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Heidegger on 'Possibility'

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Martin Heidegger's project in *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*, 1927¹) involves a critique of a form of 'actualism' in philosophy together with the promotion of a certain idea of possibility. This first emerges in the remarks in §7 of the text concerning the idea of phenomenology as a school or method in 20th-century philosophy: the "essential character" of phenomenology, Heidegger writes, "does not consist in its actuality as a philosophical 'movement'. Higher than actuality stands *possibility* (Möglichkeit)" [SZ 38]. Heidegger thus seems to advance the doubtless difficult thought that the possibility of something, here the phenomenological school, is more proper to what or how it is than its actuality. The thought is advanced more deliberately later in the text: "possibility", Heidegger writes in §31, "is the most primordial and the ultimate (*ursprünglichste und letzte*) positive ontological determination" [SZ 143] of being – of, first of all, the being (the *Dasein*, in Heidegger's German) that each one of us is. Far, then, from having merely a methodological significance within a reflection on the idea of phenomenology, a notion of possibility as somehow constitutive of the essence of being is, for Heidegger, the base and the summit, the alpha and omega of ontology. Possibility, on this account, is not distinct from being, and it does not constitute a realm of *possibilia* that is not quite, not yet or not fully in being; it rather belongs to the essence of being itself, and it can do so because being, for Heidegger, is not to be equated with traditional ideas of 'actuality'. Whatever else the text of 1927 has to say about the meaning of being – with its most fundamental task consisting of showing how time is the "horizon of any understanding of being whatsoever" [SZ 1] –, at the very heart of *Sein und Zeit* stands a reflection on *Sein und Möglichkeit*, on being and possibility.

¹ I refer to the fifteenth edition of *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1984) in square brackets in the body of the text as SZ. Both published English translations of the text contain the pagination of the German edition as marginalia, and thus I do not refer to them. I am indebted to Matt Barnard and Joseph Carter for responses to drafts of this essay.

In the lecture course of the winter semester 1925-26, *Logic: The Question Concerning Truth*, Heidegger had signalled the importance of an idea of possibility for his philosophical project. He suggests that his task consists in clarifying the nature of possibility as such:

[t]he concept of possibility is quite obscure [*ganz ungeklärt*] in scientific philosophy hitherto; and the extent to which it is clarified is normally limited to possibility in the sense of modality, of modality which is seen in the context of statements and their possible certainty. In this way, the idea of possibility is bound up with actuality and necessity as determinations of being, and indeed of the being of nature in the widest sense. The meaning of possibility and the type of structures of possibility belonging to *Dasein* as such have remained wholly concealed from us up to the present day.²

These remarks contain two important clues for understanding Heidegger's thinking in the 1920s and its relation to traditional doctrines of modality. First, possibility will not be determined according to what can be said and conceived, and this indicates that Heidegger's problematic transcends the question of whether conceivability is merely a guide to rather than a test for possibility, and also any *de re/de dictu* distinction in modal statements.³ If one can justifiably claim that there are "in Western thought, three broad conceptions of possibility",⁴ Heidegger is concerned neither with a critical theory of modality in a Kantian sense, nor with a doctrine of *possibilia* as distinct from the actual world, but rather with – though he aims to radicalise it – possibility in an Aristotelian sense of potentiality as an ontological determination of real things that is the condition of, and contrasts with, their actuality. Second, Heidegger's radicalisation of possibility in this sense will not focus on the things that we are not – 'nature in the widest sense' – but rather on the being that we are. It is by focusing on human being that Heidegger aims to grasp a sense of possibility as constitutive of the very essence of being, and thus to rethink the very idea of possibility.

This emphasis on an idea of possibility does not end with the *Daseinsanalytik* of *Being and Time* and Heidegger's project of 'fundamental ontology' in the 1920s. It is equally essential to his later work. According to *Contributions to Philosophy*, a text written between 1936 and 1938 that is often held to constitute Heidegger's second major work, it is precisely by means of a notion of possibility that 'another beginning' (*ein anderer Anfang*) in philosophy can be instituted: "the

² Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe vol. 21: Logik: Die Frage nach der Wahrheit*, ed. W. Biemel (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1995), p.228; *Logic: The Question of Truth*, trans. T. Sheehan (Bloomington: Indiana, 2010), p.191. After having initially provided a full bibliographical reference to a volume of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*, and to its English translation, I refer to it with the abbreviation GA followed by the volume number, page number, and, after a forward slash, the page number of the translation. I have often modified the translations, as in the passage cited: translating *ganz ungeklärt* as 'wholly unclarified', instead of 'quite obscure', makes Heidegger contradict himself in the following sentence.

³ For a range of contemporary treatments of this issue see *Conceivability and Possibility*, ed. T. Gendler and J. Hawthorne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴ J. N. Mohanty, 'Husserl on "Possibility"', *Husserl Studies* 1 (1984) 13-29, p.21.

possible (das Mögliche) essentially occurs in being [*Seyn*] alone and as its deepest fissure, so that in the thinking of the other beginning being must first be thought in the form of the possible”.⁵ This other beginning in philosophy, which takes its lead from an idea of the possible, is necessary, Heidegger contends, precisely because of the predominance of ideas of actuality in the history of metaphysics. “Metaphysics”, as he writes, using the term in a pejorative sense, “makes the ‘actual’ as what is [*als das Seiende*] its starting point and the goal of any determination of being”, whereas a more fundamental and original thinking of being will apprehend being as the possible.⁶

A notion of possibility, then, is central in Heidegger’s thinking, both within his ‘fundamental ontology’ of the 1920s and after the *Kehre* or turn that marks his philosophical development in the 1930s. Yet how exactly are we to understand this or these conceptions of possibility, and how exactly are we to understand them in relation to traditional doctrines of modality?⁷ A principal aim of the present paper is to show how Heidegger’s account of *Dasein*’s *Möglichsein* or being-possible relies on an interpretation of its being as a form of movement. Heidegger is able to consider *Dasein*’s being as being-possible because he considers *Dasein* – like the phenomenological school of thought, as we saw above – as a movement. The idea of *Dasein*’s movement or *movedness* [*Bewegtheit*] is relatively underdeveloped in the text of *Being and Time*, but it emerges, as I will show, in and from the interpretations of Aristotle’s conception of modality and movement that Heidegger had advanced earlier in the decade. Although the declarations in *Being and Time* concerning the primacy of possibility in 1927 contradict Aristotle’s statements concerning the ontological superiority of actuality or *energeia*,⁸ previously, before the explicit formulation of the project of ‘fundamental ontology’ according to the conjoined questions of

⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe vol. 65: Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994), p.475; *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. R. Rojcewicz and D. Vallega-Neu (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), p.374.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Attempts to address Heidegger’s conception of possibility directly and to relate it to traditional doctrines of modality have been, perhaps surprisingly, rare in Heidegger studies. Wolfgang Müller-Lauter’s *Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit bei Martin Heidegger* (De Gruyter: Berlin, 1960) is the longest and most direct study, but it does not stand as an exception to rule that anything published on Heidegger prior to the 1980s, given the publication of his *Gesamtausgabe*, is of merely historical interest. Without referring to Müller-Lauter’s work, in his ‘Heidegger, The Possible and God’ (first published in *Heidegger et la question du dieu*, ed. R. Kearney and J. O’Leary, Paris: Grasset, 1981; republished in Heidegger, *Critical Assessments* vol. 4, ed. C. McCann, London: Routledge, 1992, pp.299-324), Richard Kearney noted that the question of the possible had “hitherto been much neglected by Heidegger’s commentators” (299), and addresses it directly both in the essay and in his *La poétique du possible: phénoménologie herméutique de la figuration* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984). Of more recent scholarship, William McNeill’s ‘Rethinking the Possible: On the Radicalisation of Possibility in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*’ (in *The Condition of Possibility, theory@buffalo* 13 (2009) 105-125), offer insightful remarks on Heidegger’s thinking, but has a narrower focus than this essay and is less concerned with Heidegger’s situation in the history of philosophy.

⁸ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IX, 1049b13.

being and *time*, Heidegger had attempted to retrieve a conception of being as *Möglichsein* from the Stagirite.

The second section of the essay address Heidegger's account of *Dasein* as a being-possible in terms of its movedness, while the third shows how this movedness is ultimately to be thought as the movement of time – time in the particular sense in which Heidegger accounts for it, namely as *temporality*. The fourth section then shows how a proper grasp of *Dasein's* movedness as a being-possible allows us to understand Heidegger's controversial analysis of death as the 'possibility of the impossibility' of existence. Yet the scope of this paper is limited neither to Heidegger's account of *Dasein* as a being-possible nor to his philosophical project in the 1920s. For after having examined the modal sense of the account of tool-being in *Being and Time* in the first section of the paper, the fifth section is concerned to show how Heidegger's reflection on the 'modality' of art production in the 1930s introduces a shift in his interpretation of possibility and his interpretation of Aristotle's modal thinking in a way that is pivotal for his *Kebr*.

1. Handiness and Being-Possible

In *Being and Time* possibility is both a 'category (*Kategorie*)' and an 'existential (*Existenziale*)', which is to say that it characterises the being of things as well as the being – the *Existenz* – of *Dasein*, the being that we are. Although Heidegger does not dwell on this dichotomy, it is important to recognise it for, as I will show, it is a changed conception of possibility in relation to the things that we are not that is at the heart of his *Kebr* in the 1930s. The brief remarks on possibility as a category in §31 of *Being and Time*, however, presuppose the famous analysis of tool-being or handiness earlier in the text. §§15-18 advance the claim that prior to being the isolated objects of a disinterested theoretical gaze, things shows themselves as pointing beyond themselves within the horizon of my practical concerns. Things are apprehended as 'useable for', 'good for' a particular purpose, and in the given situation each thing is seen in relation to others: the hammer, for example, points beyond itself to the nails and to the boards within the horizon of the task at hand. Things in their individuality withdraw themselves from my attention to the degree that they are used, to the degree that I am absorbed by my practical project, but, for Heidegger, this claim has ontological and not merely psychological significance. Things encountered within the horizon of my practical concerns are *zubanden* – their being, in other words, is not objectivity, or an indeterminate notion of 'reality in general', but rather *Zubandenheit*, being-ready-to-hand. Being ready-to-hand is not simply a property of something, of something *vorhanden*, as Heidegger puts it

– which is to say, explicitly present as an object.⁹ It is still less the product of a merely subjective judgment or valuation. Being-ready-to-hand is rather a pre-thematic purposiveness that is intrinsic to things, and which determines *how* they exist, their way of being.

Certainly, this intrinsic purposiveness does not occur without the practical project of the agent; the thing cannot be purposeful without someone with a purpose. According to §31, the purposiveness of the thing is a function of *Dasein's* pre-predicative, pre-conceptual understanding, which constitutes the horizon in which things appear. This practical horizon is one aspect of what Heidegger understands as ‘world’, which is not a thing or a collection of things, and rather belongs to *Dasein's* being as *in-der-Welt-sein*, being-in-the-world.¹⁰ The understanding of this practical horizon of world is no mere passive reception of the given, but a projection or *Entwurf* that structures the agent’s dealings with particular things. Yet projection here is not to be understood in the sense of a secondary, and ultimately fictive interpretation of intrinsically purposeless things *vorhanden*. Instead, the pre-thematic purposiveness at once understood and projected by the agent determines, on Heidegger’s account, the very being of things ready-to-hand. In our every comportment towards beings, Heidegger contends, there is an understanding of these beings in their being, and in engaging with what is ready-to-hand, there is and must be an understanding of their *being*-ready-to-hand.

In §18 Heidegger had discussed *Dasein's* encountering of things ready-to-hand within the horizon of a practical project as a *Freigabe*, as a making-free or freeing-up of the thing for what it is good for; things, insofar as I engage with them, are freed up to be what or, better, how they are, namely ready-to-hand. However, in §31, which contains some of *Being and Time's* most programmatic remarks on possibility, he accounts for this freeing-up, briefly but no less emphatically, in modal terms: “when that which is in the world is itself freed, this entity is freed for its own possibilities. The ready-to-hand is discovered as such in its serviceability, usability, detrimentality [Dienlichkeit, Verwendbarkeit, Abträglichkeit]” [SZ 145]. Within the horizon of my practical projects thing are encountered as useful, useable, available, or, on the contrary, as unavailable or as detrimental, and this practical possibility, this form of practical modality, does not just reside in the agent’s thoughts – in my, as Kant would have it, merely subjective teleological judgments. There is an awareness of modality prior to explicit conceptual thought,

⁹ The sense of the reference to the *hand* in the term *Vorhandenheit* – which for Heidegger serves to translate *existentia* [SZ 42] – is clarified only by Heidegger’s ‘destruction of the history of ontology’, an essential element of his project of fundamental ontology. One aspect of this ‘destruction’ concerns the way in which being in the philosophical tradition means being-produced, being-(hand)made. On this point, see Chapter 1 of my *Heidegger, Aristotle and the Work of Art*.

¹⁰ See §15 of *Being and Time*.

and this practical modality belongs as much to the things as it does to the person using them. To be sure, the awareness of this practical modality is not gained by “the theoretico-thematical consideration of the possible as possible, and by having regard for its possibility as such”, but rather by a concern for what I can do and make actual with the instrument in hand, by “looking circumspectively away from the possible and looking at that for which it is possible [*das Wofür-möglich*]” [SZ 261]. In no way do I need to be reflectively aware of the ready-to-hand for it to be ready-to-hand; on the contrary, the ready-to-hand as such precedes and to a certain degree escapes explicit, conceptual awareness.

The basic point, for us, is this: there is a practical consciousness, an ‘I can’, that underlies and precedes the reflective self-consciousness of the ‘I think’, but the ‘I can’ is given and coeval with an ‘it can’, through the pre-reflective possibilities afforded to me by the thing or things in question. Now, other thinkers in the phenomenological tradition, including Edmund Husserl, may well offer versions of this insight, and we can gain a better grasp of the specificity of Heidegger’s approach in comparing it to that of his teacher. Husserl famously argues that in perceptual experience the present thing is given with a kind of halo or horizon of potentialities; part of the intended sense of my perception of, say, this table here and now, and from the position I perceive it, is that when I move other presently invisible aspects of the table will present themselves. The unity of the three-dimensional object in experience is not, in other words, as the thoroughgoing empiricist will contend, a product of mere associative and secondary processes in the mind. In this sense, in describing the ‘Actuality and Potentiality of Intentional Life’, Husserl claims that “every actuality involves its potentialities, which are not empty possibilities, but rather possibilities intentionally delineated”;¹¹ other possible aspects of the table are delineated in the aspect of the table that I see, and these possibilities, since they constitute an aspect of the intended sense of any given object, are more determinately rooted in perceptual experience than any mere logical possibility. Now, it can be argued, following J. N. Mohanty, that this horizon belonging to all objective experience is not merely a matter of intellectual cognizance, and that it is in and of itself a “practical horizon ... indicating a system of possibilities for practical intervention”; the table presents itself as something that I *can* work on or walk around, and in this way the “pre-delineated possibilities of fulfilment are practical possibilities”.¹² The potentialities given in perceptual consciousness are, from the ground up, a function of a practical consciousness, of an ‘I can’. Understood in this way, Husserl’s account of the horizons in and of perception is in the closest proximity to Heidegger’s account of

¹¹ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), §19, p.45.

¹² J. N. Mohanty, ‘Husserl on “Possibility”’, *Husserl Studies* 1 (1984) 13-29, pp.27-28.

Zuhandenheit. Yet there is nevertheless an essential difference in their approaches: for Heidegger, it is not simply the case that the *actual* thing is present within an ultimately practical horizon of pre-delineated possibilities or potentialities. The very being of the thing, Heidegger urges us to recognise, is something other than actuality or *Vorhandenheit* precisely insofar as it recedes from conscious awareness as an isolated object when I purposefully go about my projects. In short, Husserl sees individual things with a halo or shadow inviting a practical response, whereas Heidegger sees things as intrinsically and pre-thematically interrelated, each pointing beyond itself within the teleological horizon of the given situation.

Certainly, one might wonder whether in his account of tool-being Heidegger exaggerates the extent to which things are pre-objective or non-thematically apprehended in practical experience. One might also wonder why he begins with tools and the world of the workshop in a narrow sense in order to account for practical experience in general.¹³ For our present purposes, however, it is sufficient to note that an account of this pre-thematic projective understanding of possibility is no mere ancillary detail in a theory of modality. On the contrary, it constitutes a fundamental awareness of modality, an awareness given prior to the explicit grasp of conceptual possibility, i.e. to concepts of what could be objectively present. This particular form of modal understanding is prior to conceptual possibility, just as, on Heidegger's account, things are first encountered as *zuhanden* before their possible apparition as objectively present, as *vorhanden*. Yet this epistemological precedence is accompanied by an ontological superiority. In the case of possibility as "modal category of *Vorhandenheit*", Heidegger writes, "possibility means what is *not yet* actual and what is *never* necessary. It characterises what is merely possible. Ontologically it is on a lower level than actuality and necessity" [SZ 143]. We might understand possibility in this sense as "mere empty logical possibility" [SZ 143], or in a more real or metaphysical sense, following Kant, as characterising that which accords with the – transcendental – conditions of experience, but in either case it characterises a deficient mode of being. Within Heidegger's analysis of tool-being, in contrast, possibility determines the fullest and most original mode of the being or existence of things. Traditional doctrines of modality have passed over this sense of possibility; and they have passed over it precisely because of the predominance of an idea of existence understood – in different ways, certainly, at different moments of the tradition – as objective presence. For Heidegger, throughout the tradition the modal categories – actuality, necessity, possibility – are modes of objective presence, i.e. of existence or actuality, with one of the modes standing thus as the measure of the other two – or else all three are taken as modes of

¹³ On both these questions, see the second chapter of my *Heidegger, Aristotle and the Work of Art* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006).

‘something’ other, i.e. of being, the meaning of which has never been adequately brought into question.

On this basis, and even before examining Heidegger’s analysis of human being or *Dasein* as a being-possible, we gain a preliminary understanding of the stakes of his critique of actualism in philosophy. ‘Actualism’ here does not simply signify the doctrine according to which only actual things – the table, say, that I am writing on – exist, as opposed to possible things – the unicorn, say, I am thinking about –, which, claims the actualist, have no being at all. From Heidegger’s perspective, ‘actualism’, more fundamentally, amounts to the idea that being or existence is identical to actuality, i.e. to objective presence. Actualism in this more fundamental sense is, in the end, the prior ground of actualism in the narrower, contemporary sense, i.e. of attempts to exclude possible things from the realm of being: it is by assuming that being means objective presence that possibles are excluded from its domain as a result of being insufficiently objective or present. This is not to say, of course, that Heidegger is on the side of the ‘possibilists’ within contemporary debates in the metaphysics of modality. He is little concerned with the status of *possibilia*, with possibility in the sense of possibly objectively present, i.e. possibly actual things.¹⁴ He rather devotes his entire philosophical career to the commitment that the meaning of being cannot, or at least should not, be restricted to objective presence – and instead of wondering if and to what extent possibilities are actual, Heidegger urges us to question the predominance of ideas of actuality in metaphysics.

2. *Dasein*’s Movedness as Being-Possible

Heidegger points to the peculiar modal status of being-ready-to-hand almost in passing in §31, and his more basic concern in this section is to elucidate, at least provisionally, the being of *Dasein* as a being-possible. *Dasein* understands the particular possibilities afforded to it by things encountered pre-objectively, yet it does this only against the background of an understanding of its own projects, projects that are but possibilities of its own being.¹⁵ I can choose to do one thing or another, and this means that I can choose to become, as is sometimes said, one particular person or another – hero or traitor, stoic or coward, dissolute or disciplined. Yet

¹⁴ As Michael Inwood notes, Heidegger is not directly concerned with any form of modality in a logical sense, and he “has no more interest in logical necessity than in logical possibility”; *A Heidegger Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p.172.

¹⁵ As Heidegger puts it: understanding “projects the being of *Dasein* with respect to that for the sake of which it exists with equal primordiality as it projects *Dasein*’s being with respect to the significance that constitutes the worldliness of a particular world” [SZ 145].

Heidegger aims to lead us away from the idea that we are simply something or someone with possibilities, to the idea the very being of *Dasein* is a being-possible. The possibilities that *Dasein* has are not to be thought as a present-at-hand quality or attribute of something – the ‘person’ – also present at hand. §9 of *Being and Time* had already suggested that *Dasein*’s way of being is irreducible to any notion of *actualitas* or *existentia*, and this precisely because it is characterised by possibility:

[t]hat 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, and it ‘has’ this possibility, but not just as a property, as something *vorhanden* [SZ 42].

Dasein is that being concerned for what or how it can possibly be; and this possibility is ‘ownmost’ or most proper to *Dasein* in the sense that no one else can live out this concern, i.e. life my life, for me. *Dasein* is possibility from, as it were, the ground up.

§31 attempts to address directly, then, the issue of *Dasein*’s *Existenz* as possibility announced earlier in the text, but even here Heidegger announces that this issue can be “prepared as a problem” [SZ 144] only. We should not be surprised by this: if possibility in some sense ‘is’ *Dasein*’s being, and if – as Heidegger recalls in an Aristotelian fashion within the opening pages of *Being and Time* – being cannot be defined [SZ 3], then possibility too will not allow itself to be captured in the form of a simple definition. Moreover, if possibility in some sense is being, then an account of the nature or essence of possibility will at least partially depend on what Heidegger has to say in Part II of the text of 1927 about being and time, about ‘time as the horizon for any understanding of being’ [SZ 1]. The first steps in the preparation of possibility as a problem in §31, however, involve an elucidation of what possibility in this sense *is not*. It is not – as we have already seen in discussing possibility as a category – mere logical possibility, or a modal category subordinate to actuality understood as *Vorhandenheit*. It is also to be distinguished from contingency, from the non-necessity characterising the being that can change, that can come into and go out of existence.

As Heidegger additionally, and crucially, remarks, possibility as an *existentiale* is not to be taken as the “free-floating object of a purported *liberty of indifference* (*libertas indifferentiae*)” [SZ 144]. *Dasein*’s possibilities are not the object of an arbitrary or indifferent choice, in the way that one chooses a main course from a menu when unmoved by any of the options. To conceive possibility in this way would be to misconceive both the nature of *Dasein* as a being that in some

sense ‘chooses’ and the nature of the possibilities from which it ‘chooses’.¹⁶ *Dasein* does not sit in judgment on objective possibilities that are simply indifferent to it, and it does not survey these possibilities from a position external to them; on the contrary, it always and already finds itself in a world, with a history, and thus as already having taken up definite possibilities:

In every case, *Dasein* ... has already got itself into definite possibilities. As the potentiality-for-being (*Seinkönnen*) which it *is*, it has let such possibilities pass by; it is constantly waiving the possibilities of its being, or else it seizes upon them and makes mistakes. But this means that *Dasein* is being-possible (*Möglichsein*) which has been delivered over to itself – *thrown possibility* through and through [SZ 144].¹⁷

Dasein's understanding of possibilities is certainly a function of a projection or *Entwurf*, but this projection is itself always and already *projected* or *thrown* [*geworfen*] in that we always and already find ourselves in a given situation, with a world and at a particular point in history. *Dasein* is bound to this world and history and dependent on it. Possibility in some sense constitutes the essence of *Dasein*'s freedom, but according to this idea of thrownness, *Dasein*'s freedom is not absolute; *Dasein*, to be sure, is not autonomous in the sense of self-grounding.¹⁸

Yet if *Dasein* is not an ahistorical, isolated, self-grounding subject, then just as little are the possibilities it ‘chooses’ objects for it:

... the character of understanding as projection is such that the understanding does not grasp thematically that upon which it projects – that is to say, possibilities. Grasping it in such a manner would take away from what is projected its very character as a possibility, and would reduce it to the given contents which we have in mind [SZ 145].

The possibilities offered by things can be understood conceptually and reflectively; but prior to this, *Dasein* has an understanding of a different strata of possibilities, which ultimately are possibilities of its being, and which are pre-thematic, pre-predicative and pre-conceptual. This priority constitutes, again, an ontological superiority rather than deficiency; possibility in this sense, according to *Being and Time*, is possibility in the most genuine sense. Heidegger even seems to argue that an intellectualist construal of possibility – i.e. understanding possibility as conceptual or ideal – would reduce possibility to actuality, for conceptual possibilities, though not actually present in the world, are nevertheless concepts of possibly actual things or events.

¹⁶ For a recent discussion of ‘choice’ as irreducible to intellectual deliberation in Heidegger’s text, see Béatrice Han-Pile, ‘Freedom and the ‘Choice to Choose to Oneself’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Being and Time*, ed. M. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp.291-319.

¹⁷ Passages like this suggest that Heidegger aims in some sense to distinguish *Dasein*'s potentiality-for-being or ability-to-be, (*Seinkönnen*) from its ‘being-possible’ (*Möglichsein*). It is far from obvious, however, that Heidegger is attempting to mark the difference between “our life projects, on the one hand, and our projecting ourselves into those projects, on the other”, as Iain Thomson claims without elucidating or substantiating his claim in any way; ‘Death and Demise in *Being and Time*’, *The Cambridge Companion to Being and Time*, ed. M. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 260-290, p.269.

¹⁸ On this point, see Section III of William McNeill, ‘Rethinking the Possible: On the Radicalization of Possibility in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*’.

Heidegger may well be gesturing here at a combinatorial construal of possibility: conceptual possibilities are, in the end, actualities, because these concepts, like all concepts, as one might claim, derive from sense-experience. For the combinatorialist, unicorns, though not actual, are possible precisely and only insofar as their idea is combined from those of actual horses and horns. If this is Heidegger's intention, his approach, it is worthwhile to remark, shares common ground with the account of possibility that Henri Bergson, a thinker to whose conception of time as duration Heidegger is evidently indebted, was developing at around the same time. In his '*Le possible et le réel*',¹⁹ Bergson argues, in endorsing a traditional identification of possibility with conceivability, that the possible does not precede the real, as, say, Leibniz had it, but rather follows from it, since our ideas of what can be possible derive only from reality. On this basis, Bergson offers a particular and radical response to the oft-invoked difficulty of accounting for novelty within a combinatorial construal of possibility: things or events, in their novelty, *are not possible before they occur*. *Macbeth*, say, was not possible before it was written precisely because it was not foreseeable, i.e. conceivable before it was written; and it became possible, i.e. conceivable, only as an actually existing work of art. Now, Heidegger could accept all of the elements of this critique of possibility as conceivability, but, in distinction to Bergson, he aims to think under the heading of 'possibility' a more fundamental sense of modality that is irreducible to conceivability.²⁰

According to *Being and Time*, in any event, *Dasein* is not distinct from the pre-conceptual possibilities that it projects and understands, for these possibilities are, at bottom, possibilities of its own being. Yet is not enough to say that *Dasein* is not distinct from the possibilities that it projectively understands, for Heidegger's fundamental claim is that *Dasein* is the possibilities that it projects:

... projection, in throwing, throws before itself the possibility as possibility, and lets it *be* as such. As projecting, understanding is the kind of being of *Dasein* in which it *is* its possibilities as possibilities [SZ 145].

¹⁹ It was published in the 1934 volume *La pensée et le mouvant*, ed. F. Worms (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009).

²⁰ In *La poétique du possible: phénoménologie herméneutique de la figuration* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984, p.35), Richard Kearney thus rightly notes that, from Heidegger's perspective, we have to distance ourselves from Bergson's conception of possibility. Felix O'Murchadha's contrasting claim (*The Time of Revolution: Kairos and Chronos in Heidegger*, London: Continuum, 2013) that Bergson and Heidegger "share the thought" that "if we are to understand possibility on the basis of freedom, then it can no longer be thought as a realm of present options which can be chosen" (p.24) is unhelpful in that it goes beyond anything that Bergson actually says about possibility. On the question, however, of how Bergson's philosophy does require a more positive sense of modality than the critique of possibility he presents in 1934, see my 'Bergson on Possibility and Novelty', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 96/1 (2014) 104-125.

Dasein already *is* its possibilities and thus these possibilities do not simply constitute an imperfect state *from which Dasein* moves in order subsequently to become the *Dasein* that it really is. To claim this is not, to be sure, to deny that Heidegger aims to account for *Dasein*'s being according to an idea of movement. *Being and Time* is certainly – even though Heidegger says little explicit about this in the text of 1927 – grounded on the idea that *Dasein* has a form of movement all of its own, a “movedness (*Bewegtheit*)” [SZ 374] that is analogous but irreducible to locomotion or to any other Aristotelian category of movement or change applicable to things. The characterisation of the ‘kind of being’ proper to *Dasein* in the passage cited above recalls, in fact, Aristotle’s ‘definition’ of movement in *Physics* III as the “actuality of the possible as such (*tau dunamei ontos entelecheia hei toiouton*)” – as the actuality of the possible as possible.²¹

In order to understand Heidegger’s appropriation of Aristotle in this connection, it is crucial to see that the Stagirite’s definition of movement can hardly be held to account for it simply as the *transition* from potentiality to actuality. Such a transitional account of movement would be insufficient in at least two ways: first, it would be circular, since it accounts for movement as a transition, i.e. as a movement between two states; and, second, it tells us nothing about movement itself and only something about the states between which the thing in movement moves.²² We have good reasons to consider that Aristotle is thinking of neither a process nor the result of a process, but rather of a particular mode or way of being – *movement* – in which the possible really or genuinely exists as the possibility that it is. This is the way that Heidegger interprets Aristotle’s definition in a lecture course of 1924 on the *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*:

movement is the *entelecheia*, the presence [*Gegenwart*] of beings *as* the ability of being-there [*als des Daseinkönnen*], and indeed this presence *as long as* it is able to be there. Motion is the presence of the ability of being-there as such.²³

Movement is ‘where’ possibility exists fully as possibility in the sense that the potentiality of the wood to form a statue only really becomes apparent, and only fully exists, in the process of its realisation. Movement, as Aristotle says, is a certain type of *energeia*, of being-in-work or activity, an activity that is *ateles*,²⁴ which has not yet come to its end, and it is insofar as the movement

²¹ Aristotle, *Physics* III.1, 201a10. That Heidegger repeats Aristotle’s definition of motion in the passage last cited from §31 of *Being and Time* seems to have escaped the notice of even those commentators most concerned to stress the importance of Aristotle’s definition of motion for Heidegger’s *Daseinsanalytik*.

²² For these arguments, see Aryeh Kosman, ‘Aristotle’s Definition of Motion’, *Phronesis* 14/1 (1969) 40-62, p.42.

²³ Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe vol. 18: Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2002), p. 313, and *The Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. R. Metcalfe and M. Tanzer (Bloomington: Indiana, 2009), p.211. In 1924, *Dasein* is not yet a term of art in Heidegger’s philosophical lexicon, and it means here existence in general.

²⁴ Aristotle, *Physics* V 2, 201 b 32.

has not finished that the possible can genuinely appear as the possible. Of course, given that the realisation of a possibility, in the case of a movement, is the abolition of that possibility, Heidegger's is also claiming that possibility genuinely appears only on the way to its abolition. Despite its air of paradox, Aryeh Kosman has more recently advanced a similar interpretation: Aristotle's definition of movement attempts to reveal "the *activity* of being able to be",²⁵ an activity that does not yet characterise the idle potentiality of the wood to form a statue and that is no longer possessed by the statue as a finished product.

In order to understand Aristotle's definition of movement, and Heidegger's interpretation of it, it is crucial to see that there are levels of potentiality: the potentiality of the wood to form a statue is latent and inactive when the wood is not being worked on, but manifest as an "active potentiality", a *tätige Möglichkeit*,²⁶ when the wood undergoes change by means of the work of the craftsman. Movement or change in the widest sense is certainly movement *from* something to something, from one state to another, from potentiality to actuality, but it is the peculiar being of this from-to structure, of this *being on the way to completion, a being on the way where possibility fully exists as possibility*, that is the focus of Heidegger's interest in Aristotle's conception of movement.²⁷ It is the peculiar "presence (*Gegenwart*) of this being-from-to (*Von-zu-Sein*)"²⁸ structure that is at issue, as Heidegger claims in 1924 – and it is this that he will incorporate within an account of the movedness proper to *Dasein*. *Dasein* is somehow stretched out between its possibilities and their realisation. Indeed, as Heidegger will put it in Part II of *Being and Time*, the movedness of *Dasein* is a function of a "stretching", which is necessarily a "*stretched out self-stretching [erstreckten Sicherstreckens]*" [SZ 374-5] since there is no external agency which stretches *Dasein* out. It is insofar as *Dasein* is stretched out in this way that, *on the one hand*, its possibilities

²⁵ Aryeh Kosman, *The Activity of Being: An Essay on Aristotle's Ontology* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013), p.68. Kosman acknowledges a kinship with Heidegger.

²⁶ Heidegger writes this in his *Handschriften* to the lecture course of the summer semester 1924: GA18 378/256. In his 'Heidegger's *Sein zum Tode* as Radicalization of Aristotle's Definition of *Kinesis*' (*Epoché* 18/2, 2014, 473-502), and by showing that Heidegger is offering an account of levels of potentiality in Aristotle, Joseph Carter easily rebuts Francisco Gonzalez's claim ('Whose Metaphysics of Presence? Heidegger's Interpretation of *Energeia* and *Dunamis*', *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 44: 533-68) that Heidegger offers a muddled interpretation of Aristotle's concept of movement in the lecture course of 1924.

²⁷ Heidegger was certainly influenced by Søren Kierkegaard's transposition of Aristotle's modal categories within his religiously motivated psychological reflections, but another essay would be able to show that it is precisely through this interpretation of movement *as a mode of being* that the German philosopher goes beyond the remarkable and enigmatic reflections of the Dane.

²⁸ Heidegger, GA18 315/212. Husserl's account of the horizons constitutive of experience was certainly significant for Heidegger's account of being and possibility, as we saw in the first section of this essay, and as Iain Macdonald contends in "What is, is more than it is": Heidegger and Adorno and the Priority of Possibility', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 19(1): 31-57. It is, however, only an idea of movement that enables the break-through to an account of *Dasein's* being as a being-possible; Husserl's static analysis of the ideal horizons constituting the present thing does not yet bring us to an idea of *Dasein* as stretched out beyond itself, beyond the present, according to the peculiar from-to structure characteristic of movement. See also U. Haase and M. Sinclair, 'History and the Meaning of Life' in *Heidegger in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. T. Giorgakis and P. Ennis (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015).

can fully and genuinely exist as possibilities, and that, *on the other hand*, it can exist as these possibilities. In existing, *Dasein* certainly moves from particular possibilities to their realisation, but the being of *Dasein* – as a being that is always in ‘movement’, as a being that is not, for as long as it is alive, a ‘finished product’ – consists in the peculiar stretched-out being or activity of the possible that *is* its movement.

Although *Dasein* can realise particular possibilities, it can never simply be those possibilities actualised, for it is continually in movement, continually on the way to another possibility of its own being. *Dasein* can *be* the possibilities that it understands and projects, possibilities that it *is not* yet – but it can never simply be the possibilities once actualised since it is always more than it *actually* is, always on the way to another possibility of its own being. “*Dasein* is in each case already ahead of itself in its being. *Dasein* is always already ‘out beyond itself’, not as a relating to other beings that it is *not*, but as being towards the potential for being that it itself is” [SZ 191-2], as Heidegger will put it in §42 of *Being and Time*. It is in precisely this sense that *Dasein*, in its being, is a *Seinkönnen* [SZ 144], which is to say a being-possible, an ability to be or a potentiality-for-being. Thus, as Heidegger argues in §31:

Dasein is constantly ‘more’ than it factually is, supposing that one might want to make an inventory of it as something-at-hand and list the contents of its being, and supposing that one were able to do so. But it is never more than it factually is, for to its facticity potentiality-for-Being belongs essentially. Yet as Being-possible, moreover, *Dasein* is never anything less; that is to say, it *is* existentially that which, in its potentiality-for-Being, it is *not yet* [SZ 145].²⁹

The distinction between factuality and facticity is key here: if one thinks being ‘factually’ and, that is to say, according to a traditional idea of actuality, *Dasein*, in being stretched out and thus always ahead of itself, is either less or more than what it is. Yet the ‘less’ as much as the ‘more’ here presupposes an ontological standard that is wholly inadequate, Heidegger contends, to the *Faktizität* or facticity, to the particular kind of worldly and historical being of *Dasein* as a potentiality-for-being.

²⁹ Against the background of this paragraph, Judith Wolfe argues (*Heidegger’s Eschatology: Theological Horizons in Martin Heidegger’s Early Work*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p.119) that Heidegger’s account of possibility in §31 of *Being and Time* “can be criticised on Heidegger’s own terms as a spatialization of being-as-possibility. Because *Dasein* is its possibility (in the present) rather than relating to any particular possibility (in the future), no particular choice or event actually matters for its essence”. On the contrary, every particular choice *Dasein* makes matters for it, because what it decides and does becomes – as we will see – its factual and thrown having-been which is constitutive of what, or, better, who *Dasein* is. This analysis of possibility in Part I of *Being and Time*, as will become clear below, does not contradict Part II of the text, but leads to it. Wolfe does not elucidate why exactly Heidegger’s analysis in these pages amounts to a spatialisation of *Dasein*, and the additional contention that “in thus ‘spatialising’ possibility, Part I retains, despite its phenomenological method, characteristics of a *philosophia perennis*: a philosophy arrogating to itself a God’s-eye-view from outside factic experience” is little more than an arbitrary assertion.

3. Temporality and the Modality of History

Dasein's projective understanding of its own possibilities, which underlies its everyday commerce with the ready-to-hand things of the world, is, on Heidegger's account, the most fundamental form of our awareness of possibility; it is, as he puts it in 1928, "the origin of possibility as such".³⁰ That said, the claims of §31 of *Being and Time* concerning *Dasein* as a *Seinkönnen* can hardly be accepted, or even understood, without further development. The idea that *Dasein* is what it *is not yet* is problematic not least because it evidently contradicts a common, 'vulgar' conception of time as a succession of moments. If *Dasein* is what is not yet, it exists beyond the present and it is in some sense its future. That this is Heidegger's thought becomes explicit in Part II of *Being and Time*, and particularly in §65 concerning "The Temporality of the Understanding", where Heidegger begins to interpret the previous findings of the text in terms of temporality:

The projective self-understanding into an existential (*existenziellen*) possibility has for its ground the coming-to-itself from a given possibility, as which in each case *Dasein* exists. The future makes possible a being that is in such a way that it understandingly exists in its ability-to-be. The essentially futural projecting does not grasp the projected possibility thematically in a conceiving (*Meinen*), but rather projects itself into it as possibility. [SZ 336]

The being of *Dasein*, as we have already seen Heidegger argue, consists in a pre-conceptual, projective understanding of its own individual and particular possibilities. These *existenziell* possibilities are made possible by the structure of *Dasein's* *Existenz* in such a way that *Dasein*, in 'projectively' understanding its possibilities, is always and already projected beyond itself. In this sense, the future makes possible the ability to be that is *Dasein*, and *Dasein* thus *is* its future. Moreover, insofar as it is the past that bequeaths 'given possibilities' to *Dasein*, Heidegger is also affirming that *Dasein* somehow is its past. The mode of being of *Dasein* somehow consists in being stretched out between its past and future; *Dasein* is this stretch.

It thus becomes clear that Heidegger's reflection on *Sein und Möglichkeit*, on being and possibility, leads to the critique of a 'vulgar' conception of time and the concomitant account of *Zeitlichkeit* or temporality presented in Part II of *Sein und Zeit*. The vulgar conception of time is an expression of, to use contemporary philosophical terminology, 'presentism', in that it holds that the present, however fleeting it may be, is the only real aspect of time. Yet Heidegger is far from advocating 'eternalism' in opposition to 'presentism', since the former is equally an

³⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Gestamtausgabe vol. 26: Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*, ed. K. Held (Frankfurt am Main; Vittorio Klostermann, 1978), p.244; *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. M. Heim (Bloomington: Indiana, 1984), p.189.

expression of a deep-rooted ‘metaphysics of presence’. The eternalist merely extends the domain of the actual in holding that the past and future are equally as real or actual (i.e. present), as the present, the difference between these aspects of time being merely one of our limited perspective, of our frame of reference.³¹ Heidegger’s concern, in contrast, is to question the primacy of actuality and of presence, and their role as ontological standards. Being, he argues, at least in the case of *Dasein*’s being, involves the past and the future in such a way that being ‘is’ not simply presence. *Dasein* is its past, and is its future; and it is both in a way that goes beyond any ordinary or traditional conception of time reducing existence to the standards of the present. The past and future somehow exist – which is not to say that they are present or that they are in any sense things – because *Dasein*’s past and future are not a series of now-points that are, respectively, no longer or not yet present.

“Future [*Zukunft*]”, in the most profound or original sense, “does not mean a now that has *not yet* become actual and that sometime *will be* for the first time, but the coming [*Kunft*] in which *Dasein* comes toward itself in its ownmost potentiality for being” [SZ 325]. The future thus understood is so fundamental to *Dasein*’s being as an ability-to-be that Heidegger can claim its pre-eminence in relation to the past and present [SZ 337]. Nevertheless, the future is what it is only by means of the past, understood in the particular sense of the ‘beenness’ or *Gewesenheit* of *Dasein*; “only insofar *Dasein* is as ‘I have been’ can it futurally come toward itself in such a way that it comes back” [SZ 352]. The past in this sense is what it is by means of *Wiederholung* [SZ 375], which is not merely a reiteration of the same, but repetition *with a difference*, a productive repetition that takes up what has been as a source of possibility for the future. *Dasein*’s having-been is not a realm of dead necessity, and yet the possibilities it bequeaths are what they are only in their repetition through the openness of the future. If the future presupposes the past, therefore, it does so only to same degree that having-been itself presupposes the future: “*Dasein* can only be its been-ness insofar as it is futural” [SZ 352]. There is a mutual inherence of *Dasein*’s having-been and its futurity, and time as temporality in this sense “does not mean a ‘succession’ (*Nacheinander*)” of what Heidegger terms the “ecstases” of past, present and future; “the future is *not later* than having-been, and this is not *earlier* than the present” [SZ 350]. *Beenness* is not a series of ‘nows’ that are no longer, and the future is not a series of ‘nows’ that are not yet. Instead, the past, the present and the future all ‘occur’, as it were, ‘at the same time’.

³¹ For some interesting remarks on Heidegger’s account of time in relation to the presentism/eternalism distinction within 20th-century ‘analytic’ philosophy of time, see Jack Reynolds, “The Analytic/Continental Divide: A *Contretemps*?” in *The Antipodean Philosopher*, Vol. 1, ed. G. Oppy, N. Rakakis, L. Burns (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington, 2011), 239-254.

If *Dasein's* being is a form of movement or movedness, then, as Heidegger argues in Part II of *Being and Time*, time is of the essence of this movedness. *Dasein* is the movedness of time, where original time is no simple 'passage', 'flow' or 'process', but 'ecstatic temporality' wherein the 'ecstases' of future, present and past are not independent parts or mutually exclusive aspects of time.³² According to this ecstatic temporal structure, it is not the case that possibilities bequeathed by *Dasein's* having-been in any given situation simply pre-exist the present. They certainly do not pre-exist the present like the possible worlds that Leibniz's God surveys before the actualisation of the best among them. They do not even pre-exist the present in the sense of constituting an ever-growing block of former actualities, an independently existing reservoir of possibilities into which *Dasein*, from time to time, can 'dip'. On Heidegger's account, possibilities are rather what they are only through their futural repetition, through their revitalising retrieval, and do not exist independently of the latter.³³ Consequently, it makes little sense to wonder whether possibility chronologically precedes actuality or *vice versa*. Recall that in *Metaphysics* IX Aristotle is concerned to determine whether actuality is ontologically, epistemologically but also chronologically prior to possibility.³⁴ Once we recognise, however, with Heidegger, that ecstatic temporality is ontologically prior to and makes possible *chronos* or clock-time, then we arrive at the insight that possibility is not *temporally* prior to actuality. Both arrive, as it were, 'at the same time', and, in the event, co-constitute the shock of the new.

Dasein, then, is stretched out ecstatically between its past and future in such a way that the possibilities bequeathed by its 'having-been' are intrinsically futural. It is only insofar as it is ecstatically stretched-out in this manner that possibility can be higher than actuality, and that *Dasein* can exist as a potentiality-for-being. As Heidegger puts it in a lecture course of 1928:

³² Joseph Carter ('Heidegger's *Sein zum Tode* as Radicalisation of Aristotle's Definition of *Kinesis*', p.474) has asked: "if temporality is the fundamental aspect of the being of *Dasein*, then why does Heidegger also remark that *Dasein* is constituted in terms of motion? Are these two ways at odds, or might there be something more to *Dasein's* temporality that is not made explicit in the text?". I hope to have clarified that what is not made explicit in *Being and Time* is how Heidegger's thinking – in the 1920s as a whole and also in the two published parts of the text – moves from an analysis of *Dasein's* movedness as a potentiality-for-being to the account of temporality that that analysis requires and presupposes.

³³ In 1928 Heidegger explicitly criticises Bergson's version of this 'growing-block' theory of the past in itself; see GA 26 266/206.

³⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IX, 1049b13. Aristotle's remarks concerning the chronological priority: "possibility in one sense is prior, in another sense not". In *Le problème de l'être chez Aristote* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962, pp.442-3) Pierre Aubenque uses this dual response in support of his argument that Aristotle's account of movement is already ecstatic in Heidegger's sense: "the debate concerning the respective priority of possibility and actuality is a false debate. Actuality and possibility are co-originary; they are only the ecstases of movement; only the clash of possibility and actuality at the heart of movement is real; only the violence of human discourse ... can maintain dissociated ... the originary tension which constitutes, in its unity that is ever divided, the being of the being in movement."

... in ourselves possibility is higher than actuality, because with *Dasein* itself this being-higher becomes existent. This being-higher [*Höhersein*] of the possible, vis-à-vis the actual, is existent only when temporality temporalizes itself [*sich zeitigt*].³⁵

If *Dasein* were not ‘ecstatically’ projected beyond itself into its having-been and future, it could not be an ability-to-be, and would instead be something actually present – and, concomitantly, possibility could only be of a lower ontological status than actual presence conceived as the meaning of being. The “original determinant of possibility, the origin of possibility itself”, as Heidegger writes in 1927, is thus time insofar as it “temporalizes itself”.³⁶

The analysis of possibility and repetition in *Being and Time* applies not only to individual temporality but also to collective history. The possibilities bequeathed to *Dasein* come to it not only from its own individual past, but also, and perhaps primarily, from the past of its community, from the “past of its generation” [SZ 20]. This past, as much as *Dasein*’s individual past, “is not something which *follows along after it*, but something which already goes ahead of it” [SZ 20]. Moreover, Heidegger extends this analysis of possibility and repetition to our explicit knowledge of the past in the *study of history*.³⁷ He argues that the proper “theme of *Historie*”, of historical knowledge, “is neither that which has happened just one for all nor something universal that floats above it, but the possibility which has been factually existent” [SZ 395]. A genuine or authentic mode of studying history should be concerned neither solely with recording past actualities in the sense of establishing what really happened, nor with attempting to discern necessary laws governing the historical process. Instead, the study of history should be concerned primarily with possibility, and it

will disclose the quiet force of the possible with greater penetration the more simply and the more concretely having-been-in-the-world is understood in terms of its possibility, and ‘only’ presented as such [SZ 394].

The historical process is the history of human beings, each of which, as *Dasein*, is a being-possible and a genuine historical study has to take this potentiality-for-being as its primary object. One might say that historiography has to recognise human freedom as its proper object, and Heidegger could happily accept such a claim on condition that one follows his attempt in *Being and Time* to conceive freedom from the perspective of his analysis of possibility and ecstatic temporality. From this perspective, wondering whether Heidegger is proposing a mode of

³⁵ Heidegger, GA 26 280/216.

³⁶ Heidegger, *Gestamtausgabe vol. 24: Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, ed. F.-W. von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1989), p.463; *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. A. Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana, 1982), p.325.

³⁷ It is not possible to engage here with the nature and legitimacy of Heidegger’s move – if it is one – in *Being and Time* from an analysis of individual temporality to one of collective history.

history either concerned or unconcerned with the ‘facts’ amounts to a false debate: if historical facts are understood merely as past actualities, then Heidegger certainly urges us to look beyond them, but if they are understood in their *facticity*, and that is to say, as a manifestation of *Dasein*’s potentiality-for-being, then the study of history, at least in the existentialist mode of history that Heidegger presupposes, should begin and end with them.³⁸

Such an existentialist mode of historical study is grounded on a particular, authentic mode of *Dasein*’s being-historical, an authentic mode of *Geschichtlichkeit* or historicity, in which the past as possible is genuinely ‘repeated’ for the sake of the future: “only by historicity [*Geschichtlichkeit*] which is factual and authentic can the history [*Historie*] of what has-been-there [...] be disclosed in such a manner than in repetition the ‘force’ of the possible gets struck home into one’s factual existence” [SZ 395].³⁹ In this sense, the historical world is the domain of the possible not simply because it is the history of former potentialities for being, but also because it is what it is only a function of the futurity of *Dasein* in the present. We might ordinarily think that the historical past is a domain of necessity since we can no longer do anything about it, but, for Heidegger, the past in its sense and significance for us is still to come. Thus, as he writes in 1928:

The actuality of what has been resides in its possibility. The possibility becomes manifest as the answer to a living question that sets before itself a futural present in the sense of “what can we do?” The objectivity of the historical resides in the inexhaustibility of possibilities, and not in the fixed rigidity of a result.⁴⁰

The study of history should not, *pace* the young Nietzsche of the 2nd *Untimely Meditation*, be sometimes critical, sometimes antiquarian and sometimes monumental. It should, as Heidegger contends in §76 of *Being and Time*, be all three all at once; and as always monumental, it should

³⁸ Felix O’Murchadha responds to the claim of David Hoy (‘History, Historicity and Historiography in *Being and Time* in M. Murray (ed.), *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978) that the historian should not be concerned with facts but with possibilities thus: “[i]t is indeed the case that Heidegger states the *theme* of historiography to be the possibility of having-been existence. The theme is, however, the ‘horizon’ of a projection, which holds a particular region of entities [...]. Within this horizon are the objects of the specific sciences, the entities as present-at-hand. Historiography does not disclose its theme in its truth. It remains tied to its objects. Without understanding this difference between theme and object, Heidegger’s attempt to transcend historiography and chronology must remain obscure” (*The Time of Revolution*, p.27). Heidegger does not, however, attempt to ‘transcend’ historiography (i.e. the study of history) but rather to lead the historian to conduct it in the right way; and there is no justification for considering the ‘theme’ of historiography as a kind of transcendental condition that is presupposed by but not directly accessible to the historian.

³⁹ See Costantino Esposito, *Heidegger. Storia e fenomenologia del possibile* (Bari: Levante editori, 1992), and particularly its chapter ‘La storiografia come scienza del possibile’ for a longer exposition of Heidegger’s claims concerning history and possibility.

⁴⁰ GA 26 88/72.

always be concerned with what we can do now and in the future, with the past as a source of possibility for the present and future.⁴¹

4. Death as the Possibility of Impossibility

No examination of Heidegger's treatment of possibility could hope to be comprehensive without discussion of his account of death [*Tod*] as the "possibility of the absolute impossibility of *Dasein*" [SZ 262]. This account has long been a matter of controversy, but my aim here is to show how an adequate grasp of *Dasein's* being-possible as movedness allows us better to understand it, and allows us to avoid the more extreme positions taken in relation to it within the secondary literature.

How can I understand death? I cannot experience *my own* death, given that I will no longer exist at the moment it occurs. I can experience only dying, in the sense of the moments before death, but not my death itself. "Death", as Heidegger writes, "gives *Dasein* nothing to be 'actualised', nothing which *Dasein*, as actual, could itself *be*" [SZ 262]. For all that death is the end of my existence is not an actual event in that existence, not even the final one. Yet there is, Heidegger contends, another reason for death's lack of actuality: I do not experience death when witnessing somebody else 'pass away'. I certainly witness their passing from being-alive to being-dead, but I do not, despite our ordinary use of language and the gravity of the event, experience their death, for death, in its most proper sense, is always *my death*.⁴² Death is, as Heidegger puts it, "non-relational (*unbezüglich*)" [SZ 250], since no one can experience my death with me, and in this sense one always dies alone. Death is the "ownmost (*eigenste*)" [SZ 250] characteristic of *Dasein*, since no one can die in my place and it is radically individualising. Someone can heroically save my life at the cost of his own, but nobody can take my death upon themselves in the sense of experiencing it for me, and nobody can save me from the necessity of facing it at some time.

Is death, then, a necessity? "Nobody doubts that one dies" [SZ 257], and the fact that no exception has yet been found to the proposition that all men are mortal may seem to amount to

⁴¹ Heidegger's relatively generous interpretation of Nietzsche's 2nd *Untimely Meditation* in §76 of *Being and Time* is altered significantly in his 1938 seminar on the text; see *Gesamtausgabe vol. 46: Zur Auslegung von Nietzsches II. Unzeitgemässer Betrachtung*, which is soon to be published in English translation by U. Haase and M. Sinclair as *Interpretation of Nietzsche's 2nd Untimely Meditation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

⁴² It is not possible here to address the numerous critiques of Heidegger's distinction between my death and the death of the other, but see Daniel Dahlstrom, 'Authenticity and the Absence of Death' in *Heidegger, Authenticity and the Self: Themes from Division Two of Being and Time*, ed. D. McManus (London: Routledge, 2015) 146-162 for a recent response to the issue.

some kind of necessity. Death is “not to be outstripped (*unüberholbar*)” [SZ 251], and at some point, as we claim to know, my time will and must end. Yet this necessity is no logical necessity, and it should be noted that in the terms of an Aristotelian statistical or temporal account of modality this apparent necessity is merely a possibility; the possible on this account is what must be actualised at some point in time, in contrast to the necessary which is actual at all points in time. If death must occur at some point, then, according to this schema it resembles more a possibility than a necessity, even though my death can never be an actual event. Death resembles a possibility all the more in that it is “indefinite as to its when” [SZ 258] and can happen at any time.

Heidegger’s existential analysis of death, famously, attempts to account for death as a possibility, and the preceding remarks help us to understand why. Of course, the other possibilities of *Dasein* can be actualised – even though, as we have seen, *Dasein* can never simply be those possibilities once actualised for it is always on the way to another possibility of its own being – whereas *Dasein*’s death cannot. Yet this, Heidegger contends, takes nothing away from, and, in fact, only adds to, death’s character as a possibility: death “offers no support for becoming intent on something, ‘picturing’ to oneself the actuality which is possible and so forgetting its possibility” [SZ 262]. That death is not the possibility of an actuality is, of course, one reason why Heidegger characterises this possibility as the ‘possibility of an impossibility’. Another reason is that this purported possibility amounts to *Dasein*’s no longer existing as a being-possible, to its no longer existing at all; “[i]ts death is the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-there (*Nicht-mehr-dasein-könnens*)” [SZ 250].

For some, this talk of a possibility that is not the possibility of an actuality amounts to little more than empty speculation based on an abuse of language. As Paul Edwards has it, to “describe the annihilation of all consciousness, the impossibility of every way of comporting oneself” as a possibility “is carrying the misuse of language to the ultimate degree”.⁴³ Heidegger is and must be using the term ‘possible’ here in a particular sense, a sense that contrasts with the rest of *Being and Time* and that amounts to a non-sense. The term, Edwards argues, is redundant in the existential analysis of death, since Heidegger is speaking merely of the non-actuality, the total absence, of *Dasein* once dead; and if he had described death simply as the ‘impossibility of *Dasein*’, as absolute non-existence, he would have produced much less confusion.

William Blattner has presented an influential response to such charges by defending Heidegger’s use of ‘possibility’ as consistent with *Being and Time* as a whole, and by urging us to

⁴³ Paul Edwards, ‘Heidegger and Death as “Possibility”’, *Mind* 84 (1975) 548-566, p.558.

recognise instead that it is the term ‘death’ that does not have an ordinary sense in its existential analysis. Death does not mean the termination of *Dasein*’s ‘life’ – this is what Heidegger terms “demise (*Ableben*)” [SZ 247] – but a particular way in which *Dasein* exists. As Heidegger writes: “[d]eath is a *way* to be, which *Dasein* takes up as soon as it is” [SZ 245]. For Blattner, this particular way of existing amounts to an anxiety attack: “death is a condition in which *Dasein*’s being is at issue, but in which *Dasein* is anxiously unable to understand itself by projecting itself into some possible way to be”.⁴⁴ In such an anxiety attack, *Dasein* loses its grip on the world and all its particular possibilities appear equally meaningless. Death is thus a concrete possibility of existing, and I may have already ‘died’ several times; but this possibility is one whereby *Dasein*, in its anxiety, finds itself no longer able to project itself into any particular possibility – and thus no longer genuinely able to be. For Blattner, Heidegger’s analysis thus presupposes two levels of existence: *Dasein*’s sheer existence in a ‘thin’ sense, as disclosed in an anxiety attack, and as disclosed as being for whom such an anxiety attack is possible, is distinct from and the condition of its existence in a ‘thick’ sense as projecting possibilities at any given time.

This interpretation certainly has the merit of stressing that Heidegger’s analysis of death is an account of “*dying* [*Sterben*]” [SZ 247], which is a structure or aspect of its existence, and thus that death, existentially understood, is in some sense a phenomenon of life. Yet though death, for Heidegger, is not the termination of a life, it nevertheless remains the case that the structural features of death in this existential analysis are, as Iain Thomson has highlighted recently,⁴⁵ all borrowed from, and intrinsically related to, the life-terminating event that Heidegger names *demise*. Moreover, Heidegger does not describe dying as episodic in the way that Blattner’s interpretation of it as an anxiety attack would require.⁴⁶ Finally, as Havi Carel has argued,⁴⁷ this interpretation removes Heidegger’s analysis of death from the wider context of Part II of *Being and Time*, from its concern for the temporality of *Dasein* and for the finitude of that temporality.

Is there, then, a way to defend Heidegger’s account of death as the ‘possibility of the impossibility of existence’ from charges of obscurantism and redundancy that at the same time avoids the drawbacks of the decontextualising interpretation proposed by Blattner? My contention here is that there is, and that this way relies on understanding adequately Heidegger’s

⁴⁴ William Blattner, ‘The Concept of Death in *Being and Time*’, *Man and World* 27 (1994), 29-70.

⁴⁵ See Iain Thomson, ‘Death and Demise in *Being and Time*’.

⁴⁶ For this critique of Blattner’s interpretation, see Taylor Carman, ‘Things Fall Apart’ in *Heidegger, Authenticity and the Self: Themes from Division Two of Being and Time*, ed. D. McManus (London: Routledge, 2015) 135-145.

⁴⁷ See Havi Carel, ‘Temporal Finitude and the Finitude of Possibility: the Double Meaning of Death in *Being and Time*’, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 15/4 (2007), 541-556.

account of being-possible in terms of *Dasein's* movedness.⁴⁸ “Death”, certainly, “gives *Dasein* nothing to be ‘actualised’, nothing which *Dasein*, as actual, could itself *be*” [SZ 262], but *Dasein* nevertheless *is* its death, at each and every moment of its life – *not as an actuality, but as a possibility*. *Dasein*, as we have seen, is the possibilities it is on the way to realising, and those possibilities genuinely exist as possibilities only when it is on the way to realising them. There is, however, one particular possibility that *Dasein* is on the way to realising, and thus that it *is*, from the moment of its birth – and that possibility is its *death*. In short, Heidegger argues that *Dasein*, for as long as it is alive, *is* the non-actualisable possibility of its own death. There is no flat contradiction in the phrase the ‘possibility of the impossibility’ if we see that the ‘possibility’ constitutes *Dasein's* being in the present, as a being-on-the-way to its death, whereas the ‘impossibility’ describes the non-actualisable end of *Dasein's* existence that could befall it at any time, and to which *Dasein* is always and already heading. We do not need ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ notions of existence in order to see something other than a contradiction in Heidegger’s formulation; we need simply to recognise that possibility, for Heidegger, is a *mode of being*. *Dasein is* its possibilities when it is on the way to realising them, and there is one possibility that it always and already is. Certainly, the idea of a possibility that can never be realised is strange; but the strangeness of Heidegger’s formulation attempts to describe the essential strangeness of the human condition; a condition in which, as Heidegger contends, the human being does have an individual and internal sense of its own mortality.

The term ‘possibility’ in Heidegger’s existential analysis of death is, then, used in a sense consistent with the rest of *Being and Time* – but in order to understand this analysis we first have to understand the general sense of possibility in Heidegger’s Aristotelian account of *Dasein's* movedness. Of course, *Dasein's* death as a possibility is distinct from all others. It is a non-contingent possibility that is independent of circumstance and the particular situation. Moreover, Heidegger is at great pains to show that the more *Dasein* understands and reveals itself as a finite, ever non-actualisable being-possible, the more it understands and reveals itself as mortal, with a limited-time span for any of the particular, realisable possibilities it endeavours to pursue: “anticipation”, as Heidegger puts it, “makes accessible *in* the possibility that cannot be outstripped all of the possibilities available for *Dasein*” [SZ 264]. Anticipation reveals possibilities

⁴⁸ My interpretation owes much to Joseph Carter’s ‘Heidegger’s *Sein-zum-Tode* and Aristotle’s Definition of Kinesis’. Carter does not, however, show how a proper understanding of *Dasein's* movedness allows us to respond to Edwards’ and Blattner’s influential responses to Heidegger’s analysis of death as a possibility.

as what they are, namely possibilities for and of a finite being-possible – and in this sense in death “*Dasein*’s character as possibility lets itself be revealed most precisely” [SZ 248].⁴⁹

5. Possibility as Hidden Appropriateness

It remains to examine how Heidegger’s conception of possibility undergoes a significant change in the 1930s – a change that, I contend, is pivotal in the turning or *Kehre* that marks his philosophical development in that decade. This change occurs by means of a reflection on the work of art, and through, more specifically, attention to art-production. In *Being and Time*, as we have seen, Heidegger had conceived possibility as a category according to an account of things in their use, according to the idea of *Zuhandenheit*. However, in and after ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, an essay the third and final draft of which was written in 1935-36,⁵⁰ Heidegger reflects on the production of both artwork and equipment in a way that leads him to revise his conception of the modal status of the things that we are not.

‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ addresses the issue of art-production with reference to a dictum of the German Renaissance artist, Albrecht Dürer: “in truth, art lies hidden within nature; he who can wrest (*reißen*) it from her, has it”. Heidegger takes this to mean that the finished form of the artwork lies dormant in nature, in the work materials, and that the artist has to coax the form from them. This entails, first of all, that the vision or knowing peculiar to creation is not to be understood as the envisaging, in abstraction from the work material, of an idea, or plan of the work to be realised, which idea could then be superimposed on, forced on that material. The vision consists much more in the capacity to apprehend what is possible for the material with which one is working; it consists in the capacity to apprehend the possibility of, for example, the statue in the stone, to apprehend what figure the stone itself is apt for or capable of. Art-

⁴⁹ Concerning the specificity of death as a possibility, Steven Mulhall writes in ‘Human Mortality: Heidegger on How to Portray the Impossible Possibility of *Dasein*’ in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, 297-310, p.304): “[w]e cannot understand our relation to our own end on the model of our relation to any authentic possibility of our being – as if our death stood on the same level (the ontic or existentiell level) as any other possibility upon which we might project ourselves. Heidegger’s point in calling our relation to our own end our “being-toward death” is to present it as an ontological (that is, existential) structure, rather than as one existentiell state (even a pervasive or common one) of the kind that that structure makes possible. In short, we cannot grasp Heidegger’s account of death except against the horizon of his account of the ontological difference – the division between ontic and ontological matters.” It is not, however, possible to separate the ‘existential’ from the ‘existentiell’, or the ontic from the ontological in this way, for Heidegger’s point is that any particular possibility is already ontological or existential in that *Dasein* is that possibility when it is on the way to realising it. Iain Thomson is much closer to the truth when he notes that “here as elsewhere, the ontic and the ontological are not *heterogeneous* domains (*pace* orthodox Heideggerians and influential critics like Habermas) but rather necessarily overlap and interpenetrate” (‘Death and Demise in *Being and Time*’, p.278).

⁵⁰ For a genetic study of the development of Heidegger’s thinking in the three versions of ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, see the fifth chapter of my *Heidegger, Aristotle and the Work of Art*.

production is less ‘creative’ than it is revelatory, and in realising the design in the work material the artist does more, or less, and at any rate something other than act on an inert matter. In ‘wresting’ the figure from nature she rather *lets* the material come to presence in a definite figure, she brings this figure itself into presence, from a prior obscurity or state of hiddenness. Art-production, Heidegger contends, contains an essential passivity; it is “a receiving and extracting [*Entnehmen*] within the relation to un-concealment”.⁵¹

Heidegger appeals to Dürer’s dictum in ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ in order to distinguish what we traditionally call ‘fine art’ from the merely mechanical arts. The ‘fine’ artist clearly does not produce something that will recede from our attention to the degree that it is successfully used, but rather makes something that will stand *before the eyes (or ears)*, often in a peculiar isolation from all other things; but, as Heidegger also contends, the particular form of the artwork is drawn from rather than imposed in a mechanical fashion on what we call the ‘work-material’.⁵² Yet Heidegger’s strategy is interrupted by the fact that Dürer’s dictum expresses an idea that finds its origin in the philosophy of Aristotle, who makes no such distinction between ‘fine art’ and craft production. Dürer’s dictum expresses a commonplace of Renaissance art-theory⁵³ – the idea that the work is hidden in the work material before it is unearthed in the process of production – but this commonplace ultimately derives from Aristotle’s account of possibility as potentiality. In *Metaphysics* IX, Aristotle distinguishes actuality from possibility thus:

energeia means the presence [*to hyparchein*] of the thing but not in the sense which we mean by *potentiality* [*dunameis*]. We say that a thing is present potentially as Hermes is present in the wood.⁵⁴

Although the example is of a statue, the idea of potentiality here applies to craft production or *poiesis* in general. In production as such the product is potentially present in the work material – and since the wood *is* the statue potentially, the latter needs only to be wrought out, as Aristotle continues, from the former by a process of *aphairesis*, a process of abstraction.⁵⁵

One might understand possibility in this sense as a state of in-determination: before the actualisation of the specific form of the statue, the wood is in a mere state of in-determination, a

⁵¹ ‘Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes’ in *Gesamtausgabe* vol. 5: *Holzwege*, ed. F.W. von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1994), 1-74, p.50; ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ in *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. J. Young and K. Haynes, 2002), 1-56, p.37.

⁵² GA5 34/25.

⁵³ See Erwin Panofsky, *Idea*, trans. J. S. Peake (New York: Harper Collins, 1975).

⁵⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1048a 32-3.

⁵⁵ On the manifold meanings of *aphaeresis* in Aristotle, see Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978), pp.382-385, and John J. Cleary, “On the Terminology of ‘Abstraction’ in Aristotle,” *Phronesis* 30 (1), 13-45.

state from which other forms or determinations could have emerged than those in fact actualised. In 1939, however, within a reading of Book II, Chapter II of Aristotle's *Physics*, Heidegger attempts to think this sense of *dunamis* more positively in translating it as 'appropriate-for [*Eignung-zu*]:

'Appropriate-for' means: tailored to the appearance of a table, hence for that wherein the generating of the table – the movement (*metabole*) – comes to its *end*. The change of the appropriate wood into a table consists in the fact that the very appropriateness of what is appropriated emerges more fully into view and reaches its fulfilment in the appearance of a table and thus comes to stand in the table that has been produced, placed *forth*, i.e. into the unhidden.⁵⁶

Wood is appropriate for the making of a table, and this appropriateness comes into view all the more clearly, as we have seen, in the process of production. The appropriateness of the wood for the table is what is, in a sense, appropriated by the producer in the process of production. To be appropriated in this sense, however, means to be brought forth from a prior state of invisible latency into the light, into presence. Heidegger reads in Aristotle's thinking, then, a contrast between a latent, hidden capacity or appropriateness and its bringing to light, between a hidden capacity and its revelation, which revelation is an emergence into the 'unhidden'. Certainly, Aristotle might be taken to speak simply of a difference between in-determination and determination, between that which is formed, and that which is, relatively speaking, formless. Yet this, for Heidegger, would be to fail to grasp adequately what it means for Aristotle to hold that the form is already present, but hidden, in the work-material, and thus that the form needs only to be 'abstracted' from that material.

In returning to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, then, Heidegger comes to see the possibility of an element of revelation in all modes of manual production, in both 'fine art' and 'craft'. In so doing, he alters the interpretation of *dunamis* that he had advanced in the 1924 *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*. Here he had interpreted *dunamis* in terms that point to the analysis of *Zubandenheit* in *Being and Time*, even though the focus is on the utility of the work-material from which the product is to be produced, rather than on the utility of the finished product:

The tree-trunk can present itself to me according to its character of serviceability for (*Dienbarkeit zu*), its availability for boat-building. This tree-trunk has the character of being-serviceable (*Dienlichsein*) for, of usability (*Verwendbarkeit*) for [...], not because I apprehend it in this way, but rather it is its way of being. [...] *Dunamei*-being is a *positive determination of the way of its there*. For a

⁵⁶ Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe vol. 9: Wegmarken*, ed. F.-W. von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1976), p.350; *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, ed. W. McNeill, 1998), p.214.

long time I have preferred to call this being-character of things significance [*Bedeutsamkeit*]. This character of being is the primary one in which the world shows itself to us.⁵⁷

In the 1930s, this early reading of *dunamis* is not negated but enlarged: *dunamis* certainly involves an idea of being-appropriate for something else, and thus a certain idea of utility. Yet appropriateness is, Heidegger contends, a *hidden* appropriateness, an ability to come into presence – to, for and before the carpenter working on the tree-trunk – that is irreducible to any conception of utility, to the purposes of the agent, even if these purposes are thought ontologically according to the idea of *Zubandenheit*. The idea of *Zubandenheit* passes over the *hidden* appropriateness of the work-material, and the ability to enter into the unhidden that constitutes its very being.

This change in interpretation of Aristotle’s concept of *dunamis* may appear to amount to little more than a nuance.⁵⁸ Yet everything in Heidegger’s changed interpretation of Aristotle in the 1930s turns on this apparent nuance: this account of *dunamis* enables Heidegger to claim that in Greek thinking matter (*hulē*) is not simply inert matter, just as the producer is not an *efficient* cause forcing the wood to become simply what it is not. At the same time, it allows him to argue that the master-word of Aristotle’s metaphysics, namely *ousia* – ordinarily translated as being – should be understood as:

Anwesenung, presencing, instead of *Anwesenheit*, presence. What we mean is not *Vorhandenheit*, and certainly not something that is exhausted in mere stability; rather: presencing, in the sense of coming forth into the unhidden, placing itself into the open. One does not get at the meaning of presencing by referring to mere duration.⁵⁹

Finally, it allows him to argue that Aristotle’s conception of *energeia*, understood, verbally, as a having-been-released into presence, is fundamentally different to the Latin *actus*; and to argue that with this Latin translation of *energeia*, with one fell swoop “the Greek world”, i.e. the Greek understanding of being, “was toppled”.⁶⁰

We should note also that this changed conception of production leads Heidegger in ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ to reconsider the being – the ‘modality’ – of the finished product beyond the idea of *Zubandenheit*. He selects as an example, not equipment held in the hand, but

⁵⁷ GA18 300/134. This reading of Aristotle is echoed in *Being and Time* when Heidegger talks of natural things as natural resources: “The wood is a forest of timber, the mountain a quarry of rock; the river is water-power, the wind is wind ‘in the sails’” [SZ 70]. Certainly, by 1927 Heidegger has curtailed the generosity of his reading of Aristotle: “the specifically ‘pragmatic’ character of the *pragmata* is just what the Greeks left in obscurity” [SZ 68], and no more will he attempt to retrieve a concept of *Sein-in-einer-Welt* from Aristotle.

⁵⁸ The importance of this nuance has consistently been overlooked by Thomas Sheehan in his once ground-breaking work on Heidegger’s interpretation of Aristotle. See, for example, ‘On the Way to *Ereignis*: Heidegger’s Interpretation of *Physis*’ in *Continental Philosophy in America* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1983), 131-164.

⁵⁹ GA9 272/208.

⁶⁰ GA9 286/218.

equipment worn on the feet, a pair of boots belonging to a peasant-woman. In the field, before the peasant might take them to the cobbler when they require repair, the shoes have, Heidegger contends, a *reliability* which is prior not only to their *presence before the eyes* or *Vorhandenheit* but also to their *Zuhandenheit*. It is because of, by virtue of the reliability of a pair of shoes – if they are in good state of repair – and only by virtue of this reliability that the peasant can have particular projects to pursue: “the equipmental being of the equipment consists indeed in its usefulness. But this usefulness rests in the abundance of an essential Being of the equipment. We call it reliability (*Verlässlichkeit*)”.⁶¹ The reliability of equipment is the prior condition of its utility and the “latter vibrates in the former”; it “would be nothing without it” and is its “essential consequence”.⁶² The peasant takes them for granted, but what is granted is this taking-for-granted is a form of life that precedes her explicit projects and even any form of purposiveness. The shoes open possibilities for the peasant, it might be said, but these possibilities are prior to any purposiveness. To be sure, this thesis is phenomenologically problematic, for the reliability that Heidegger attempts to expose does not manifest itself directly in experience. It does not even appear in the breakdown of the item of equipment, as *Being and Time* had argued concerning *Zuhandenheit*.⁶³ This, it would seem, is the principal reason why Heidegger introduces it, infamously, by way of an interpretation of a Van Gogh painting. Yet in tracing how it follows from his changed interpretation of production and *dunamis*, and thus from his recognition that the truth of what is transcends any mere utility, we are at least in a position to understand why he advances the thesis.

6. Conclusion: Being as Possibility in the Later Heidegger

In the mid-1930s, then, a significant change occurs in Heidegger’s conception of possibility as a category, i.e. as an ontological determination of the things that we are not. Understanding this takes us some of the way to grasping the particular sense in which Heidegger, shortly after his reflection on art, in the *Contributions to Philosophy*, ponders ‘another beginning’ in philosophy that would set itself the task of thinking being as the possible. As we have seen, Heidegger contends that “the *possible (das Mögliche)* essentially occurs in being [*Seyn*] alone and as its deepest fissure, so that in the thinking of the other beginning being must first be thought in the form of the

⁶¹ GA5 19-20/14.

⁶² GA5 20/15.

⁶³ On this point, see p.154 of my *Heidegger, Aristotle and the Work of Art*.

possible”.⁶⁴ To think being as the possible, is to think it – not simply in terms of *Dasein*’s movedness, and beyond the idea of *Zuhandenheit* – as a hidden appropriateness first of all, and thus as an element able to grant or bestow a particular configuration of presence to, for and before the human being. Yet from the *Contributions to Philosophy* onwards, Heidegger attempts to radicalise and generalise this (neo)-Aristotelian insight concerning hidden appropriateness in craft production: being is a bestowal or granting, not simply or solely insofar as it characterises the peculiar form of ‘appropriation’ that is manual production, but rather in that it constitutes the appearance of beings as such, the appearing of beings to and for the human being. Beings are granted by being, and being as such a granting is precisely what is to be thought as the possible:

that being [*Sein*] is, and therefore does not become a being – this can be expressed most pointedly by saying that be-ing [*Seyn*] is possibility, something that is never objectively present and yet is always bestowing and denying itself in refusal through ap-pro-riation (*Er-eignis*).⁶⁵

Being as such is to be thought verbally as a happening or *event* – the ordinary meaning of the German *Ereignis* –, an ‘event of appropriation’ whereby, in our intentional and purposeful comportment towards ourselves and other things, beings are granted and bestowed by being. Being ‘is’ the coming into presence, the coming into the open of beings – and if we can hear in the word possible something other than a mere state or a static transcendental condition, then an idea of possibility can serve as a guide in our attempts to think this. Yet it is crucial, for Heidegger, to recognise adequately – in a way that, he claims, the thinkers of the ‘first beginning’ of philosophy in ancient Greece did not – that being as presencing does not deliver over its own secrets, and is as much a refusal and denial as it is a donation or granting – for being, of course, is never present and available to us as a being. Thus if being is the possible, it is, as it were, a ‘possibilising’ or enabling of beings that, as an inexhaustible capacity, maintains its own reserve.

This allow us to approach, finally, Heidegger’s remarks in the 1946 ‘Letter on Humanism’ concerning being as possibility. Here he underlines once again that possibility in his sense must be distinguished from any notion of possibility as subordinate to actuality:

Our words *möglich* and *Möglichkeit*, under the dominance of ‘logic’ and ‘metaphysics’, are thought solely in contrast to ‘actuality’; that is, they are thought on the basis of a definite – the metaphysical – interpretation of being as *actus* and *potentia* ... When I speak of the ‘quiet power of the possible’ I do not mean the *possibile* of a merely represented *possibilitas*, nor *potentia* as the *essentia* of an *actus* of *existentia*; rather, I mean being itself, which in its favouring [*mögend*] enables [*vermag*] thinking and hence the essence of humanity, and that means its relation to being. To enable [*vermögen*] something here means to preserve it in its essence, to maintain it in its element.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Heidegger, GA65: 475.

⁶⁵ Heidegger, GA 65: 475.

⁶⁶ GA9 316-17/242.

Being, thought as the possible, and thought verbally as an enabling coming to presence, grants beings to the human being and enables what, for Heidegger, is proper to it, namely thinking:

This enabling is what is properly 'possible' [*das Mögliche*], whose essence resides in favouring. From this favouring being enables thinking. The former makes the latter possible. Being is the enabling-favouring, the 'may be' [*das Mög-liche*]. As the element, being is the 'quiet power' of the favouring-enabling, that is, of the possible.⁶⁷

Heidegger draws, then, on the verbal root of the German word for possibility: *Möglichkeit*, possibility, is a function of a certain *mögen*, a liking, granting or favouring that is, he contends, the 'essence' of being itself. That he now claims that this favouring enables thinking amounts to the recognition that *Dasein*, as a being-possible and in its ecstatic temporality, is itself bestowed, favoured and enabled by being as such. As he will put it in the later essay *Time and Being* – an essay which obviously refers back to his master work of 1927 – when thought verbally as a presencing, being is akin to a fourth dimension of time: what unifies and first grants the ecstatic unity of future, present and past is the entry into being of this unity itself, the favouring or enabling of this ecstatic unity by being.⁶⁸ This by no means constitutes a *volte face* in relation to *Being and Time*, but only a decentring of *Dasein's* understanding of being in Heidegger's philosophy, and a new prioritisation of that which it understands, namely being, understood as an enabling coming-to-presence – as the 'possible' – that nevertheless maintains its own absence.

⁶⁷ GA9 316/242.

⁶⁸ See Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1976), p.16; *On Time and Being*, tr. J. Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p.15.