already thrown, and which determines Dasein’s meaningful interpretations of the beings that present themselves to Dasein. The worldhood of the world is the complex structure of relations by which Dasein “understands” the significance and meaning of the various beings which surround Dasein. The world is that in which Dasein discovers itself already projecting itself into its possibilities. These relationships of meaning which constitute Dasein’s world reveal other ways of Being of beings. Things which are encountered in Dasein’s dealings with beings in the world are seen as things in order to x. That is, all beings are primordially understood practically in Dasein’s familiar everyday way of Being. Dasein’s original “contact” with things gives them significance primarily as “in order to’s”—equipment. This encountering and dealing occurs in the context of work, and another way of Being of beings—that is, another way in which beings take on meaning for Dasein. The equipmental way of Being is what is called “Being-Ready-to-hand”. All equipment is “for the sake of”. He here notes that language and signs (revealing the “utility” of his earlier discussion of language), when used to indicate some being, determine beings in the “towards which” relationship in which they take on their meaning. Dasein is the ultimate term of the “for the sake of which” a work (the context in which beings are seen to Be-Ready-to-hand or un-Ready-to-hand) is accomplished and, therefore, the ultimate term

¹⁸⁴⁷The relationship between Being (meaning) and Language (discourse, communication, etc.) will become a major theme in Heidegger’s later work. This demonstrates that his turning was not a rejection of his earlier work in *Being and Time*, but, rather, a development and maturation of his earlier thought.

of the “for the sake of which” beings which are used “for the sake of” the work being accomplished which is “for the sake of” Dasein. It follows, then, that Dasein is the foundation of the meaning and significance of all beings; that Dasein is the cause and foundation of the Being of all beings; and that Dasein is the cause of its own Being. This leads us to conclude that Dasein’s signification (by which dasein already understands itself as projecting itself into a world of significance) is the basis/foundation of language. From which it follows that Dasein’s signifying is the basis of the determination of the Being of being. This allows us to posit a number of preliminary conclusions: (1) there are three primordial ways of Being (a) Dasein, (b) Presence-at-hand, (c) Readiness-at-hand; (2) Dasein is the foundation/primordial basis of the other ways of Being; (3) Dasein is the foundationless foundation of its own way of Being.

This would lead us to the conclusion that each individual Dasein is the foundation of its own world, which could be construed as a form of absolute Relativism, except that Heidegger, in pushing forward, shows that though individual Dasein is, in a sense, the cause and foundation of its own Being, it turns out that all of our interpretations of our “world” are given to us already by the “They” (social or cultural norms), in which we discover ourselves already absorbed, and which “determine” “who” we are and are becoming. This is an important achievement because what is primarily given is our practical know-how—our familiarity with beings and understanding of their meaning—which can, through a degeneration of concern, also provide us with the theoretical understanding and interpretation of the “world” of Dasein. It seems to follow that if Dasein sees x as y (if x has a particular meaning or significance for Dasein), then this is not because (1) x is essentially y, but, because, (2) the “they” in which Dasein discovers itself already thrown provides Dasein with the “seeing-as” by which x is seen as y. It also seems to follow that all “seeing-as” is “culturally” and “socially” determined. We are not seeing x as it is, but as the

“They” tell (cultural determination) us that it is.¹⁸⁴⁸ Dasein, of course, contributes either to the continuation of this “seeing-as”, or to the modification of this “seeing-as”. It seems to follow, from this, that the “They” is the ultimate source or ground of all Being (meaning/shared practices). It follows, then, that there is no absolute ground. The ground is groundless, ever-changing.

Heidegger, however, does not think that the “They” is the final “authority” for the meaning of Being. Nor does he think that individual Dasein is the final “authority” for the meaning of Being. Rather, as we show, above, in our illustration of Heidegger’s understanding of the meaning of Being, individual Dasein and the “They” are co-determiners of Being. Indeed, Heidegger seems to propose that there are at least two ways of interacting with the “They”. Dasein may, *inauthentically*, lose its own self-ness (identity) by becoming the “They”—by being-conformed or subjugated to social norms.¹⁸⁴⁹ We might liken this to the adding of meat that has been soaked in water to a stew. The meat ends up taking on the flavor of the stew, but adds nothing to the flavor of the stew. The only *authentic* way to be one’s own-self is to modify the “They” (not by leaving the “They” behind) by discovering the “world” for one’s self, as one’s self, in one’s own way, and by projecting one’s self into that possibility. We might liken this to the adding of strong spices to a bland meal. The spice, by being itself, modifies the very flavor of the soup.

Having discovered one way in which Dasein is the cause and foundation of Being, Heidegger turns to other ways in which Dasein founds the Being of beings. Dasein is always already in a mood/state-of-mind towards beings. This state-of-mind determines how Dasein sees

¹⁸⁴⁸This raises the question about which culture or society (or sub-culture) is determining our “seeing-as” such that x is seen as y. Are all cultural or societal “seeing-as’s” equal?

¹⁸⁴⁹One might ask, what if Dasein decides that it agrees with the social norms, and, therefore, decides to project itself into its own possibilities in these social norms?

beings—that is, beings are “seen-as” Being in certain ways because Dasein is already in a state-of-mind which determines Dasein’s “seeing-as”. Inasmuch as theoretical knowledge is derivative of practical know-how, theoretical knowledge is determined by our mood/state-of-mind, and can never not be determined by some mood/state-of-mind because Dasein is always already in a mood/state-of-mind. It seems to follow, not only that theoretical knowledge and practical know-how are determined by the “They”, but that they are also determined by the “mood/state-of-mind” of particular Dasein. As such, everything is always, already, interpreted. Heidegger continues by noting that the so-called nature of X is dependent on what Heidegger calls the understanding—the pre-theoretical interpretation of beings which is our natural way of comporting ourselves (Being) towards beings. Pre-theoretical comportment is the primordial understanding of beings—for it is here that beings receive their meaning. This interpretative seeing-as (articulation) occurs prior to, and grounds, all other “seeing-as’s” (such as the predicative “seeing-as”). It follows, then, that all Being (meaning) is grounded in Dasein. Dasein gives meaning to beings by projecting itself into the possibilities in which it already finds itself. Heidegger applies these discoveries to language noting that language is grounded in Dasein’s pre-theoretical understanding and moods such that all assertions, discourse and communications which determine the Being of beings are determined by Dasein. Thus Dasein is the determining foundation of all assertions or truth claims about the Being of beings.

Heidegger has already noted that in order to understand the meaning of Being we must, first, understand the meaning of the Being of Dasein. This, notes Heidegger, can only be accomplished if the meaning of the Being of Dasein is grasped as a structural whole. In order to this, one must see Dasein through an understanding mood which englobes all of Dasein. This, says Heidegger, is said to be Anxiety, or *Malaise*. The analysis of Anxiety reveals that Dasein is, essentially, *care*. As care, Dasein is projecting itself ahead of its Already-Being-in-the-world as

Being-alongside. Some of the consequences of Heidegger's analysis thus far include: (1) the Realism/Idealism debate is meaningless. (2) Truth is Being which is meaning. Meaning is determined by Dasein. Thus, all truth is Dasein-dependant—determined by Dasein. Therefore, if there is no Dasein, then there is no Truth.

Heidegger has, at this point, proved that which he set out to prove.¹⁸⁵⁰ Being is meaningfulness to some Being that “cares”. Truth is a way of Being and, as such, is co-extensive with Being. Being is dependent on Dasein which is the ultimate source of all meaning.¹⁸⁵¹ This is a preliminary answer to the question of Being which opens up “ontological research” to an almost eternal investigation of Being. This is the case because everything that becomes Being does so in a different way. The very same being can receive Being in an infinite number of ways, as it receives Being from different Dasein's immersed in different “They's”, which are being constantly modified by authentically Being Dasein's. Ontology is the exploration of the Being of beings, thus it is an infinitely incomplete pursuit of Being. Thus, in some sense, we might say that Heidegger has saved “metaphysics” from Kantian ruin. But has he saved metaphysics? Is this not a case of: out of the frying pan, and into the fire?

¹⁸⁵⁰In the rest of *Being and Time* Heidegger attempts to prove that Temporality is the horizon of Being (this implies that we have already figured out what Being is). In attempting to accomplish this second task he begins by presenting Dasein as Being-towards-Death. He proposes that viewed as such we are able to see Dasein as a structural whole, which is necessary for an understanding of the meaning of the Being of Dasein. Dasein is, of course, the basis of its own potentiality-for-Being and in this way it is also the basis of Negation (for every projection into its possibilities is a negation of other possibilities for Being). Thus, the notion of Being includes, necessarily, the notion of nullity. Meaning, or giving-meaning, also implies a negation of meaning, or meaninglessness. Dasein must distinguish itself from others in order to authentically Be. Dasein is not the basis of its own thrownness (though it is the basis of its own Being) which is determined by the They, but, by resolute anticipation it must take over its very Being and distinguish itself from the They. Heidegger seeks to show, therefore, that Temporality just is Anticipatory Resoluteness, which just is Care ((a) Future being-towards-death, (b) Past Being-Guilty, (c) Present making-present resolutely), which just is Dasein. If this argument works, then Dasein just is Temporality. Dasein has already been seen to be the basis or foundation of Being (meaning). Therefore, Temporality just is the basis or foundation of Being. The question is, does Heidegger succeed?

¹⁸⁵¹Interestingly there are some important similarities between the presuppositionalist system of the Christian reformed theologian Cornelius Van Til and Martin Heidegger's approach. One might suggest that, for Van Til, God just is the ultimate Dasein which determines the meaning of the world for all “lesser” Daseins. Thus the ultimate interpretation is the interpretation of God.

We can summarize Heidegger's approach to the question of Being as follows: (1) Recognize, first of all, that there is a traditional answer to this question which covers over the "truth" about Being. (2) Recognize that you have, unknowingly and inauthentically, accepted and become entrenched in that tradition. (3) Leave behind, voluntarily and violently (through destruction of the tradition), this tradition. (4) Return, as much as it is in your power to do so, to the original understanding (practical know-how) of Being so as to reinterpret it in a new and so far unknown manner. (5) Realise that the true answer to the question of Being cannot be made into a tradition, but is, instead, a lived perpetual questioning of Being (meaning).

CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING HEIDEGGER'S ANSWER TO THE QUESTION OF BEING

Heidegger makes the attempt to respond to the question of the meaning of "Being" one of the most important pursuits of his life. The honest reader of Heidegger, however, is left with a number of questions about Heidegger's approach to the question of Being. Has Heidegger really answered the question of Being, or has he answered a different question? Does Heidegger's approach to the question of Being leave us hanging? Is there anything that can be added to Heidegger, or should we retreat from his position and start again?

Regardless of what we think about Heidegger's approach to the question of Being, it is important to note that he has put his own thought on Being on the philosophical map, and has become a necessary stop for anybody who, today, wishes to approach the question of Being. We have now considered the approaches of Plato, Aristotle, and Martin Heidegger to the question of Being, and we have explained our understanding of their answers to this question. We are now in a position to compare their different approaches and answers to the question of Being, and to make some suggestions about where we can go from here. In other words, Aristotle, Plato and Heidegger have each said something about Being. Now what? How do we proceed from here?

PART 2

THE FUTURE OF THE QUESTION OF BEING

*If the Poet can be called a seer,
the philosopher is no less entitled to this name, though in his own way.
He may at times be the victim of some bewilderment;
but at other times he will know the joy of discovery;
and for all of the knowledge he will have got out of books,
for all of his knowledge of life,
he will owe both bewilderment and joy
to the fact that he remains enraptured with Being.*

Jacques Maritain

*The metaphysical truth about Being does not, strictly speaking,
fall to man as his possession...
It is not held by man as his property but rather as a loan.*

Josef Peiper

THE FUTURE OF THE QUESTION OF BEING

INTRODUCTION

In his article *A Possible Future for Philosophy*, Josef Pieper begins by noting, “Nowadays it has become evident that when we talk about ‘the future’—something to which we have, in fact, become exceedingly prone—the word is not always being used in the same sense...a case may be made that the future of philosophy is intimately bound up with the future of mankind.”¹⁸⁵² Philosophy, for Pieper, is man’s questioning of the totality of being, the pursuit of Being. Pieper is surely right, for, as the Ancient philosophers have so often reminded us, the gods do not (indeed, need not) philosophize, and that which is less than human is incapable of philosophizing. So, if there is to be a future for philosophy, then it is a future that it is intimately tied to the future of humanity. The future of the question of Being depends entirely on whether humans continue to ask it. But, we might ask, is it a question that still merits being asked?

One might be led to think that the question of Being has run its course, as much of what passes for philosophy in contemporary universities is either the historical study of what past thinkers thought, or an unphilosophical approach to ethics. History is not philosophy, and, the history of philosophy does not concern itself with truth, but with the accurate representation of the truth claims of philosophers. In an article on interpretation, Pieper notes a comment that is made by C. S. Lewis, in the *Screwtape Letters*, about the historical approach to any text. Commenting on Lewis, Pieper states that because the scholars of the western world have been converted to the historical point of view, “the only question one could be sure would not be posed

¹⁸⁵²Josef Pieper, “A Possible Future for Philosophy,” in *For the Love of Wisdom: Essays on the Nature of Philosophy*, trans. Roger Wasserman, Ed. Berthold Wald (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 311.

was the one concerning the truth of what they had read.”¹⁸⁵³ Pieper goes on to note that what is worrying about this trend is not so much the historical point of view, as the fact that the historical point of view is keeping today's scholars from asking about the truth of the positions they are studying, “what is actually being said is of less import—or so it seems to me—than the intentional diversion of attention away from the work’s content and connection with reality itself to the author and the condition surrounding his act of self-expression.”¹⁸⁵⁴ Has philosophy, the veritable questioning of Being, been replaced by history? If so, then what future is there for philosophy and the question of Being? We think that the relationship between humanity and philosophy is such that when philosophy ceases to truly exist, humanity will be all but extinguished, and vice versa. In other words, inasmuch as humans are, the question of Being can be asked. As such, the Being of humans guarantees a possible future for philosophy, but it is a possibility that must be brought about. How is this to happen? Where do we go from here?

Plato, Aristotle, and Martin Heidegger each approach the question of Being, though in different and distinct ways. Where have they left us? Have any of them actually answered the question of Being? Is there anything that can be added to their works, or should we retreat from their positions and start again? Perhaps one of their positions holds the key to answering the question of Being? Is it possible to return to the beginning (as Heidegger proposes in his later work), and start over in our approach to the question of Being? That is, can we forget all that has been said (rightly or wrongly) by the great philosophers of the past, and just start over? The response to this last question is, “Yes and No”. That is, Heidegger’s career shows us that returning to an absolute beginning, uninfluenced by those philosophers who have come before us,

¹⁸⁵³Josef Pieper, “What is Interpretation?,” in *For the Love of Wisdom: Essays on the Nature of Philosophy*, trans. Roger Wasserman, Ed. Berthold Wald (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 223.

¹⁸⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 224.

is next to impossible without at the same time becoming incomprehensible, irrelevant and futile.¹⁸⁵⁵ Yet, there may be a way to return, individually, to a form of absolute beginning. We will explore this possibility in what follows.

How, then, do we move forward? If we remain within the constraints of this study, then it would appear that there are three possible ways of moving forward: (1) Seeing the history of philosophy as a perpetually forward-moving process of thought in which what is past is also passé (much like technological progress), we can continue, picking up where Martin Heidegger left off, in the direction that the history of human philosophy is leading us; (2) We may realize that, somehow, we got off in the wrong direction, somewhere; and we may attempt to return to the “croisé des chemins” where we took the wrong turn. Starting from here we may move forward. As C. S. Lewis says, “We all want progress. But progress means getting nearer the place where you want to be. And if you have taken a wrong turning, then to go forward does not get you any nearer. If you are on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; and in that case the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man.”¹⁸⁵⁶ The difficulty, of course, is determining where we went wrong. (3) We may realize that there is not one proper approach to the question of Being, that all approaches reveal something of Being, and, therefore, that any approach that we desire to take will be sufficient.

¹⁸⁵⁵The impossibility is due, partially, to the fact that from the moment we begin our childhood education, to the time we become interested in asking the question of Being, our thoughts are influenced by the predominant philosophical positions that are being proposed (consciously or unconsciously) by our parents, friends, teachers, and other influences in our lives. The return to an absolute starting point would necessitate the conscious putting aside of all of these views (many of which are not consciously held). We see this with Heidegger who, claiming to return to the very beginnings of philosophy, in order to “begin again”, never succeeds in escaping the Neo-Kantian phenomenology in which he was trained. This impossibility is also due, partially, to the fact that we received, from the moment we are born, an inherited language with ways of talking about reality. It seems that in order to return to an absolute beginning one would also either put aside this inherited language, or redefine it entirely. But, in both cases, one becomes incoherent and impossible to understand for everyone else but themselves, and a few elites. This is, again, the very same thing that we see happening with Heidegger who attempted to redefine the traditional language about Being, and, in so doing, becomes incomprehensible except to those few who succeed in discovering the real meaning behind the words that Heidegger is using.

¹⁸⁵⁶C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952; repr., London: Collins-Fontana, 1956), 35.

We proposed, in the introduction to our dissertation, to “open”, in a sense, a “new horizon” to the question of Being, and, this, through an examination of three important approaches. Before we can choose one of the ways of moving forward (we should note that it is entirely possible that one of our three possibilities may be forced upon us), we need to ask another question, “is it *possible* to ‘open’ a ‘new Horizon’ to the question of Being?” It seems clear to us, now that we have considered the approaches of Plato, Aristotle, and Heidegger, that if “horizon” is understood according to the definition that it is given by Heidegger—as something that outlines or limits something else—then, we think, the answer is “No, there can be no horizon of Being, let alone a *new* horizon of Being”.¹⁸⁵⁷ Anything that can Be in any way must be said to Be—there are no limits to Being *qua* Being. Even if Being is understood as meaning in situatedness, there seems to be an unlimitable, infinite, number of possible interpretations for any given phenomena. As such, no horizon can possibly be proposed. This conclusion is borne out, we think, by the failure of Heidegger to succeed, in the second major section of *Being and Time*, in showing that time and temporality are the horizon of Being.

If, however, we understand horizon not as a limiting notion, but as a “that which lies before us—a ‘future’ of undiscovered possibilities—disappearing into the distance”, then, perhaps, we may be able to suggest some thoughts about how to proceed towards the Horizon of Being. Where to start, how to proceed, and what attitude to take? Perhaps we may even suggest, based upon the common notions that we find in these great thinkers, a proper understanding of the question, a proper approach to answering this question, and an answer to the question, of Being.¹⁸⁵⁸ This may include returning to past victories in order to move forward, but, perhaps,

¹⁸⁵⁷The editors of the English translation of *Being and Time* note, as we mention in our exegesis of Heidegger’s work, that, for Heidegger, a *horizon* is “something which we can neither widen nor go beyond, but which provides the limits for certain intellectual activities performed ‘within’ it. (Heidegger, *BT*, 19fn4.)”

¹⁸⁵⁸Oliva Blanchette, in his *Philosophy of Being*, notes in the introduction, that he will “argue that there is

treading the already cleared terrain may allow us to make better progress. We will begin by considering the similarities and differences between, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of, the approaches of Plato, Aristotle, and Heidegger to the question of Being. We will then consider where they leave us, as regards this question. We will, thirdly, attempt to answer for ourselves, standing on the shoulders of these metaphysicians, two questions: (1) Can the question of Being be answered? (2) If so, how? This third section will be an exercise in ontological reflection about the question of Being. That is, we will attempt, for ourselves, to ask the question of Being, and to follow it through to an approximate answer. We will conclude this section, and our dissertation, by noting some of the consequences (for ontology, philosophy in general, the natural sciences, and religion) of our answer.

CONTRAST AND COMPARISON OF THE THREE VIEWS

Our analysis of the approaches to the question of Being, of Plato, Aristotle, and Heidegger, reveals that there are many profound similarities and some minor differences between the approaches of Plato and Aristotle, but that there are only superficial similarities and major differences between what we might call the Platonic-Aristotelian approach, and the approach of Martin Heidegger. We will draw out these points of comparison in relation to three essential aspects of the question of Being: the nature of the question of Being, the starting place (s) in approaching the question of Being, and what can be said about Being. It is worth noting, before we begin, that Martin Heidegger's approach to Being, if essentially right, poses major problems,

not only a proper beginning for this question but also a proper way of considering it, so that there is also a middle and an end in this science of being as being that culminates in a consideration of a summit of being. (Blanchette, *PB*, 6.)” Whereas he sets out to prove these points, we propose to set out to discover them. Whereas Blanchette appears to have already travelled this route, we propose to travel it anew, guided by Aristotle, Plato and Heidegger, and keeping our eyes open for signposts that have been left by others who traveled it before us. We think that this new attempt to travel the route to Being will reveal something about the question of Being, how to approach Being, and what Being is.

not only for the “Platonic-Aristotelian” approach, but, also, for any other approach to the question of Being, including his own approach. We will see why in what follows.

The Question of Being *per se*

Plato on the Question of Being

When we consider Plato’s thoughts on the question of Being, especially as he has been interpreted by contemporary philosophers, we get mixed signals. First of all, Plato does not explicitly propose to answer the question of Being. This does not mean, of course, that he does not attempt to answer it. On the contrary, as we have seen already, Plato provides the attentive reader with a very intricate and profound answer to the question of Being. The confusion concerning Plato’s approach to the question of being is not so much due to Plato himself, as to his interpreters. So, for example, we find Stanley Rosen who proposes to explain the platonic approach to the question of Being. He says that to ask ‘What is Being?’ is to presuppose, already, an answer to the question.¹⁸⁵⁹ The question of Being, says Rosen, is necessarily about the ‘Being of beings’.¹⁸⁶⁰ But, this question is essentially unanswerable, and, thinks Rosen, was not answered by Plato.¹⁸⁶¹ Paul Ricoeur seems to agree with Rosen. Ricoeur states that the question of Being asks about the Being of beings, “que signifie *l’être* de chacun de ces êtres que sont les Idées ou Formes?”¹⁸⁶² But, says Ricoeur, this question is unanswerable—that is, it is not that Plato did not answer it, but that by not answering it Plato is revealing to us that it simply cannot be answered.¹⁸⁶³ The question of Being, then, is a perpetually asked question that is never

¹⁸⁵⁹We think that Rosen is implying that when we ask “What is Being?” we must already have a vague, or confused, notion of just what “Being” is. We will come across, later, a vague notion of Being, as it is possessed by the philosophizing person, even before asking the question of Being. Perhaps this is what Rosen is referring to.

¹⁸⁶⁰Rosen, *QB*, 119.

¹⁸⁶¹*Ibid.*, 59, 28-29.

¹⁸⁶²Ricoeur, *EESPA*, 118.

¹⁸⁶³*Ibid.*, 135.

answered, nor answerable, the asking of which is the perennial task of authentic philosophy. Pieper, a recognized authority on Platonic philosophy, notes, concerning the unending task of philosophy, that “What is explicitly und [*sic*] unmistakably being sought in the philosophical question is knowledge of the highest cause...but philosophy will persist in this search, on this path, passionately inquiring, as long as man—and mankind generally—is on this path, in *statu viatoris*. Thus, any claim to have found the ‘cosmic formula’ can be dismissed without need of further inspection as unphilosophical. It belongs to the very essence of philosophy that it cannot take the form of a ‘closed system’—‘closed’ in the sense that the essential reality of the world would be adequately reflected in it.”¹⁸⁶⁴ It is important to note, that, inspite of superficial similarities, Pieper does not ultimately agree with Rosen and Ricoeur. Rather, Pieper thinks that philosophy can attain some answers. For Pieper, philosophy is like an artist painting an infinitely large landscape on an infinitely large canvas, though his canvas will never, during his lifetime, be finished, the painter is still capturing something of the landscape, and what he captures can be judged as to its accuracy. This, we propose, is also the approach of Plato to philosophy.

This is not, we propose, Plato’s understanding of the question of Being, nor of its answer. According to the *Parmenides*, as we have seen, it is the purpose of the true philosopher to seek to answer the question of Being. Indeed, as the *Sophist* reveals, the truly philosophizing person is difficult to see for the simple fact that he is absorbed by Being which is the sole and unique object of his desires. According to the *Theaetetus* we, in fact, imitate God when we gaze upon Being (or, we might say, when we make Being the object of our continued contemplation). Plato demonstrates, as we have already shown in our analysis of the *Sophist*, that in order to properly discuss questions concerning Non-being, truth and falsehood, appearance and reality, morality,

¹⁸⁶⁴Josef Pieper, “Philosophy and the Sense for Mystery,” in *For the Love of Wisdom: Essays on the Nature of Philosophy*, trans. Roger Wasserman, Ed. Berthold Wald (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 306-307.

and, indeed, in order to be able to do philosophy at all, one must first answer the question of Being. In other words, the possibility of discourse depends upon our answer to the question of Being. We see the Eleatic Visitor, in the *Sophist*, in his pursuit of the sophist, being forced to descend deeper and deeper until he arrives at the question of Being, and, only then, finding that which allows him to return to the surface and catch the sophist. The entire discussion about the nature of the sophist depends upon his answers to the question of Being.

As such, we can agree with Rosen and Ricoeur that, for Plato, the question of Being is certainly about the existence, or Being, of beings—that is, the question of Being, for Plato, seeks to answer the question, “what is common to everything that, in any way, is?” We must, however, disagree with Rosen and Ricoeur about the possibility of answering this question. Regardless of whether or not Plato actually answered the question of Being, it is clear that he thought that it could be answered, and that, in order to save the possibility of dialogue and philosophy itself, it must be answered. That Plato did not explicitly answer the question of Being in his dialogues does not mean that he did not answer it, both, implicitly in his dialogues, and explicitly in his lectures to his students—as the Tübingen school, in their most modest and useful theories, has shown.

Aristotle on the Question of Being

When we arrive at Aristotle we find the question of Being, “what is being (*ov*)?”, transformed and stated, explicitly, as the question “What is Being (*ovσία*)?” Is this a valid move? As we have already shown, this so-called modification of the question of Being is based upon an analysis of the different things to which the word *ov* is applied—that is, “what do we primarily mean, point at, or signify, when we say ‘*ov*’?” Aristotle discovers that, of the multiple things to that are signified (pointed at) by *ov*, *ovσία* is the most foundational or most primary. Thus, when

we say “*ov*” we are primarily pointing at “*ovócia*”. Thus, in order to properly answer the question “What is *ov*?” we must answer the question “What is *ovócia*?”

The *Metaphysics* of Aristotle, as we have shown above, just is the narration of human inquiry into the question of Being. Some scholars (we noted, specifically, the work of Pierre Aubenque) have attempted to say that Aristotle never answered the question of Being, nor, indeed, thought it possible to answer the question of Being. These scholars seem to be more influenced by the Heideggerian notion that true philosophy is a continual questioning without ever arriving at an answer,¹⁸⁶⁵ than by Aristotle’s approach to philosophy, in which questions are asked, and answered (the answers may bring up further questions, but those questions are discovered, in truth, because we have answered the previous questions).

We noted that there are two elements of the question of Being: the quantitative and the qualitative (or the extension question and the intension question). The quantitative or extension question leads us to the qualitative or intension question. Both questions are asked in the same way, but understood differently. So, for example, the quantitative question, “What is Being?” is asking “What are the things that are in the act of Being¹⁸⁶⁶”? This is the same type of question as that which one might ask when seeing a number of unrecognized things moving rapidly across

¹⁸⁶⁵Theodore Kisiel brings out this element elegantly in his *Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time*, where he notes that in the winter course of 1921-1922, Heidegger’s notion of formal indication is given the role of seeking “a middle ground between abstractly strict universal definition (its overestimation) and concrete experience (underestimation of definition). (Kisiel, *GHB*, 233)” It “is now charged with the skepticism of radical questioning; it is thus situated in a fundamental experience which ‘is not the saving coastline but the leap into the tossing boat, where everything hangs upon getting hold of the sail line and looking to the wind...Solid ground lies in seizing questionability’. (Ibid.)” A little later Kisiel notes that, for Heidegger, “The true having of philosophy is not in the cognition but in the comporting, the persistent bearing toward inchoate being. Otherwise put, the authentic having of philosophizing is in the ‘full stretch (*Voll-zug*) of the actualizing sense (*Vollzugs-sinn*) itself, pursuant to the temporalizing sense of always being ‘underway’. (Ibid., 235.)” Turning to the published notes of the winter course in question, Martin Heidegger’s *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, we see Heidegger saying that to do philosophy & the history of philosophy, one must become a questioning and a seeking after answers (Heidegger, *PIA*, 4.), that skepticism is the beginning and end of philosophy (Ibid., 28), there is no such thing as a perennial philosophy (Ibid., 50.), and the only way to avoid ‘ruinance’ is to maintain one’s self in a perpetual questioning (Ibid., 113, 114, 134.).

¹⁸⁶⁶This short phrase, “the act of being”, is extremely important for our approach to the question of Being.

some terrain, “what is running?” or, in other words, “what are those things that are running across that terrain?” This question presupposes, as we noted, a prior understanding (even if very vague) of what is meant by the term “running”, and, as concerns the question of Being, the term “being”. That the notion of Being, in this question, is vague does not mean that we cannot answer the question, or that we have already, implicitly, answered the question, but, rather, with further reflection, this question pushes us to ask the qualitative question of Being. This question has the same form as the quantitative/extension question, “what is Being?” In the qualitative question, however, we are asking, not about the things that are in the act of Being, but, rather, about the nature of the act of Being itself. Returning to the question about the things that are running, the qualitative question “What is running?” is no longer asking about what is the nature of the things that are currently in the act of running, but, rather, about the nature of running itself—running *qua* running. As such we may understand the qualitative question of “running” as “What is it to run?” or, “What is running *qua* running?” In the same way, we may understand the qualitative question of Being as “What is it to Be?” or, “What is Being *qua* Being?” In other words, what is it that can be said of everything that in any way can be said to be? This is the question of Being as Aristotle understands it. As we saw, Aristotle not only thought that this question could be answered, but he proposes a very far-reaching and profound answer to this question.

Heidegger on the Question of Being

Stanley Rosen, commenting on Martin Heidegger’s approach to the question of Being, proposes that Heidegger is asking not about Being (or Being-ness), but about Nothing (or Nothing-ness).¹⁸⁶⁷ Though Rosen may not be entirely wrong about this, a deeper analysis of

¹⁸⁶⁷Rosen, *QB*, 119.

Heidegger's work shows that it is not the case that what Heidegger is asking about is, strictly speaking, "Nothing"—not, at least, in the sense in which we normally understand this term. On the contrary, Heidegger is indeed asking a question of Being, but, as we have seen, it is not quite the same question of Being as that which is asked by Aristotle and Plato. Heidegger transforms, as we have already noted, the question of Being (which for Plato and Aristotle was the qualitative question, "what is it—the essence or nature of—to be?") into the question "What is the *meaning or signification* of Being?" Being becomes, for Heidegger, meaning or signification itself. Or, we might say, just as Plato thought that Being was grounded in the pair of great Forms "Same-Difference", so Heidegger thought that Being was grounded in Meaning or Significance.¹⁸⁶⁸

This question ("What is Meaning, or Intelligible content, or signification?") takes its sense from the notion (ultimately taken from the development, by Hegel, Husserl, and others, and from the reactions of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and others, to the Kantian critique of knowledge) that the ultimate ground or source of the meaning and significance that we 'give' to reality is the 'mind of man'. If my 'understanding' of reality is the source of its meaning and significance, then, proposes Heidegger, my 'understanding' of reality is the ultimate source or cause of the Being of 'reality'.¹⁸⁶⁹ As such, the question of Being just is the question of 'meaning', and it can only be answered by discovering 'how' humans give (and, ultimately, how each individual human being gives) meaning, intelligible content, or significance, to reality. Heidegger, by remaining trapped with-in the Kantian critique of knowledge, reinterprets and, finally, entirely

¹⁸⁶⁸Being is not, as with Kant and the Idealists, grounded in thought or intellect, but, in meaning or lived interpretation.

¹⁸⁶⁹It should be noted that Heidegger is not too far from the Ancient question of Being. For Aristotle and Plato, part of philosophical questioning, and scientific knowledge, is knowing the causes of the object of our inquiry. Indeed, they did not think that we could claim to have knowledge of X until we knew the causes of X. Thus, in order to answer the question of being one must know the causes of Being. As Pieper has already noted, "What is explicitly und [sic] unmistakably being sought in the philosophical question is knowledge of the highest cause. (Pieper, *Philosophy and the Sense for Mystery*, 306.)" Heidegger proposes that Dasein, as the meaning-giving Being, is the ultimate cause of all meaning— that is, the cause of all Being.

modifies the Platonic-Aristotelian question of Being. As such, the question of Being (meaning) can never be given a final and ultimate answer because each and every individual has his or her own interpretation of what his or her very own “Being” is.

Note, in conclusion, that Heidegger’s question is different because he is asking about something different. Rather than asking “what is common to everything that, in any way, is said to Be?”, he is asking, “what is common to everything that, in any way, is said to mean, signify, or be interpreted as meaningful?” The question is still asking about what is “common”, but the “object” is different. We suggest that, rather than discovering something that “founds or grounds” Being, Heidegger has picked out one “way” of Being and made it the totality of Being, and the object of his questioning.

Conclusions about the Question of Being

It is important to note that the questions we ask, and the way in which we understand the questions we ask, determine the answers that we get (or are able to get). Aristotle and Plato are both asking the same question, but Heidegger has transformed the question of Being into something entirely different. We seem to be warranted, therefore, to claim that, though Heidegger is asking a similar question (seeking what is common to X), he is not understanding it in the same way as Aristotle and Plato. It follows, then, that, on a deeper level, he is not asking the same question. We should not be surprised, then, if he arrives at entirely different conclusions from those of Plato and Aristotle (and, at interpretations of Plato and Aristotle that differ enormously from the so-called traditional interpretations of Plato and Aristotle—He is reading, coherent with his own approach to Being, Plato and Aristotle through the lense of his radically reinterpreted approach to the question of Being.). The fact that he is asking an entirely different question

means that his answers (or lack of answers) to the question of Being, may not help us as much as we had hoped in our approach to the question of Being.

We might liken this circumstance to three people setting off on a journey. They agree that they want to go to Washington. Two of them understand their destination as Washington, D.C., the third as Washington State. Inevitably, the voyagers end up on entirely opposite sides of the continent (one ends up waiting for the sun to set over the Pacific Ocean, the other two end up watching the sun rise over the Atlantic Ocean), and we should not be surprised. The question asked determines the answer that will be received. This does not mean that the answer is of no value, but, rather, that the questioners have simply asked about different things. The question we are asking here, is not, which of these questioners understood the question properly? But, rather, which of these questioners truly asked the question of Being?

We propose, based upon our interpretations of Plato, Aristotle and Heidegger, that Plato and Aristotle have asked the question of Being, whereas Heidegger has asked the question, not of Being, but of *the Being of Meaning*. Heidegger artificially, one almost wonders if it is not unconsciously, limited the question of Being to the Being of the meanings that the human intellect gives to the beings of human experience. By limiting his question to the Being of only one type of Being he severely limits his ability to actually answer the question of Being (at least as it is asked by Plato and Aristotle). That is, of course, unless ‘meaning’ is the only type of Being that can be said to Be. As we will see, however, Heidegger himself allows for the Being of other beings that are, in spite of not being given meaning, and they are not, he says, for just this reason. If his answer to the qualitative question does not apply to every thing that is discovered by the quantitative question, then his answer is, at best, flawed. We would also propose that this explains why so many have found so-called major flaws in Heidegger’s answer to the “question of Being?” It is not because Heidegger gave a poor answer to the question of Being, but that this

is not the question he was asking. Having understood the nature of the question being asked, we turn now to the proposed starting place in their approaches to the question.

Starting Places

The question of starting places in answering a question leads us to ask some further questions such as: is there a best, a mediocre, and a worst starting place? Or, is there a normative starting place? How do we know when we have found an appropriate starting place? What is the nature of the starting place *per se*, as starting place? Does our approach to the starting place determine the answers we will get from the question? If so, how? Our analysis of these thinkers has shown that all three of these philosophers propose different ways of understanding the point of departure in the attempt to answer the question of Being.

Plato's Starting Place

Plato, as interpreted by Rosen, begins with “ordinary everyday life, thinking, or experience”,¹⁸⁷⁰ by which Rosen means that Plato begins with beings as they are perceived in the everyday life of their particular existence in relation to the everyday life of human beings, and as they participate in the Forms. As we noted above, it is quite obvious that Plato's approach to Being begins with the changing realm of sensible beings. These changing particular beings, for Plato, point the observer beyond the sensible realm to the *λογος* which determines them. If the beings of everyday life are not the starting point, then, Plato proposes (and Rosen notes), anything goes—we become the creators of reality and philosophy becomes nothing but poetry about our creation.¹⁸⁷¹ For Rosen, who does not think the question of Being can be answered, the

¹⁸⁷⁰Rosen, *QB*, 42-44, 94, 99-100, 208, 273, etc.

¹⁸⁷¹This is a telling commentary when one considers Heidegger's approach to Being, and his post-turn work

particular beings of the everyday world in which humans live are only the starting point and ground of the quest of questioning Being. Perhaps it would be better to describe the particular beings of the everyday world, as Plato sees it, as a form of launch pad from which the human mind is propelled into the “realm” of True-Being—the Forms.

Ricoeur, however, does not seem to agree with Rosen. Ricoeur seems to think that Plato’s proposed starting point, for the answer to the question of Being, is the essences themselves (the Forms). Ricoeur does, however, propose that there is, in a sense, more than one starting point, he notes that there is also an *existential* starting point: intellectual curiosity or wonder. Ricoeur muddies the waters, however, by also proposing that, for Plato, it is not so much the essences which constitute the point of departure, but, rather, language (the definitions or *λογος*) which, ultimately, constitute the foundation of Platonic ontology.

Reale agrees with Rosen, *contra* Ricoeur, that Plato begins, ultimately, in the sensible world, with the particular beings. Reale notes that, for Plato, there is no one particular being in the sensible world of beings that must, necessarily, serve as the starting point, but, rather, that the starting point would be better construed as the totality of particular beings that present themselves to us in the everyday world. In other words, and here Reale seems to agree with what we said above about the qualitative question beginning in the quantitative question, the question of Being gets its jumpstart from the human observation of things that are in the act of being (regardless of how they are Be-ing).

We may posit, therefore, that Plato’s starting point in his answer to the question of Being is wonder, surprise, or curiosity (*existential* starting point),¹⁸⁷² at the fact that there are so many

(which is, we think, nothing but the direct product of his pre-turn approach to the question of Being). Plato’s claim is proved true, we might say, by Heidegger. This may be the most important revelation of Heidegger’s approach to the question of Being.

¹⁸⁷²Louis Lachance, talking about what we call the existential or psychological starting point, notes that

different things (the *quantitative* starting point) that are in the process (or act) of Being and becoming. The actual attempt to answer the question of Being starts with the observation that we say (*linguistic* starting point) that so many different things are Be-ing (the act), and this leads us to ask the question, “What is it about all these things that leads us to say that they are all Be-ing (the act)?” Responding, for Plato, to the questions that we proposed in the introduction to this sub-section: there is not, necessarily, one starting place which is better or worst—anything that can be said, in any way, to Be, is an appropriate starting place. To put it another way, the only thing normative about the starting place is that we start with something which is said to Be, and, therefore, is part of the observed totality of things that, in some way, Be (are in the act of Be-ing).

Aristotle’s Starting Place

Turning to Aristotle we find major agreement with Plato, but with some refinements. We should emphasize, along with Lear, that the question of Being, for Aristotle, begins in the observations that Aristotle made in his previous works (which is why it is so important to note that the *Metaphysics* is a relatively late work, following upon the observations and reflections made in Aristotle’s earlier works in biology, logic, and physics). In other words, Aristotle’s approach to the question of Being begins in observations about things that in some way Be (the act of Be-ing).

“Platon attribuait l’éveil philosophique au ‘choc’. (Louis Lachance, *L’Être et ses Propriétés* (Montréal: Les Éditions du Lévrier, 1950), 42.)”, and that Plato suggested that this “choc” could be triggered (Ibid.). Concerning the triggering of the “choc”, Lachance notes that “Ce travail préliminaire se faisait par la confrontation des idées reçues et par la mise en lumière de leur opposition, si ce n’est de leur contradiction. Et il résultait de la découverte de cette contradiction ainsi que du sentiment de conflit intime qu’ell provoquait, une attitude mentale négative, une impression pénible de désarroi, d’insuffisance, de pauvreté, de vacuité. C’était effectivement le *choc*. Il s’accompagnait d’un embarras, d’un malaise, d’une inquiétude analogues aux troubles qui marquent les heures angoissées qui précèdent l’‘enfantement’. (Ibid., 42-43.)”

Heidegger would, as Kisiel notes in his *Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, contest this observation. Kisiel notes that, for Heidegger, "In approaching the difficult question of *ὄντῃα*, Aristotle's real starting point and basic phenomenon of his thought turns out to be the statement or assertion, *λόγος*."¹⁸⁷³ Stanley Rosen seems to agree with Heidegger's analysis of Aristotle's starting point, for he seems to think that Aristotle equates Being with thought, making him into an Idealist of sorts. Rosen states, "This is not true in Aristotle's analysis. The openness of the being is precisely its truth or actuality as now being thought...From this crucial standpoint, we can say that Aristotle is an Idealist...Aristotle places the being itself within the act of thinking itself."¹⁸⁷⁴ He goes on to state that "His so-called realism or empiricism, that is, the fact that he starts with particular beings or residents within the everyday world of genesis, is entirely illusory."¹⁸⁷⁵

It seems that some, through a superficial reading of Aristotle (or by an unbalanced and misinformed reading of Aristotle), have led themselves to believe that Aristotle is starting with language about Being (as he asks about the many ways in which Being is said).¹⁸⁷⁶ One must, however, read this question about the ways in which Being is said, in light of his comments about *homonymy* in the introduction to the *Categories*, and in his other works. Homonymy happens when there are many different things to which one word or term is attributed. It is the things to which we apply the same name, not the name itself, which are homonymous.¹⁸⁷⁷ As such, when we are asking about the many ways in which Being is said, we are implicitly asking about the

¹⁸⁷³Kisiel, *GHBT*, 231.

¹⁸⁷⁴Rosen, *QB*, 76.

¹⁸⁷⁵Ibid., 77. Interestingly enough he also states, in the *Question of Being*, that "I would therefore say that Aristotle is right to orient metaphysics by everyday experience and noetic perception. (Ibid., 42-43.)"

¹⁸⁷⁶It is not so easy to argue, as Rosen does, that the Being is in the act of thinking, especially in light of Aristotle's comments about *true* being.

¹⁸⁷⁷Of course, when it comes to the question of Being, as we see it in Aristotle's approach to this question, even the words we use to talk about Being 'Be' in some way, and, therefore, fall under the quantitative question of Being.

different things of which the term Being is said, and what it is about these things that allows us to say that they, in some way, Be (the act of Be-ing). Aristotle, in other words, is less worried about language than about how language is used to portray or reflect that which, in some way, Is. In light of this point, and in light of what we have already shown, it is evident that both Heidegger and Rosen are mistaken in their understanding of Aristotle's starting point.

Aristotle, like Plato, proposes what we might call an *existential* or *psychological* starting point—wonder,¹⁸⁷⁸ as well as an *ontological* starting point—the totality of things that, in any way, Be (the act). Aristotle, however, qualifies the starting point—the totality of beings—by noting that, due to the nature of the human intellect and the human learning process, there are some types, modes, or ways, of Being which constitute, if we wish to truly answer the question of Being, a more appropriate starting point. The most appropriate starting point just is the *particular sensible* beings of the everyday lived experience of human beings (this includes, but is not limited to, human beings themselves). This qualification of the starting place is seen in the way in which Aristotle answers the question of Being in the *Metaphysics*, proceeding from that which is most known to human beings to that which is least known to human beings.

Responding, for Aristotle, to the questions that we asked in the introduction of this subsection: there is, for human beings (and this due to human nature), one starting place which is better than other possible starting places—particular sensible beings—those things which are most commonly said to Be (the act of Be-ing). To put it another way, the only *normative*

¹⁸⁷⁸Lachance, concerning Aristotle's proposed psychological starting point, says, "Ce qui tire la conscience de sa torpeur et déclenche en elle la réflexion, ce qui provoque la liquéfaction de son contenu habituel, ce qui amène la précipitation et la cristallisation de ce contenu en une formule nouvelle, c'est l'«étonnement»...Il en fut à l'origine comme il en est maintenant : ceux-là sont aptes à philosopher qui ont le don de s'émouvoir et de s'étonner. (Lachance, *EP*, 44-45.)" Lachance describes the wonder that provokes the true philosopher to pursue an answer to the question of Being as follows, "Elle consiste en une certaine inquiétude sacrée qui envahit l'âme, qui la secoue, qui rompt la gangue épaisse de ses représentations frustrées, qui la laisse en proie à une curiosité à la fois timorée et féconde. (Ibid., 45.)"

ontological starting place is that we start with that (of all the things that can be said to be) which, most manifestly, for human beings, Is (the act of Being). We want to know what is common to everything that is said, in any way, to Be (the act of Being). In order to ensure that we do not go astray in attempting to answer this question we must begin with that which, for human Beings, is easiest to understand, and easiest to recognize, as Being (act). It is not as obvious, for human Beings, that supra-sensible beings (whether we are referring to beings of reason, abstract ideas, to angelic or divine beings, or to something else) Be (the act), so, we should not begin with these types of Being. That which most obviously is, for human beings, are the composite beings of sensible reality. Thus, we should begin with them, and, then, proceed from our analysis of what constitutes—what is the cause or principle of—the “Be-ing” of these beings to the consideration of the other things that are said to Be. We are awakened, on the psychological level, to the question of Being by the amazement and wonder that is created in us by the overbearing presence of beings which impose themselves on us as Be-ing.

Heidegger’s Starting Place

We saw, in considering Heidegger’s understanding of the question of Being that Heidegger is asking a different question. It follows that we can expect Heidegger to propose a different starting point (to which we have already alluded) from which to begin his investigations into the question of Being. Our expectations are confirmed. Heidegger begins *Being and Time*, as we noted above, by claiming that there really is only one appropriate starting place in any attempt to answer the question of Being—Human-Being. “Why is this?”, one might ask. In light of what we have already seen concerning Heidegger’s understanding of the question of Being, this starting point makes perfect sense: Human-Being, Dasein, is the only way of Being which gives meaning to itself, and to everything else. Being is meaning. So, if we want to answer the question

“what is Being (meaning)?”, then we must begin with the meaning-giving (being-giving) Being—that which is the cause or principle of all Being (Meaning), even of its own Being (Meaning).

It is important to remember that Heidegger is performing a phenomenological study of how Being *appears* to Human-Beings. This is a study, not of beings that are outside of Human perception, but of beings as they are perceived (or given meaning) by Human-Being. As such, the point of departure is not the beings themselves, but human interpretation of beings—the meaning that humans give to the beings that they interpret or encounter. This is why Heidegger proposes that “Being” is in the temporal actualization of human selves (that is, the giving of meaning to one’s self, and practically understanding this meaning, in meaningful relations with the beings that have meaning in one’s world).

This is also why Being is dependant on humans and human societal/cultural norms. We begin by giving, to the beings that present themselves to us, the meaning that our society/culture gives them. Later, if we are somehow awakened to this inauthentic way of Human-Be-ing, we begin giving different meanings to these beings. In so much as a being is perceived by a Human-Be-ing, it is never meaningless, and, therefore, it remains in Be-ing for so long as it receives meaning. If, however, it ever ceases to have meaning to Human-Be-ings, then it also ceases to Be.

Not only is Heidegger asking an entirely different question from that of Plato and Aristotle, but he has inversed (turned upside down) their approach to the question of Being. Aristotle, in particular, arrives at an understanding of the “being-giving Being” after having explored those “beings” which are easiest to understand (the particular beings of sensible reality). Heidegger begins with the “being (meaning)-giving Being” (exploring the ways of being, giving-meaning, of human-being) in order to understand the ways of being (meanings) of the things that

are given being (meaning). Heidegger attempts a “top-down” approach in answering his version of the question of Being, whereas Aristotle proposes an approach which begins at the lowest level of Being (that which is most readily available and comprehensible by humans) in order to move towards the highest level of Being.

It should be noted that it really is almost impossible to compare Aristotle’s approach to the question of Being and Heidegger’s approach to the question of Being. They are asking two very different questions about two very different things, and arriving at two very different answers. This being said, this comparison does help us to further emphasize that Heidegger is simply not asking (nor attempting to answer) the same question as that which is asked by Aristotle and Plato.

It should be said, however, that Heidegger seems to propose, along with Plato and Aristotle, that there is a *psychological* or *existential* starting point for the questioning of Being. Jacques Maritain sums it up nicely when he notes that “De même le philosophe allemande Heidegger assure qu’on ne peut être métaphysicien sans passer d’abord par l’expérience de l’angoisse, en donnant à ce mot une portée non seulement psychologique mais aussi métaphysique que possible. C’est le sentiment tout à coup vif et déchirant de tout ce qu’il y a de précaire et de menacé dans notre existence, dans l’existence humaine, et du même coup, par l’effet même de ce sentiment, de cette angoisse, cette existence se dépouille de sa banalité, elle prend une valeur unique, sa valeur unique, elle se présente à nous comme quelque chose sauvé par le néant, d’arraché au néant.”¹⁸⁷⁹ So, Heidegger agrees with Aristotle and Plato on one point, at least, the quest for Being must begin in a psychological or existential experience which awakens the questioner to the question of Being.

¹⁸⁷⁹Jacques Maritain, *Sept Leçons sur l’Être et les Premiers Principes de la Raison Speculative* (Paris : Pierre Téqui, 1932-1933), 58.

Note, however, the great gulf that separates Heidegger's understanding of the psychological starting point from that of Plato and Aristotle. For Plato and Aristotle, we begin questioning Be-ing because of an experience of wonder—*étonnement*—that is awakened by the beings themselves. For Heidegger we begin questioning Be-ing, our very own Be-ing (by which he means our very meaning or significance) because of an experience of absolute dread and fear—*angoisse*—that is awakened through the experience of coming face to face with our own finitude, our Being-towards-death, our tendency towards our own *Annéantissement*.

These two psychological starting places are as different as night and day, and, indeed, can be illustrated by this very phenomenon. The same path through the forest (how it imposes itself on our senses by what we see, hear, smell and touch) can take on a very different appearance, and awaken very different psychological reactions, depending on whether we walk this path in the morning (when the sun is rising, and the forest is coming alive), or if we walk it in the evening (when the sun is setting). In the early morning, as the sun is rising, it is as if the forest comes to life once again. We are everywhere presented with life, and everything seems to be renewed. In the coming darkness, however, and with the last few rays of sunlight, the forest becomes a forest that is haunted by our very own nightmares, creations of our own mind, which terrify us at every step. So, in Heidegger's approach to the question of Being, where Be-ing is nothing but what I make it to be, Be-ing tends to take the forms of the worst characters of our worst nightmares—presented with our own death we are driven to question the very meaning of our own existence. For a person who is naturally optimistic this experience may end up Be-ing revelatory, and encouraging, like a hiker who, as the sun sets, arrives home to a fire in the fireplace and a meal on the table. For a person who is not optimistic, and who may even tend towards pessimism, this experience takes on a dreadful and horrifying appearance, like the hiker who, as the sun sets, realizes that they have lost their way in the forest, and is no longer able to see the path. There are

no signs that can point him in the right direction, Be-ing has set, and faced with his own nothingness, he despairs of Be-ing.

In order to be equitable, let us answer, for Heidegger, the questions that we proposed in the introduction to this sub-section: there is, necessarily, one and only one starting place from which we can begin our attempt to answer the question of Being (Meaning)—that is Human Being. It is the only meaning (being)-giving Being, and, as such, is the only appropriate starting place in attempting to answer the question of Being (Meaning). Martin Heidegger latches on to one tenant in the qualitative question of Be-ing (that tenant which Aristotle says is, least of all, Be-ing) and makes it THE Being which is, most of all, Being—and the source and foundation of all the other types of Being (meaning). Heidegger's approach to the question of Being is the perfect inversal of Aristotle's approach to Being. Beginning in the mind, Heidegger, like René Descartes, is incapable of escaping the mind in order to talk about those beings which ARE independent of, whether or not they are known or given meaning by, the human intellect. Starting in the human *λόγος*, it should come as no surprise that Heidegger's answer to the question of Being will differ drastically from that given by Plato and Aristotle (who, both, see the human *λόγος* about Being as dependent on Being itself, and as that type of being which, least of all, is said to Be), and will lead Heidegger to drastically misinterpret both Plato and Aristotle (imposing his own meaning upon them). Note, however, that by imposing his own interpretation upon Plato and Aristotle, Heidegger is being fully coherent with his own approach to the question of Being.

Conclusions about their Starting Places

We have now considered the different ways in which Plato, Aristotle, and Heidegger understand the question of Being, and their different starting places in the attempt to answer this question. We have seen that whereas Plato and Aristotle are seen to be in major agreement, with some minor disagreements (they both propose that the quest for Be-ing begins in wonder at the beings of everyday experience), Heidegger is off on an entirely different path (he proposes that the quest for Be-ing, my own meaning and significance, begins in the horror that is awakened by the confrontation with my own tendency towards *annéantissement*). Plato and Aristotle are headed towards the East coast, Heidegger to the West coast. Plato and Aristotle start on their journey to Washington from an “earthly” starting point (We might say that Plato suggest that we choose any particular starting place, so long as it is on the earth—China, Australia, Antarctica, or Philadelphia are all equally appropriate places to start. Aristotle, on the other hand, says that it is better to start somewhere in North America.). Heidegger, on the other hand, begins on Haley’s Comet, or in some black hole from which the earth is almost impossible to observe. It should, therefore, come as no surprise that Aristotle and Plato’s journey ends in a brilliant, almost indiscernible, light (as the sun rises over the Atlantic Ocean, giving light to everything else), whereas Heidegger’s quest ends in an indiscernible darkness of Nothingness and the despair that one may never quite arrive at the intended destination. Let us turn, now, to the answers that are given by each of our voyagers to the question of Being.

What is Being?

As we noted above, the way in which we understand a question will determine the kind of answer that we give to it. It should also be obvious, at this point, that the point of departure from which we attempt to answer the question will also have an influence upon the type of answer that

we receive. We noted that Plato and Aristotle both agreed that, in general, the starting place from which one should attempt to answer the question of Being is the totality of the things that can be said, in any way, to be Be-ing. Though Plato seems to have left this as an unqualified starting place, Aristotle proposes that, due to the nature of man's capacity to learn and to know, we should begin with those beings (from within the totality) which are easiest for man to know (thus, the particular beings of sensible reality). We will begin to see, in the answers that they give to the question of Being, some more pronounced differences. This being said, the differences between Aristotle and Plato are negligible in comparison with the differences that have become obvious between the answer of Martin Heidegger, and the answers of Plato and Aristotle.

Plato's answer to the Question of Being

Rosen proposes, as we have seen, that, for Plato, though Being has a nature, nothing, or next to nothing, can be said about the nature of Being. There can be no science of Being, because there is no way to say anything definite about Being. That being said, Rosen does think that we can, at very least, say that To Be is to be an essence (or Idea). This seems, to us at least, like a fairly "definite" answer to the question of Being, especially within platonic ontology. Ricoeur goes a little further than Rosen, noting that Being, for Plato, is one of the 5 great Forms (or genres). Reale agrees with Ricoeur, that Being is one of the 5 great Forms (a meta-Idea), noting that, for Plato, the Ideas just are true Being. Being, however, is not the highest of the great Forms (in what we might call the hierarchy of the Ideas), but is caused by the One-Good-Beautiful (the bi-polar principle: The One-Dyad). Reale goes on to distinguish between Being-in-itself (or we might say, Being *qua* Being), and the totality of Being (or Being-in-its-totality). This distinction corresponds to the questions of quality and quantity. Reale notes, finally, that Non-Being is the Form of that which is, in some way, different from, or other than, Being. Turning from the

commentators to the dialogues themselves, we see Plato describing Being, in the *Parmenides*, as an indefinable, but almost all-extensive Form. For not being able to say a whole lot about Being, we have been able to arrive at a fairly concrete answer to the question of Being. *Being just is the essence of Being-ness in which anything which can be said, in any way, to Be, participates.*

Aristotle's answer to the Question of Being

Turning to Aristotle we find different answers given by different commentators. Lear understands Aristotle to be saying the same thing (on the surface) as Plato—Being is Form—but, not understanding this to say that Being is “a” Form. Rather, Being could be said to be THE Form of any thing that in any way can be said to Be. This seems to equate to the claim that Being just is instantiated essence. Witt seems to think that to Be, or to have Being, is to be *properly basic*—to Be that beyond which we cannot go, that ultimate explanation which, itself, cannot be explained. Now, we might be inclined to accept, tentatively, this claim, but, perhaps, not in the same way as Witt understands it. For Witt, that which is properly basic just is the beings that make up the totality of Being. This, of course, is nothing more than to say that Be-ing just is to be an instantiated essence.

Perhaps, however, this is what Aristotle is saying. It should be noted that Aristotle very clearly states that Being is neither a genus, nor in a genus. He also notes that Being is *οὐσία*. He notes, as we saw above, that Being is that which is common to anything that can, in any way, be said to Be (the act). As such, many have concluded that Being, for Aristotle, is instantiated (or, put more simply, existing) essence (or some nature that is), and, therefore, that it is impossible to talk about Be-ing without at the same time mentioning something that is. Indeed, most commentators seem to understand Aristotle to be saying that ‘Being’ is ‘οὐσία’. ‘Οὐσία’ is

interpreted, frequently, as substance. Thus, to Be is to be an Aristotelian substance—an instantiated essence.

This is, we think, most certainly true, both of talking about Being, and of Aristotle’s approach to Being. We must not stop, however, at this point, otherwise (so we propose) we will not discover Aristotle’s ultimate answer to the question of Being. He goes on, as we have noted above, to point out (and attempt to explain) three “types” of existing *οὐσίαι*¹⁸⁸⁰: particular sensible instantiated essences/beings, Beings of reason (mathematical entities, ideas, and abstract objects which are essences which are abstracted from their material instantiation in some intellect), and supra-sensible beings (such as the unmoved movers, and the first unmoved mover). Aristotle begins, as we noted earlier, by attempting to discover just what it is that is common to all sensible particular *οὐσία*, as their common cause or foundation of Being. What is common to all of these types of existing *οὐσίαι*? That they, in some way (unique to their type of essence),¹⁸⁸¹ can be said to Be—that is, that they are all existing somethings, or existing essences. The way in which each of these existing essences is said to Be is different, but, they all are. We find, therefore (as we noted above), what might be called an analogy (proportionality) of Being in Aristotle. Each of these ways of Being can be properly said to Be (the act), but their way or mode of Being (being in act) is different based upon what type of Be-ing they are.

It might seem as if Aristotle has an answer dangling in front of his eyes, but that he never actually accepts it as an answer to the question of Being. As we have seen in our exposition of Aristotle’s approach to Being, it seems that Aristotle goes beyond the notion that to Be is to be an

¹⁸⁸⁰It must be remembered that though Being is *οὐσία*, Aristotle distinguishes between 4 different things to which the word *οὐσία* refers, and that we cannot, superficially, say that by *οὐσία* Aristotle means only one of these 4 things. We must, rather, submit to the context in order to understand what he means, in any particular section of the *Metaphysics*, by this word.

¹⁸⁸¹It is important to note that that which is common to everything that, in any way Is, is “specified” differently based upon the ‘type’ of nature that is said to Be. In other words, the way of Be-ing (by which we might say, the manner of be-ing and/or amount of be-ing) of each thing is different in relation to its essence.

existing something, to distinguish between Being and the thing that is Being. Aristotle seems to be saying, as we have shown above, that when we separate Being from the thing that is Being we can only describe Being through negation (infinite, etc.).

As we have already seen, for Aristotle, in order to know X, one must know the cause of X. The answer to the question of Being, then, may end up being two-fold. That is, we may end up with an answer to the *question of commonality* which differs slightly from the answer to the *question of causality*. That which is common, proposes Aristotle, is that everything that presents itself to our senses as Being (and, in truth, everything that is said, in any way, to Be), is an existant-essence. What is the cause of the “existence” of these essences? Here Aristotle relies on his distinction between the four causes. He proposes that the essence of any existant-essence is the Formal cause of that existant-essence, and that there is, one “Being”, whose essence it is to exist. This essence which is its own existence is the ‘Final cause’ of the existence of every other existant-essence. There is a legitimate question as to whether or not Aristotle thinks that this “Final cause” is, also, the “Efficient cause”, of the existence of all other existant-essences. One thing that is certain, for Aristotle, is that the Final cause of the existant-essences which are known by Human-beings is the subsistent essence which is its own existence. We may conclude, thus, that for Aristotle, Being (and the cause or foundation of everything else that, in any way, can be said to Be), ultimately, is the subsistent essence of Being itself, which is describable only by negation.

Heidegger’s answer to the Question of Being

Coming to Heidegger, and this should be no surprise, we find his answer to be entirely different from that of Plato and Aristotle. Indeed, all resemblances between the answer of Martin Heidegger, and the answers of Plato and Aristotle, are entirely superficial. As we have seen, in

order to understand the meaning of Being we must first understand the Being which is the meaning (being)-giving Being—Dasein, and how it gives Being (meaning). As we have already shown, Being, for Heidegger, just is meaning, signification, or intelligible content. In other words, to Be just is to have some meaning to some meaning-giving being. Dasein is the meaning-giving being, therefore, Dasein is the foundation and cause of Being (even of its own Being). This is what allows Heidegger to talk about the groundless ground of Being which grounds itself by giving itself its own meaning. This implies that Being is whatever Dasein takes something to Be (whether it be Presence-at-hand, Readiness-to-hand, Dasein, or some other possible way of interpreting—or giving sense and meaning to—beings). Dasein’s interpretation of itself in the “world (cultural or societal norms)” in which it finds itself is the foundation of all language. Yet, it turns out to be language which becomes the foundation of Dasein’s world, as Dasein uses it (indeed, as Dasein also receives it from the world in which it finds itself already thrown) to interpret and give meaning to itself and the “beings” that it signifies. This would be absolute relativism finds itself “founded” in the unfounded cultural norms established by the “they”, which is always changing.

This is not, however, the whole story, for, as we have already pointed out, there are, in *Being and Time*, traces of an underlying or deeper notion of Being. Though Heidegger claims that a being does not have Being unless it be interpreted (given meaning) and seen-as-something-to-something (Being, therefore, involved in the complex of meaningful relations that constitute the “world” of Dasein), he still allows that the “things” that receive Being from Dasein have some sort of “Being” or “Existence”—*vide de sens*—even when they are not given meaning by Dasein. Heidegger displays, for our amusement, a magnificent painting on an enormous canvas. The painting fills (covers over?) the horizon. However, through a small hole that has formed in the canvas we are able to see something else that is beyond the canvas—the sun setting over the

Pacific Ocean? Of course, as soon as we see it, it is interpreted and is integrated into the canvas as something that is ready-to-hand, present-at-hand, or Dasein. There is, then, some latent type of “being” that is not Be-ing, but which is undeniably “there”, and must “Be there” in order for anything to have any meaning. We will come back to this in the next section as we discuss some of the difficulties that are caused by the respective views of Plato, Aristotle and Heidegger.

Conclusions about their answers to the Question of Being

We can note, in concluding this section, that Plato and Aristotle both tend towards Form, or Essence, as the ultimate answer to the question of Being. Both Plato and Aristotle tend to see the ultimate Form, or cause, of Be-ing in everything else as a supra-sensible *οὐσία* which is, in some sense, the self-subsistent essence of Being.¹⁸⁸² Martin Heidegger is far from agreeing with Plato and Aristotle, except at the superficial level of language (which is why he has been frequently accused of equivocation).¹⁸⁸³ We think that it is now evident that not only is Martin

¹⁸⁸²As we have seen, this agreement between Plato and Aristotle is more than just a superficial agreement. They disagree about the specific nature and ontological status of the supra-sensible *οὐσία* Being, but they both agree that the ultimate answer to the question of Being is this supra-sensible *οὐσία*.

¹⁸⁸³The accusation that Heidegger is guilty of unbridled and almost intellectually immoral equivocation is not far from the truth, but it needs to be nuanced. It is, admittedly, difficult to create an entirely new philosophical language without using the same terms that have always been used. Heidegger attempted to redefine these terms, and this must be maintained, always, in the front of our minds when we seek to interpret Heidegger. He is not so much equivocating as redefining. Many philosophers have found this practice to be either philosophically immoral, or, at least, downright *malhonnête*. Jacques Maritain, for example, takes exception to Heidegger’s constant redefinition, and re-employment so redefined, of philosophical terms of art, “if we are to call things by their right names, we are obliged to say that in the phenomenological existentialism that originates with Heidegger there is a radical *bad faith* which consists in appropriating to itself all the notions that we owe to the great metaphysicians of being, and which possess meaning only for the realistic intellect whose quest is the extra-mental mystery that surrounds what is. Those notions were appropriated for the purpose of exploiting them in the universe of phenomenological thought, the universe of the ‘appearance which is essence’ (*L’Être et le Néant*, p. 12), where, in reality, they cease to possess meaning, but where, since the aim is to remain a metaphysician, they will continue to be used and corrupted in such a way that they may endlessly yield anti-natural meanings. This sort of transcendental embezzlement could not but end in a tainted metaphysical system. (Maritain, *EE*, 6fn1.)”

Josef Pieper is another philosopher who, being a German philosopher, critiques Heidegger’s use of language. In his work on the use of Language by philosophers, Pieper begins by stating that the philosopher must attempt, as much as is possible, to express philosophical truths in the language of the speech of the educated many (Josef Pieper, “Language and the Philosophizing Person,” in *For the Love of Wisdom: Essays on the Nature of Philosophy*, trans. Roger Wasserman, Ed. Berthold Wald (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 197.), and, this, “not for purely didactic purposes, but simply because one would otherwise wind up in a world of nonbinding utterances,

Heidegger asking an entirely different question from that of Plato and Aristotle,¹⁸⁸⁴ starting from an entirely different starting point, and answering that question with an entirely different method, but (and this, we think, is a necessary result of the difference in question, starting place, and method) he is also arriving at an entirely different answer. They are, quite simply, not talking about the same thing; therefore, we should not expect them to say the same things (except, perhaps, on the superficial level of using the same words). It is tempting, therefore, to put Heidegger to one side, and to continue our pursuit of an answer to the question of Being without Him. After all, we are not even travelling on the same road, nor in the same direction, nor towards the same end, and we cannot even begin at the same place where he began his reflexions. We will eventually have to put much of what Heidegger says to rest; but not quite yet, for Heidegger, inspite of the major differences, has some important contributions which we must not, entirely, reject. The baby must not be thrown out with the bath water. One element that propulses itself to the forefront of any serious engagement with their respective works is that we can see hints, in each of their works (inspite of the major differences between the Platonic-Aristotelian approach and that of Martin Heidegger), of a different, and perhaps more profound answer to the

with the certain ground of reality swept from under one's feet. (Ibid.)” He goes on to note, as a German philosopher, concerning Heidegger's work, and the fact that it is almost impossible to translate it, that “the reason is by no means always to be found in the ‘depth’ and ‘breadth’ of their language but more often than not in their arbitrarily inconsistent use of words. Just one example: ‘the thinging of the thing takes place’ (‘[Es] ereignet sich das Dingen des Dinges’)—how can this rather cryptic phraseology of Heidegger's be translated into a foreign language, if it is already questionable whether it may really be considered German at all. (Ibid., 205.)” In another comment concerning the philosophical use of language, which is also aimed (at least in part) at Martin Heidegger's strange use of words, Josef Pieper notes that “In those cases where a linguistic conformity, whether expressly agreed or tacitly enforced through convention, has been replaced by the arbitrariness of a personal terminology, the individual speaking in this manner has in so doing abandoned the essentially shared human endeavor to acquire knowledge—which, far from ruling out the formation of fraternities, encourages them. (Pieper, *A Plea for Philosophy*, 141.)” Rather than renew philosophy, and liberate it from its coveredness in traditional and conventional use of terms, Heidegger, according to Pieper, actually makes it even more difficult to do philosophy, and creates, rather than dismisses, an entirely new tradition of philosophy and a class of the philosophical “elite”, who, alone (in a way that very much resembles a religious cult), can understand and properly interpret Martin Heidegger.

¹⁸⁸⁴Heidegger may have started off asking the same question, but, as is evident from an involved reading of *Being and Time*, it did not take long for the question of Being, in Heidegger's mind, to take on an entirely different meaning, and to pursue an entirely different object.

question of Being. Before we consider this different, more profound, answer, let us look at some of the difficulties that are created by their respective approaches.

Difficulties caused by their respective views

A Problem in Plato

The major difficulty with the solution that is proposed by Plato is that the Form of Being is not the ultimate principle of the Being of all things (and does not seem to be participated in by everything that is said to Be). It, indeed, is below the dyadic pair of the Great Forms Same-Difference, and it receives its very “Being” from a higher principle that transcends Be-ing—the Good-One-Beautiful. We might rephrase this problem as follows: Plato’s solution to the question of Being does not succeed in answering the quantitative or extension question. Regardless of the solution that we provide to the qualitative question of Being, it must answer the quantitative question of Being: “What is common to everything and anything that can be said, in any way, to Be?” Plato does not succeed in answering this question because there are things that can be said to Be, but which do not participate, according to Plato, in the Form of Being.

Difficulties in Heidegger

This same problem is also seen in Martin Heidegger’s approach to the question of Being. That is, as we noted above, Heidegger allows that there *are* beings which *are not*. There are beings which can be truly said to *Be* (the act), but, because they are not given any meaning, or significance, by some Dasein, they must, according to Heidegger’s answer to the question of the Meaning of Being, *Not-Be*. Therefore, Heidegger’s answer to the question of Being suffers, at least, from the same flaw as that of Plato, that is, his answer to the qualitative question of Being does not answer the quantitative or extension question of Being: “What is common to everything

and anything that can be said, in any way, to Be?” One might say, indeed, that Heidegger’s approach to the question of Being was doomed to “failure” from the get-go. That is, if we expect Heidegger to answer the question of Being, as it is posed by Aristotle and Plato, then we will be let down, as this is, quite simply, not the question that Heidegger is trying to answer (despite the fact that he says it is).

If we take Heidegger at his word, and allow that he is trying to answer the same question as that which Plato and Aristotle are asking, then we run into a second problem. Heidegger limits, from the very beginning, and in an *ad hoc* manner, what can be allowed to count as Be-ing. Heidegger proposes Time and Temporality as the “horizon” of Being. “Horizon”, in Heidegger’s work, is, as we noted earlier, a limiting term. That is, Time and Temporality are proposed as that limit within which Being is to be understood. It must be remembered that Time and Temporality is not to be understood as in the traditional sense, but in Heidegger’s redefined understanding of these terms as integral elements of the way in which Dasein actualizes itself in the world in which it finds itself already thrown. If, we suggest, Being must be understood within the horizon of Time and Temporality (regardless of whether we take this as Heideggerian Time and Temporality or in the classical approach to Time and Temporality), then there can be nothing that can be said to Be that is outside of Time and Temporality, or, we might say, there is nothing that is not-Temporal (in the Heideggerian sense of the term temporal), or “un-interpreted”.

This brings up a very important question. It seems evident that we can certainly allow Being, understood in Heidegger’s terms (as Meaning and significance) to be limited to Time and Temporality (understood, again, in Heidegger’s terms), but, the question we need to ask is, “if we are seeking to answer the same question of Being as that of Plato and Aristotle, then on what basis can we limit Being to the horizon of Temporality?” What do we do with those “beings” that are “worldless”, that “exist or Be” but without any Dasein-given meaning or significance, and,

therefore, without any “Being”? Heidegger’s approach to the question of Being creates an artificial limit that leaves out things that, in some sense, Are.¹⁸⁸⁵ It seems, therefore, that as interesting as his answer is, he has not succeeded in answer the question of Being (not, at least, as it is understood by Plato and Aristotle). Indeed, as we have already noted, if the question of Being is understood as “what is common to all that, in anyway, is?”, then it seems that Heidegger, far from answering the question of Being, is both (1) changing the question—turning our regard away from some of the things that, in some way, “are”, and (2) telling us that this is the only approach to Being—that is, answering the question of Being by outlining the ways in which things are as understood by Dasein.¹⁸⁸⁶

A third, and, we think, insurmountable difficulty with Heidegger’s approach to the question of Being is that it is not, quite simply, an approach that we can “authentically” follow. An “authentic” approach to any philosophical question, and, therefore, to the question of Being must always, and of necessity, be different for each person who authentically questions. Therefore, a Heideggerian who wishes to remain true to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger must say that there is no wrong path to Being except the one that has already been travelled (and this includes Martin Heidegger’s path). Metaphysicians or Ontologists—true seekers after Being—are always (and, for Heidegger, must always be) trail blazers, opening ever new, and never traversed (and, in fact, never re-travers-able), trails to Being. This means that even if we wanted to follow Heidegger in his approach to the question of Being, if we also wish to accept and coherently apply the claims of Heidegger, “following his lead”, then we must reject his approach, and head

¹⁸⁸⁵It is almost as if Heidegger sees a number of different, unidentified, things running across a field. Some are closer and others are further way, but, they are all running. Heidegger says, “Limiting our answer to ONLY the closest things that are running, ‘What is common to ALL of the things that are running?’”

¹⁸⁸⁶He does admit, near the end of *Being and Time*, that there may be other approaches to the question of Being, but, he works very hard to eliminate the “traditional” approaches to this answer. There is, indeed, a discernible effort to demonstrate that Being can only be understood within the “horizon” of Time.

off in an entirely different direction, from an entirely different starting point, and by an entirely different route. If Heidegger is right, then there can be no true philosophical tradition (all so-called traditions must be modified by the authentic Dasein—“a constant reformation of the reform”), but this means that there can be no true Heideggerian tradition.¹⁸⁸⁷

To attempt to defend Heidegger’s approach to Being is to misunderstand Heidegger’s approach to Being. To be truly Heideggerian is to leave Heidegger behind. True Heideggerians should never call themselves Heideggerians. To be a Heideggerian is to essentially cover over Being and to be inauthentic. Now, this may or may not be perceived, by true Heideggerians, as a problem. It does seem, however, difficult to follow someone who tells us that we cannot authentically follow them (we can follow them, but if we do, then we are not authentically philosophizing). Perhaps, we suggest, it is best to learn from him what we can, but to look for a different approach to Being. Regardless of whether we follow Plato’s approach, Aristotle’s approach, or Heidegger’s approach, we will be following a tradition, and, as such, for Heidegger, we will not be authentically asking the question of Being.

We might conclude these comments on Heidegger by restating Heidegger’s actual approach to the question of Being, thus demonstrating how it is, quite literally, impossible to follow Heidegger. (1) *Recognize, first of all, there there is a traditional answer to this question which covers over the “truth” about Being.* There are, indeed, many “traditional” answers to this question, but, interestingly enough, that answer and approach that is given by Heidegger has now become, itself, a traditional answer. (2) *Recognize that you have, unknowingly and*

¹⁸⁸⁷There is a certain truth to the claim that there can be no true philosophical tradition. Each individual begins anew, from a different existential and intellectual starting point, and following different paths, from those who precede that individual. This is a fact of human life. This does not, however, (we propose) necessitate that all is necessarily different. This brings us back, in a sense, to the Heraclitean claim that all is Flux. The differences, the flux, require a stable foundation. This is the unique discovery of Plato and Aristotle, which remains true today.

inauthentically, accepted and become entrenched in that tradition. You have accepted the Heideggerian answer and approach to the question of Being. Furthermore, you have also become entrenched in that tradition and defend it, dogmatically, as the only possible approach to the question of Being. As such, you are no longer authentically answering the question of Being. (3) *Leave behind, voluntarily and violently (through destruction of the tradition), this tradition.* In order to authentically answer the question of Being you must destroy, and voluntarily leave behind, Heidegger's answer and approach to the question of Being. As a rocket on a launch-pad, this tradition must be seen as nothing more than a point of departure, from which we 'blast off' into uncharted territories—thus leaving the launch-pad behind. (4) *Return, as much as it is in your power to do so, to the original understanding (practical know-how) of Being so as to reinterpret it in a new and so far unknown manner.* Having left Heidegger behind you must seek to experience Be-ing for yourself, and attempt to arrive, by yourself, at your own approach and answer to the question of Being, but, this can only be done by step 5. (5) *Realise that the true answer to the question of Being cannot be made into a tradition, but is, instead, a lived perpetual questioning of Being (meaning).* There is no other answer to the question of Be-ing than the answer that you, yourself, give for yourself. Be-ing is whatever you understand (by practical lived know-how and experience) it to be. It is important to note that as appealing as such an approach may seem, the approach itself is part and parcel of Heidegger's answer to the question of Being, and, as such, this approach (with its understanding of the question of Being, the starting place, the method, and the answer) must, itself, be left behind. Therefore, in order to truly answer, in a Heideggerian manner, the question of Being, you cannot even follow the 5 steps of the Heideggerian approach to the question of Being. There is no universally appropriate approach to the question of Being—not even that of Heidegger himself. We are left in a clearing, deep in the

woods, so it appears, with no guide, no trail to follow, no signs by which we can find our way. We are nowhere, with nothing, and nowhere to go.¹⁸⁸⁸

But, then, as we stated earlier, Heidegger has not only not asked the same question of Being as we are here asking, but he has not answered it either. So, perhaps, we are warranted, as we suggested earlier, to leave Heidegger behind and to proceed with what we have discovered in Plato and Aristotle. This would be, in any case, an almost authentically Heideggerian approach to the question of Being—if there is such a thing. Heidegger’s approach to his modified question of Being is not entirely unprofitable. He shows us the ultimate terminus of the modern and post-modern philosophy that began with René Descartes, and was continued and developed by Kant and the Existentialists. We may, indeed, characterize Heidegger’s approach to his modified question of Being as a modification of Kant’s approach to knowledge. Whereas Kant tried to cut a middle road between Realism and Idealism by saying that there is a basic reality that is not mind-dependent, but which becomes what we see it to be by the “insertion” of the categories of the pure intellect, Heidegger attempts to say that the entire Realism and Idealism debate is inappropriate and philosophically stagnant because there is a basic reality (beings, or things that present themselves to Dasein’s meaning-giving understanding) that is not mind-dependent, but which becomes what we see it to be when it is interpreted understandingly in a state-of-mind, and through a mood, of Dasein. As such, nothing is until it is given significance (or is-ness) by Dasein. Kant had man inserting the categories of the understanding, Heidegger has man inserting the “categories” of significance and Meaning—Being.¹⁸⁸⁹

Furthermore, Heidegger warns us, wisely, to beware of cultural norms, and other such influences, which may keep us from being able to answer the question of Being. We should

¹⁸⁸⁸Was Rosen, in the end, right? Is Heidegger really asking about Nothing?

¹⁸⁸⁹Cf. Werkmeister, *An Introduction to Heidegger’s ‘Existential Philosophy’*, 82.

probably not go to the extreme, suggested by Heidegger, of modifying and “destroying” them in the pursuit of authentic Be-ing, but, to be aware of their influence on our understanding (and, we might say, interpretation of events, beings, and texts of all sorts) is certainly quite important for any attempt to philosophize, theologize, or some other practical or theoretical endeavour. Indeed, many ways of understanding certain terms have lost their very meaning, and rendered those who use them incoherent (or worse irrelevant), because these terms have been removed from the philosophical and explanatory context in which they first “came to Be”.

Heidegger also accentuates, and brings to the forefront, another way of saying being—self-identity or personality. He reminds us that humans are Beings, and that their attitudes, knowledge, and ways of understanding are all ways of Being. This is important, because, as we noted above, the question of Being is not fully answered until we have considered the extension question—seeking to find out what is common to everything that in any way is. We do not think that this notion was foreign to Aristotle,¹⁸⁹⁰ but Heidegger emphasizes its importance, and this is certainly a good thing.

Finally, one of the major lessons that we should learn from Heidegger—in relation to the perpetual pursuit of, and attempt to portray, Meaning—is that human attempts to signify—portray or make meaningful—Being, will inevitably fail, as the finite fails to englobe the infinite and the temporal fails to englobe the eternal.

¹⁸⁹⁰We also find it in other pre-Cartesian thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas, who, in his *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, in his response to the 15th contrary opinion, states, in discussing two ways of attributing ‘to live’, that “It [to live] is taken in another sense for the activity of the living thing, insofar as understanding and sensing are ways of being alive (Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestio Disputata de Virtutibus In Communi*, q. 2, ad 15, in *Disputed Questions on Virtue*, trans. Ralph McInerney (1999; repr., South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2009), 16.)”

What about Aristotle?

Aristotle's answer to the question of Being, we propose, is also flawed, but for a different reason. We found that Plato's approach did not quite arrive at an answer to the question of Being because his answer did not quite answer the quantitative or extension question of Being. Heidegger's approach suffered, among other more crippling problems, from the same problem. Does Aristotle's approach to Being suffer from this problem? The answer, interestingly enough, is, according to our interpretation of Aristotle, "No". That is, we think that he has succeeded in discovering and, at least, mentioning, everything that, in some way or another, can be said to Be. Yet we are not quite content with his final answer. Why? Though Aristotle succeeded in answering the quantitative question ("What are the things that can be said, in some way, to Be?"), he did not, we propose, succeed in giving an ultimate answer to the qualitative question ("What is common to everything that, in some way or another, can be said to Be?"). We think that the answer is found in his *Metaphysics*, even if it was not, finally, provided as the ultimate answer to the question of Being. As such, he did not answer the question of Being. He did, however, or so we propose, set us up to answer the question of Being. In other words, we have, thanks to Aristotle, a comprehensive articulation of everything that, in any way, can be said to Be. Our task, then, in answering the question of Being, is to attempt to discover just what is common to all these things.

Where do they leave us, in regards to the Question of Being?

Our observations in the preceding section allow us to note, here, some of the major advantages that we can glean from the works of these three thinkers. We might say that they have left us in a perfect place from which to begin our own attempt to answer the question of Being. We have learned, from the Platonic-Aristotelian approach, that the question of Being must really

answer two questions: the quantitative or extension question (“What are all the things that can be said, in some way, to Be?”), and the qualitative, intension, or essential question (“What is common to all of these things that are said to Be?”). We have learned, from Aristotle specifically, that Being is said in many ways of many different things. It does not necessarily mean the same thing for all of the different things to which the word Being can be applied, but, there is a common thread that is true of everything that is said, in any way, to Be (regardless of whether we are talking about a table, a chair, a human-being, a mood or attitude, an understanding, a figment of our imagination, a thought, or a word). Some have called this the *analogy of Being*. Plato and Aristotle both teach us that we can discover some answer to the question of Being, and that we can, somehow, arrive at some knowledge of what Being is. Truth is possible, but so is error. As such we need to be careful to start well,¹⁸⁹¹ avoid pitfalls on the voyage, and be as clear as is humanly possible in our final description.¹⁸⁹² We must also accept the possibility that we have not quite latched on to the final, exhaustive, and most absolutely ultimate, answer to the question of Being, but that there may be more that can be said (perhaps not less, but, at least, more).

From Heidegger we learn to be wary of terms and propositions that are loaded with meanings which may not portray what we hope to portray, or which we understand through our own tradition, but which may have an entirely different meaning in the tradition which first used

¹⁸⁹¹A point which Aquinas warns us of in the opening comment of his well-known treatise, treating, in part, the question of Being, *De Ente et Essentia*. Here Aquinas says, “Quia parvus error in principio magnus est in fine, secundum Philosophum, primo *Caeli et Mundi*. (The Latin is from Catherin Capelle’s small edition which contains the Latin text alongside a French translation. See below.)” We can translate this roughly as, “A small error in the principle (beginning) is magnified (or made even greater) in the end (or conclusion), says the Philosopher, in on the *Heavens and the World*.” Cf. Thomas d’Aquin, *L’Être et L’Essence (De Ente et essentia)*, trans. & ed. Catherine Capelle, 3rd ed. (Paris : Librairie Philosophique J. VRIN, 1965), 14-15. Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, trans. Armand Maurer, 2nd ed. (Toronto, ON: PIMS, 1968), 28.

¹⁸⁹²We say this, all the while keeping in mind the comment of Étienne Gilson concerning the difficulty of accurately describing Being, “l’être transcende toute representation possible, parce qu’il refuse de se laisser inclure sous aucune quiddité. Le métaphysicien qui s’engage dans la consideration du premier principe se sait donc d’avance condamné à tourner en quelque sorte autour de son objet et pour ainsi dire à le cerner par une suite de jugements destinés à le tenir pur de ce qu’il n’est pas (Gilson, *CPE*, 40-41.)”

this term to answer the question of Being. In other words, in spite of the fact that Heidegger is often accused of the fallacy of equivocation, and perhaps because of this accusation, we learn from Heidegger the danger of equivocation,¹⁸⁹³ and the danger of reading into a text something that is not there. Ironically this is exactly what Heidegger did in his own interpretations of Aristotle, “At its conclusion [the end of his 1922 Summer Seminar on Aristotle’s Ontology and Logic], he admits that his category of ‘caring’ cannot literally be found in the Aristotelian text and has served to push the text to interpretative extremes. This, however, is of the essence [according to Heidegger] of philosophical interpretation which seeks to bring the underlying context of the text into sharp relief.”¹⁸⁹⁴ Though we might take exception with the way in which Heidegger does violence to the texts that he interprets, we must admit that he succeeds in making his point all too clear: we all too often interpret texts (and even events) with preconceived ideas of what words (and circumstances) actually mean, rather than seeking to discover what the words meant for the author. Our preconceived, and blindly accepted, cultural and societal norms determine not only how we interpret texts, but, also, how we understand the things that happen to us and are around us. It is important to be aware of the all-pervasive influence of these “norms” so that we can attempt to put ourselves, as much as possible, into the shoes of those who we are reading, or interpret events from different perspectives.

CAN THE QUESTION OF BEING BE ANSWERED? IF SO, HOW?

The Question of Being?

Plato and Aristotle thought that the question of Being, as they understood it, could be answered (if not entirely, at least partially). Heidegger, not actually interacting with the question

¹⁸⁹³A danger that Aristotle had already warned us about, many times, and so long ago.

¹⁸⁹⁴Kisiel, *GHBT*, 240.

of Being as posed by Plato and Aristotle, did not think that his own modification of the question of Being could be ultimately answered; but, rather, that it must be continually asked. On this point Heidegger was most certainly right. His modification of the question of Being turned the question of Being into a question that must be perpetually asked and answered by, and for, each and every individual “meaning-giving Being”. This, however, does not, ultimately, affect our approach to the question of Being, which is essentially the same as that which was understood by Plato and Aristotle; nor is this perpetual questioning, of Heidegger (and as understood by Heidegger), applicable to the question of Being that is proposed by Plato and Aristotle.

Having explained, compared, and criticized the approaches of Plato, Aristotle, and Heidegger to the question of Being, we have come to the conclusion that the question of Being, which ends up being two questions, can be answered. That is, we reject Heidegger’s understanding of the question of Being. The question he is asking is not the question “what is common to anything and everything that in any way can be said to Be?”, but, rather, “What is the meaning or significance of Dasein (the individual meaning-giving be-ing)?” His answers to this question have, as we noted above, important consequences for any attempt to question anything, but, he is, quite simply, not asking the same question as Plato and Aristotle, and, so we propose, his is not the question of Being, but the question of Meaning. As such, we propose to ask the question of Being as it was understood by Plato and Aristotle, that is, “what is common to everything that in any way can be said to Be?”¹⁸⁹⁵ In what follows, we will attempt a renewed

¹⁸⁹⁵It should be noted that the question of Being is not, as Pieper suggest in one essay, “‘Why is there something at all rather than nothing?’ (Pieper, *A Plea for Philosophy*, 95.)”, nor is it, as Pieper suggests in the same essay as Aristotle’s question of Being, “What does it mean to be something real? (Ibid., 95, 135, 296.)”. These are both questions of Being that are secondary in profundity to the question of Being which we mention above, though these questions may lead one to the question of Being (that is, they may be first in the movement of the intellect, but they are secondary in order of importance and depth). Only once we have answered the question of Being, can we answer the questions: “What does it mean to Be Real?” and “Why is there something rather than nothing?” Both of these questions presuppose, at least, that the philosophizing person has begun answering the question of Being, and, has, at least, made it to the first step (see below).

approach to the question of Being. Taking what we have learned from Plato, Aristotle, and Heidegger, we will set out on a quest to answer the question of Being. In what follows, any references that we may provide to other thinkers have, for the most part, been added after the fact, and, thus, should be understood not so much as the support of a tradition out of which we seek to propose an approach to Being, but, rather, as indicating that others have already taken the road that we are, in this new approach to Being, just now discovering. We find their traces everywhere, and it is both helpful and encouraging to note that others have already gone in this direction. A journey is rendered more agreeable when it is taken in the company of others, rather than by oneself.

The Starting Point in our Quest

If this is the question that we seek to answer, then, so it would appear, there is a *normative* starting point for our quest: that being which is, most commonly, said to Be. That is, we think that the proper *ontological* starting place for any attempt to answer the question of Being is some, any, particular sensible be-ing.¹⁸⁹⁶ Without a doubt, many things present themselves to our senses

¹⁸⁹⁶Oliva Blanchette seems to agree with us, as he says, “Before the question of being can properly arise, one has to have traveled some distance along the way of questioning, which may or may not be technical at the outset, depending on where one stands in the history of questioning. Questioning does not immediately begin with being as being for human understanding. It begins with particular things or beings, how they relate to one another, and how they might serve our projects. (Blanchette, *PB*, 7.)” Blanchette later says, “The ‘being’ that is said to ‘fall’ first in our apprehension or to be conceived first is a being given through experience, a *this* or a *that*. (Ibid., 67.)” Cf. Ibid., 51, 67-70, 78, 87, 109, etc. Jacques Maritain agrees with this ontological starting point, noting that existence is first known, implicitly, in the senses which are imposed upon by intelligible acts of existing (particular existant-essences—beings) (Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, trans. Lewis Galantieri and Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1948), 11, 20-21, 31-32.). Elsewhere he shows his agreement with this ontological starting point by noting that “Un métaphysicien privé de ses sens, ou don’t les sens sont liés, un métaphysicien endormi, un métaphysicien qui rêve, c’est une impossibilité absolue pour saint Thomas, un monstre, une absurdité. Non seulement parce que les idées viennent des sens, mais parce que les sens (qui ont une valeur spéculative obscure, mais spéculative) sont indispensables...(Maritain, *SLSE*, 29.)” Aimé Forest also agrees with this starting point, noting that this starting point reflects “l’ordre naturel de la connaissance humaine. Le point de depart de cette connaissance, c’est toujours l’expérience sensible; aussi voyons-nous les premiers philosophes occupés surtout de l’aspect sensible du réel. (Aimé Forest, *La Structure Métaphysique du Concret selon Saint Thomas d’Aquin* (Paris : J. VRIN, 1931), 3. Cf. Ibid., 13.)” In his 1950 Aquinas Lecture, *Method in Metaphysics*, Robert J. Henle notes that “the metaphysician must at every step resort to the sense data, must continue to employ inductive insight at every

as being and becoming, generating, being-generated, growing, degenerating, and ceasing-to-be. Cats, dogs, rabbits, tables, chairs, lights and light-bulbs, my skin, my hair, my current state of typing, my eye-sight and hearing, trees, the sun and moon, my dreams and imaginings, what I see or think I see, hallucinations, anger, fear, love, wonder and dismay. All these things are, can be, or have been. These are just a few examples of the multitude of beings that present themselves to us, in many different ways, at every moment of our Be-ing.

As for the *psychological* (or *existential*) starting place, Jacques Maritain is certainly correct in claiming both that any particular psychological or existential experience can become an appropriate starting place of the quest for Being, but, that, as a corollary, this cannot be taught. Concerning the legitimacy of any particular existential or psychological starting point, Maritain says,

There are diverse ways and paths leading towards the attainment of this intuition. None is traced in advance, none is more legitimate than another—precisely because here there is no question of rational analysis or of an inductive or a deductive procedure, or of a syllogistic construction, but only of an intuition which is a primary fact... It matters little whether the intuition of being resemble the innate gift of an imperial intelligence serenely relying upon its limpid strength and upon the cooperation of a pure and delicate flesh, and of a vivid and perfectly balanced sensibility, as seems to have been the case for Thomas Aquinas; whether, alternatively, it spring unexpectedly like a kind of natural grace at the sight of a blade of grass or a windmill, or at the sudden perception of the reality of the self; whether it proceed from the implacability with which the being of things independent of ourselves becomes abruptly evident to us, suddenly casting our own being back upon its solitude and its frailty; whether I make my way towards it by inner experience of duration, or of anguish, or of certain moral realities which transcend the flow of time—these alternatives, I repeat, are of slight moment. What counts is to take the leap, to release, in one authentic intellectual intuition, the sense of being, the sense of the value of the implications that lie in the act of existing. What counts is to have seen that existence is not a simple empirical fact but a primitive datum for the mind itself, opening to the mind

point where his science rests boldly on the real. (Robert J. Henle, *Method in Metaphysics* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1951), 45.)” Beatrice H. Zedler, in her 1983 Aquinas Lecture, agrees entirely with our claim, noting that “since we are human beings, our loftiest flights of thought take off from earthly and temporal experiences like, for example, the stealing of some pears, being imprisoned in a dungeon, or climbing the Jersey Palisades. (Beatrice H. Zedler, *How Philosophy Begins* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1983), 35.)” Louis Lachance also agrees with this ontological starting point (Lachance, *EP*, 50-65.), as do Jolivet (Jolivet, *Métaphysique*, 198-199, 200.), Van Steenberghen (Van Steenberghen, *Ontologie*, 31-33, 51.), and many others.

an infinite supraobservable field—in a word, the primary and superintelligible source of intelligibility.¹⁸⁹⁷

That which is important is not the nature of the “existential crisis or awakening”, that brings us to consider the question of Being, but, rather, what we do in light of that “existential crisis”. Perhaps we are awakened to the problem of Being because of the anguish and dread that is experienced when we are faced with our own Being-towards-death. On the other hand, perhaps

¹⁸⁹⁷Maritain, *EE*, 21. Beatrice H. Zedler agrees entirely with Maritain, and a good part of her Aquinas Lecture, bearing the title *How Philosophy Begins*, is dedicated to an analysis of the existential starting points of a number of important philosophers (Zedler, *HPB*, 13-30.). Josef Pieper agrees with Maritain in noting that there are many different ways in which man can be awakened to the call of philosophical questioning of Being. Pieper’s explanation of this existential experience is of particular interest, for he directs it, in part, at Martin Heidegger’s attempt to discuss the pre-theoretical meanings of Being. “Generally, man is not in the frame of mind to inquire—he simply does not feel like inquiring—into the ultimate meaning of reality as a whole...It simply does not occur to us as long as our attention is being claimed by the active pursuit of life’s goals, with the soul’s ‘objective’ fixed on a sharply delimited cross section of the world, that is, to what belongs to the problem at hand...I mean by philosophical questioning an existential process that is carried out in the core of the would, an urgent, spontaneous act of our inner life from which one cannot desist.) Thus it probably also requires a shaking up of our everyday ‘normal’ understanding of the world which—naturally and quite rightly—dominates man’s workday. (Pieper, *A Plea for Philosophy*, 92.)” This shock is compared, by Pieper, to “one’s personal encounter with death (Ibid.)”, or to “The other existential force, eros, which is contrasted with death, is also able to affect and transform man in this way. (Ibid., 93.)” In an earlier article in this same compilation Pieper shows his agreement with Aristotle, Plato, and Aquinas, by noting philosophy originates in wonder (Josef Pieper, “What does it mean to Philosophize?,” in *For the Love of Wisdom: Essays on the Nature of Philosophy*, trans. Roger Wasserman, Ed. Berthold Wald (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 56.). He goes on to state that “The dulled sense of the philistine finds everything self-evident...It is thus the wondering person who alone realizes that primordial relation to Being in pure form which, since Plato, has been called *theoria*, a strictly passive attending to reality, which is not troubled by any intercession of the will...*Theoria* only exists insofar as man has not become blind to the wondrous, which is wonder before the fact that something is. For it is not, in fact, what never was—the abnormal, the sensational—that incites philosophical wonder—something like that could be experiences as a substitute for authentic wonder only by a dulled intelligence. Whoever requires the unusual in order to fall into wonder shows himself by virtue of this very fact to be someone who has lost the ability to respond correctly to the *mirandum* of Being. (Ibid., 57.)” Indeed, states Pieper, “the meaning of wonder lies in the experience that the world is more profound, more commodious, more mysterious than it appears to our everyday understanding. The inner intentionality of wonder is fulfilled in the development of a sense of mystery. This inner directionality does not aim at raising doubt but at awakening the knowledge that Being as Being is incomprehensible and mysterious—that Being is itself a mystery, a mystery in the authentic sense, not sheer impassibility, not absurdity, not even genuine obscurity. (Ibid., 59.)” Pieper goes on to note that “Wonder is not simply the origin of philosophy in the sense of *initium*, beginning, first stage, preliminary step. Rather, wonder is the *principium*, the enduring wellspring inherent in philosophizing. It is not as if the philosophizing person, in philosophizing, ‘emerges from wonder’—he simply *fails* to emerge from wonder unless he ceases to philosophize in the genuine sense. The inner form of philosophizing is virtually identical with the inner form of wonder. (Ibid., 60.)” Pieper, in a different article, notes that “What is meant by the wondrous, however, is not that about which human beings generally tend to wonder [*staunen*]—and certainly not the extraordinary, that rare eruption of the sensational beyond all normalcy. On the contrary, the wondrous refers to the astounding fact [*das Erstaunliche*] that there is something real at all; it points to a dimension of non-everydayness in the things themselves that one is inclined to dismiss by force of habit as something that is in fact natural. (Pieper, “Language and the Philosophizing Person,” 207.)”

we are awakened to the problem of Being due to total amazement—wonder—at the imposition upon us of the Being of the totality of all that is (be this the closing in upon us of the universe as we are smothered by the fact that we are, but that we are one solitary being in an enormous universe of beings; or, be it the opening up to us of a universe of beings to be explored, experienced, and discovered). Regardless of how we are awakened to Being, this experience, in order to bear ontological fruit, must lead to a questioning of Being—but what, just what, is this Be-ing that is common to all that presents itself to me as Be-ing? This is why Maritain later states, somewhat dogmatically, that “A philosopher is not a philosopher if he is not a metaphysician. And it is the intuition of being...that makes the metaphysician.”¹⁸⁹⁸

The second element that Maritain notes is that this opening up of the intellect to the intuition of Being is not something that can be taught. He says, “It is not enough to teach philosophy, even Thomist philosophy, in order to possess this intuition. Let us call it a matter of luck, a boon, perhaps a kind of docility to the light. Without it man will always have an opining, precarious and sterile knowledge, however freighted with erudition it may be; a *knowledge*

¹⁸⁹⁸Maritain, *EE*, 19. Fr. Lawrence Dewan, in a personal conversation with Dr. Jason West, commented on this statement by Maritain, that “If Descartes and Kant never had the intuition of being, what chance do I have? (Jason West, *Personal Correspondance* (March 23, 2016).)” This intuition of Being is what Maritain calls the “abstractive intellection, of an eidetic or intensive visualisation which owes its purity and power of illumination to the fact that the intellect, one day, was stirred to its depths and trans-illuminated by the impact of the act of existing apprehended in things, and because it was quickened to the point of receiving this act, or hearkening to it, within itself, in the intelligible and super-intelligible integrity of the tone peculiar to it. (Maritain, *EE*, 20.)” It should be noted that what Maritain seems to mean by the intuition of Being is not at all what other like-minded thinkers (mostly thomists) mean. Régis Jolivet, for example, says that *ens commune* (common being)—that vague and confused first notion of Being as it is applicable to anything and everything that in any ways is—is the intuition of Being (cf. Jolivet, *Métaphysique*, 205-206.). We may, therefore, though we have not arrived at this point in our reasoning process, note that what Maritain means by the intuition of Being is the final knowledge of Pure Being “abstracted” (analogously) from every thing else, where as there is a first and primary intuition of Being which is what Jolivet means by the original concept of Being which is known as Common Being, and which is applicable to everything including God. This distinction is very important for understanding thomistic ontology. That is, there are two distinct intuitions of Being, one that is the fruit of the psychological starting point of the quest for Being, and is the intellectual starting point of reflection on the question of Being, the other which is the terminus or end which is sought by all those who ask the question of Being. Suffice it to say that the fact that (and, how) one begins the quest for Being is no guarantee that one will arrive at an intuition of Being. Many have started, few have arrived.

about.”¹⁸⁹⁹ We must agree with Maritain. This first opening up of the intellect to the intuition of Being cannot be taught—it is an experience like that of awakening. We do not teach people how to awaken, they do this on their own, when the right stimuli are provided. But, following the image of awakening, this unteachable experience may, however, be stimulated. That is, though we cannot teach people how to awaken (either from sleep, or to the intuition of Being), we can, by experimentation, learn the best ways to awaken them. Different types of people necessitate different stimuli (water, a loud noise, shaking), but only the dead cannot be awakened. Lachance seems to agree with us when he notes that “cet événement ne peut avoir lieu que si une cause le provoque, que si un facteur jusque là inagissant vient s’interposer entre la pensée et l’objet de son observation.”¹⁹⁰⁰

*Thus, the starting point for the question of Being is the existential awakening, through our interaction with the particular, sensible, beings of human experience, to the all-extensiveness, and all imposing presence, of Being.*¹⁹⁰¹ True wonder is what you experience, not when you are amazed by human stunts (such as magicians, jugglers, etc.), but, rather, what you experience when, walking in the woods or observing the stars, you are, all of a sudden, struck by the majesty, beauty, and greatness that surrounds you. This “wonder”, an existential awakening, is the stimulus that drives the philosophizing person to ask the question of Being.¹⁹⁰² Yet this is just the beginning, the first step in a journey of discovery. Perhaps, in the next section, we can provide a

¹⁸⁹⁹Maritain, *EE*, 21-22.

¹⁹⁰⁰Lachance, *EP*, 42.

¹⁹⁰¹This is what is described by Maritain in the following lines, “At the instant when the finger points to that which the eye sees, at the instant when sense perceives, in its blind fashion, without intellection or mental word, that *this exists*; at that instant the intellect says (in a judgment), *this being is or exists* and at the same time (in a concept), *being*. (Maritain, *EE*, 25.)”

¹⁹⁰²This—the honest attempt to answer the question of Being—will inevitably, in my humble opinion, lead the truly philosophical person to realize that God exists, and that he, as a miniscule creation, must bow before the majesty of the ONE who caused the great majesty and beauty of the beings that surround him. Pieper seems to agree with us, as he says, of Aquinas, that, “Aquinas believes that in the very first moment of wonder man sets his foot on the path at the end of which lies the visio beatifica, the blissful perception of the ultimate cause. (Pieper, *What does it Mean to Philosophize?*, 58.)”

brief guide for the journey. We should note, before we go any further, that Blanchette is certainly right to warn us that “To pursue the question of being as being, one must be more rigorous, not less, than in empirical science or phenomenology.”¹⁹⁰³ We are entering a dialogue, which, like the black forest in Germany, has caused many to lose their way, to get lost and to never come out of the darkness into the light. The path is filled with pitfalls and false shortcuts, and it is all too easy to so closely observe one way of Be-ing that we lose sight of every other way of Be-ing,¹⁹⁰⁴ so we must advance with care.

The *End* of our Questioning, the *End* of our Quest¹⁹⁰⁵

A Common Thread in Plato, Aristotle and Heidegger

We think that a key element of the answer to the question of Being can actually be seen, slipping through the cracks, in a sense, in the works of all three of these great Philosophers. We saw, first of all, that Plato leaves out ‘things’ that could be qualified as Being and, thus, does not give a complete answer to the question of Being (the Bipolar principle, for example). He does, however, show us that the answer to the question of Being will be the Form of Being—that which is common to anything that in any way is. We must also note, however, that in Plato’s *Sophist* we are introduced, tentatively, to the notion of *δυναμις* (power to either act or to be acted upon), which is later rejected as a wrong answer to the question of Being.

¹⁹⁰³Blanchette, *PB*, 118.

¹⁹⁰⁴We might call this *the uncommon fallacy*: to so concentrate a particular X that one ends up passing over (indeed, covering over) that which is common to every X. One can’t see the forest, because one has put all their attention on one part of the forest. This is a fallacy that was discovered, first, by Socrates.

¹⁹⁰⁵The word “end”, in Aristotelian-thomistic philosophy, refers to the *terminus* or *telos*, the “that for which”, something is or something is done. Aquinas, in his *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, notes that the beginning of action is its *telos*—“In action, the end is its starting point. (Aquinas, *DQV*, 42, 91, 115, 118.)”—it’s “that for which” it is done. As we have already noted, the question poses, for us, the end to be pursued. This is what we refer to when we speak of the end of our quest or the end of our questioning.

Heidegger not only changes the question of Being, asking a question that is entirely different from that of Plato and Aristotle, but he also, like Plato, leaves out a lot of things that could be ‘qualified’, in some sense or another, as Being (everything, for example, that is not, at some point, meaningful to at least one Dasein, anything that is temporal, unchanging, unmoving, etc.). He does, however, show us ways in which Dasein actualizes itself and how this can affect our exploration of the question of Being. He emphasizes, in this way, that things appear to us differently based upon “how” we are (our attitudes, practical understandings, etc.). Note, finally, that Being (*οὐσία*) is frequently described, by Heidegger, as *presence*.¹⁹⁰⁶ In Heidegger, then, Being is also portrayed as *presence*, or the *presencing* of something to Dasein (that which is present to the interpreting perception of Dasein).

Aristotle, finally, attempts to be as comprehensive as possible (learning the importance of the quantitative question from Plato, and attempting to move towards an answer to the qualitative question of Being). However, in the end, Aristotle does not quite arrive at, so we proposed, a final answer to the question of Being. He includes, in the extension of Being, sensible beings, supra-sensible beings, beings of reason, ways of being human, etc. Aristotle provides us, indeed, throughout his works, with what might be said to be a complete list of everything that in any way is. He argues, however, that anything that is, is *οὐσία*—existent essence, but, this is nothing more than to say that to be is to be something.¹⁹⁰⁷ This is certainly not false, though we may have

¹⁹⁰⁶Heidegger says, for example, in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, that “For the Greeks, ‘Being’ fundamentally means presence (Heidegger, *IM*, 64 [46].)” Later on he says that “*Ousia*, then, can mean both the coming to presence of something that comes to presence *and* that which comes to presence in the whatness of its look (Ibid., 193 [138].)”

¹⁹⁰⁷Many thomistic textbooks on Ontology begin by noting that when we say “being”, as a noun, we refer to that which is—the existant-essence, and that the verb “to be” refers to existence. Take, for example, the following quote from Celestine N. Bittle’s work on Ontology, “The form ‘being’ is the participle of the verb ‘to be,’ and the verb ‘to be’ means ‘to exist,’ ‘to have existence.’ But while the participial form of ‘being’ means ‘having existence,’ the term ‘being’ is usually taken as a noun, and in this substantive form it is equivalent to ‘that which exists,’ ‘that which has existence.’ This nominal definition is taken from the etymology of the term and is sufficient as a preliminary designation. (Celestine N. Bittle, *The Domain of Being: Ontology* (1939; repr., Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1950), 12.)”

hoped for something more (at the same time, we must consider the possibility that, perhaps, we will be unable to go beyond Aristotle). In his analysis of supra-sensible being (which he views as, more than anything else, truly Being) he notes that the supra-sensible first unmoved mover is pure act, and that it is the ultimate cause of the Being of every other being. In Aristotle, one of the ways in which Being is said, is as *Act*; and that which, more than anything else, *Is*, is *Pure Act*.

Plato, Aristotle, and Heidegger, then, all hint at something that, in each of their approaches, is common to all that, according to their different theories, can be said in any way to Be (though they mean different things by these descriptions, and even, in some cases, finish by rejecting these descriptions). This is the case regardless of whether we understand Being as the Form of Being, as *ὄνσια*, or as Meaning or Presence. That which they all seem to mention is *Act* or *Presence*. Have we, here, lighted upon, revealed, or made manifest, the proper answer to the qualitative or essential question of Being (the question that we are asking is the same as that of Plato and Aristotle, and we will now put aside Heidegger,¹⁹⁰⁸ except for his useful term “presence”, as irrelevant to the question of Being as such)?

¹⁹⁰⁸We think that we have shown, above, that the entire approach of Heidegger to the question of Being turns out, as an approach to the question of Being, to be fruitless and impossible to follow. This being said, has he not, at least, thrown down a challenge to the Aristotelian and Platonic approach to the question of Being which we will now follow? That is, does not the way in which he grounds our understandings and interpretations of beings in Dasein (as the meaning-giving Being), and, thus, “discovers” that all “theories” are the result of degenerate (uninterested or unconcerned, but mood-filled) ways of looking at the Present-at-hand (Heidegger, *BT*, 99 [69].), such that our theories are always products of the culture or social norms in which we find ourselves already thrown (Ibid., 177 [138].), challenge the Platonic-Aristotelian approach to the Question of Being? Heidegger proposes, indeed (as we have already noted), that it is not possible, even in a non-circumspective looking at the world, to leave all states-of-mind behind, and these states-of-mind determine how the world appears to us—how we interpret the world. We are not talking here about what some would call objective or subjective ways of viewing the world, for, in Heidegger’s understanding this is a false dichotomy; but, rather, Heidegger seems to be saying that there is no possible way of looking at the world such that it is not already interpreted according to way of Being-in-the-world. All that appears to Dasein, appears as already interpreted, as already in a schema of relations. Does this not throw a monkey-wrench into any ontological questioning? That is, are we not condemned, from the get-go? Not necessarily. *First of all*, Heidegger does not think that theory is necessarily to be avoided, but, rather, that we should attempt to outline and make explicit, in an ontology, as Blattner says (cf. Blattner, *HBTRG*, 20.), our practical understandings of beings. He goes on to say that “Because our pre-ontological understanding is embedded in our conduct and pre-reflective ways of going about our lives, ontology is an attempt to put our practical understanding of being into words. (Ibid.)” Thus, for Heidegger, we must construct a theory of ontology—an explicit outline of our own practical understanding of Being—how Be-ing appears to us (at a practical pre-theoretical level) from within the tradition,

If we have learned anything, from our voyage down the respective paths that these great philosophers of Being have taken, it is that, in our response to the question of Being: (1) we should not feel obliged to accept the conclusions, or propositions, of any one tradition, but, rather that we should critically consider their approaches, so as to arrive at our own conclusions. (2) Approaching Being is like staring at the Sun, the longer we stare, the harder it is to discern any one particular “Form”—it is an impenetrable light that can be only described by saying what it is not. (3) In order to answer the qualitative question of Being our answer must be quantitatively comprehensive—predicable of anything that can, in any way, be said to Be.

The Extension Question

Following Aristotle and Plato’s lead (interpreting them as close as possible to their original meaning, and not imposing our own views on their works), we begin with the quantitative or extension question, and a *vague* (one might say “popular”) notion of Being.¹⁹⁰⁹

culture, or society, in which we find ourselves already thrown. Taking this first point literally (and assuming that we have not already pointed out a major problem with Heidegger’s very approach to Being), this is exactly what we will be doing in what follows. *Secondly*, we think that Heidegger is, quite simply, wrong to think that the “pre-ontological” ways in which beings present themselves to us as something-for-something (based upon the interpretational schema that we have inherited from the culture or society in which we find ourselves already thrown) constitute the most profound way of understanding Be-ing. That is, we think that an analysis of Heidegger’s work on Being shows (as we mention above) that he lets a more foundational approach to Being slip through the cracks—that there is a deeper sense of being that is beyond human meaning-giving; that is, that there are beings that Be, regardless of whether they are, or are not, given meaning by Dasein. If this is true (and we have argued, above, that it is, then Heidegger’s approach to Being does not, in fact discover Be-ing itself, but a way of Be-ing that needs to be accounted for by a more all-encompassing ontology. *Thirdly*, we think that given the second point, we are, in fact, able to raise ourselves above the tradition, culture, or society, in which we find ourselves already thrown, and ask the question, “what is it that is common to everything that, in any way (including the ways that are outlined by Heidegger), is said to Be?” This is what we will do below. Furthermore, we will seek to integrate the ways of Be-ing that Heidegger “discovers” into our approach. *Fourthly*, by allowing that a Dasein, in order to authentically-Be, must distinguish its Be-ing from that society or culture in which it finds itself already thrown, Heidegger leaves the door open to the possibility that a person is able to raise themselves above the interpretations of their culture and look at things for themselves. *Finally*, growing up, and living, in a culture that is profoundly Heideggerien, is it not of the essence of Heidegger’s approach to the question of Being that one must, in order to authentically-Be, raise one-self above Heideggerian philosophy with the hopes of finding another way of Being? Based upon these observations, we do not think that Heidegger’s approach to Being, as “Meaning” that is grounded in the Meaning-giving-Be-ing, causes any problems for the approach to Being that we will outline below.

¹⁹⁰⁹Concerning this first vague notion of Being, Cardinal Mercier says, “Lorsque l’intelligence entre pour la première fois en contact avec une chose d’expérience, celle-ci apparaît comme un tout indistinct, coloré, étendu, posé

What, then, can be said to *Be*? Throughout our analyses of these different approaches to Being, we have come across an enormous amount of things that can be said to Be. As we consider the different things that are said to Be, we are impressed with the fact that Aristotle's fundamental distinctions seem to include everything that is, in some way, said to Be. If we attempted a rough, preliminary classification of the different types of Beings, it might look something like this: (1) *sensible beings* (including, but not limited to, sensible events, actions, relations, or circumstances; physical or material beings; perceived beings; interpretable beings; interpreted beings; etc.), (2) *beings of reason or intellect* (including, but not limited to, interpretations, affirmations, thoughts, imaginations, moods or attitudes, theoretical knowledge, practical know-how, abstract objects, mathematical concepts, terms, concepts, ideas, questionings, etc.), and (3) *supra-sensible beings* (including, but not necessarily limited to, imperceptible unmoved movers—what some would call angels, demons, or gods; and a first unmoved mover—what some would call God, etc.).

We would suggest that Aristotle's distinction between these three types of Being essentially answers the quantitative/extension question of Being. That is, anything that can be said to Be, in any way, will fit, in some way or another, under one of these three general modes

là, dans l'espace. L'intelligence n'y distingue de prime abord, ni genre, ni espèce ; elle n'y distingue ni substance, ni accidents ; elle est réduite à y voir *confusément* une chose quelconque, qu'elle se représente néanmoins comme *une chose subsistante, per se stans*. (D. J. Mercier, *Métaphysique Générale ou Ontologie*, vol. 2 of *Cours de Philosophie*, 7th ed. (Louvain : Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1923), 13-14.) » Concernant les premières notions que l'intellecte formule des choses, Mercier note que « Les premières notions d'une chose sont donc inévitablement défectueuses ; la toute première est la plus défectueuse ; elle fait apparaître la chose à l'intelligence dans un tel état de confusion que rien de ce qui la constitue ne s'y révèle distinctement ; le terme de cette première notion est vaguement une chose existante : voilà tout. (Ibid., 17.) » Mercier conclut, concernant la première notion de being, that "Nous avons donc raison de la dire superficielle, confuse, sterile. (Ibid., 18.)" Concerning this vague and confused early conception of Being, George P. Klubertanz says that this primitive notion of being is arrived at through the "perceptual judgment (George P. Klubertanz, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Being* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1955), 40.)". He notes that the person experiences different things (this particular pencil, this particular chair, this particular table, the sunlight, the breeze, etc.) as "Be-ing"—that is, as present to his senses, not as essences, but as particular, sensible, instances of these essences (Ibid., 40-41). Van Steenberghen seems to view this vague notion of Being as the experience of existence (Van Steenberghen, *Ontologie*, 264.). Jolivet agrees with the claim that metaphysical reflection begins with the confused and vague notion of Being, as we will see below (cf. Jolivet, *Métaphysique*, 205-206.). Blanchette notes that "Being, as we understand it primordially, is not nothing, but everything or whatever is. In this immediacy it is neither indeterminate nor determinate. It is simply confused and calls for clarification through questioning. (Blanchette, *PB*, 32.)" Cf. Ibid., 109-110.

or ways of Being. Some of the beings that we listed above are not immediately evident, to the senses, in the act of Being. For example, it is not *immediately* evident to the senses that God, angels, or demons, are in the act of Being; as such, until their “extra-mental” Be-ing has been proved, they *could* be included under the category of “Beings of Reason or Intellect”. However, in order to keep our possibilities open, and to not eliminate possible be-ings prior to examination, it is *best*, for the time being, to keep them under the category of “supra-sensible Beings”.

The Essential or Qualitative Question

Step 1: A Preliminary Reflection

The question we need to ask now, a question that Socrates taught us to ask,¹⁹¹⁰ is: “What is *common* to all of these ways, modes, or types of Being? What can be said, even if the way in which it is said differs in important respects, of all of these ‘Be-ings’—these things that are in the act of Being?” Our initial answer to this question, as we consider the different things that Be, is that, following Aristotle, every thing of which we say that it is, is an *existant essence*—a that-which is. So, for example, if we consider the number “4” (a Being of Reason), we say that the number “4” Is, when someone is thinking of the sum of 2 and 2, or of the sum of 1 and 3, etc. But we say that it is, because the essence or nature of the number 4 is actually in the intellect of the person thinking about it—4 is, when its nature is extant. We say that a rabbit is in the act of Being, when the nature that is proper to rabbits is instantiated in an individual living, breathing, and multiplying, rabbit. We say that the rabbit has ceased to Be when it is no longer living, that is, when the life-breath of the rabbit has been removed, and nothing is left but the corpse. An Angel

¹⁹¹⁰A question that we have also discovered to be fundamental to the approaches of Aristotle and Martin Heidegger.

would be said to be if ever the (or, an) angelic essence was instantiated such that an individual possessing the angelic nature exists. In each of these cases, the Being is the existing-essence.¹⁹¹¹

We must, at this point, be very careful, for the fallacy of equivocation looms large in the background. We use the word “being” to refer to many very different things (both sensible and supra-sensible things), such as, “*that which* something is”, “*that* something is”, “the *ways in which* a ‘that which something is’ is or can be (in itself or in relation to others)”, and, even, “*who* a rational ‘that which something is’ is or can become”. If we don’t distinguish between what *referant* we are asking about, then we will, inevitably, end up in confusion, and/or superficial disagreement with those whom, so we think, appear to disagree with us. Heidegger seems to want to limit the term “being” to only “*who* a rational ‘that which something is’ is or can be”, and, derivatively, to those things which mean something to the “who”. If this is what “being” is, then necessarily, only that which can be described as a “who” (or, as having meaning to a “who”), is.¹⁹¹² But, we think, Heidegger artificially limits the notion of Being to “who’s”, and, thus, is led into error about just what Being is.

It is important that we remind ourselves that the question we are asking, and that question which we take Aristotle and Plato to be asking, is the question of just what it is that is referred to when we say that something (a that-which) is. The most common way of talking about the “is-ness” of any given “that which”, is to use the term “existence”.¹⁹¹³ “Existence”, then, will be used

¹⁹¹¹Note, for example, Josef Pieper’s comment about the impossibility of separating existence and essence, “Strictly speaking, there is in reality neither an existence that would predate a being’s essence, nature, or whatness nor an essence that would predate existence; being, in abstraction from essence and whatness, is just as inconceivable as whatness and essence in abstraction from being and existence. (Josef Pieper, “Creatureliness and Human Nature: Reflections on the Philosophical Method of Jean-Paul Sartre,” in *For the Love of Wisdom: Essays on the Nature of Philosophy*, trans. Roger Wasserman, Ed. Berthold Wald (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 176.)”

¹⁹¹²This is starting to sound like something out of a Dr. Seuss book.

¹⁹¹³We understand that the terms “essence” and “existence” have acquired an enormous amount of baggage since their original introduction into philosophical discussion. We define these words in this paragraph, and will use these words to mean only that which we propose as their definitions.

to replace, in what follows, the term “Being” in the question where we are asking about that to which we refer when we say “that” something “is”, or is in the “act of Be-ing or existing”, or has “Be-ing”. “Essence”, on the other hand, will replace the term “Being” when we ask about “what it is” that has, or does not have, Being. In other words, “Essence” replaces Being in any statement that refers to “*that which* something is” by provenance, generation, or birth (not by education, socialisation, character formation, indoctrination, or other ways in which a personality can be moulded)¹⁹¹⁴; and “Existence” replaces Being in any statement that refers to the fact “that” some Essence “is”.¹⁹¹⁵ But it seems that we have arrived at the medieval distinction of Essence and Existence.¹⁹¹⁶ That is, the distinction between *what* something is by provenance, generation or birth, and *that* something is. Our initial answer to the question is, therefore, exactly what Aristotle proposed as his answer to the question of Being—the *existant essence*.

¹⁹¹⁴“Personality” or “character” are ways of Being of a contingent rational Being which can be formed and moulded in its actions, reactions, perception of what is good and bad, etc., by education, socialization, etc. It is, we think, an essential attribute of a way of Being-Human.

¹⁹¹⁵Mercier also notes the confusion that is created by the word “being”, when discussing the elements (principles or causes of the “Being”) of a sensible Being. He says, “Ces deux raisons objectives s’expriment indistinctement en français par le même mot *être*, qui répond au latin *ens* ; pour les distinguer l’une de l’autre, nous recourons aux deux expressions *être essentiel*, *être existentiel*, qui équivalent respectivement aux termes οὐσία, *essentia*, εἶναι, *esse*. (Mercier, *MGO*, 26.)” We think that the terms *être essentiel* and *être existentiel* tend to muddy the waters rather than makes them clearer. It is better, we think, to say that the two constitutive elements of a sensible being are its essence and its existence (its act of existing). As noted above, both essence and existence are often referred to, indiscriminately, with the word *being*. This word *being* can, as Aristotle notes (and as we have already mentioned), be applied to the essence, the universal, the composition of the essence and its particular matter, and that which underlies and founds the composite. It is debatable as to whether Aristotle meant, by this latter, the act of existing (or the existence of the essence), but, if he did not, then we suggest that there are, at least, five things to which we refer when we say being. The question of Being, we suggest, has to do with the act of existing of the instantiated essence. Joseph Owens also notes the ambiguity of the word “being”, though he only focuses on two ways of saying “being”. He says, “These considerations show, further, that being has more than just one meaning. It can mean existence in reality, it can mean existence in cognition. In either way a thing may be, different though the meaning is in each of the two cases. (Joseph Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 2nd ed. (1985; repr., Houston, TX: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1986), 39-40.)” L.-B. Geiger also notes the multiple meanings of Being, when he says, “le mot être comporte des sens multiples suivant l’usage qu’on en veut faire. (L.-B. Geiger, *La Participation dans la Philosophie de S. Thomas d’Aquin*, 2nd ed. (Paris : J. VRIN, 1953), 315.)” Geiger then goes on to note that the word “Being” can be used to refer to the totality of Beings (“tout ce qui est, est de l’être (Ibid.)”).

¹⁹¹⁶For an indepth analysis of the essence/existence distinction in Thomas Aquinas, and how it is to be distinguished from his predecessors, see De Finance, *EA*, 80-111. See also, R. P. Phillips, *Metaphysics*, vol. 2 of *Modern Thomistic Philosophy: An Explanation for Students* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1948), 192-204.

We should note that it is easy to stop here and think that we have discovered THE answer to the question of Being. But is this really the case? We have discovered that there is a certain relationship that can be said of everything that in any way is—the relationship between essence and existence—that is, that to Be a being is to Be an existent-essence. There are some important corollaries to this discovery. *First of all*, some of the things which are—the sensible beings—force themselves upon our intellect as existing essences which we neither sought to present to ourselves, nor can, necessarily, restrain from presenting themselves to us (except by a voluntary act of the will—such as, closing your eyes, plugging your ears or nose, or backing away from that which touched us.). That is, these existing essences are out of our control—they do not depend upon us. *Secondly*, when we analyse our initial claim that “this thing is”, we realize that we are able to distinguish between *the essence itself* of the being, and the fact that this essence *is*. That is, we are able to distinguish between the essence and the existence of this being.¹⁹¹⁷

Yet, *thirdly*, this being only is if its essence *exists*, in some way. That is, though we can, in our minds, separate the essence of X from the existence of X, and this without destroying the X which is independent of our minds; we cannot separate the existence of the mind-independent X from the essence of the mind-independent X without destroying the mind-independent X such that it can no longer be said, independently of our intellect, to Exist. A consequence of this third point is that we must distinguish between a mind-independent Be-ing and a mind dependent Be-

¹⁹¹⁷To this point, Mercier notes that “Cet être subsistant que nous avons appelé avec Aristote la substance première, enveloppe dans son concept: un élément quidditatif, ce que la chose est, l’essence, ou si l’on veut, l’être essentiel; et un élément complémentaire, l’existence, ou, si l’on veut, l’être existentiel. (Mercier, *MGO*, 25.)” As we have already noted, the terms that Mercier uses to describe these different elements (*être essentiel* et *être existentiel*) tend to create more confusion than clarity. In spite of this, his observations tend to confirm our own thoughts on the subject. Joseph Owens seems to say the same thing when he notes that “The conclusion emerging from these considerations is that a sensible thing and its being are not entirely the same. The thing may have real being, lose that way of being, and still retain or acquire cognitional being. The thing, then, is not exactly the same as either its real being or its cognitional being. It remains the same thing as it loses one way of being and acquires the other way of being. Sensible things, accordingly, are in some way other than their being. (Owens, *ECM*, 37.)”

ing. Our initial distinction, following Aristotle and the medieval scholastics, between what we called sensible beings and beings of reason or intellect, seems to be supported by these observations. We may be on to something when we say that “Real Beings”—Beings that exist in the fullest sense—are those which have existence independently of our own minds, and have existence independently of other Real Beings.¹⁹¹⁸ Two of the categories that we listed above may be found to fit under the broad category of “Real Beings”: Sensible Beings¹⁹¹⁹ and Suprasensible Beings. “Beings of Reason”¹⁹²⁰ are those essences that exist only in our minds. In each case we are talking about some essence that exists. Another point of interest, here, is that Real Beings and Beings of Reason differ in their way (manner, mode) of existing: one is inhered in, the other inheres in.¹⁹²¹

¹⁹¹⁸Cf. Klubertanz, *IPB*, 24, 34-35. Klubertanz defines a Real Being as “an actual being, one which is not merely an object of the mind or merely possible, but *is* actually in itself. (Ibid., 24.)” He establishes his distinction between what which is merely an object of the mind and that which is a Real Being, by comparing pure imaginations (we might propose Sherlock Holmes and Scooby Doo) with those things that we would say are “Real” (such as ourselves, our families, or our pets). It should be noted that Klubertanz includes, in the definition of Real Being, the notion that to be considered a Real Being, X must not depend upon some other Real Being for its own existence (in the sense that it’s existence is neither in the mind, alone, of some other Real Being, or that it’s existence is not inherent to—as an accident, for example—some other Real Being). In this way he is stating what Aristotle discovered, that accidental Being (thus all the categories with the exception of *οὐσία*), and True and False Being, cannot be said to be Being in the primary (primordial) sense of Being. That is, they exist, but not of themselves. This notion of “of themselves” or “in itself” seems to be quite important for a coherent philosophy of Being, but we will not be considering it here. Joseph Owens’s approach to the notion of “Real Being” is, we think, shows how we arrive “existentially” at this concept, but he agrees with Klubertanz’s basic understanding of “Real Being”. He says, referring to the examples he had just considered, “The above examples are concerned with being in the real world, in the world that exists whether or not any man is thinking about it at the moment. Technically, such being may be called **real being**, or **being in reality**. These phrases, perhaps, are none too satisfactory, but they are traditional, and they seem the best available...It means being in the world that exists outside mere thought or imagination. In this perspective, things that exist in the real world may be said to have being **in themselves**, in contrast to being in someone’s cognition. (Owens, *ECM*, 30. Bold typeface is the original authors.)” Cf. Bittle, *DBO*, 22. W. Norris Clarke, in his 1993 Aquinas Lecture, states that “One of the central themes in the thought of Aquinas is his notion of real being, i.e., actually existing being, as intrinsically active and self-communicating. (W. Norris Clarke, *Person and Being* (1993; repr., Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2016), 6.)”

¹⁹¹⁹We might note that not all of the beings that are listed under the notion of sensible beings will fit nicely under the notion of Real Beings.

¹⁹²⁰That to which Aristotle was referring (for the most part) when he talked about True and False Being, but which also may include imaginations, dreams, hallucinations, etc.

¹⁹²¹This reveals that we can not only talk about different types of essences, but that we can talk about different ways of existing. Joseph Owens seems to agree with us on this point, for he notes that “Being in reality and being in thought are only too obviously different ways of being. They are subject to conditions so divergent that one does not at all feel justified in arguing from status in thought to status in reality, and especially to an exactly corresponding status in the real order...In contrast to the being that is conferred upon things by real existence,

We should also note that we have, here, stumbled upon a *fourth* consequence: we must distinguish between the notion of “existence *per se*” (which we distinguished from the essence which is existing, but which is inseparable from the mind-independent existing essences without destroying them) and the “concept” of existence. This concept of existence seems to be applicable to anything and everything that, in any way, can be said to Be (even if it is not yet). But is this not what is meant by the medieval notion of *ens commune*—common being? This notion of common being—that notion of existence which is applicable to everything and anything that, in any way, is said to Be—covers everything (including rocks, planets, animals, man, Sherlock Holmes, Angels and, even God or gods); and yet, if we are not careful, it also “covers over”, to borrow a concept from Heidegger, these very same things, for it hides the very different ways in which they exist (we have already noted the different ways in which Beings of Reason and Sensible Beings exist). Louis-M. Régis notes, concerning this concept of existence, that “L’*exister* ou le *est*, voilà donc ce qui, pour saint Thomas, caractérise formellement l’être en tant qu’être, car c’est en lui et par lui que tout s’oppose au néant... Il est donc normal que ce communisme de l’exister lui ait mérité une appellation particulière : aussi le désigne-t-on par l’expression : *esse commune*, en vertu de cette participation universelle qui fait dénommer être, tout ce qui s’oppose au néant.”¹⁹²² Common Being—the notion of existence as it can be extended

existence in the mind or imagination or sensation may be called **cognitive being**. Still more technically, it is termed **intentional being**. (Owens, *ECM*, 31-32. Bold typeface is the original authors.)”

¹⁹²²Louis-M. Régis, *L’Odyssée de la Métaphysique* (Montréal : Institute d’Études Médiévales, 1949), 35-36. Jolivet notes that all metaphysical reflection on Being begins in the confused intuition of Being (as *ens commune*—see above), “Il consiste en l’*appréhension spontanée de l’être enveloppe, en quelque sorte, dans les qualités ou choses sensibles (ens concretum quidditati sensibili)*. (Jolivet, *Métaphysique*, 205.)” *Ens Commune* is seen to be “being”, or existence, as it is seen, by the intellect, to extend to anything that in any way can be said to Be. “Il [the extensive intuition of Being] possède une virtualité illimitée, puisque tous les modes du réel sont compris sous lui. Ce qui revient à dire que l’idée d’être que fournit l’abstraction extensive est caractérisé par son extrême confusion. (Ibid., 207.)” He later notes, once again, that the concept of *ens commune* is predicated analogically of all the things that are (Ibid., 218.). We think that this is what Klubertanz means by the primitive notion of Being (cf. Klubertanz, *IPB*, 40-41.). We might add the comments of Cardinal Mercier who notes that “Les métaphysiciens qui s’attachent servilement à la signification étymologique de l’*Ontologie* lui attribuent pour objet l’être en général, c’est-à-dire l’être qui n’est ni substance ni accident, ni être réel ni être de raison, mais ce minimum d’entité en dehors duquel il

n'y a plus que le néant. Ils se trompent. Cette notion de *l'être en général* est analogique : elle s'étend à des objets de nature toute différente, à la substance, à l'accident, même à l'être de raison. (Mercier, *MGO*, 20.) » We think that when Mercier says « l'être en général » he is referring to the notion of *ens commune*—common being. Joseph Owens agrees with these other thinkers, and with our own observations, for he says, “Being, then, is universally what makes a thing different from nothing. It may therefore be called the act of all acts and the perfection of all perfections. In this way it is conceptualized as common to all, even though the act that does make a thing different from nothing is diverse in every single case. Conceived as common, it can be applied to any act of existing. (Owens, *ECM*, 60.)” He states, further on, that “Being, as originally apprehended in sensible things, is highly individualized in time and place. It presents no common nature that the mind at once could conceptualize as in the case of species and genera. Yet it is conceptualized by the the mind as common. (Ibid., 65.)” Note that “common being” for Owens, is a concept—which, technically, could be called a Being of Reason—which is applied by the intellect to everything that, in any way, can be said to Be. Concerning common being, Oliva Blanchette notes, that “What we are speaking about in metaphysics is not being under any particular aspect, but as something common to whatever there is, what Aquinas spoke of as *ens commune* and what the Greeks spoke of as *to on xynon*. (Blanchette, *PB.*, 40-41.)” Blanchette seems to contradict, outright (cf. Ibid., 83.), Mercier (or, at least, to fall prey to that servile attachment to common being that Mercier mentions). Perhaps their differences could be resolved by noting that common being is the intellectual notion of the act of existing as it can be said of anything that, in any way, is. This notion of common being points towards something—the act of existing of existant-essences. Perhaps Blanchette is speaking of the latter, while Mercier is speaking of the former. If so, then they could be made to be in agreement. Eleonore Stump appears to fall prey to this same “servile attachment” when she states that, Aquinas “considers metaphysics to be the science of being considered generally (*ens commune*). (Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003), 12-13.)” She qualified this statement, in personal correspondance, by noting that “My own line about the subject of metaphysics was not meant to pick out ENS COMMUNE, but only to indicate that the discipline of metaphysics has to do in a general and abstract way with issues related to being. (Eleonore Stump, *Personal Correspondance* (2016/03/21).)” Stump approaches the subject in greater detail in her recent *Aquinas Lecture* where she distinguishes between Being (*esse*) as it is known by the intellect (as a universal) and, using Aquinas’s terms, *id quod est*, the that which is (Eleonore Stump, *The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2016), 83.). Here she notes that “Something that is *esse* alone does not have existence, then, and there is consequently no distinction between *esse* and the existence of *esse*. (Ibid., 85.)” She then goes on to explain Aquinas’s real distinction on the basis of her distinction between *esse* and the *id quod est*, “In reality, a composite thing is a being (an *id quod est*) that has being (*esse*). Its being an entity is one thing ; its having being (*esse*) is another.” Applying this to God she notes that “God is...both *being* itself and also a being, both *esse* and *id quod est*. (Ibid., 86.)” Stump thinks that she has, thus, properly explained Aquinas’s claim that “[in God] *esse* and *id quod est* do not differ. (Ibid.)” She later qualifies her statement about God by noting that “the *esse* that is God is not a universal like *redness*. Rather, this *esse* is such that it is also right to say that it is an *id quod est*. As such, it is right to say that it is a particular, a being, an entity, and that it does exist. (Ibid., 91.)” It seems to me that in Stumps work there is a confusion between the essence of the subsistent being (the “that which” of the that which is), and the subsistent or existing being (the “that which is” which, I think, would correspond to the *id quod est*) which is what Aristotle would say is the appropriate referent for the term “a being”; as well as a confusion concerning the meaning of the term *esse* (which she seems to understand as both the common notion of being, and the act of being). It seems that Joseph de Finance is referring to the notion of common being, when he notes that “S’il n’y a pas une ‘nature commune’ de l’être, ‘coiffant’, pour ainsi dire, la distinction du fini et de l’infini, il reste que l’*esse* fini participe vraiment de l’*Ipsum esse subsistens* : il y a entre eux un lien interne, dont la ‘nature commune’ n’est, au fond, que l’expression conceptualisée. (De Finance, *EA*, xii.)” This may be that to which Forest is referring in the following claim, “L’être, dit-on, a dans tous les cas une fonction commune qui est d’exclure le néant. (Forets, *SMC*, 12.)” Geiger commente sur la notion d’ens commune que “Pour tenir lieu de cette unite par simplicité et plénitude, nous possédons l’être analogique, sorte de concepte imparfait, qu’invinciblement d’ailleurs nous formons en remarquant l’unité de l’être en toutes choses. C’est l’*ens commune*, l’*ens universale*, qui peut convenir à tout sans appartenir en propre à rien. (Geiger, *PPTA*, 338.)” Cf. Bittle, *DBO*, 12-13, 20.

to anything that is said in any way to be—is, we must remember, primarily a « Being of Reason », it is a concept in the mind that is discovered by a preliminary reflection about the results of the extension question.

Step 2: Have we Finally reached the End?

We have not, however, arrived at the terminus of our quest for Being. As we consider common being—existence as it is distinguishable in the intellect from the existing essences of everything that exists—we ask ourselves, what is it about this common existence that allows us to say, of all existing essences, that they exist? Answering this question brings us to Aristotle’s distinction between *Act* and *Potency*. Everything that presents itself to our intellect, through the senses (or, indeed, in our imaginings, dreams, hallucinations, etc.), and which is said to Exist (even, one might add, the nominal conception of God—divinity as we conceive of it, not as it is in reality), is composed of Essence and Existence. Yet, if we push our reflection a little bit further we see that their very existence seems to be composed of Potency and Act (or presence). That is, they are but could not be, or, they are not but could be (and this is true as much of Beings of Reason as of Real Beings, or, for that matter, of any other manner of Being that we have, thus far, distinguished).¹⁹²³

This is an important point to note, every being that we come across (dogs, cats, the ideas of dogs and cats, the memories of dogs and cats, dreams of dogs and cats, pictures of dogs and cats in books, the sounds of dogs and cats, our stances towards dogs and cats, etc.) presents itself to us (either as forcing itself upon us, or as a creation of our mind) as something that is (all these beings *act* or are present to us) but was not (at one point it was only a possible-being: a non

¹⁹²³Cf. Owens, *ECM*, 33-34fn10.

existant but possibly existent essence), and which may not be (it may, at some future time, cease to exist). That is to say, before they were in act, they were potentially in act (in some previously in act essence), and, as acting they are also possessed of possibilities to present themselves differently or to cease to be in act.

We must carry this thought a step further, everything that presents itself to our senses is in act and in potency not only in relation to the realization of its essence, but, also, in regards to its very existence. That is, not only are actual beings in potency to generation and destruction, growth and physical regression, movement, change, and other actualizations of intrinsic and extrinsic possibilities, and this according to their essence (that which they are by provenance, generation, or birth); but they also have act and potency in regards to their very existence. That is, if they exist, then they are in act (and in potency to ceasing to exist); but if they do not exist, but could exist, then they are in potency to being in act. Thus, even the existence of some essence can be divided into act and potency. What, we now ask, constitutes, the very existence of some essence?

It cannot, we propose, be *potency*, for, properly speaking, that which “is potential” only, or “possible” only, Is-Not actually. It is not (or has no existence) except, so to say, as a possible, but non-existent (not actual) way of being that can be actualized by some being (an existing essence) which is actual.¹⁹²⁴ Potency, therefore, as with non-Being, is dependent upon act, both for it, itself, to be actualized, and for us to be able to discuss it.¹⁹²⁵ Thus, though we can talk about potency as being in some existing essence (as that which it can be), and though there must

¹⁹²⁴This character of Potency (as not-Being, but possibly Being, and thus having potential existence within that which is already in act) is what leads many thomistic philosophers to say that Potency is something of an intermediate state between the actual and the non-existent (Cf. Van Steenberghen, *Ontologie*, 112. Jolivet, *Métaphysique*, 242. Feser, *SM*, 33.).

¹⁹²⁵We cannot, indeed, discuss it unless we are actual and capable of actualizing a discussion of it.

be potency in the existing essence if there is to be any change, it must be remembered that its “existence” is derivative of act. *Pure Potency* (which might be described as substantial existing potency) is an absolute impossibility outside of the intellect—which is to say that it is no more than a being of reason, and, that, without form and void.¹⁹²⁶ We can only talk about the “existence” of Potency if there is some existing essence which, by its very essence, possesses unactualized potencies (that is, there must be some changeable being that can cease to exist, or that can realize possible ways of existing, related to its essence). But, every being that we come across both in sensible reality (sensible beings), and in our mind (beings of reason), is this type of Be-ing. As such, we see Act and Potency in every being. The Act is what constitutes the very existence of every existant-essence, the Potency is what constitutes, and indeed determines, what the existant-essence is and can be. We could say, thus, (1) that Existence is to Essence as Act is to Potency, and (2) that Pure Act is to Pure Potency as the Act of Existing is to Non-existence. As such, there is a very real distinction, in sensible particular beings and beings of reason, at least, between potency and act. This leads us to our final reflections about “Being”.

What, then, is common to everything that in any way is? We suggest that the ultimate answer to the question of Being is not that beings are given meaning or signification (which, we propose, is just another way of Being that can be classified within in one of the three ways of Being as outlined by Aristotle), but that beings (existant-essences), in some way, *act* or *presence* (or are brought into act and presence). They impose themselves on us, or are imposed by us (through our imagination or interpretation, etc.) on ourselves or on others, but, either way, they are all, in some way or another, in act or present. They act, or presence, or reveal themselves, regardless of whether or not we perceive them, or interpret them, or see them, or know them, or

¹⁹²⁶Cf. Feser, *SM*, 38.

use them, or give them meaning or significance in relation to us or our world.¹⁹²⁷ That is, the existence of some existant-essence just is the act of existing.¹⁹²⁸

We need to develop this notion of Being as *act* or *presence* further. Aristotle distinguishes, in the *Metaphysics*, between being in act and being potential (in potency). He makes an early distinction in *Metaphysics A* 1017a36-1017b9, where he notes that both in the case of that which is in Potency and in the case of that which is in Act, we say that something has Being. He later discusses, in much greater detail, Act,¹⁹²⁹ Potency,¹⁹³⁰ Act in relation to Potency,¹⁹³¹ and that there must be some cause of the Be-ing of all sensible be-ings that is Pure Act.¹⁹³² In his discussion of act and potency he discovered that in order to account for any type of change (change of an accidental nature, change of a substantial nature, change of mind, change of mood, etc.) there must, first of all, be something that acts or presences, and which is the foundation of that which is not yet (which could be described as only potential or as un-present).¹⁹³³ In other words, the precondition for any potency is that there be something that is in

¹⁹²⁷Blanchette notes that “Actuality is a third within the concept of being, but not as a *this* or a *that*, nor as a quidditative determination of any kind. It is simply *be* as an *act*, something more positive than thisness or whatness in being, but yet found or disclosing itself only in whatness and thisness. (Blanchette, PB, 92.)” In other words, act presents itself as something over and above the composite of essence and existence, and over and above the essence of the existant-essence. What, however, should we do with this?

¹⁹²⁸In the words of De Finance, “L’existence—*ipsum esse*—, c’est l’acte d’être. (Joseph de Finance, *Existence et Liberté* (Paris : Emmanuel Vitte, 1955), 54.)” He later says, “Mais, d’autre part, l’existence nous apparaît comme l’acte le plus intime de l’être, pénétrant jusqu’aux derniers replis de la subjectivité singulières. (de Finance, *EL*, 58.)” Forest notes that “l’être nous apparaîtra tout d’abord comme un acte, la notion de puissance est dérivée et relative à la première. Il est impossible de donner de l’acte une définition rigoureuse...Pourtant en nous tenant près de l’expérience sensible, nous appellerons acte, d’abord le mouvement qui nous paraît la forme extérieure et visible de l’être, ensuite nous attribuerons l’acte à l’existence elle-même. (Forest, *SCM*, 13.)” A comment by Henle, concerning the act of existing in metaphysical reflection, is worth noting, “Let us turn then to metaphysics. The basic insight and intelligibility of Thomistic existential metaphysics is that of the *esse*, the act of existence. Metaphysics does not ignore the order of essence or the total structure of beings, but all its contemplation, all its effort to understand is carried on in the light of this act, *esse*. (Henle, *MM*, 51.)”

¹⁹²⁹Aristotle, *Metaphysics H* 1042a1-1045b25, and *Metaphysics Θ* 1048a25-1048b34.

¹⁹³⁰Aristotle, *Metaphysics Θ* 1045b27-1047b30, 1048b35-1049b3.

¹⁹³¹Aristotle, *Metaphysics Θ* 1047b31-1048a24, 1049b4-1051a33, *Metaphysics K* 1065b5-1066a34, and *Metaphysics A* 1071a5-1071b2.

¹⁹³²Aristotle, *Metaphysics A* 1071b3-1075a11.

¹⁹³³Aristotle, *Metaphysics H* 1044b21-28, *Θ* 1045b28-1046a18.

act.¹⁹³⁴ In sensible things we can talk about a mixture, or composition, of potency and act which is the principle of all movement. That which, as actual, is composed of potency of act, has the potency either to actualize (make present) some potency (interior or exterior), or to be acted upon such that some potency is actualized (made present). Actuality, then, in sensible things, is typically associated with movement.¹⁹³⁵ This being said, movement should be, here, understood in its largest possible sense, as the actualization of some potency. Aristotle concludes, from his discussion of act and potency, that even if some X potentially is, it *is not* until it is in Act¹⁹³⁶—in other words, insomuch as something is *only* in potency, it is not,¹⁹³⁷ but, in so much as something is, it is in act. Also, something can only be said to be in potency if it is the possible state of Being of some already in act essence. Aristotle states, therefore, in no uncertain terms, that “Actuality is the existence of the thing.”¹⁹³⁸ This statement must, however, be qualified by the following statement (to which we have already alluded on a number of occasions), “But all things are not said to be in act in the same way, but rather by analogy.”¹⁹³⁹

¹⁹³⁴Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Θ 1049b12-17. De Finance comments, referring to this passage, that Act is first in the conceptual order, “la puissance ne se définit qu’en fonction de l’acte. (De Finance, EA, 8.)”

¹⁹³⁵Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Θ 1047a21-1047b2.

¹⁹³⁶Ibid.

¹⁹³⁷De Finance seems to agree with our analysis of Aristotle on this point, as he notes that “La puissance passive n’a de réalité que s’il se trouve une puissance active capable de la déterminer ; or la puissance active est un acte. (De Finance, EA, 8.)”

¹⁹³⁸Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Θ, 1048a30-32. He says, “ἔστι δ’ ἡ ἐνέργεια τὸ ὑπάρχειν τὸ πρᾶγμα.” This seems to contradict Van Steenberghen’s claim that if we wish to follow Aristotle to the letter, then we cannot express existence and essence in terms of act and potency (cf. Van Steenberghen, *Ontologie*, 261-262.). Thomas Aquinas seems to agree with Aristotle (and us) in stating that Act is the existence of some essence, for he says, in his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, that “The Act of existing [esse] signifies act. We do not say that a thing is [esse] due to it’s being [est] in potency, but from the fact that it is [est] in act.” (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, vol. 1, XXII, 4. My translation.) See Mercier’s comment on this in *GMO*, 26-27. Blanchette notes that “The actuality of being, which we can refer to as the be of being, has to be understood as an *act* that contains the intelligibility of the fact as understood or interpreted but in a higher order, the order of being itself, which is higher than the order of determinations, let alone the order of thisness and thatness, but this act is still conjoined for us to the first order of fact as found in experience. (Blanchette, *PB*, 94.)” In otherwords, the actuality of an existant-essence refers to the act of existing of the existant-essence. He later notes that “Even if the be of being is the ultimate opening for us of all that is, it is still known initially or originally as an aspect of the being we know concretely or as the *act* of this being that is at the same time a particular kind of being. (Ibid., 95.)” De Finance suggests that, for Thomas Aquinas, “L’esse apparaît comme l’acte ultime, dont tous le reste participe, mais qui lui-même ne participe de rien. (De Finance, EA, 107.)”

¹⁹³⁹Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Θ, 1048b6-7. He says, “λέγεται δ’ ἐνέργεια οὐ πάντα δμοίως, ἀλλ’ ἢ τῶ

Taking our lead from the three different types of Being (Sensible Beings, Beings of Reason, and Supra-Sensible Beings), let us attempt to see if we can confirm what we have been discovering about what it means to say that they Be—that they are in the *act* of Being. That is, let us now “re-flect” upon our discoveries, to see if what we have found can account for all beings. We wish primarily, to discuss the Being of Non-Being, and the Being of Meaning or Significance, but, before we arrive at these two (somewhat complicated beings), let us begin with something that is somewhat easier, such as a sensible Being or a sensible event.

We say that a *human child Is* (is in the act of Be-ing, has Be-ing, or exists), only once it is present or actual. We do not mean, by this, “when it is present to the intellect”, or “actually in our thoughts or field of vision”, but, rather, regardless of whether we are thinking about it or seeing it “when human nature has been actualized or made present in the world in its earliest stages of development”.¹⁹⁴⁰ Taking this human child, the actualization of the human nature in its earliest stages of development, we can go on to say, of it: “It is small.”, “It is crying.”, “It is drinking milk.”, etc. Each of these attributions can be construed as the proposition that some thing can be said to be of the child, or that some event is be-ing actualized by the child. For example, when we

ἀνάλογον.” In discussing “existence” then, we seem forced to predicate ‘existence’ analogically of the different things that exist. Much has been said of the so-called analogy of Being, and it seems that we will, indeed, be unable to avoid it, for, when we try to discuss Being we end up, inevitably, in an eternal labyrinth of confusion if we do not speak analogically of the existence of different essences. In order to avoid confusion, then, it seems necessary to say that anything that can be said, in any way to exist, is said to exist primarily by way of the *Analogy of Attribution*, and, secondly, that existence is said of each different essence by way of the *Analogy of proper proportionality*. The analogy of attribution is primordial (when discussing Pure act in comparison with everything else that is both in act and potency), Analogy of Proper proportionality is primordial when discussing different essences that can be said to exist as instantiated essences. The Analogy of Attribution is said when that which is ‘analogous’ between the primary and secondary analogates, “exists intrinsically only” in the primary analogate, and “is attributed to the secondary analogates merely by virtue of their relation to the primary analogate. (Edward Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* (Germany: editions scholasticae, 2014), 257.)” The Analogy of Proper Proportionality is what happens when each X to which Y is attributed literally is or has Y, but Y is possessed in a way that is properly proportionate to the nature of X (Cf. *Ibid.*, 257.). Cf. Forest, *SMC*, 4, 10-12. André Munier, *Théodicée, Critique, Ontologie*, vol. 2 of *Manuel de Philosophie* (Belgique : Desclée & Cie, 1956), 447-449.

¹⁹⁴⁰We will leave to one side the question of what makes it to be-come, as we are primarily interested in what we mean when we say that it is. We need, for the time being, to leave the question of the human nature to one side as well.

say that it is small, we are making a statement about the actualization of a relationship between the child and some other being (compared to the parents, the child *actually* is small). It is entirely possible that once the child has actualized, or made present in the world, the adult form of the human nature (as individualized by the child), that we will say that the child (compared to its parents) is big or tall. Which is to say, that *compared* to the parents, the child *actually* is big or tall. We might note that the comparison, or proposed relationship, is actualized by the intellect, in comparing two actualized essences. As such, we may say, terms of comparison or relationship are beings of reason that are actualized by the intellect when the intellect is presented with two actual essences (and, this, regardless of the nature or type of the essence). Turning to “crying” or “drinking”, we are talking about the actualization of a way of being-alive (an action) that is being actualized by the child. The child cries in *actuality*, or the child drinks *actually*. Prior to crying or drinking we cannot say that the child is crying or is drinking except (as a being of reason) in potency. That is, the child *could actualize* the way of Be-ing that we describe as crying or drinking, but, this potential for be-ing is *not actualized*, therefore it *is not*, except as a potential way of Be-ing of the child. In all of the considerations that we have just made, *to Be* is to actualize (to make present or actual) some nature, some relation, some action, some event, etc. *To not-Be* is to not actualize (to not make present or to not actualize) some potential nature, some potential relation, some potential action, some potential event, etc. Let us turn, now, to the more complicated cases of Non-Being, and Meaning.

In what way can *Non-Being* be said to Be? This is one of the major questions that Plato struggled with in both the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist*. That Non-Being is “predicated”, is manifest to all; but, how can we predicate Non-Being, either stating that it is or is not (for example, “Non-Being is not.”, or “nothing is Non-Being.”), or attributing it to something else (for example, “my 10th child is not.”, or “Sherlock Holmes is not.”)? Here we find the type of Being

that we called a Being of Reason to be quite helpful. Not-Being is not something that can be said to Be in any meaningful sense other than as a concept, a notion of the intellect that is used to describe a lack or absence of existence of some nature or essence in what we might call, for lack of a better term, the extra-mental totality of beings.¹⁹⁴¹ This does not mean that that to which we attribute Not-Being is not, in any way, but that it Is-Not in, at least, one particular way. For example, when we say that Sherlock Holmes is not, we mean that Sherlock Holmes is not a “Real” person—thus, he does actualize the human nature in the extra-mental totality of beings. This does not mean that Sherlock Holmes Is-Not absolutely. Rather, Sherlock Holmes, as a fictional character, Is the actualization of the human nature in the imagination of whoever is thinking of him at any given time. The same could be said of any other Being that is not the actualization of some nature in the extra-mental totality of Beings, but, is the actualization of some nature within some mind.

What about *meaning* or *significance*, which Heidegger proposed, in *Being and Time*, as what is “meant” by Be-ing? Meaning, we propose, is a Be-ing of Reason which has the potential to actualize certain “real” ways of Be-ing in real Be-ings that are endowed with reason (any nature that is actual independent of any human mind). That is, *Meaning* is the actualization, within the mind of a rational Be-ing, of a way of interpreting and understanding events, actions, persons, and other phenomena. This interpreting or understanding almost always actualizes certain ways of Be-ing that are particular to that individual real Be-ing that actualized the interpretation or understanding (such as Being-afraid, being-anxious, being-angry, etc.). We can,

¹⁹⁴¹Joseph Owens seems to agree with us concerning the status of non-being, for he says, “Similarly, express **negations** like nothingness have no being in reality, yet they are given being in human thought when they are considered or discussed. **Privations** also, like blindness, when taken in themselves, and certain relations like identity, can have being only in human reason. They are not things that can exist as such in the real world. They are beings, but only beings of reason. (Owens, *ECM*, 39. Bold typeface is the original authors.)” Cf. Bittle, *DBO*, 18, 21.

thus, talk about the actualization of an understanding which, even, modifies the original state of affairs, or actualizes a different state of affairs, a different event, a different interpretation, or, to be as general as possible, another potency. As complicated as this can get, that meaning which Is, is the meaning or significance that presences or acts in the intellect of the individual meaning-giving Be-ings. That meaning which Is-Not, but which Could-Be, is that meaning which is only a potentially actualizeable meaning; and this potentially actualizeable meaning finds its foundation, or ultimate grounding, in individual meaning-giving Real Be-ings.

This allows us to talk meaningfully about the different ways of Be-ing meaningful that Heidegger discusses in his work on the question of Being. When an individual meaning-giving Be-ing *sees* another Be-ing *as* an individual meaning-giving Be-ing, the first *sees* the second *as Dasein*. When an individual meaning-giving Be-ing *sees* another Be-ing *as* Present-at-hand, the first sees the latter as a part of its environment with which it is able to interact. In Heidegger's own words, presence-at-hand refers to "the Being of those entities which we can come across and whose nature we can determine if we discover them in their own right by going through the entities proximally encountered."¹⁹⁴² When an individual meaning-giving Be-ing *sees* another Be-ing *as* Ready-to-hand, the first sees the latter as a Be-ing of its environment with which it is immediately concerned for some reason or other. In Heidegger's own words, Ready-to-hand refers to "the Being of those entities within-the-world which we proximally encounter".¹⁹⁴³ Ready-to-hand beings present themselves to us differently depending on how we are concerned with them. When an individual meaning-giving Be-ing *sees* another Be-ing *as* un-Ready-to-hand, the first sees the latter as a Be-ing of its environment with which it is immediately concerned for some reason or other, but which, for some reason or another, presents itself as not

¹⁹⁴²Heidegger, *BT*, 121 [88].

¹⁹⁴³*Ibid.*, 121 [88].

immediately available—or, in other words, as, all of a sudden, missing. Heidegger proposes, as we have already noted on numerous occasions, that the Being of Philosophizing is to be in a perpetual questioning.¹⁹⁴⁴ In the words of Josef Pieper, who is describing Martin Heidegger's

¹⁹⁴⁴We would agree, to a certain qualified extent, with this articulation of this way of Being-philosophical. That is, as we saw, earlier, in our comments on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, the philosopher often begins with many questions, and, the questions just don't stop coming. One should note, however, that many questions are, indeed answered. The philosopher maintains himself in a perpetual pursuing of wisdom, receiving some, but always thirsty for more. The philosophizing person receives answers to his questions, but never runs out of questions to ask. As such, the philosophizing person is, as Heidegger would say, perpetually questioning, but, it is not, *contra* Heidegger, the questioning itself that the philosophizing person is pursuing, but the answers to the questions. Josef Pieper seems to agree with Heidegger, that the philosophizing person is constantly questioning, for he says, "In this there is an intimation of the type of demand that is being placed on the philosophizing person in Plato's view and how one goes about recognizing the 'philosophical man'. It is, above all, the energy of the soul that allows it to persist implacably in its questioning, which, as a living spiritual act, is directed toward the world in its totality and depth; it is an openness for that which arouses wonder—wonder at the fact that something exists at all—an openness that must continually be reconstituted anew. (Pieper, *On the Platonic Idea of Philosophy*, 167.)" Though Pieper seems to agree with Heidegger on the fact that the philosophical person is perpetually questioning, and he even agrees on the fact that the object that is always sought by the truly philosophical question is Being and the totality of Being (He says, for example, that "Whoever entertains a philosophical question in the genuine sense...is always asking at the same time about the structure of the world as a whole; he views reality in its entirety. (Josef Pieper, "The Dilemma Posed by a Non-Christian Philosophy," in *For the Love of Wisdom: Essays on the Nature of Philosophy*, trans. Roger Wasserman, Ed. Berthold Wald (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 297.)" Cf. Pieper, *On the Platonic Idea of Philosophy*, 168-169. Pieper, *A Plea for Philosophy*, 92, 107.) But, says, Pieper, if a truly philosophical question is always asking about the totality of all that is, then four things will result. *First of all*, philosophy must, necessarily, ask theological questions. He argues, indeed, in the article just quoted, that in the originary conception of philosophy (Heidegger was always calling us back to the originary and primordial experience of Being) "the primary element in the original conception of philosophy consists of nothing other than an uninhibited relation to theology, a methodological openness in relation to theology...As a result, whoever entertains a philosophical question is *eo ipso* compelled to discuss everything—to speak about God and the world. (Ibid., 296-297.)" *Secondly*, philosophy is a never ending pursuit, "This, then, is the end toward which philosophy aims: understanding reality in terms of a single unified principle. It belongs, however, to the nature of philosophy that although it is 'on the way' to this goal—indeed, in loving and hopeful pursuit!—it is fundamentally incapable of attaining it...In other words, there cannot be a 'closed system' of philosophy. (Pieper, "What does it mean to Philosophize?", 67.)" *Thirdly*, an "atheistic" philosophy runs into the dilemma of either not truly being philosophy (in the sense of the word that we have inherited from the pre-Socratics, through Plato, Aristotle and the Scholastics), or having to redefine philosophy such that it no longer means anything like that pursuit of wisdom that has been going on for, at least, over 2000 years. In Pieper's words, "If the original conception of philosophy by definition includes a methodological openness to theology; if philosophizing necessarily implies viewing a thing within the horizon of reality as a whole and thus relating it to God and the world; if *philo-sophia* is the loving search after wisdom such as God alone perfectly possesses—if the original conception of philosophy contains all these elements—then, as far as our Western world is concerned, 'Christian philosophy' is simply *the* one and only genuine, necessary, and natural form of philosophy...From the standpoint of the Platonic/Aristotelian conception of philosophy, it is not the notion of a 'Christian philosophy' that requires defense and justification. Conversely, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to answer the question of how something like a *non-Christian* philosophy is supposed to be possible. (Pieper, *The Dilemma Posed by a Non-Christian Philosophy*, 299-300.)" Finally, some form of a Classical Theistic philosophy (When Pieper was writing Christianity was really the only major monotheistic religion in the West. Since his time Islam has grown enormously.) is the only truly approach to reality that is available for philosophizing people. Says Pieper, "There is today in the West no theology other than the Christian one! Where could a non-Christian theology in the robust sense be found? This implies, in turn, that, in the Christian era, it is only possible to philosophize in counterpoint to the Christian interpretation of the world if those aspirations are to be realized with which Plato entrusted philosophy. (Pieper, "What does it mean to Philosophize?", 73.)"

description of human inquiry, “Man’s questioning is, he says, not directed toward an answer at all, but the questioning itself, as an obstinate holding of one’s ground in the absence of any reply, is ‘the highest form of knowledge’.”¹⁹⁴⁵ To Be-a-Parent, is to see oneself as in a certain type of relationship between yourself and your progeniture. Each of these “seeing-as” ways of Being produce certain types of actions, or other ways of Being-Human. It seems, then, that all of Heidegger’s interesting analyses concerning Be-ing fit under the grand type of Be-ing which we have called *Beings of Reason*.

It seems, then, that at its deepest level, the existence of an existant-essence (a being) just is its Act or Presence. Even so-called Potency (that which is in potency, or is only potential—that which may Be, but which Is-not) finds its ultimate foundation only in Act. That is, that which may Be, but which Is-not, can only be said to Be inasmuch as it Is (as an unactualized actualisable way of Being, recognized as such by rational Beings) in something that is already in Act. That is, until actualized, potency is nothing, Non-Being, or, rather, a Being of Reason that may be-come if actualized by what presently Acts.¹⁹⁴⁶ In order for potential Be-ing (regardless of its type of Be-ing, or nature) to Be, it must be made actual or present by an already Actual or Present being. For example, my thought about my wife is not actual when I am not thinking about her, but, because I can think about her at any time that I so desire, my thought about her is always in Potency. This Potency of being-in-mind, is only a potency because I am in Act, I think in Act, and have a wife in Act. In other words, all Be-ing-in-Potency finds its foundation, and very possibility for Be-ing, in that which *Actually Presences*.

¹⁹⁴⁵Josef Pieper, “Heidegger’s Conception of Truth,” in *For the Love of Wisdom: Essays on the Nature of Philosophy*, trans. Roger Wasserman, Ed. Berthold Wald (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 196.

¹⁹⁴⁶To say that something “is” in X, is to say that X can become that which it potentially is. But potential X, is not unless actualized (except, we might say, virtually). X’s potential to X₁ “is” virtually in the materialized particular nature of X.

The final answer, we propose, to the question of Being—the only thing that can be said of all of the things that, in some way, Be—is that anything that in any way is, is *present*, or in *act*. The difficulty of talking about Be-ing without, at the same time, talking about something that Is, the Way in which it Is, and What it is, becomes more and more manifest. This difficulty should not, however, keep us from our conclusion. Anything that, in any way, is, seems to be an acting essence, realizing or presencing itself (or being realized or presented by an already actual essence) in different and changing ways (according to the essence which is being actualized). Louis-M. Régis seems to agree with our conclusions when he says that “L’actualité absolue, le present, le stable et l’immobile, voilà la signification de l’exister, car tout ce qui sera dénommé être, qu’il soit futur, passé ou possible, sera dénommé par la participation passé, possible, ou future à cet exister qui est actuel. »¹⁹⁴⁷

Thus far, all of the ‘beings’ (acting-essences) that present themselves to our senses (or minds), are composed of act and potency. If act is the existence of such beings, how, then should we describe Pure Being or Pure Existing? If act is *Pure Being*, then, we propose, the very essence or nature of Existence, is best described as *Pure Act*.¹⁹⁴⁸ This, we think, is what Aristotle was hinting at, and this is what we take Heidegger to mean by *Presencing*.¹⁹⁴⁹ Some comments by

¹⁹⁴⁷Régis, *OM*, 37.

¹⁹⁴⁸Blanchette makes the following comment on this point, “It is important to note that, if we think of pure be as pure act, this act has to be thought of as infinite, unlimited by any of the differences of whatness and thisness, not as something merely indeterminate. (Blanchette, *PB*, 95.)” De Finance seems to agree with our conclusion, and seems to think that this is the conclusion of Thomas Aquinas, “l’esse est au contraire acte ultime, terme de tout devenir, de toute generation. Il est le desirable par excellence, et les diverses perfections n’ont de prix que parce qu’elles conditionnent sa participation. (De Finance, *EA*, 113.)”

¹⁹⁴⁹Note, for example, how W. Norris Clarke, a thomistic metaphysician who interacts with Heidegger on a number of occasions, uses the notion of Presence, or Presentness, to describe Being. He notes that though it is quite difficult to draw out just what we mean by Being, “One way is to call up paraphrases, for example: ‘exists,’ or—perhaps more evocative—‘presents itself’: a being is that which is actually present in some way, presents itself as standing out from the darkness of non-being into the light of being (W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 26.)” Clarke says, in his 1993 Aquinas Lecture, that “the full meaning of ‘to be’ is not just ‘to be present,’ but ‘to be actively present.’ Existence is power-full, energy-filled presence. (Clarke, *PB*, 13.)” Note that, even if this is not what Heidegger “actually” means by “presencing”, we think that a true Heideggerian, based upon what we have already seen, should

Étienne Gilson are of importance for the progression of our attempt to approach the question of Being. First of all, notes Gilson, “Le philosophe ne peut plus que méditer. Contempler serait un mot bien ambitieux pour l’effort d’une pensée incapable de fixer son regard sur un objet situé au-delà de toute imagination sensible quel qu’elle soit. Elle sait bien à quoi elle pense, mais elle ne peut s’en faire aucune représentation positive. »¹⁹⁵⁰ Try as we might it seems impossible, without complicated words that lose their sense almost as soon as we speak them, to give any accurate description of Pure Being. Is this not, however, what Aristotle was getting at when he described Pure Act (that which we suggest is the very nature of Pure Be-ing)?

Preparing us for Aristotle’s description of Pure Act, Gilson notes, secondly, that “Un deuxième caractère de la situation est beaucoup plus important à observer. C’est que, désormais en quête d’un objet de pensée parfaitement simple, nous sommes hors de l’ordre de la définition. En tant précisément que transcendant, l’être se situe hors du genre, à plus forte raison hors de la différence spécifique. Il ne serait pas exact de dire que l’objet de la réflexion est ineffable, car nous pouvons le penser et en parler, mais nous ne pouvons le définir. L’être pur n’a pas de *quid* à partir duquel on puisse en construire un concept quidditatif... De là, dans cette doctrine, l’importance capitale de la notion de voie négative en théologie. Ramenée au plan purement métaphysique, sur lequel d’ailleurs elle se définit d’abord, cette notion signifie que l’être transcende toute représentation possible, parce qu’il refuse de se laisser inclure sous aucune *quiddité*. »¹⁹⁵¹

not really contest our interpretation of Heidegger on this point, but, rather, should see our interpretation of Heidegger as the actualization of our own way of Being, thus modifying the Heideggerian “They”.

¹⁹⁵⁰Gilson, *CPE*, 41.

¹⁹⁵¹Ibid., 40-41.

Pure act, though not quite indescribable, is indefinable, unlimited,¹⁹⁵² non-temporal (always actual), never possible because always actual. Indeed, as Gilson says (and as we see in Aristotle), the only way to describe pure Being is by negation.¹⁹⁵³ Was Aristotle that far off, then? It might be proposed that Aristotle's first unmoved mover, the supra-sensible purely actual cause of all that is not Pure Act—the pure substantial act of Being—,¹⁹⁵⁴ just is Being (in its fullest sense), and the ultimate answer to the question of Being; and that everything else that can be said, in any way, to Be, only Is, to borrow a concept from Plato, by *participation in or imitation of* Being.¹⁹⁵⁵ Everything that Is, Is only insofar as it is in Act—Present. When it ceases to Act (or Presence), then it Is-not.

To summarize what has been said thus far, Being is that about X by which we say that X is *present*, is *there*, is in *act*, in some way or another, regardless of whether or not there is a human knower to whom X presents itself, or on whom X acts. Things that Be, can Be in many

¹⁹⁵²On the infinity (unlimitability) of pure act, Blanchette says, “When we come to the third aspect of our concept of being, the be of being over and above its determinations, we have to think of something yet more positive than any determination, something that is infinite not only with respect to thisness but also with respect to the limitations that determinations represent for one another. We have to think of something positively and absolutely infinite, since there is nothing that can be thought of as limiting be from outside of itself, so to speak. Only something positive, like a *this* or a determination, can limit something else, like another *this* or another determination. Outside of be there is nothing positive. There is only or simply nothing, which in its purity as nothing is not a limit of anything, not even of being...If there is such a pure act of being, it is certainly not like any being we know from experience. What we know from experience or in the direct exercise of judgment is an act of being or, more precisely, a being in act that is finite. (Blanchette, *PB*, 96.)”

¹⁹⁵³Dr. Thomas De Koninck seems to suggest that we cannot ascribe, to Aristotle, a form of Negative Theology (Thomas De Koninck, *Aristote, l'intelligence et Dieu* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008), 117fn1.).

¹⁹⁵⁴Aristotle described this subsisting pure actuality, in *Metaphysics A*, 1072b14-1073a13, as follows (my own translation): “But, it is evident from what has been said, therefore, that some one *οὐσία* [which is a *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι* – a that which is Be-ing] is eternal and unmoving [or motionless] and is separated from [that which is] perceivable by the senses. But it has been shown [or brought to light] that it is not possible for this *οὐσίαν* to possess any vastness [or magnitude or massiveness – which would imply that it is possible to delimit it by saying “it is this big”.] as it has no parts and is indivisible...But, truly [it is] impassible [or incapable of suffering] and immutable [or unchanging]. For all other movements follow upon locality [or place – and by implication this *οὐσία* cannot be localized].” That is, not temporal, not moving, not sensible, not spatial, without parts, not divisible (absolutely simple), impassible, immutable, in no one place, etc. Were we to follow Aristotle all the way, at this point, we would go on to demonstrate the necessary extra-mental existence of Pure Act—the substantial act of existing which is the ultimate source of all that is not pure act. We leave this for another study. Cf. Owens, *ECM*, 80-83.

¹⁹⁵⁵This is exactly what we mean when we talk about the Analogy of Attribution. See Above.

different ways, for example, they can Be in the intellect, they can Be in material and sensible reality, they can Be in supra-sensible reality. It seems that, or so Aristotle seems to think (and we tend to agree with his approach at this point), when it comes to sensible beings, beings of reason, etc., that the “Be-ing” of X is limited by some “What-ness”, such that we can say that “horse” Is, that “house” Is, etc. Horse and house are definable, and they Are, but, or so it seems, it is impossible to set off the IS-ness of that horse and define the Is-ness as Is-ness without coming to the claim that this horse, or this house, just is the Act or Presence of some individualized nature of horse-ness house-ness. As such, we are pushed to the conclusion that the answer to the question of Being that, at the same time, answers both the comprehension (or quantity) question and the Essential (or quality) question is: Act or Presence. In sensible beings and beings of reason act is always mixed with potency (based upon the essence that is in act), but there is a Pure Act which is the substantial act of existing—the essence of Pure Act.

CONCLUDING REMARKS CONCERNING THE CONSEQUENCES OF OUR RESEARCH

A PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

From Aristotle to Thomism?

In our introduction to the preceding section we noted three possible ways of moving forward from our observations concerning the ways in which Plato, Aristotle and Heidegger have approached the question of Being. It should, by now, be evident that of the three possible ways of moving forward, we have been forced, by the rejection (rejection that was forced upon us by the many difficulties that Heidegger's approach led us into) of the first and the last ways, into the second way forward. That is, through our critical analysis of Plato, Aristotle and Heidegger, we realized that somewhere between Aristotle and Heidegger we got off in the wrong direction. The notion of philosophical progress is, already, riddled with problems,¹⁹⁵⁶ but, if we must use the image of progress, it seems that the only way to make progress is to go back to Aristotle, to the "croisé des Chemins" where we took our wrong turn; and, starting from here, attempt to move forward. The difficulty, of course, is determining just where we went wrong. This is a task for another time, and, has already been discussed by other philosophers. The conclusions of our research seem to show, at least, that regardless of that point to which we return, we are looking for a philosophy of Being that develops the notion of Being as Act.

But, one might protest, is this not just remicrowaved Thomism? Have we not just read Aquinas's answer to the question of Being into Aristotle, Plato and Heidegger? We would respond to this concern by asking another question, "Is it not possible that Aquinas arrived at his

¹⁹⁵⁶Pieper, *A Plea for Philosophy*, 136.

answer to the question of Being (an answer which appears to be very much the same as our proposed answer) in the very same way (minus the analysis of Heidegger) that we have arrived at our answer to the question of Being?" That is, we have sought to discover how Aristotle, Plato, and Heidegger have approached, and attempted to answer, the question of Being. We have attempted to interpret their works without imposing upon them any modern or contemporary (or even medieval) categories, or interpretations. It is our contention that we have, for the most part, succeeded in interpreting, or articulating, as they meant to be understood, each of these thinkers. We have, then, outlined and explained their basic approach to, their respective starting places in their attempted answers to, their answers to, and their understanding of, the question of Being. We saw, first of all, that Plato and Aristotle are asking a very different question than that which is being asked by Heidegger, and, therefore, that they arrive at very different conclusions. Being as equitable as possible to Heidegger, we decided to take him at his word, that is, that he is asking the same question as Plato and Aristotle. We then sought (1) to see if there was anything common to all three of these authors, (2) to draw out whatever was common, and (3) to use this (or these) commonality (ies) in order to attempt to guide our answer to the question of Being. Through a preliminary reflection upon everything that is, in any way, said to Be, we discovered that that which is said to Be, is, primarily, the existing essence. A second reflection brought us to distinguish in the "existing" of the essence, potency and act. We concluded that that which is most common to everything that, in any way is, is act. This led us to the conclusion that the ultimate answer to the question "What is Being?" is Pure Act, unmixed with any potency.

These three thinkers led us to the dichotomous nature of the question of Being (the quantitative/extenstion and qualitative/essential questions), and, ultimately, to *Act* or *Presence* as the ultimate answer to the question of Being. If we are saying the same thing as Thomas Aquinas, then, we propose, this is not because we have imposed his thought onto Plato, Aristotle, and

Heidegger, but, rather, that, in following the route taken by Plato, Aristotle, and Heidegger, we climbed the mount of Being, and, upon arriving at its summit, we discovered Aquinas, and his thomistic followers, already there, engaged, with Aristotle and Plato, in the contemplation of Being.¹⁹⁵⁷ As we have already noted, we are not really all that surprised by the fact that Heidegger is “not-present”.

This, we think, seems to imply that it is time for a renewed look at Thomism. This does not necessarily vindicate all of the claims or arguments of Thomism, but, as a philosopher who took Be-ing as Pure Act, it seems likely that Aquinas may have made some important observations about Be-ing. As we noted earlier, we have arrived, in our own journey through the differing approaches to the question of Being of Plato, Aristotle, and Heidegger, at the same conclusion as that of Aquinas. Is it possible that there is something that we can still learn from him? If Be-ing is Act, or Presence, this will have consequences, so we think, on other areas of thought. We will finish our approach to the question of Being with some thoughts about the consequences of our research.

CONSEQUENCES OF OUR APPROACH TO BEING ON OTHER DOMAINS OF “KNOWLEDGE”

Being and Knowing

If, as we propose, Be-ing is that about X by which, or through which, X is present now, or is in Act, then, what, if anything, does all this mean for human knowledge? We cannot fully answer this question in our concluding remarks, though we may, perhaps, be permitted to draw out some possible consequences. First of all, we propose, the opposite of Be-ing is Not-Be-ing.

¹⁹⁵⁷This statement is obviously, for anyone who has read the book in question, inspired by the conclusion of Robert Jastrow’s book *God and the Astronomers* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 116.

Not-Be-ing simply is Nothing (It is, as noted above, nothing but a being of Reason.). But, secondly, if the first consequence is true, then either all knowledge is of Be-ing, or all knowledge is of Nothing (Non-Being). Thirdly, it seems impossible, and counter-intuitive, to say that knowledge is of No-thing. It seems appropriate, therefore, to say that knowledge that is of No-thing, is not knowledge. Fourthly, if the third consequence is true, then it seems to follow that all knowledge is necessarily of Be-ing (in some way, shape, or form). If this is the case, then, fifthly, Be-ing is, a principle (if not THE principle, cause, ground, or foundation) of all knowledge, and knowing is a way of Be-ing of knowing beings. That is, knowledge is impossible without Being. But, if Be-ing is the principle of knowledge (at least for the human knowing way of Be-ing), then all human knowing finds its foundation in Be-ing, and not the inverse. Be-ing is foundational for know-ing (which is, itself, a way of Be-ing).

Being and Dialogue

Furthermore, knowledge of X depends not only on X Be-ing in some way, but on their Be-ing some X to know. This certainly has important consequences for any theory of language that we may wish to propose, for, as both Plato and Aristotle noted, the way-of-Be-ing of Language depends upon the way-of-Be-ing of a know-ing Be-ing. That is, language only Is, because some X which is capable of language Is. If there was no X that could actualize speech, then there would be no language. If this is the case, then Language depends upon the Be-ing, as Act or Presence, of some X which is capable of Language, and not the inverse. As we saw, it would appear that meaning and significance depend upon Be-ing (meaning is only when in act, and as soon as some X no longer actually means anything to me, the meaning—not the X—ceases to be). As we have already noted, Plato was adamant in noting that all discourse, and philosophy itself, depends upon providing an answer to the question of Being. This conclusion is

confirmed by the above discussion. More could certainly be said about these highly controversial subject, but we must move on, as these discussions lead us to another question.

Being and the Things that Be

Our observations above may have an impact on debates concerning the types of beings that Are. For, if to be present, or to be in Act, is what it means to Be, then the question we want to ask next is, “what is it” that Acts or is Present? That is, to be is to actualize some nature, quality, state of affairs, or event, etc. Indeed, even linguistic “entities” are actualized (made to Be) by rational minds that, themselves, must Act in order to actualize the linguistic entities. Each of these things that Are can Be characterized and classified (a way of actualizing rational beings) based upon their ways of Actualizing themselves or of Be-ing Actualized. If there are certain ways of Be-ing that always tend towards the same way of Be-ing (fixed natures, and, this, independently of their being known by human-beings), are we, then, warranted to classify these ways of Be-ing into categories that may be said to have the same nature (way of Be-ing, and this based upon themselves, and not on our knowledge of them)? That is, perhaps when Aristotle and other philosophers talk about natures (the “that which” is actualizing), what they are talking about is different observable ways of Be-ing sensible, of Be-ing material, of Be-ing thinkable, etc. If so, then our answer to the question of Be-ing affects the Nominalism—Realism debate.

Questions about Human lived-experience and Morality

We noted, above, that Heidegger emphasized what we might call the lived-experience of Human-Be-ings, and how this lived experience could either Be authentically or inauthentically. How, in light of our approach to the question of Be-ing could we interpret Heidegger’s concerns? We propose that what Heidegger was showing was that human-beings actualize their rational

(intellect and will) nature such that they bring certain characters or personalities into Be-ing, and do not bring other characters or personalities into Be-ing. For example, when we say that some person has a happy-go-lucky personality, what are we saying? We are saying that the way in which that person actualizes, on a regular basis, their actions and reactions, is such that they can be described, in general, as Joyful and carefree. That is, they make themselves to Be a human person that is joyful and carefree. Thus, an authentic human Being, for Heidegger, would be that human which is not blindly enslaved to the whims and opinions of the society, or culture, concerning their personality or character. Rather, the authentic human Being discovers “who” they are, from within, and in liberating themselves from, the societal or cultural norms in which they find themselves already.

Does this not create important consequences for Morality? Though we cannot provide definite answers to this question in our conclusion, we might note that it would seem that the actions of rational and emotional Beings affect or modify their “being” (self-identity or personality). It is important, here, to not fall into an unfortunate equivocation. My self-identity, character, or personality, is often described as “my way of Being”. The phrase “my way of Being”, must be taken to mean, in this context, the way that I have actualized, and thus formed, my character, such that I actualize or present certain actions or reactions always (or mostly) whenever certain events or circumstances are actualized. The question we would ask, in moral concerns, is, are there any ways of actualizing my character which are inherently wrong, or wrong based upon the actual circumstances. This, of course, implies an answer to the question of “What” is Be-ing—that is, are there natures? Heidegger would probably say that any action that I actualize which goes against my actual understanding of “who” I Am, is an immoral action. Aristotle and Plato would, presumably, say that any action that I actualize which goes against ‘what’ I am *supposed* to Be (based upon my nature), and how I *should* actualize that nature

within the actual circumstances (in which I find myself—including my society as a larger context, but, also, the immediate context which include my physical shape, the particular elements of the situation, etc.), and, this, whether or not I know my nature or how it should be actualized, is an immoral action.

Other Questions

Our answer will also have an impact on politics (the Being of human societal or communal interactions), psychology (the Being of the intellect or mind, the Being of the Will, the Being of the Emotions, and how these different things are actualized by rational beings), the natural sciences (the study of different types of Real Beings), theology (the study of God, answering the question as to whether Pure Act can be conceived as God, and, if so, what this implies for all other ways of Be-ing, and any related questions), other metaphysical questions (such as the nature of the Good), etc.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

“Il n’est pas seulement inhumain, il est contraire à la philosophie de prétendre déterminer la vérité sans tenir compte des dispositions subjectives de celui qui la cherche. La vérité est le bien de l’intellect, nul ne la trouve qui ne la désire et l’aime ; nul ne la saisit qui ne soit d’abord résolu à l’accueillir [*sic*] parce que, quelle qu’elle soit, c’est elle qu’il aime. Un état de disponibilité intérieure totale, non pas à tout, mais à la vérité seule, est la condition première du succès dans sa recherche. Rien n’est plus rare.”¹⁹⁵⁸ We began our research by noting that we had been influenced, in our previous studies, by the work of Thomas Aquinas and some of the great

¹⁹⁵⁸Gilson, *CPE*, 35-36.

Thomists. We also noted that we were taking precautions to make sure that these previous “philosophical tendencies” did not taint our interpretation and appreciation of the works of Plato, Aristotle, and Martin Heidegger. It is our hope that we have succeeded in, far from imposing our own interpretation on these thinkers, allowing ourselves to be informed, inspired, and instructed by their approaches to the question of Being.

We began our dissertation by noting that progress in metaphysics is, if not entirely impossible, at very best, quite difficult. Rather, metaphysical research is much more like artists comparing their paintings of the same object, than scientific or technological advancement. As such, that part of our dissertation which is, in our own eyes, the most important, is also, most likely, that in which we made the least amount of progress. How do you make a new discovery, when your discovery is that the way to get to your destination has already been travelled, and sufficiently cleared by those who have already attempted the trip?

In light of this somewhat discouraging realization, we might propose that, in this dissertation, we have succeeded in contributing to the perennial journey of metaphysical reflection in the following ways. *First of all*, we have, on a small scale, contributed to the contemporary discussion of the question of Being as found in Plato, Aristotle, and Heidegger. This, we have done by not only providing our own interpretation and defense of their respective philosophical positions, but we have also interacted with (and brought into dialogue with each other) some of their greatest contemporary interpreters. In doing so, we have, or so we think, not only demonstrated that many contemporary interpretations of Aristotle and Plato are severely flawed, and end up misrepresenting their approaches to Being, but, also, we have clarified, and brought to light, the best interpretation of their respective approaches to Being.

We have, *secondly*, brought Aristotle, Plato, and Heidegger into discussion amongst themselves, and provided an entirely new comparison of their different approaches to Being. That

is, we have attempted to display their respective approaches to the question of Being, and their respective answers to the question of Being. Having read and interpreted (for ourself) these three philosophers, we allowed our interpretations of these philosophers to be corrected and modified (where necessary), by the greatest interpreters of these philosophers. We arrived, or so we hope, at accurate and true interpretations of their respective approaches to the question of Being. We discovered, along the way, that Aristotle and Plato approached the question of Being in very much the same way (in their understanding of the question, their starting place, their methods, and their ultimate conclusions), but that Heidegger, aside from superficial similarities in language, was asking a different question, starting from a different point of departure, using different methods, and arrived at different conclusions. We concluded, therefore, that, though Martin Heidegger had made many important and helpful observations, they were almost useless in our approach to the question of Being. Indeed, according to his own approach, we can neither follow him, nor use a similar approach. Just as it is possible to compare, amongst themselves and over-against the object painted, the paintings, of one and the same object, that three different artists paint, so it is possible to compare the approaches to Being of Plato, Aristotle, and Heidegger. Our conclusions have, we think, revealed more distinctly than ever, the major similarities and minor differences between Plato and Aristotle, and the major differences and minor similarities between the Platonic-Aristotelian approach and that of Martin Heidegger.

We have, *finally*, approached the question of Being for ourselves. This itself, a new attempt to answer the question of Being, is a contribution to living and contemporary philosophy. Beginning with what we have learned from Plato, Aristotle, and Heidegger, we used their combined wisdom as the point of departure for a renewed attempt to answer the question of Being. We here discovered, and we think that this discovery is quite significant, that the combined wisdom of these three philosophers, inspite of their many differences, leads us down

that same road that has already been travelled by Aristotle and those philosophers who have truly followed him (many of them thomist in character and approach). We discovered that Heidegger's approach to Being leads from nowhere to nowhere, but, that the rays of a deeper, brighter, and all-compassing, notion of Being can be seen, seeping through the cracks of his carefully built system. This discovery led us to realize that Heidegger had discovered neither the cause, nor the ground of Being, but, rather, that he had so concentrated on one way of Being that he had missed all the other ways. His answer, therefore, to the question of Being, can only be applied to one type of Being. We then asked, what is common to all the ways of Being that manifest themselves to us (including the type of Being that Heidegger considered). This led us to the realization that to Be is to be present or in Act, and, thus, that that philosophy of Being that begins with the act of Being is the most accurate representation. That is, having observed the paintings of Being that are given us by Plato, Aristotle and Heidegger, and having set out on our own quest for Being, we realized that Aristotle's painting is, of the three, the most extensive and precise. We attempted to learn from the observations of these philosophers, and to use them in our trek to the top of the Mountain of Being. Here we found Aristotle and Plato, along with Aquinas and his followers, gazing upon the almost indescribable light of Pure Being—Act or Presence. In our quest for Being we found that the road that we were travelling had already been travelled, and that trail markers had been left for us, by Thomas Aquinas and those who followed him. Having followed these three paths, it is now our humble conclusion that the proper approach to the question of Being is that of Aristotle, which he learned from Socrates and Plato, and which he passed on to Thomas Aquinas. This, we think, requires us to say that the future of the question of Being lies in a renewed look at the thomistic interpretation of Aristotle's approach to Being.

APPENDIX 1

HEIDEGGER'S KNOWLEDGE OF AQUINAS

It is a matter of some debate as to whether or not Heidegger actually possessed a working knowledge of the philosophical thought of Thomas Aquinas. This is not a philosophical question, but a historical question. As such, it is best to advance with a sufficient amount of caution. Certitude is difficult to come by in historical explorations, though we can probably arrive at some fairly certain conclusions. I remember writing a text for a graduate course in which I suggested that Heidegger did not really understand Thomas Aquinas, only to be told, in a note from the professor, that, without any doubt, Heidegger both understood Aquinas better than I, and Heidegger knew Thomas Aquinas by heart. Now I do not doubt the sincere adoration of this professor for the greatness of Heidegger (nor would I deny that Heidegger was a great philosopher), but I must admit that I am entirely unsure as to what this professor could possibly have meant by such a statement (It is relatively impossible for any person to know, by heart, all of Thomas Aquinas, and this impossibility is due not to the capacity of any one person to memorize, but to the amount of information that one would have to memorize in order to “know Aquinas by heart”). Needless to say, these comments served as a sort of proximate cause propelling me to look into Heidegger's knowledge of, and interaction with, Aquinas.

There is an interesting ambiguity in accounts of Heidegger's knowledge of Aquinas. Before noting that ambiguity, it might help to point out some biographical elements. Born into a devout Catholic family in 1889, Heidegger received his high school education, from 1903-1909, in what had been a Jesuit secondary school, but which, by the time Heidegger attended was in

high school, had become a secular state school.¹⁹⁵⁹ It was during his high school years that he was introduced to Franz Brentano's work *On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle*,¹⁹⁶⁰ which was so formative for Heidegger's later work in philosophy.¹⁹⁶¹ Sheehan notes that Heidegger eventually studied Aristotle himself, after having read through Brentano's work a number of times.¹⁹⁶² Heidegger was, during his last year in high school, introduced to Braig's *On Being: An Outline of Ontology* "which contained excerpts from Aristotle and from medieval philosophers such as Aquinas."¹⁹⁶³ Heidegger states, in his own autobiographical essay, that "In the last year of my stay at the *Gymnasium*, I stumbled upon the book of Carl Braig, then professor for dogmatics at Freiburg University: 'On Being. Outline of Ontology.' It had been published in 1896 at the time he was an associate professor at Freiburg's theological faculty. The larger sections of the work give extensive text passages from Aristotle, Thomas of Aquinas and Suarez, always at the end, and in addition the etymology for fundamental ontological concepts."¹⁹⁶⁴ In 1909, as a 20-year-old, he entered the university of Freiburg to study theology, where he also appears to have taught a number of courses.¹⁹⁶⁵ He started this program of theological studies after having been forced to leave his training to become a Jesuit priest (due to health problems), which he had

¹⁹⁵⁹Cf. Thomas F. O'Meara, "Heidegger and his Origins: Theological Perspectives," *Theological Studies*, 47 (1986), 207. Thomas Sheehan, "Heidegger's Early Years: Fragments for a Philosophical Biography," in *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*, ed. Thomas Sheehan (Chicago: Precedent Publishing, 2011), 4. Michael Inwood, *Heidegger: A very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1. Thomas Sheehan, "Heidegger's Lehrjahre," in *The Collegium Phaenomenologicum*, eds. J. C. Sallis, G. Moneta, et J. Taminiaux (Berlin, Germany: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), 84.

¹⁹⁶⁰Sheehan, *Heidegger's Lehrjahre*, 86. cf. Sheehan, "Heidegger's Early Years", 4.

¹⁹⁶¹We might propose that, though Heidegger was already, in his first year of university, devoting an enormous amount of time to the study of Husserl's work, Brentano remained the primary influence in Heidegger's understanding of Aristotle. Cf. Sheehan, *Heidegger's Lehrjahre*, 91.

¹⁹⁶²*Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁹⁶³Inwood, *HSI*, 1-2.

¹⁹⁶⁴Martin Heidegger, "My Way to Phenomenology," in *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 74-75. Cf. Sheehan, *Heidegger's Lehrjahre*, 90.

¹⁹⁶⁵Cf. John Van Buren, "The Earliest Heidegger: A New Field of Research," in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 20-21. Martin Heidegger, "Lebenslauf 1915," trans. Thomas Sheehan, in Thomas Sheehan, "Heidegger's Lehrjahre," in *The Collegium Phaenomenologicum*, eds. J. C. Sallis, G. Moneta, et J. Taminiaux (Berlin, Germany: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), 79.

started only 13 days earlier.¹⁹⁶⁶ Heidegger notes, in his 1915 *Curriculum Vitae*, that during this time he studied among other works “the *Small Summa* [the *Compendium Theologiae*] of Thomas Aquinas”, which was “decisive for the process of my scientific development.”¹⁹⁶⁷ He left these studies in theology, once again for health problems, in 1911 (after only 2 years of training), and turned, in 1911-1912, towards the study of mathematics.¹⁹⁶⁸ This did not stop him, however, from attending a multitude of lectures on philosophy.¹⁹⁶⁹ I would like to point out, at this point, that 2 years of theological training, in any university, is not nearly enough to allow us to say that he had an in-depth knowledge of the thought of any theologian, let alone the thought of Thomas Aquinas. This observation is even more pertinent when we consider that there was a disturbing lack of “scholastic” teaching in the theological training of Martin Heidegger, “His course of study, however, was for that time surprising: courses on the OT and NT and on church history complement courses on ‘theory of religion’ and ‘hermeneutics’; there are few lectures on scholastic theology, although the basic courses in theology of God and moral theology presented neo-scholastic material. This weak scholastic orientation in Heidegger's theology courses mirrors the lack of scholasticism at Freiburg. Welte has documented how little the scholastic monopoly penetrated into this university.”¹⁹⁷⁰ Thomas Sheehan provides us with the complete list of Heidegger’s coursework for Heidegger’s entire university work, including his studies from 1909-1911,¹⁹⁷¹ as well as Heidegger’s coursework for the years 1911-1913.¹⁹⁷² As Sheehan notes, from 1909-1911 Heidegger only took two philosophy courses (Logic and Metaphysics), the balance of

¹⁹⁶⁶Cf. Françoise Dastur, “Heidegger et la Théologie,” *Revue Philosophique du Louvain*, 4e série, t. 92, no. 2-3 (1994), 228. O’Meara, “Heidegger and his Origins,” 208. John MacQuarrie, *Martin Heidegger* (1968; repr., Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1969), 1. Sheehan, *Heidegger’s Lehrjahre*, 83, 88-89.

¹⁹⁶⁷Heidegger, “Lebenslauf 1915”, 79. Cf. Sheehan, *Heidegger’s Lehrjahre*, 90.

¹⁹⁶⁸Cf. Heidegger, “Lebenslauf 1915”, 79.

¹⁹⁶⁹Ibid., 79-80.

¹⁹⁷⁰O’Meara, “Heidegger and his Origins”, 208.

¹⁹⁷¹Sheehan, *Heidegger’s Lehrjahre*, 90-96.

¹⁹⁷²Ibid., 98-103.

his course work being in Biblical Exegesis, Catholic Dogmatics and Church History.¹⁹⁷³ So, despite the fact that Thomism was, during these years, experiencing a form of revival (O'Meara notes that this thomistic revival began in Italy, and spread to the German universities in Mainz and Munster, but, for some reason, was strangely absent from the universities at Tübingen and Freiburg.¹⁹⁷⁴). Sheehan also notes that in the early 1900s, the very time when Heidegger was studying at Freiburg, "there was a shortage of good lay Catholic philosophers in Germany with strong foundations in Scholasticism."¹⁹⁷⁵ Heidegger, indeed, does not appear to have been immersed in the works that were produced by this revival. O'Meara notes that it would have been only in his third semester in theological studies at Freiburg that Heidegger would have been introduced, through a course with Carl Braig, to Aquinas.¹⁹⁷⁶ Heidegger notes, in the autobiographical article mentioned earlier, his growing interest in the speculative dogmatic theology of the scholastics, as it was taught by Braig in his courses on dogmatic theology.¹⁹⁷⁷ This coincides perfectly with Heidegger's comment, in his 2015 *Curriculum Vitae*, to the effect that his "basic convictions remained those of Aristotelian-Scholastic philosophy."¹⁹⁷⁸ It is important to note, however, that Braig, in spite of Kisiel's description of him as a "Thomistic philosopher",¹⁹⁷⁹ was anything but a thomist; rather, to borrow McGrath's description, Braig was "in some respects an anti-Thomistic neo-scholastic",¹⁹⁸⁰ who "belonged to the Tübingen school of speculative theology, which integrated the insights of German Idealism with

¹⁹⁷³Ibid., 90-96.

¹⁹⁷⁴O'Meara, "Heidegger and his Origins", 208.

¹⁹⁷⁵Sheehan, *Heidegger's Lehrjahre*, 108.

¹⁹⁷⁶O'Meara, "Heidegger and his Origins," 208. Cf. Sheehan, *Heidegger's Lehrjahre*, 87, 94. It should be noted that O'Meara's claim is difficult to understand in light of Heidegger's 2015 *Curriculum Vitae* translated by Sheehan. O'Meara's and Heidegger's claims could perhaps be reconciled if we are to understand O'Meara as referring to formal training, and not extra-curricular reading.

¹⁹⁷⁷Heidegger, *My Way to Phenomenology*, 75. Cf. Sheehan, *Heidegger's Lehrjahre*, 98.

¹⁹⁷⁸Heidegger, "Lebenslauf 1915", 80.

¹⁹⁷⁹Kisiel, *GGBT*, 6.

¹⁹⁸⁰McGrath, "Heidegger's Approach to Aquinas", 266.

scholasticism”,¹⁹⁸¹ and, being primarily influenced by Scotus,¹⁹⁸² criticized Aquinas’s *analogia entis*.¹⁹⁸³ It is in this way that Heidegger was introduced to the importance of Hegel and Schelling for theology.¹⁹⁸⁴ It should also be noted that Heidegger’s attitude towards Catholic theology, and Thomism, was also heavily influenced by his reading of Herman Schell, an Catholic theologian who shunned the thomistic revival.¹⁹⁸⁵ Looking to the courses that he took from 1911-1913, after his change of concentration (from theology to mathematics and natural science), we note that the bulk of Heidegger’s coursework was in mathematics and the natural sciences. It should, however be noted that he also took a large number of courses in philosophy (steeped in Kantian and Husserlian undercurrents): two courses in the winter session of 1911-12 on Logic and Epistemology, and Spinoza’s Ethics;¹⁹⁸⁶ an introductory course to Epistemology and Metaphysics, and a Seminar in Epistemology, in the summer session of 1912;¹⁹⁸⁷ the winter session of 1912-1913 included a course on the history of philosophy and another course on Epistemology. It is during these later years that Heidegger came under the influence of Geheimrat Rickert.¹⁹⁸⁸ Let it be noted that there is not one course that is dedicated to the thought (philosophical or theological) of Thomas Aquinas, and that the majority of his professors who would have mentioned the work of Aquinas (perhaps all of them), though experts in “scholastic and medieval thought”, were primarily anti-thomist, and heavily influenced by the thought of Emmanuel Kant. Those professors who taught biblical exegesis in Heidegger’s theological studies were, according to Sheehan, conservative Catholic exegetes.¹⁹⁸⁹ Concluding this short

¹⁹⁸¹Ibid., 267-268.

¹⁹⁸²Ibid., 268.

¹⁹⁸³Ibid.

¹⁹⁸⁴Ibid. cf. Sheehan, “Heidegger’s Early Years”, 6. Sheehan, *Heidegger’s Lehrjahre*, 129n74.

¹⁹⁸⁵Sheehan, *Heidegger’s Lehrjahre*, 93.

¹⁹⁸⁶Ibid., 99.

¹⁹⁸⁷Ibid.

¹⁹⁸⁸Cf. Ibid., 99-100.

¹⁹⁸⁹Ibid., 128n59, 128n60.

biographical sketch, it is to be noted that his doctoral thesis was entitled *The Theory of Judgment in Psychologism*, and his 1915 habilitation was entitled *Duns Scotus's Theory of Categories and Meaning*.¹⁹⁹⁰ According to Husserl, Heidegger's work on Duns Scotus was only a beginner's work.¹⁹⁹¹ Sheehan notes that when Arthur Schneider retired, thus leaving the chair of Christian philosophy vacant, "From mid-1913 through early 1917 Heidegger was intensely involved in an unsuccessful attempt to succeed Schneider in the chair, and he actively promoted himself around Freiburg as a Christian philosopher in the tradition of Thomas Aquinas."¹⁹⁹²

Consider, now, the ambiguities surrounding Heidegger's knowledge of Aquinas. Some, implying that Heidegger had a very deep understanding of Aquinas, point to the fact that Heidegger was born Catholic, was educated as a Catholic,¹⁹⁹³ and remained a Catholic until 1919, when he was 30 years old.¹⁹⁹⁴ The idea that is being presented here, is that Heidegger was immersed in Thomism from his youth. Pierre Aubenque, for example, talks about the thomistic and suarezian atmosphere in which Heidegger was immersed during his youth, "L'atmosphère thomiste et suarézienne qui baignait, si elle n'inspirait plus toujours, les premières fréquentations philosophiques de Heidegger jusqu'à ses études de théologie à Fribourg en 1909-1911."¹⁹⁹⁵ We might also add, to strengthen this argument, Heidegger's own words, noted above, to the effect that his reading of Thomas Aquinas *Short Summa* was influential in his intellectual development. Would not these 30 years immersed in Catholic theology, and his own reading of Aquinas, have

¹⁹⁹⁰Cf. Inwood, *HSI*, 2. Sheehan, *Heidegger's Lehrjahre*, 77.

¹⁹⁹¹Cf. Sheehan, "Heidegger's Early Years", 8.

¹⁹⁹²Sheehan, *Heidegger's Lehrjahr*, 108.

¹⁹⁹³Though Sheehan does not provide this as evidence that Heidegger had a proper understanding of Aquinas, he does mention Heidegger's training in Catholic apologetics, doctrines and church history (Sheehan, *Heidegger's Lehrjahre*, 86.), which some could take as proof that Heidegger had a proper understanding of Aquinas.

¹⁹⁹⁴Cf. Arrien, "Penser sans Dieu, vivre avec Dieu", 68. Ryan Coyne notes that this "deconversion" from Catholicism took place between 1915 and 1921 in his review of a book by S. J. McGrath (Ryan Coyne, "Review of S. J. McGrath's *The Early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy: Phenomenology for the Godforsaken*," *Journal of Religion*, vol. 89, no. 1 (Jan., 2009), 116.

¹⁹⁹⁵Pierre Aubenque, "Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)," *Les études Philosophiques*, no. 3, *Philosophie Allemande* (Juil.-Sept., 1976), 262.

been sufficient for us to say that Heidegger had a more than adequate understanding of Aquinas's thought, such that Aquinas would have agree with Heidegger's portrayal of Aquinas's thought? Aubenque's claim is seen, in light of our biographical observations, to be so imprecise as to be false. The atmosphere at Freiburg was anything but thomistic. On the contrary, as we have seen, there was a strange absence of any profound thomistic influence in Heidegger's education. It seems that Heidegger's main knowledge of Aquinas comes from his interaction with Braig's work in dogmatic theology, Braig's book on Ontology, and his own extra-curricular reading of Aquinas (read through spectacles provided for him by Duns Scotus, Suarez, Kant, Husserl, and Braig.¹⁹⁹⁶). Yet, it seems that even Braig had not properly understood Aquinas's philosophy of Being and doctrine of God,¹⁹⁹⁷ interpreting Aquinas through Scotus. Though it is not impossible, it does seem odd, however, to claim that Heidegger has properly understood Aquinas when those who influenced his understanding of Aquinas had not, themselves, understood Aquinas (and were often in stark disagreement with Aquinas). One might say that Heidegger's reading of Aquinas was tainted, from the very beginning, by false assumptions. Indeed, states McGrath, noting that Heidegger's reading of Aquinas was inspired by Scotus, Luther, Dilthey, and Braig, "Each of these voices contributed to a prejudice in Heidegger, which made it difficult, if not impossible, for him to read Aquinas sympathetically."¹⁹⁹⁸ Furthermore, reading selections from Thomas Aquinas that have been compiled by a theologian who is known as an anti-thomist, does not seem

¹⁹⁹⁶Indeed, Kisiel notes that "This theme of scholastic logic and ontology is to be examined by the means of modern philosophy and its logic. For the young Heidegger, this means the focus provided by the confluence of neo-Kantianism and phenomenology in Lask's application of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* to the 'logic of Philosophy.'" (Kisiel, *GHB*, 26.)" Kisiel notes, earlier, that Heidegger's approach to the analogy of Being was from Scotus (Ibid., 20.)

¹⁹⁹⁷Cf. John F. X. Knasas, "A Heideggerian Critique of Aquinas and a Gilsonian Reply," *The Thomist*, 58, 3 (1994), 132.

¹⁹⁹⁸McGrath, "Heidegger's Approach to Aquinas", 266. Cf. Ibid., 279-280.

to warrant the claim that Heidegger had indeed understood, in any meaningful sense of the term, the thought of Thomas Aquinas.

Another element of ambiguity can be seen in the way that many point to the young Heidegger's so-called "scholastic" training as proof that Heidegger understood, quite well, the thought of Thomas Aquinas.¹⁹⁹⁹ Such a "historical" link is like throwing sand in the eyes of one's opponent, it is a red herring, and this for two reasons. First of all, equating scholasticism with Thomism is an unfortunate ambiguity,²⁰⁰⁰ which can be found anytime a scholar uses the general claim that Heidegger's training was in *scholastic* theology as proof that Heidegger received a *thomistic* training, or that he understood Aquinas's approach to either theology or philosophy because of his scholastic training. It is certainly true that Aquinas was a scholastic, but, it is also true that many philosophers who disagreed fundamentally with Aquinas (or who had either misunderstood or distorted Aquinas) were also scholastics (such as Duns Scotus, Occam, Suarez, etc.). To say that Heidegger was well-trained in scholastic philosophy (indeed, immersed in it) cannot be used to imply that he had any knowledge of Thomas Aquinas. It is entirely possible for someone to have studied "scholastic philosophy" all one's life, without ever gaining a proper understanding of the philosophical thought of Thomas Aquinas. At least one philosopher has noted that it is not possible to talk, meaningfully, about "scholastic philosophy" (for example, by equating all of scholastic metaphysics with that of Suarez), but, rather, that it is more precise to talk about scholastic "philosophies".²⁰⁰¹ Secondly, as noted above, there was a strange absence, at the university of Freiburg, of true scholastic theology, so it is an overstatement to say that

¹⁹⁹⁹Cf. Sean J. McGrath, *The Early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy: Phenomenology for the Godforsaken* (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 2006). Inwood, *HSI*, 2. Van Buren, "The Earliest Heidegger", 20. McGrath, "Heidegger's Approach to Aquinas", 267.

²⁰⁰⁰Coyne notes this ambiguity in McGrath's work (Coyne, *Review*, 117.).

²⁰⁰¹Cf. John Doyle, "Heidegger and Scholastic Metaphysics," *The Modern Schoolman*, vol. 49, 3 (Mar., 1972).

Heidegger was trained in scholastic theology. It seems that, at best, Heidegger's knowledge of scholastic theology was primarily of the works of the Mystics (such as Meister Eckhart), and of the later Aristotelian philosophers such as Duns Scotus, but that he was severely lacking in any in-depth training in the works of Thomas Aquinas. Fernand Van Steenberghen seems to agree with this point as he claims that Heidegger is most certainly not, due to his education and training, a thomistic thinker.²⁰⁰²

This is, in fact, the same conclusion that many well-trained thomists have arrived at when they consider what Heidegger has to say about Aquinas's philosophy and theology. W. Norris Clarke, for example, notes that though many of the metaphysical systems that have been proposed throughout the history of philosophy do, indeed, fall prey to Heidegger's complaints concerning the forgetfulness of Being, "One of the few exceptions is the 'existential metaphysics' of St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), which Heidegger never came to know in any depth."²⁰⁰³ Knasas notes that Heidegger is blissfully unaware of important elements (one might say the key elements) of Aquinas's approach to Being.²⁰⁰⁴ Thomas Joseph White, who interacts extensively with Heidegger's attacks (notably Heidegger's Onto-ontological difference) on what is commonly called Natural Theology (demonstrating conclusively that Heidegger's arguments do not hold against Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, when properly understood), notes that Heidegger's broad claim that all of Metaphysics falls prey to the onto-ontological difference (and can be described as ontotheology) is misguided. White notes, "Heidegger claimed that his criticisms were pertinent for thinkers from Aristotle to Hegel. A number of influential contemporary medieval scholars argue, meanwhile, that historically many of the attributes of

²⁰⁰²Van Steenberghen, *Ontologie*, 30.

²⁰⁰³Clarke, *TOMCTM*, 9.

²⁰⁰⁴*Op. cit.*

such thinking began to develop implicitly only with Scotus's rearticulation of Avicennian metaphysics."²⁰⁰⁵ Is it not at least a little bit suspicious that the very metaphysical approach that Heidegger claims to see throughout the history of metaphysics only began with Scotus—the only Scholastic philosopher that Heidegger could claim to have extensive knowledge of? White goes on to quote noted French medievalists Alain de Libera and Olivier Boulnois (as well as Jean-Luc Marion and Jean Francois Courtine) to the effect that Heidegger's characterisation of Metaphysics is only applicable to Scotism,²⁰⁰⁶ and that Aristotle and Aquinas are both left untouched by Heidegger's arguments.²⁰⁰⁷ Note, also, the comment made by Joseph Gerard Trabbic in his doctoral dissertation, "Heidegger's reliability as a guide to Aquinas's thought is highly questionable and we can legitimately wonder how far, if at all, Heidegger's critique of ontotheology applies to Aquinas."²⁰⁰⁸ Perhaps I may be allowed one last citation in which a noted thomist scholar begins by noting Heidegger's relative ignorance of Aquinas's approach to Being, and then goes on to show, by a very interesting comparison of the thought of Aquinas and Heidegger, not only that Heidegger did not understand Aquinas, but, also, that (a) where Aquinas and Heidegger agree, Aquinas simply said it better, and (b) where they disagree, Heidegger is simply wrong. He states, at the beginning, "There are those who would claim, however, that the question of being was not only posed by Aquinas centuries earlier, but brought to light in a way which, unknown to Heidegger, responds to his call for a mode of thinking which goes beyond that-which-is to an original thinking of what it means to be."²⁰⁰⁹

²⁰⁰⁵White, *WFM*, 25fn51.

²⁰⁰⁶Ibid.

²⁰⁰⁷Ibid.

²⁰⁰⁸Joseph Gerard Trabbic, *Aquinas, God, and Ontotheology*, dissertation (New York: Fordam University, 2008), 45.

²⁰⁰⁹Fran O'Rourke, "The Gift of Being: Heidegger and Aquinas," in *At the Heart of the Real*, ed. Fran O'Rourke (Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 1992), 310.

One possible reaction to this might be that Heidegger must have known Aquinas very well, for he quotes him incessantly, from numerous primary sources, and taught a number of courses (the majority of the courses mentioned below, with the exception of one or two, were taught at least once prior to the publishing of *Being and Time*) in which he specifically interacts with Aquinas, such as: an as of yet unpublished seminar for advanced students called *The High Scholastics and Aristotle (Die Hochscholastik und Aristoteles)*, in which Heidegger apparently examined Aquinas's *De Ente et Essentia* and Cajetan's *On the Analogy of Names*,²⁰¹⁰ another as of yet unpublished seminar called *Practicum on the Ontology of the Middle Ages (Ubungen zur Ontologie des Mittelalters)* in which he apparently examined Aquinas's *De Ente et Essentia* and *Summa Contre Gentils*,²⁰¹¹ a course called *History of Philosophy from Thomas Aquinas to Kant*.²⁰¹² (This work is, as of yet, not translated into other languages.); *Introduction to Phenomenological Research*, where he interacts primarily with a couple articles from Aquinas's *De Veritate*,²⁰¹³ *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, where he discusses a short section from Aquinas's *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*,²⁰¹⁴ *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, where he interacts with relevant sections from *De Veritate*, the *Summa Theologiae*, and *De Potentia*,²⁰¹⁵ *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, where he interacts with Aquinas's essence/existence distinction as found in the *De Veritate*, the *Summa Theologiae* and in sections of Aquinas's *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*,²⁰¹⁶ and as interpreted by

²⁰¹⁰Kisiel, *GGBT*, 464, 472.

²⁰¹¹Ibid.

²⁰¹²Martin Heidegger, *Geschichte der Philosophie von Thomas von Aquinas bis Kant*, ed. Helmuth Wetter (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2006).

²⁰¹³Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Phenomenological Research*, trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

²⁰¹⁴Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 46-51.

²⁰¹⁵Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 30-43-48, 80-81.

²⁰¹⁶Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (1982; repr., Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 83-93.

Suarez, and, more importantly, Aegidius Romanus and Joannes Capreolus.²⁰¹⁷ He also mentions the *De Ente et Essentia*,²⁰¹⁸ but does not seem to interact with it. Heidegger interacts with Aquinas in many other works and lectures. Interestingly enough, Van Buren notes that Heidegger also gave lectures, in 1915-1916, on “The Basic Outlines of Ancient and Scholastic Philosophy”, but, that we do not have, unfortunately, either Heidegger’s notes, or students notes from the lectures.²⁰¹⁹ It would be interesting to see what he had to say at such an early stage in his training. Most of Heidegger’s interaction, however, with Thomas Aquinas, turns around Aquinas’s definition of truth (as found in *De Veritate* and the *Summa Theologiae*) and the essence/existence distinction, and is read through the interpretative lenses of the neo-scholastics interpretations (such as Braig’s) of the later scholastics interpretations (such as Scotus’s) of Aquinas. Much has already been written about Heidegger’s interpretations of Aquinas, and the image that is given is of a philosopher who (1) only studied those parts of Aquinas which were immediately useful for his research, (2) interpreted Aquinas through the lenses of other interpreters, and (3) read into Aquinas what he wanted to get out of Aquinas. Indeed, states Sean McGrath, “Although a large literature on Heidegger and Aquinas exists, Heidegger has comparatively little to say about Aquinas or Thomism. His principle medieval sources are Augustine, Scotus, Eckhart, and Luther, all of whom stand in tension with, if not opposition to Aquinas on many points.”²⁰²⁰ One might say that Heidegger did not read Aquinas in order to understand Aquinas, but as an opponent wishing to refute him. He was, indeed, hostile to any attempts to draw connections between his

²⁰¹⁷Ibid., 103.

²⁰¹⁸Ibid., 83.

²⁰¹⁹Van Buren, “The Earliest Heidegger”, 20.

²⁰²⁰McGrath, “Heidegger’s Approach to Aquinas”, 264.

thought on Being and Aquinas's *esse*, "Heidegger...dismissed these works, rejecting any attempt to build a bridge between Aquinas and his philosophy as a theologization of ontology."²⁰²¹

A counter-response to this might claim that this is all the futile lamentations of a medievalist who wishes either to preserve his precious religion, or to preserve his favourite philosopher, from the "far-reaching" critiques of Martin Heidegger. That may be true, however, when those who are experts in the various ancient and medieval philosophers, who are all gathered under Heidegger's sweeping statements about the forgetfulness of Being and Ontotheology, unanimously complain that Heidegger has entirely misread and misunderstood Aristotle, Plato, Augustine,²⁰²² Thomas Aquinas,²⁰²³ etc., one begins to wonder if it is not true that Heidegger is indeed mistaken, and that those who defend Heidegger's broad strokes are guilty of a form of hero-worship which has blinded them to Heidegger's all too frequent mistranslations and misinterpretations of the philosophers he critiques. Sean McGrath, in an unpublished article that is available online, states as much when he notes that "It is a lamentable situation that Heidegger's critique of Scholastic ontology is now better known in continental circles than Scholastic ontology itself."²⁰²⁴ It is, indeed, lamentable, that those who shout the loudest (and it, indeed, has become more of a shouting match than actual philosophical discourse) about the merits of Heidegger's critiques of Ancient and Medieval metaphysics, are those who, often enough, know the least about the very metaphysical systems that Heidegger is critiquing. They know Heidegger's critiques of these systems, but seem unaware that Heidegger is guilty of the straw man fallacy. Mario Enrique Sacchi, in his insightful and provocative analysis of the

²⁰²¹Ibid., 265.

²⁰²²See McGrath's article mentioned below.

²⁰²³John Cronin, for example, claims that Heidegger has read Aquinas through Suarez, and other interpretations that Aquinas would never have accepted: John Cronin, *Heidegger: Interpreter of Medieval Thought*, doctoral dissertation (Louvain, Belgium: Université Catholique de Louvain, 2009).

²⁰²⁴Sean J. McGrath, "The Young Heidegger's Problematic Reading of Augustine's Ontological Restlessness," www.jcrt.org/archives/04.1/mcgrath.shtml (accessed 2015-11-24).

philosophy of Martin Heidegger, notes the unwavering (almost cultish) dedication of those who adhere to Heidegger's views "But why has authority been given to Heideggerian thought to arbitrate the dispute about the philosophical competence of metaphysics, particularly the efficacy of this science to deal with Sein itself? Some think that there is only one answer to such a question: other than being the last word in this subject, Heidegger's thought on the science of being in common and also about Sein is taken to be an unimpeachable authority. Why? The reason this *potestas supremas* is based on three unfounded assumptions: First, that Heidegger described comprehensively and accurately the history of Western metaphysics' errors; second, that his criticism of this radically flawed metaphysics is overwhelming and irrefutable; third, that Heidegger organized a thought on Sein that not only surmounts the failure imputed to first philosophy, but also substitutes for metaphysics the only kind of thought about Sein sufficiently able to make known what Sein itself is...It is a servile acquiescence to the critique of metaphysics contained in Heideggerian thought about Sein which is unsupported by any examination of the proper nature of the science of being as such and merely stipulates the truth of what Heidegger said about the history and epistemic organization of first philosophy."²⁰²⁵

In light of what we have seen, here, it seems evident, first of all, that we cannot say that Heidegger did not know something of Aquinas, or that he was unaware of Aquinas's writings on subjects related to issues that Heidegger was dealing with. What should, however, be overwhelmingly evident is that, secondly, whatever Heidegger had learned of Aquinas, his understanding of what he had learned was so tainted by the assumptions that he brought to his reading of Aquinas that he was entirely unaware that he was deforming Aquinas as he was interpreting him. We must conclude, then, that if we wish to say that Heidegger had received a

²⁰²⁵Mario Enrique Sacchi, *The Apocalypse of Being: The Esoteric Gnosis of Martin Heidegger*, trans. Gabriel Xavier Martinez (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), 30-31.

scholastic training, then we must qualify this statement by noting that he did not receive a thomistic training, in any meaningful sense of the term. As Heidegger himself has noted, using a philosophers' terms, divorced from that philosophers' philosophical system, will inevitably lead one into philosophical nonsense,²⁰²⁶ and, yet, this is exactly what Heidegger did with what he actually knew of Aquinas. Thus, did he know something of Aquinas? Yes. But, did he understand, and grasp, the actual meaning behind the words he was quoting? Was he able to articulate Aquinas philosophical and theological thought on Being such that Aquinas would have agreed with the outcome? It would seem not. It seems, then, that we are warranted in concluding that Heidegger's relative knowledge of Aquinas's approach to Being was, at best superficial, and at worst, erroneous.

²⁰²⁶Cf. Blattner, *HBTRG*, 119-121.

APPENDIX 2

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS IN HEIDEGGER

World is that 'wherein' Dasein discovers itself as appropriating the projection of one of Dasein's possible ways of Being.

Understanding is the projection of potentialities-of-Being

Interpretation the appropriation of a potentiality-of-Being grounded in understanding

Articulating is the seeing something *as* something

Assertion is the communicative pointing at or exhibiting something such that it is seen as something within an interpretation.

Signification is what has been seen as something from that which can be seen as something, or, as he says elsewhere, the assigning of an entity to a relational totality, wherein Dasein already is projected, and which discloses Dasein's world. *Signification*, then, is the seeing of something as something from within an assigned understanding, which is the world of Dasein.

Meaning is the appropriation of a projection of a possible way of Being, of Dasein, towards an entity present-at-hand, in which that entity is discovered *as* something, by Dasein, and this discovering occurs within the preconceived, pre-possessed, and pre-seen 'where-in' (world) of relations that Dasein finds itself in.

What it means to say that beings have meaning: "If we say that entities 'have meaning', this signifies that they have become accessible *in their Being*; and this Being, as projected upon its 'upon-which', is what 'really' 'as meaning' first of all. Entities 'have' meaning only because, as Being which has been disclosed beforehand, they become intelligible in the projection of that Being...The primary projection of the understanding of Being 'gives' the meaning. The question about the meaning of the Being of an entity takes as its theme the 'upon-which' of that understanding of Being which underlies all *Being* of entities."²⁰²⁷

Discourse is the Articulation of Intelligibility (the type of Being that Dasein gives to beings: present-at-hand, ready-to-hand, Being-in-the-world, etc.): so, the seeing of some being *as* present-to-hand, or ready-to-hand, etc.

²⁰²⁷Heidegger, *BT*, 371-372 [324-325].

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