

HEIDEGGER’S INQUIRY IN *BEING AND TIME* AS A TRANSFORMATION OF
TRANSCENDENTAL PHILOSOPHY

by

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(Under the Direction of Richard Dien Winfield)

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores Heidegger’s project in *Being and Time* as a response to the central problem of transcendental philosophy: epistemological foundationalism. Kant and post-Kantian thinkers seek to critically establish universal and necessary conditions for the possibility of knowledge, but their efforts rely on a foundational assumption that is left unjustified. I argue that Heidegger recognizes this problem and employs a method—hermeneutic phenomenology—that avoids making any foundational assumption. I show how Heidegger develops this method in his inquiry into the meaning of Being (the *Seinsfrage*), and how he further explores foundations in “On the Essence of Ground,” a treatise written shortly after *Being and Time*. I conclude that Heidegger is not a transcendental philosopher in the tradition of Kant, as his method avoids positing a foundation for epistemic justification. Nonetheless, his method remains deeply informed by transcendental philosophy in its structure and application. In this way, Heidegger *transforms* the transcendental tradition in his inquiry into the meaning of Being.

INDEX WORDS: Heidegger, Transcendental, Foundations, Grounds, Hermeneutic,
Phenomenology

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I. Introduction: Heidegger and the Problem of Transcendental Philosophy

The non-philosophical sciences (that is, the natural, formal, and social sciences) begin their investigations by assuming their subject matter. The objects that these disciplines investigate are simply a given, predetermined content that is stipulated by the scientific investigator. All knowledge about these objects, then, is relative to the assumptions made at the outset of the scientific investigation. Not only do the sciences assume the nature of their subject matter, but they also assume the particular method by which to investigate such subject matter. In other words, each science takes for granted a specific way of knowing, an established methodology that is deemed appropriate for accessing and explaining its domain.

These scientific disciplines, or positive sciences, derive all justification of their findings from their foundations—namely, from the initial assumptions they make about what they are studying and how it is to be studied. As a result, the positive sciences, by positing the form (the method or structure of inquiry) and content (the subject matter or domain of objects) of their procedures, do not produce *pure* or *absolute* knowledge. That is, they do not uncover things as they are *in themselves*, independent of any conceptual framework or methodological lens. Rather, the knowledge they generate is always *relative* to the delineated concepts, definitions, and relations that are determined at the outset of their investigations. For example, the natural science of physics posits that there exists matter extended in space and time, and that through observation and inductive reasoning it can get at universal and necessary laws that govern a unified area: a coherent domain of physical phenomena structured in a way that can be systematically understood through quantifiable, empirical regularities. The natural science of

biology posits that there are living things and seeks to observe and classify them through taxonomy, a system of categorization based on shared characteristics. Even the so-called formal disciplines, such as mathematics, assume their subject matter. Mathematics posits number, assuming the existence of abstract numerical entities, as well as logical operations, such as addition, negation, or implication, in order to conduct its abstract, deductive analysis.

Now, it is not expected that the positive sciences examine and question the foundations upon which they operate. For the positive sciences are oriented toward producing results and in order to make concrete progress in explicating the nature of definite objects, they must have at their disposal a predefined subject matter to investigate and a predefined method by which to investigate it. The examination and questioning of the foundations or presuppositions of any investigation is a task reserved for philosophy. It is philosophy that is constantly redefining itself and challenging its own assumptions. The history of philosophy is the history of a discipline that is always questioning what it is to be investigated and what method is to be used in order to investigate it. In other words, philosophy takes nothing for granted: there is no authority it is beholden to, and there is no assumption that is not up for dispute. It is for this reason that philosophy stands over all other disciplines. Philosophy—unlike the disciplines that investigate some determined subject matter—is the discipline that is most directed toward truth in its immediacy precisely because of its ability to free itself from relativity.

This refusal to take anything for granted—whether the content to be investigated or the method by which it is investigated—is what distinguishes philosophy from the positive sciences. Whereas the sciences require a predefined subject matter and a fixed methodology in order to function productively, philosophy, by contrast, is open to questioning how it gets off the ground at all. It does not assume in advance what it is to study nor how that study is to proceed. Instead,

philosophy is marked by a radical openness to the problem of its own foundations—the question of whether and how it is possible to begin thinking without smuggling in unexamined assumptions about either form or content. But this very openness gives rise to a deep and enduring problem in philosophy: the problem of foundations. If philosophy is not allowed to simply posit its starting points in the way that the sciences do, then how can it begin at all? What legitimates the first step in thought if every assumption is to be held open to scrutiny? Historically, this tension has expressed itself in the search for a first principle, a foundational ground that would justify everything that follows from it. Yet even this pursuit often betrayed its own philosophical spirit, as many so-called first principles were themselves assumed uncritically. It is, therefore, appropriate to provide a brief sketch of the struggle over this problem in the history of philosophy.

Prior to Kant, philosophy can be seen, broadly, as metaphysics: as attempts to get at the truth of “what is,” or being, by employing reason, recognizing that appearances and the contingencies of experience provide inadequate sources to arrive at this truth. The assumption here is that only reason—unlike the senses, which deal in changing and unreliable appearances—is capable of accessing what is necessary, eternal, and foundational in reality. Philosophy, then, if it is going to get at the truth of being, must arrive at the ultimate starting point that, once known, would justify knowledge of anything that is—i.e., a principle so self-evident, necessary, and independent that all other knowledge could be derived from it or grounded in it, either through logical deduction or ontological dependence. What philosophers have done, by engaging in metaphysics, is to try to locate what it is in the structure of being that comes first and that which rests upon nothing else, but which everything else depends on, both for its being and intelligibility. Historically, this first principle has been posited in different ways (as suprasensible

forms, God, principles of logic—e.g., the principle of non-contradiction, principle of identity, the principle of sufficient reason, etc.).

For any foundational principle that is taken to be the ultimate grounding for reality, there arises a problem: this principle cannot be derived from anything else or else it loses its status as a fundamental principle; if the principle justifies itself, there is a question of how this principle, rather than some other principle, is privileged; if one attempts to ground its justification in what follows from it, one runs into circular reasoning. Another problem for foundational metaphysics is that, in positing a first principle of being, knowledge is then justified by this principle. This is the problem that will ultimately lead to the Kantian project and its transcendental turn. In any effort to get at what is and what is most fundamental, in whatever claim that may be made, it is taking for granted that the knowing that it employs—in whatever claims are made in regard to what is and to the fundamental principle of what is—is valid.

If knowing is going to make objective claims about being, and the fundamental principle of being, knowing must be investigated so that the claims it makes are indeed valid and true. The turn from investigating what is, to investigate knowing, is the “Copernican revolution” Kant proposes in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, setting out his critical philosophy.¹ Philosophy, with Kant, turns away from a knowing of being and becomes a knowing of knowing. Kant will argue that space and time as well as the categories of the understanding are contributed *a priori* by the knower to the knower’s experience of objects. Something will be an object of experience so long as it conforms to the sensible and conceptual conditions of experience that make up the cognitive

¹ “Up to now it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects; but all attempts to find out something about them *a priori* through concepts that would extend our cognition have, on this presupposition, come to nothing. Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition, which would agree better with the requested possibility of an *a priori* cognition of them, which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us,” Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 110.

nature of the knower. This “cognitive nature” of the knower is what Kant will examine at length in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Because objects conform to our cognition, we can know something about these objects if we are to examine our own faculty of cognition. What we know about objects will be *a priori* (logically independent of experience) and synthetic (will tell us something about the objects of experience). The possibility of synthetic *a priori* knowledge of objects is going to be the central thesis that Kant has to firmly establish and justify in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.²

In the Kantian framework, the structure of knowing itself is what is going to make valid any knowledge claim about what is. That is, the structure of knowing itself is what is going to determine the character of what is. Claims made about objects of experience are not going to be validated by some first principle of being, but rather, are going to be validated by the very structure of knowing. Now, the question that must be asked is, in Kant’s transcendental turn, in which philosophical investigation turns from a knowing of being to a knowing of knowing, how is one to justify the very knowing that investigates the knowing that determines the character of objects that can be known? It appears that Kant’s critical philosophy, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, takes for granted the character of the knowing that knows knowing just as philosophy prior to Kant took for granted the knowing that knows being.

For example, in his “Transcendental Analytic,” Kant merely posits the table of judgements as the form of thinking in general, the rules for thought, which he then uses to deduce the pure concepts of the understanding, which allow cognition of specific objects of experience.³ Kant takes the rules of thinking as given, as already sufficiently determined by Aristotle. By taking the forms of judgement as given, Kant has failed to adequately account for

² Ibid., 132.

³ Ibid., 204ff.

their justification; the forms of judgment become another assumption that provides the justification for our knowledge of objects of experience without it itself being justified. There is nothing that can be said to give the forms of judgement the privileged character of providing any sort of justification for knowledge rather than some other privileged standpoint.

Likewise, Kant shows that *the* condition for possible experience rests on the unity of apperception—the logical “I think” that integrates experience into a single unified understanding.⁴ One can never experience the “I think.” It can only be thought of as that which is a necessary condition for the possibility of experience. If knowing can only operate within the bounds of experience⁵, then knowing cannot come to grasp what it is that makes experience possible. On Kant’s account, then, knowing cannot possibly account for itself. Kant’s critical project ultimately falls to the same dogmatism that it diagnosed of metaphysics: it posits a fundamental principle (the logical “I think”) that functions as the arbiter of truth for all knowledge claims. This principle is posited uncritically; it is simply assumed as that unconditioned condition for all possible knowledge. Consequently, Kant’s transcendental philosophy ultimately takes for granted the knowing that knows knowing.

There are several post-Kantian philosophers that recognized the pitfalls of Kant’s philosophy. These philosophers understood that to engage in any systematic critical philosophy, knowing would ultimately have to account for itself. J.G. Fichte and Edmund Husserl are two such important figures who tried to finish what Kant started in ushering in a science of knowledge that could ultimately account for itself and its own investigations. Both thinkers recognized the problem with Kant’s philosophy in that it dogmatically assumed the conditions for knowledge in general.

⁴ Ibid., 246ff.

⁵ Kant ultimately argues for this conclusion in the “Transcendental Dialectic.” (ibid., 384ff.).

Fichte thought that Kant's table of judgements that are used to derive the categories of the understanding do not have a proper *a priori* status; therefore, Fichte tries to deduce the categories of the understanding from a common principle with a proper *a priori* status.⁶ This principle, it turns out, is the self-positing I. The self-positing I is a subject that posits itself in order to give rise to three basic categories: reality, negation, and limitation. This principle of the self-positing I (which can be recognized as fundamental when reflecting on the form of the identity relation $A=A$), can be seen as a principle that accounts for itself because it is the subject that gives itself its existence.

Husserl finds that it is philosophically unacceptable to posit that there are things-in-themselves, or noumena, of which we can know nothing, yet are logically necessary for the possibility of experience. For Husserl, it is the responsibility of philosophy to limit investigation to phenomena if we are going to have a truly total and systematic science of knowledge. Husserl provides us with a method with which philosophy can arrive at knowledge of universal and necessary truths regarding phenomena: *phenomenology*. The phenomenological method is going to employ what Husserl calls "epoché," which sets aside any notions that the world exists independently of what appears to us. This is going to leave us with what Husserl calls the phenomenological ego and the representations or "phenomena" that are presented to it. After engaging in the epoché, the philosopher moves from the individual consciousness of the transcendental ego and engages in "eidetic intuition," in which universal pure essences are understood, and one can derive, basically, the *a priori* essential laws that govern all experience.⁷

⁶ See Fichte, J.G., *Science of Knowledge*, trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 93-119.

⁷ See Husserl, Edmund, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorian Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969).

Ultimately, both Fichte and Husserl succumb to the problem of foundations that Kant and had fallen into. They both hold self-consciousness to be the ground for which knowing can justify what it knows. At first glance, it seems that self-consciousness provides that indubitable starting point from which philosophy can proceed: self-consciousness is the one principle that accounts for itself as well as for the objects it encounters. It appears to offer a self-contained foundation: the knower and known are unified in the reflexive act of self-awareness. However, the problem with the positing of self-conscious, whether it be “pure apperception” for Kant, the “self-positing I” for Fichte, or the “transcendental ego” for Husserl, is that the knowing which determines self-consciousness is critically unexamined. What justifies the knowing that determines the self-positing of consciousness? What determines the self-positing of consciousness is simply assumed without further critical investigation. The powerful epistemological goal of transcendental philosophy, to account for a knowing of knowing, ultimately fails because knowing is given a character that is assumed and investigated by that very knowing without further critical examination.

The problem of foundations in the history of philosophy, as conceived, has arisen in two ways: the first is ontological foundationalism and the second is epistemological foundationalism. Ontological foundationalism posed problems for philosophy as metaphysics, prior to Kant, when trying to get at the unconditioned condition for being. Epistemological foundationalism posed problems for Kant and various other post-Kantian transcendental philosophers (such as Fichte and Husserl) when trying to get at the unconditioned condition for knowledge. Both forms of foundationalism struggle in justifying their own starting point without reverting to arbitrariness, infinite regression, or vicious circularity. Where does philosophy go from here? One answer is that philosophy must begin from no foundation at all—it must be presuppositionless. There is no

widespread consensus on whether this has been achieved or whether it can even be achieved at all. One figure in the history of philosophy that has the strongest claim to a presuppositionless system is G.W.F. Hegel.⁸ Now, it is not the focus here to give an account of whether or not Hegel succeeds in the endeavor, but it is worth noting that the tradition of post-Kantian philosophy was marked by thinkers, such as Hegel, who attempted to radically systematize philosophy in such a way in which knowledge could account for itself.⁹

This unresolved tension surrounding the problem of foundations—whether ontological or epistemological—sets the stage for a distinct response in 20th-century philosophy. One figure who confronts this problem in a unique and influential way is Martin Heidegger. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger revisits the question of foundations not by attempting to construct yet another system in the traditional sense, but by rethinking the terms and starting points of philosophical inquiry itself.

In the Introduction to *Being and Time*, Heidegger distinguishes between the non-philosophical, or positive, sciences and philosophy. The positive sciences investigate a subject matter that is predetermined, using a method that is also predetermined. The role of philosophy is to determine the form and the content of such investigations. Heidegger emphasizes that the positive sciences take up a subject matter whose basic structures and concepts have already been established; in this way, they are able to produce knowledge of particular kinds of entities.¹⁰ For

⁸ For defenses of Hegel's presuppositionless system see Winfield, Richard Dien, *Hegel's Science of Logic: A Critical Rethinking in Thirty Lectures* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), and Houlgate, Stephen, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic: From Being to Infinity* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006).

⁹ For insight into this tradition and the common goal that it shares see Franks, Paul W., *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ "The totality of entities can, in accordance with its various domains, become a field for laying bare and delimiting certain definite areas of subject-matter. These areas, on their part (for instance, history, Nature, space, life, Dasein, language, and the like), can serve as objects which corresponding scientific investigations may take as their respective themes. Scientific research accomplishes, roughly and naively, the demarcation and initial fixing of the areas of subject-matter. The basic structures of any such area have already been worked out after a fashion in our

Heidegger, those basic structures and concepts that are determined prior to any scientific inquiry are determined by an interpretation of entities with respect to their Being.¹¹ This means that any encounter with or study of entities is already informed by a more fundamental understanding of what it means for something to be at all. This interpretation of entities in terms of their Being—what Heidegger understands as *ontology*¹²—involves uncovering the preconditions that make entities intelligible in the first place. The sciences, in studying particular, predefined entities, are engaged in what Heidegger calls *ontic* investigation. The task of philosophy, by contrast, is to engage in *ontological* investigation. In doing so, philosophy provides the grounding from which scientific inquiry becomes possible. It also has the unique capacity to challenge existing grounds and to disclose new foundations for ontic investigation.

Philosophy, if its task is to engage in ontology, must also justify its own role in interpreting entities with respect to their Being. Heidegger claims that ontology is a historical practice: ontology is the interpretation of entities with respect to their Being as *historicality*.^{13 14} Our understanding of Being is never formed in a vacuum: it is always shaped by the inherited conceptual frameworks, linguistic structures, and implicit assumptions passed down through

pre-scientific ways of experiencing and interpreting that domain of Being in which the area of subject-matter is itself confined. The ‘basic concepts’ which thus arise remain our proximal clues for disclosing this area concretely for the first time. And although research may always lean towards this positive approach, its real progress comes not so much from collecting results and storing them away in ‘manuals’ as from inquiring into the ways in which each particular area is basically constituted [Grundverfassungen] — an inquiry to which we have been driven mostly by reacting against just such an increase in information,” Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, trans. John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 29. In quotations from *Being and Time*, all brackets and emphases are from the translation and/or original, unless otherwise stated.

¹¹ ‘Sein’. It is important to distinguish at the outset Heidegger’s usage of ‘Sein’ and ‘Seiende’. MacQuarrie and Robinson translate ‘Sein’ as ‘Being’ and ‘Seiende’ as ‘entity’ or ‘entities’. The difference between Being and entities, or the “ontological difference,” is that Being, while not an entity, is what determines entities as entities (being qua being).

¹² Or *traditional ontology*, as opposed to *fundamental ontology* which, for Heidegger, concerns the *meaning* (‘Sinn’) of Being in general.

¹³ ‘Geschichtlichkeit’.

¹⁴ “[W]hat is philosophically primary is neither a theory of the concept-formation of historiography nor the theory of historiographical knowledge, nor yet the theory of history as the Object of historiography; what is primary is rather the Interpretation of authentically historical entities as regards their historicality.” (ibid., 31, brackets added).

tradition. In other words, Being is always disclosed to us through a particular historical horizon. This means that ontology does not interpret entities in isolation or from an abstract, ahistorical standpoint; rather, it interprets entities in light of prior interpretations of Being—what Heidegger calls the “history of ontology.”¹⁵ Every act of ontologizing already takes place within a lineage of ontological questioning, and so the interpretation of entities in their Being necessarily owes itself to this history. Ontology is itself conditioned by its own tradition: it inherits and transforms earlier understandings of Being. It is philosophy, in carrying out this historically situated task of ontology, that interprets entities in their Being and thereby lays the foundations for ontic inquiry, where the sciences investigate entities in terms of their *what-being*, that is, their natures or essential properties. Heidegger’s ontological project is to reveal the historical conditions under which scientific inquiry into entities becomes intelligible in the first place.

Philosophy, in its ontologizing as an investigation rooted in historicity, is not immune from the questioning of its very own presuppositions—namely, the inherited concepts, distinctions, and frameworks it brings to the interpretation of Being. Just as ontology defines and redefines the boundaries of ontic investigations, ontology itself is subject to ongoing definition and redefinition.¹⁶ Heidegger argues that philosophy has a task more primordial than *traditional ontology*. Traditional ontology often dogmatically interprets the Being of entities in terms shaped by unexamined historical assumptions, viewing entities primarily through the lens of substance, causality, or presence without reflecting on how such categories have come to define Being. As such, traditional ontology must have its own boundaries interrogated if it is to justify its task of

¹⁵ Ibid., 41ff.

¹⁶ “The question of Being aims therefore at ascertaining the *a priori* conditions not only for the possibility of the sciences which examine entities as entities of such and such a type, and, in so doing, already operate with an understanding of Being, but also for the possibility of those ontologies themselves which are prior to the ontical sciences and which provide their foundations. *Basically, all ontology, no matter how rich and firmly compacted a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains blind and perverted from its ownmost aim, if it has not first adequately clarified the meaning of Being, and conceived this clarification as its fundamental task.*” (ibid., 31).

interpreting the Being of entities.¹⁷ Heidegger assigns this critical role to *fundamental ontology*, which is concerned with explicating the *meaning* of Being itself, not in terms of any particular entity, but in terms of the conditions that make any understanding of entities possible at all.¹⁸ Once the meaning of Being is explicated in this fundamental sense—that is, once the structures by which Being is disclosed are made explicit—philosophy then appropriately provides the *a priori* conditions, or foundation for ontology. Ontology is then justified in its investigations to interpret the Being of entities, or how entities reveal themselves as entities.

If one holds true to the claim that philosophy should never cease to question its own boundaries, the question must be raised: what justifies fundamental ontology in its task of providing justification for ontology by clarifying the meaning of Being? Like ontology, fundamental ontology, as a philosophical investigation, must be open to an investigation of its own boundaries. Is fundamental ontology self-justifying? If so, is it then the case that fundamental ontology is arbitrarily posited as a first principle? Or, rather, does fundamental ontology draw from presuppositions that in turn must be justified? Finally, could it be the case that fundamental ontology is an inherently presuppositionless investigation? These questions address the problem of how philosophy should begin and how philosophy itself can be justified: they highlight the problem of foundations. The problem of foundations is a problem that Heidegger must address when asserting that fundamental ontology is what will justify all ontological and ontic investigations.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

II. The Priority of the *Seinsfrage* in *Being and Time*

In the Introduction to *Being and Time*, Heidegger introduces the question that will guide his methodology throughout the work: the question of the meaning of Being, the *Seinsfrage*. Heidegger claims that by posing the *Seinsfrage*, he is posing the most fundamental of questions, a question that has guided the investigations of Plato and Aristotle and provided us with the very ontology that has been passed down today.¹⁹ For Heidegger, posing the *Seinsfrage* is doing philosophy from the beginning; it is a question that orients investigation into what it is that makes any ontological and ontic inquiry possible and that therefore makes philosophic and scientific knowledge possible. With this being said, it is important to understand that by posing the question, Heidegger is not laying down any first certainties; in fact, Heidegger poses the question as a question of what is, in fact, uncertain—the meaning of Being. How can Heidegger claim, with apparent certainty, that the question of the meaning of Being is the most fundamental question, and at the same time, claim that we are uncertain as to the meaning of Being?

It is our very uncertainty of the meaning of Being that leads Heidegger to claim it as the most fundamental question. Heidegger highlights that Being has been traditionally assumed as a universal concept that is indefinable, yet self-evident in how we understand entities as entities.²⁰ We have a basic understanding of Being, evidenced by the fact that we understand what it means when someone says, ‘The sky *is* blue’.²¹ Yet, we do not have a *theoretical* understanding of Being, and we are prevented from having such an understanding so long as we hold dogmatically

¹⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 21.

²⁰ Ibid., 22ff.

²¹ Ibid., 23.

to these traditional assumptions. This is a problem for Heidegger because philosophy has historically operated as if it *did* have a theoretical understanding of the meaning of Being when engaged in ontology.²² In posing the *Seinsfrage*, Heidegger aims to explicate the meaning of Being because doing so would provide ultimate justification for ontological investigation, and thus ontic investigation, which has not yet been adequately justified.

The *Seinsfrage* itself has a direct aim: it seeks to explicate the meaning of Being, and it provides not a foundation but rather a guide for an investigation in accordance with this seeking.²³ In this case, the inquiry—the seeking—is of the meaning of Being. The meaning of Being is “that which is to be found out by the asking;” it is the *Erfragte* of the inquiry. As Heidegger argues, in order for any inquiry to commence, there must be some vague or pre-ontological understanding of what is being sought. We already have a vague understanding of Being when we understand entities *as* entities—that is, when we are able to discern what exists from what does not exist, or the way something exists from the way it does not exist. This vague understanding of Being guides the inquiry. Any inquiry, in seeking what is sought, begins with an entity—“that which is asked about,” or *Gefragtes*. An inquiry is directed toward *something* in order to articulate its *Erfragte*. Any inquiry, in order to reach a theoretical understanding of its *Erfragte*, does not passively question some entity; rather, it actively interrogates the entity at

²² Ibid., 31.

²³ “Every inquiry is a seeking [Suchen]. Every seeking gets guided beforehand by what is sought. Inquiry is a cognizant seeking for an entity both with regard to the fact that it is and with regard to its Being as it is. This cognizant seeking can take the form of ‘investigating’ [“Untersuchen”], in which one lays bare that which the question is about and ascertains its character. Any inquiry, as an inquiry about something, has *that which is asked about* [sein *Gefragtes*]. But all inquiry about something is somehow a questioning of something [Anfragen bei ...]. So in addition to what is asked about, an inquiry has *that which is interrogated* [ein *Befragtes*]. In investigative questions — that is, in questions which are specifically theoretical — what is asked about is determined and conceptualized. Furthermore, in what is asked about there lies also *that which is to be found out by the asking* [das *Erfragte*]; this is what is really intended: with this the inquiry reaches its goal. Inquiry itself is the behaviour of a questioner, and therefore of an entity, and as such has its own character of Being. When one makes an inquiry one may do so ‘just casually’ or one may formulate the question explicitly. The latter case is peculiar in that the inquiry does not become transparent to itself until all these constitutive factors of the question have themselves become transparent.” (ibid., 24-25).

hand in order to reveal modes of its Being (*Befragtes*). In doing so, the inquirer determines and conceptualizes the entity that is asked about in order to articulate its *Erfragte*.

So, Heidegger argues that the inquiry of the meaning of Being must begin with some entity that is interrogated in order to articulate a theoretical understanding of Being. But which entity is to be set out for questioning and interrogation? It seems difficult to privilege any entity for the fact that all entities *are*, that is, all entities reveal modes of Being. This means that every entity reveals something about Being simply by being the kind of thing that it is and by the way it is disclosed to us. This makes it challenging to isolate one entity as a more “fundamental” point of departure for our investigation. Heidegger resolves this difficulty by identifying the entity that poses the question (the inquirer) as the appropriate starting point for the investigation into the meaning of Being. This is because inquiry is revealed as a mode of this entity’s Being which derives its essential character from what is inquired about: Being.²⁴

Heidegger’s name for the entity that inquires, the entities that we are ourselves, is *Dasein* (Being-there).²⁵ Thus far, Heidegger wants to say that *Dasein* has ‘announced itself’ as the entity to be interrogated in the *Seinsfrage*, without claiming that its priority is demonstrated.²⁶ To the extent that inquiry is a mode of Being for *Dasein* and that this inquiry is essentially related to what it is about—the meaning of Being—*Dasein* is certainly an entity that stands as a strong candidate for investigative primacy. It is in section (4) of *Being and Time* that Heidegger establishes *Dasein* as the primary entity to be interrogated in the inquiry of the meaning of Being. Before delving into Heidegger’s argument and its implications, it is crucial to first provide a detailed account of how Heidegger himself views his method near the end of section

²⁴ Ibid., 26-27.

²⁵ Ibid., 27.

²⁶ Ibid., 28.

(2). Only then will we fully grasp the significance of Heidegger's move to single out Dasein as the entity to be interrogated in the *Seinsfrage*.

In section (2) Heidegger lays out how any inquiry must be formally structured. Any inquiry involves a seeking that is guided by what is sought; if what is sought is to be articulated theoretically, then an entity must be set aside for questioning and interrogation that ultimately defines and conceptualizes what is asked about. In the case of the *Seinsfrage*, since Being is always the Being of an entity, an entity must be set aside and interrogated with respect to its Being. Is it not the case that structuring the formal character of inquiry in this way gives rise to circular reasoning? It appears that one must assume 'Being' in order to answer what 'Being' is. The very act of setting an entity aside for interrogation seems to rely on a prior, if vague, grasp of Being, which risks begging the question the inquiry is supposed to answer. If this is in fact the case, the formal structure of inquiry, which guides Heidegger's methodology throughout the work, falls right into ontological foundationalism, which we diagnosed as problematic.²⁷

Heidegger provides a rich argument for why his method is *not* circular, in the sense of assuming Being in order to answer the question of the meaning of Being, and for why his method is not foundational, in the sense of positing a first principle of justification.²⁸ Heidegger's method is not circular because in circular reasoning there is a one-to-one relationship between what is

²⁷ Roger Waterhouse holds that Heidegger falls prey to such "ontological foundationalism." See Waterhouse, Roger, *A Heidegger Critique* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981), 149-163.

²⁸ "[F]actically there is no circle at all in formulating our question as we described. One can determine the nature of entities in their Being without necessarily having the explicit concept of the meaning of Being at one's disposal. Otherwise there could have been no ontological knowledge heretofore. One would hardly deny that factually there has been such knowledge. Of course 'Being' has been presupposed in all ontology up till now, but not as a *concept* at one's disposal—not as the sort of thing we are seeking. This 'presupposing' of Being has rather the character of taking a look at it beforehand, so that in the light of it the entities presented to us get provisionally Articulated in their Being. This guiding activity of taking a look at Being arises from the average understanding of Being in which we always operate and *which in the end belongs to the essential constitution of Dasein itself*. Such 'presupposing' has nothing to do with laying down an axiom from which a sequence of propositions is deductively derived. It is quite impossible for there to be any 'circular argument' in formulating the question about the meaning of Being; for in answering this question, the issue is not one of grounding something by such derivation; it is rather one of laying bare the grounds for it and exhibiting them," Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 27-28. (Brackets added).

assumed and what is concluded—the assumption is the conclusion, and the conclusion is the assumption. Heidegger makes the distinction: what is ‘assumed’ is a pre-ontological understanding of Being, and what is to be concluded is a fundamental ontological understanding of Being. In beginning our investigation into the meaning of Being, we already operate with a vague understanding of Being, and what is sought after is a concept of Being—a theoretical account of Being. Heidegger says that prior ontologizing has been made possible by this vague understanding of Being: ontology takes as foundational a pre-ontological understanding of Being. This pre-ontological understanding of Being is then made available to us, and it is from here that we can possibly explicate the meaning of Being which can then serve as the proper ground for ontological investigation. Heidegger’s method is also not foundational because his method is not laying down any first certainty with which to deductively derive propositions; rather, the inquirer is taking a look at how entities are already understood in their Being, pre-ontologically, in order to further explicate the meaning of Being which allows for the possibility of a foundation.

While Heidegger’s method is not circular or foundational, it is certainly not presuppositionless. According to Heidegger, any inquiry must start with a concrete investigation and thus must (provisionally) ‘assume’ the content that it is to investigate.²⁹ Because investigation begins with the questioning and interrogating of an entity, the investigation begins as an ontic investigation. In this way, Heidegger’s investigation starts with what is most concrete, most apparent, and then works backwards to articulate a fundamental ontology. However, Heidegger’s method is not an example of back-to-front reasoning—that is, reasoning that assumes as given the very thing it sets out to explain—because he is not taking for granted

²⁹ Ibid., 27.

the givenness of the entity set aside for investigation. Rather, he claims that his method displays “a remarkable ‘relatedness backward or forward’”.³⁰ Heidegger’s method has an added richness because the investigation is engaged in a “hermeneutic phenomenology”: an interpretive, descriptive method that seeks to uncover structures of meaning through which the entity, Dasein, discloses itself in its lived experience.

Heidegger turns to Dasein as the most appropriate entity for investigation in the *Seinsfrage*. Because all inquiry must begin with an ontic investigation—meaning it must focus on a specific entity—then there must be a way to determine which entity, among others, is most relevant to the inquiry. Dasein is chosen because it has a unique relationship to Being—namely, it is the only entity that explicitly asks the question of Being and is already, in some way, concerned with its own Being. Dasein is *ontico-ontological*; this means that it has both ontic and ontological priority over all other entities.³¹ Dasein has ontic priority over other entities because its particular ontic states—its particular comportment toward entities—what Heidegger calls *existentiell*³² states, are an issue for its *existence*³³, or ontological constitution.³⁴ Dasein’s essence lies in its existence; existence is what allows for Dasein’s *existentiell* states, and Dasein’s *existentiell* states define its existence.³⁵ Every *existentiell* state of Dasein embodies a relationship to its own Being. So, the Being of Dasein is what allows Dasein to engage in its *existentiell* states, and the various *existentiell* states Dasein partakes in provide Dasein with an understanding of its own Being.³⁶ Heidegger thus establishes Dasein as the entity which has

³⁰ Ibid., 28.

³¹ Ibid., 34.

³² ‘Existentielle.’

³³ ‘Existenz.’

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ “If to Interpret the meaning of Being becomes our task, Dasein is not only the primary entity to be interrogated; it is also that entity which already comports itself, in its Being, towards what we are asking about when

priority for investigation in order to answer the *Seinsfrage*. Again, Heidegger stresses that the answer to the *Seinsfrage* is not assumed by signaling out this entity, Dasein, in which to begin our investigation. Dasein is provisionally the entity with which to begin because it has a pre-ontological understanding of Being, one that is implicit in its everyday existence, and this tacit understanding provides the necessary guidance for any explicit, theoretical explication of Being—that is, for a fundamental ontology.

In his investigation of Dasein, Heidegger wants to uncover that which makes possible *all* existentiell understanding of Being—that is, the concrete, situated ways in which Dasein interprets and relates to its own existence in the world. In uncovering what makes this possible, we are laying bare the theoretical constitution of Dasein’s ontology, a fundamental ontology of Dasein itself, in order to get an understanding of the meaning of Being in general. In uncovering the “*a priori*” structure of Dasein, we are uncovering what is universal and necessary for any pre-ontological understanding Dasein has—meaning, the implicit and non-conceptual understanding of Being that Dasein always possess prior to any explicit theorizing. Heidegger calls this the “existential analytic” of Dasein, and any existential analytic of Dasein must begin with an interrogation of Dasein’s existentiell affairs.³⁷ This entails turning to Dasein’s existentiell interpretation in order to unveil the necessary structures of Dasein’s Being. It involves examining what justifies Dasein’s understanding of the Being of entities and how this understanding is reflected upon Dasein’s own Being. This is the task at hand at this point in the investigation of the *Seinsfrage*. Heidegger claims that a certain method will be employed in the

we ask this question. But in that case the question of Being is nothing other than the radicalization of an essential tendency-of-Being which belongs to Dasein itself—the pre-ontological understanding of Being.” (ibid., 35).

³⁷ “The kind of Being which belongs to Dasein is rather such that, in understanding its own Being, it has a tendency to do so in terms of that entity towards which it comports itself proximally and in a way which is essentially constant — in terms of the ‘world’. In Dasein itself, and therefore in its own understanding of Being, the way the world is understood is, as we shall show, reflected back ontologically upon the way in which Dasein itself gets interpreted.” (ibid., 36-37).

investigation of Dasein's existentiell interpretation: we will look to Dasein, in its ontic affairs, as it is shown "*proximally and for the most part—in its average everydayness.*"³⁸ The method that Heidegger describes and will employ is *hermeneutic phenomenology*—that is, a phenomenological investigation (which seeks to describe phenomena as they arise in existence) that is also hermeneutic, meaning interpretive. It focuses on uncovering the structures of meaning through which Dasein understands its Being by interpreting the way Dasein exists and makes sense of its world in its average everydayness. From this interpretive approach, the existential analytic of Dasein can be laid bare—a necessary step toward revealing the "horizon" within which an interpretation of the meaning of Being in general becomes possible. An existential analytic of Dasein thus provides an entry way into fundamental ontology.³⁹

At this point one might object that Heidegger's methodology is an example of him falling into epistemological foundationalism, and therefore into transcendental philosophy. For isn't Heidegger taking for granted Dasein's pre-ontological understanding of Being in order to arrive at an existential analytic of Dasein that provides the foundation for any inquiry into fundamental ontology? That is, isn't he assuming, without proper justification, that this pre-ontological understanding already provides access to Being, and then using that assumption to ground further philosophical claims? It appears Heidegger does so when he uses the standard transcendental

³⁸ "... In this everydayness there are certain structures which we shall exhibit—not just any accidental structure, but essential ones which, in every kind of Being that factual Dasein may possess, persist as determinative for the character of its Being. Thus by having regard for the basic state of Dasein's everydayness, we shall bring out the Being of this entity in a preparatory fashion." (ibid., 37-38).

³⁹ "When taken in this way, the analytic of Dasein remains wholly oriented towards the guiding task of working out the question of Being. Its limits are thus determined. It cannot attempt to provide a complete ontology of Dasein, which assuredly must be constructed if anything like a 'philosophical' anthropology is to have a philosophically adequate basis. If our purpose is to make such an anthropology possible, or to lay its ontological foundations, our Interpretation will provide only some of the 'pieces', even though they are by no means inessential ones. Our analysis of Dasein, however, is not only incomplete; it is also, in the first instance, *provisional*. It merely brings out the Being of this entity, without Interpreting its meaning. It is rather a preparatory procedure by which the horizon for the most primordial way of interpreting Being may be laid bare. Once we have arrived at that horizon, this preparatory analytic of Dasein will have to be repeated on a higher and authentically ontological basis." (ibid., 38).

argument of asking ‘what makes x possible?’ (where x = Dasein’s pre-ontological understanding of Being), and then points to a privileged standpoint of justification—namely, the essential constitution of Dasein as existence, which is understood as the structural condition that enables Dasein to understand Being at all. This is analogous to Kant’s procedure in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant wants to ask, ‘what makes knowledge of experience possible?’ and points to the unity of apperception, the self-conscious synthesis that grounds the possibility of unified experience and, therefore, knowledge. In this way, the analytic of Dasein (which lays bare its essential constitution) is necessary for any interpretation or understanding of Being, including an understanding of the meaning of Being in general; that is, for fundamental ontology. This is the argument that has found widespread acceptance in the secondary literature on Heidegger.⁴⁰ However, with a close look at Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology, it becomes clear that Heidegger is *not* a transcendental philosopher in this way—there is no foundation that provides epistemic justification in Heidegger’s method.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is the primary method of investigation to be used in answering the *Seinsfrage*. Phenomenology does not have a specific subject matter, as the name suggests; it will not be a “study of phenomena” or a “science of phenomena.”⁴¹ Phenomenology, rather, describes *how* a phenomenon “*shows itself in itself*, the manifest.”⁴² A *phenomenon*, as Heidegger shows etymologically from the Greek, is what shows itself in itself. It is what is brought into the light of day and made aware by us. Phenomena can be made aware in various

⁴⁰ See Blattner, William, “Heidegger’s Kantian idealism revisited,” *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 47, no. 4 (2004), 321-337; Crowell, Steven Galt & Malpas, Jeff (eds.), *Transcendental Heidegger* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Dahlstrom, Daniel, “Heidegger’s Transcendentalism,” *Research in Phenomenology* 35, no. 1 (2005), 29-54; Nelson, Eric S., “Heidegger’s Failure to Overcome Transcendental Philosophy,” in *Transcendental Inquiry: Its History, Methods and Critiques*, ed. Halla Kim and Steven Hoeltzel (Ann Arbor: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 159-179.

⁴¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 50.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 51.

ways as “indications, presentations, symptoms, and symbols.”⁴³ These “appearances” point to the underlying phenomena that are present. Heidegger then etymologically explicates *logos*, the other semantic element in the word ‘phenomenology.’ *Logos*, for Heidegger, has the signification of ‘discourse,’ discourse in the sense “to make manifest what one is ‘talking about’ in one’s discourse.”⁴⁴ *Logos*, as discourse, is the bringing forth and making clear—the explication—of the subject that is under discussion. Accordingly, ‘phenomenology’ is explicating what lies hidden: the conditions necessary for phenomena to show itself in itself. Therefore, phenomenology aims at explicating Being; it is Being itself that allows entities to show themselves in themselves. Phenomenology *is* the method of fundamental ontology.⁴⁵

The explication of Being can only begin with an interrogation of an entity because Being is always the Being of an entity. And Heidegger has set aside the entity that has priority in the investigation of the *Seinsfrage*: Dasein. So the method for investigation is phenomenology and this method will be used to interrogate Dasein. Heidegger’s method of phenomenology is self-described as hermeneutical⁴⁶ (i.e., involves interpretation). Hermeneutic phenomenology begins with an investigation of Dasein’s existentiell relations: the ways in which Dasein engages with the entities that make up a world, its ontic states. Dasein, in its existentiell relations, has a pre-ontological understanding of the Being of entities that means something for its own Being (existentials); the job of hermeneutic phenomenology, then, is to provide an interpretive explication of how this is possible. Hermeneutic phenomenology aims at the *a priori* conditions

⁴³ Ibid., 52.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 56.

⁴⁵ “*Only as phenomenology, is ontology possible.*” (ibid., 60).

⁴⁶ “Our investigation itself will show that the meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in *interpretation*. The λόγος of the phenomenology of Dasein has the character of a ἐρμηνεύειν, through which the authentic meaning of Being, and also those basic structures of Being which Dasein itself possesses, are *made known* to Dasein’s understanding of Being. The phenomenology of Dasein is a *hermeneutic* in the primordial signification of this word, where it designates this business of interpreting.” (ibid., 61-62).

for Dasein's existentiells, or ontic states; this is what constitutes the "existential analytic" of Dasein as laying bare Dasein's ontological character of existence, determining the 'horizon' for Dasein's ontological character. The meaning of Being for Dasein is hermeneutic in nature—that is, it is not simply given, but must be interpreted, articulated, and made intelligible through Dasein's own self-understanding and involvement in the world. And because Dasein has such a special relationship to Being (it is the only entity for whom Being is an issue), an interpretation of Dasein's Being is not merely of local significance but is the necessary first step toward an interpretation of the meaning of Being in general.

Closely looking at Heidegger's method of hermeneutic phenomenology provides us with a counter to those objections that this method engages in epistemological foundationalism. The objection of epistemological foundationalism is that Heidegger's method posits Dasein as the basis for justification of knowledge of Being, whether that be a pre-ontological understanding of Being or a fundamental ontological one. The objectors say that Heidegger takes for granted Dasein's understanding of Being by providing the existential analytic of Dasein. However, Heidegger only points to the existential analytic of Dasein as an entryway to conceive a privileged epistemic justifier in the first place—namely, the meaning of Being in general.⁴⁷ The existential analytic of Dasein is arrived at by examining what appears in order to explicate its conditions in a universal and necessary way. It does not take these conditions for granted. Heidegger is merely interpretively articulating the pre-ontological understanding of Being that

⁴⁷ The explication of the meaning of Being in general—what Heidegger seeks to answer in his posing of the *Seinsfrage*—is what Heidegger means by fundamental ontology. Only when the meaning of Being in general is explicated and clarified (through fundamental ontology) can ontological and ontic investigations be justified. See ¶ 3. (ibid., 31ff).

Dasein already operates with, in order to bring that understanding to a more explicit, conceptual, and theoretical level suitable for ontological investigation.⁴⁸

Explicating the horizon of Being for Dasein, then, is not about establishing a fixed epistemic foundation but about making explicit the conditions already implicit in Dasein's pre-ontological understanding of Being. In other words, the existential analytic of Dasein aims to uncover and articulate the structures through which Dasein always already relates to Being. Only when this horizon is explicated on a progressively conceptual basis can it lend validity to any understanding of Being whatsoever since such understanding can be grounded only through an interpretive clarification of Dasein's essential tendency to relate to Being. Crucially, this process involves a continuous movement of interpretation and reinterpretation of the Being of Dasein: an interpretation of Dasein lays bare the horizon for an interpretation of Being in general, which is then grounds for a reinterpretation of Dasein.⁴⁹ This interpretation and reinterpretation expresses Heidegger's "hermeneutic circle,"⁵⁰ and is the primary methodological strategy that tries to escape transcendental philosophy. Heidegger's method *seeks* a foundation; this potential foundation is the answer to the *Seinsfrage*—the meaning of Being in general. Heidegger's point of entry into answering the *Seinsfrage* is an investigation of Dasein's existentiell relations, Dasein's ontic affairs, in which Dasein operates with a pre-ontological understanding of Being, in order to explicate the existential analytic of Dasein. This investigation does not intend to posit Dasein's existential analytic as the indubitable foundation on which all interpretation must rest.

⁴⁸ "But in that case the question of Being is nothing other than a radicalization of an essential tendency-of-Being which belongs to Dasein itself—the pre-ontological understanding of Being." (ibid., 35).

⁴⁹ "Philosophy is universal phenomenological ontology, and takes its departure from the hermeneutic of Dasein, which, as an analytic of *existence*, has made fast the guiding-line for all philosophical inquiry at the point where it *arises* and to which it *returns*." (ibid., 62).

⁵⁰ Heidegger develops further the concept of the "hermeneutic circle" at the end of ¶ 32. (ibid., 194-195). See also Grondin, Jean, "The Hermeneutical Circle," in *A Companion to Hermeneutics*, ed. Niall Keane and Chris Lawn (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 299-305 for an overview of Heidegger's "hermeneutical circle."

Rather, Heidegger's existential analytic of Dasein is an interpretation that provides for fundamental ontology in itself.

Now, one might raise the objection that while Heidegger hasn't posited the epistemic foundation in his investigation, his investigation nonetheless will lead to a foundation that is mediated by the existential analytic of Dasein. However, it would be too quick to make this assumption; Heidegger's concept of the hermeneutic circle—the idea that understanding is always shaped by prior interpretations and that interpretation moves between part and whole—shows that the process of grounding philosophy, of providing a fundamental ontology, is very much open-ended and recursive. As Heidegger intimated in earlier discussions⁵¹, the interpretation of Being is a *historical* practice, and thus interpretation of the meaning of Being in general is not static; interpretation is a moving circle of understanding: a movement from the interpretation of the Being of Dasein to the meaning of Being in general and then back again, each informing and transforming the other.

One aspect of Heidegger's method that can be characterized as 'transcendental' is its use of transcendental arguments. Hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to articulate what is universal and necessary in any pre-ontological understanding of Being. The method aims to uncover the conditions for any possible understanding of Being. In this sense, Heidegger can be seen as indebted to the transcendental tradition. However, Heidegger's method is not transcendental in the sense of positing a foundational basis for epistemic justification. Rather, it is transcendental in that it employs transcendental argumentation as a way of progressing toward a theoretical understanding of Being. Thus, Heidegger's method in *Being and Time* can be understood as a

⁵¹ See Heidegger's discussion of the Interpretation of entities regarding their 'historicality,' Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 31.

transformation of transcendental philosophy: he integrates transcendental arguments with hermeneutic phenomenology, which guides his philosophical inquiry.

Given the potential issues surrounding foundations exposed in *Being and Time*, and how these foundations could possibly be mediated by Heidegger's methodology, it is appropriate to examine his understanding of foundations. This will not only clarify Heidegger's conception of foundations but also illustrate how he seeks to avoid foundationalism in *Being and Time*.

III. Heidegger On Foundations

In exploring Heidegger's account of foundations in his early works, we can shed light on how his methodology in *Being and Time* addresses the problem of foundations. The problem of foundations, as described, is a problem of knowledge justification. In identifying a foundation that provides justification for knowledge of being or knowledge of knowing, one must ask, what gives justification to the foundation itself? What justifies our knowing of that foundation which provides certification of any knowledge claim we make, whether it's a knowledge claim about being or a knowledge claim about knowing itself? The problem can be aptly illustrated by the Agrippan trilemma: positing any foundation for justification leads to either 1) an arbitrary assertion, 2) a vicious circle, or 3) an infinite regress.⁵² So, any claim of a foundation for justification of knowledge of being or knowledge of knowing leads to these problems dealing with the justification of the foundation itself. These are all problems for any foundationalist philosophical investigation because any knowledge that arises from some foundation would not qualify as indubitable knowledge, since the foundation itself is not indubitable.

When positing any foundation for a philosophical investigation, the foundation does not escape the rigors of the investigation. Philosophical investigation analyzes all knowledge claims and questions their most basic assumptions. In positing any foundation of knowledge, that foundation is subject to the same analysis and questions as any other claim. And in the case of a foundation, a first principle that is posited for any and all epistemic justification, we can ask the question: what is it that justifies *that* principle to provide subsequent justification for any

⁵² For more on the 'Agrippan trilemma' see Franks, Paul W., *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism*, 8-10.

knowledge claim? And this leaves us with the three options illustrated by the Agrippan trilemma. For example, take the principle of sufficient reason, a principle that has been taken as the foundation for any epistemic justification. The principle states that any true proposition must have a justification for why it is true. Positing the principle of sufficient reason as the foundation for epistemic justification supposedly grounds our knowledge because we can have knowledge that a proposition is true by knowing the reason for why it is true. However, to have any knowledge at all, our foundation must be known to be true since it is what provides *validity* to any true knowledge claim.

So, how do we know our foundation—the principle of sufficient reason—is true? There are three possible answers to this assertion, none of which are satisfactory. The first is that it just *is* true simply by asserting the principle. However, this would be arbitrary, as we could have posited any other principle to be our foundation and it would be just as true. It would also go against the principle itself, which states that *any* claim must have justification. To assert the self-evidence of the principle of sufficient reason violates the principle itself. It would be arbitrary to assert that the principle of sufficient reason applies to all claims except its own. The second answer to our question is that the principle of sufficient reason is true because, to have knowledge of any true proposition, we must have knowledge of what makes the proposition true. Without the principle of sufficient reason as the foundation for knowledge, all knowledge claims would be vacuous. This answer is an example of vicious circularity: it assumes the principle (that knowledge of true propositions requires that we know that those propositions are justified) in order to justify the principle itself. This leads us to the final possible answer to our question: if we take the principle of reason seriously—that the principle applies to *all* claims—then the principle itself demands justification. Yet whatever justifies the principle in turn must have

justification, and so on, *ad infinitum*. The problem with this is twofold: in seeking justification for our foundation, we forfeit its status as a foundation, because whatever justification that is identified becomes more originary. In other words, the foundation becomes mediated. The other problem is that in attempting to justify our foundation, we run into the problem of how *that* justification is justified, and so on, leading to an infinite regression. An infinite regress is a problem because it destroys the idea of a foundation: a beginning that justifies any knowledge claim. Instead, we get an indeterminate chain of justification that can provide no determinate justification for knowledge.

Thus, any foundationalist philosophical investigation fails to provide indubitable certainty for any knowledge claim. This includes what we have termed ‘ontological foundationalism,’ which posits a foundation for justification of knowledge of being (as in metaphysics prior to Kant), and ‘epistemological foundationalism,’ which posits a foundation for justification of knowledge of knowing (as in Kantian and post-Kantian transcendental philosophy). Heidegger attempts to overcome foundationalism in all its forms in how his methodology in *Being and Time* treats foundations.

Heidegger treats foundations throughout his corpus, but one that stands out for our purposes is his “*Zur Sache des Grundes*,” translated in English as “On the Essence of Ground.”⁵³ The treatise, written two years after the publication of *Being and Time*, is an early work that sheds light on Heidegger’s project in *Being and Time*. In the context of the treatise, the German word *Grund* that Heidegger uses can be translated as ‘foundation’ or ‘ground,’ but it is usually translated as ‘ground’. Heidegger’s use of the word *Grund* is used in the same context as the word ‘foundation’ figures in this thesis. Heidegger’s *Grund* is used to refer to that foundational

⁵³ Heidegger, Martin, “On the Essence of Ground,” trans. William McNeill, in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 97-135.

‘principle’ that *grounds* (justifies) knowledge. In “On the Essence of Ground,” Heidegger’s task is to investigate what a ground *is*, and if and how it can provide us knowledge, either of what is or of knowing itself. Here I will go through Heidegger’s argument in “On the Essence of Ground” so that we can get a clearer picture of how Heidegger thinks about foundations and how his understanding of foundations fits within his methodology laid out in *Being and Time*.

In the beginning of the treatise, Heidegger wants to raise the problematic of ground, or what it is that enables us to ask a “why” question, what it is that moves us to seek justification for any claim to knowledge.⁵⁴ He starts with an analysis of Leibniz’s formulation of the principle of sufficient reason: *nihil est sine ratione*: nothing is without reason.⁵⁵ Put positively, the principle states: *omne ens habet rationem*: every being (*Seiende*) has a reason. Heidegger states that the principle only makes an assertion about entities (*Seiende*) with respect to a reason—that is, a ground (*Grund*); however, the principle itself makes no claim about the *essence* of ground or whatever it is that determines ground *qua* ground.⁵⁶ As a *grounding* principle, the principle of sufficient reason presupposes the essence of ground. The essence of ground is what gives this principle its grounding character.

Already, Heidegger alludes to the ontological difference: the difference between *Sein* and *Seiende*, of Being and entities. *Sein*, ‘Being,’ is what determines entities as entities, and is not itself an entity.⁵⁷ Heidegger claims that the principle of sufficient reason states that every entity (*Seiende*) has a reason or ground—that anything that *is* has an essence or basis—but what determines this is yet to be understood or conceptualized. He argues that the principle of

⁵⁴ Ibid., 98-99.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 100.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ “In the question which we are to work out, *what is asked about* is Being—that which determines entities as entities, that on the basis of which [woraufhin] entities are already understood, however we may discuss them in detail. The Being of entities ‘is’ not itself an entity,” Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 25-26.

sufficient reason cannot provide this understanding because it is not a principle of Being (*Sein*) itself.⁵⁸ So, Heidegger's task in "On the Essence of Ground" is to explicate, to develop an understanding of what it is that *enables* grounding: what it is that determines the character of entities as having a ground or reason for their truth.

Heidegger begins his investigation with an analysis of the principle of sufficient reason in order to give an *ontological* interpretation of the principle of sufficient reason. The principle itself cannot provide for an explication of the essence of ground (because it is an ontic principle), but points to the problem of the essence of ground because we can ask *why* the principle of sufficient reason is expressed at all.⁵⁹ The methodology Heidegger employs here mirrors the one used in *Being and Time*: he seeks an answer to the question, "What is the essence of ground?" He begins an investigation to address this inquiry by interrogating a specific entity—the principle of sufficient reason—in order to explicate its ontological aspect and thereby bring us closer to what the inquiry seeks: the essence of ground. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger seeks an answer to the question, "What is the meaning of Being?" He begins an investigation to address the inquiry by interrogating a specific entity, Dasein, in order to explicate its ontological aspect and thereby bring us closer to what the inquiry seeks: the meaning of Being. So, in any inquiry, we begin our investigation by interrogating an entity (which is *ontic*) in order to explicate its *ontological* aspect. We move from the ontic to the ontological. And this is what Heidegger is doing with the principle of sufficient reason; he begins his analysis with the ontic character of the principle of sufficient reason.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Heidegger, "On the Essence of Ground," 100.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 102.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Heidegger points out that the principle of sufficient reason, as formulated by Leibniz, is conceived as necessary for truth.⁶¹ According to Heidegger, truth is characterized by Leibniz as *propositional* truth, appealing to Aristotle. For Leibniz, the essence of propositional truth is identity—namely, an identity between a subject and what is predicated of that subject. All truth, then, can be determined by an analysis of the subject: if what is predicated of the subject is derived from such an analysis, then the proposition ‘*S is P*’ is true. The derivation of ‘*P*’ from ‘*S*’ is thereby determined as the sufficient reason for why ‘*S is P*’ is true.⁶² If truth is conceived this way, propositionally, then the principle of sufficient reason *has* to be valid; otherwise there could be no truth. For if the principle of sufficient reason does not necessarily hold, then there could be a presumably true proposition that we could not *determine* is true because there would be nothing to which the proposition conforms; no ground for which the proposition can express its truth. This illustrates the circular problem of foundations expressed earlier: the principle of sufficient reason must hold because if it did not, we could not have knowledge since we would be unable to determine what makes a proposition true.

The problem with the principle of sufficient reason, according to Heidegger, is that it implicitly conceives of truth as conformity: that it makes a proposition true only if it conforms to the ground that makes it true.⁶³ Heidegger argues that conceiving truth this way, as conformity, presupposes a more originary truth: *ontic truth*.⁶⁴ This is because entities (*Seiende*) must already be manifest in order for them to be the concern of predicative determination. This original

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 103.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

manifestation of entities is what Heidegger terms “ontic truth.”⁶⁵ For Heidegger, ontic truth is just that entities are accessible—that they are manifest somehow and determined as entities.

So far, Heidegger’s investigation into the essence of ground has started with an ontic investigation of the principle of sufficient reason. An investigation of the principle of sufficient reason is ontic because the principle is a principle of *ground* that applies to what is ontic (i.e., applies to entities). Heidegger, in interpreting the conditions of this grounding identifies a further ground that is propositional truth. In interpreting the enabling conditions for propositional truth, Heidegger identifies yet a further ground that is ontic truth. Of course, Heidegger will press further to provide an ontological interpretation of ontic truth—that is, an account of what makes ontic truth (the accessibility or manifestation of entities) possible. Heidegger says that entities make themselves manifest in the ways we *comport* (*sich verhalten*) ourselves toward them—that is in the ways we encounter entities—but that this comportment alone does not make entities accessible *as* entities; rather, an understanding of Being is necessary for entities to become manifest.⁶⁶ Heidegger terms this understanding of Being “ontological truth.” Ontological truth grounds ontic truth, the manifestation of entities as entities; ontic truth, in turn, grounds propositional truth, which in turn grounds the principle of sufficient reason.

Now, ontological truth, in which the Being of entities is understood, does not necessarily entail comprehending the essence of Being; it does not require a theoretical understanding of Being.⁶⁷ Rather, all that is necessary for ontological truth to arise is a pre-theoretical or pre-

⁶⁵ “Rather beings, as the concern of any predicative determination, must already be manifest *before* such predication and *for* it. For it to be possible, predication must be able to take up residence in a making-manifest that is *not predicative* in character. Propositional truth is rooted in a *more originary* truth (unconcealment), in the pre-predicative manifestness of *beings*, which may be called *ontic truth*.” (ibid.).

⁶⁶ “Yet even such kinds of comportment, whether they are interpreted as pre-predicative or as predicative, would be incapable of making beings accessible in themselves if their making manifest were not always illuminated and guided in advance by an understanding of the being [*Sein*] (the ontological constitution: what-being and how-being) of beings [*Seiende*].” (ibid., brackets added).

⁶⁷ Ibid., 104.

conceptual understanding of Being, which, as we have seen, Heidegger calls a pre-ontological understanding of Being.⁶⁸ It is this understanding that allows us to distinguish one entity from another—so that a tree can be differentiated from a human being. Heidegger, however, is concerned with a *fundamental* ontological understanding of Being, and as such, he seeks to explicate the understanding of the Being of entities and bring it to a conceptual level. This was his task in *Being and Time*.

In “On the Essence of Ground,” Heidegger seeks what it is that enables ground to be. So far, he has identified ontological truth as that which makes ground possible—that is, what allows knowledge of true propositions to rest on ground. However, Heidegger has yet to explicate the essence of ontological truth, that which enables ontological truth to occur, and has yet to bring it to a theoretical understanding. Insofar as ontological truth is identified as an understanding of Being, Heidegger’s task, as in *Being and Time*, is to provide a fundamental ontology of our understanding of Being. At this point, it becomes clear that in inquiring into the essence of ground, we are also inquiring into Being itself. Heidegger has already undertaken some of the work related to this inquiry in *Being and Time*, and he draws on concepts developed there to advance his inquiry in “On the Essence of Ground.”

Heidegger, returning to the topic of ontological truth, seeks to interpret what it is that enables a pre-ontological understanding of the Being of entities. This pre-ontological understanding rests on an awareness of the ontological difference: that the Being of entities is not itself an entity—that which determines entities as entities is not an entity. The entity that has this (pre-ontological) understanding of the ontological difference and of Being is Dasein.⁶⁹ Heidegger

⁶⁸ “We therefore call this understanding of being that has not yet been brought to a concept a pre-ontological understanding, or ontological in the broader sense.” (ibid.).

⁶⁹ “The essence of truth in general, which is thus necessarily forked in terms of the ontic and the ontological, is possible only together with the irruption of this distinction. And if what is distinctive about Dasein

calls the ground that enables Dasein to discern the ontological difference the *transcendence* of Dasein.⁷⁰

Now, Heidegger does not use the word ‘transcendence’ in the same way as Kant or other ‘transcendental’ philosophers. For Kant and post-Kantian transcendental thinkers, the transcendental refers to an epistemological standpoint: it designates the *a priori* conditions for the possibility of knowledge of objects.⁷¹ For Heidegger, however, Dasein is transcendental in the sense that it can have an understanding of the Being of entities. This is the fundamental ‘surpassing’ of entities in which Being is understood—at least in a pre-ontological way.⁷² Transcendence is the fundamental constitution of Dasein; Dasein *is* transcendence.⁷³ Transcendence is that which makes possible for Dasein (as onto-ontological) to disclose and project the Being of beings, including itself. As such, transcendence is the surpassing of beings (*Seiende*) to Being (*Sein*).

Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, has already explicated that fundamental structure of Dasein that makes possible an understanding of Being: Being-in-the-world. So Being-in-the-world is identified as transcendence, and transcendence as Being-in-the-world.⁷⁴ In *Being and Time*, Division 1, Chapter 2, Heidegger characterizes Being-in-the-world as the fundamental constitutive state of Dasein: it is a unitary phenomenon that allows the world to be encounterable (*Begegnen*), and, analyzing each of its constitutive parts (“Being-in,” “World,” and the “Who” of Being-in-the-world), we can see that Being-in-the-world enables Dasein (as “Being-in”) to

indeed lies in the fact that in understanding being it comports itself toward beings, then *that* potential for distinguishing in which the ontological difference becomes factual must have sunk the roots of its own possibility in the ground of the essence of Dasein.” (ibid., 105-106).

⁷⁰ Ibid., 106.

⁷¹ “What ‘transcendental’ means, however, is not to be taken from a philosophy to which one attributes the ‘standpoint’ of the ‘transcendental’ or even of being ‘epistemological.’ (ibid., 109).

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 109-110.

disclose and project the world, which is there *for* Dasein as the context of meaning.⁷⁵ Being-in-the-world, as the ontological interpretation of Dasein's everydayness, is contrasted with the traditional ontological interpretation of a subject that is presented over and against a world of objects, where the subject is treated as one type of entity privileged among the totality of entities.⁷⁶ Heidegger argues that this traditional ontological interpretation, which interprets entities as present-at-hand⁷⁷, including the "subject," precludes any explication of "ontological truth" or what it is that makes ontology possible.⁷⁸ This is Heidegger's reason for starting his investigation in *Being and Time* with an investigation of Dasein's ontic affairs in their average everydayness. Heidegger's focus is an interpretation of Dasein's engagement with entities as ready-to-hand⁷⁹ and how this kind of engagement informs Dasein's existential significance.

This brings us back to "On the Essence of Ground." Heidegger names transcendence, i.e., Being-in-the-world, as that which allows for ontological truth—namely, that which allows for any ontological interpretation. Ontological interpretation is explicating of the Being of some entity, and transcendence is necessary for the possibility of this interpretation. Any *occurrent* ontological interpretation—that is, interpreting an entity as present-at-hand—presupposes transcendence. All ontology is thus grounded in transcendence, or Being-in-the-world. It is important that Heidegger's project in *Being and Time* is to present a fundamental ontology, to explicate what it is that makes ontology possible; so, explicating Being-in-the-world as transcendence is already on the way to explicating a fundamental ontology. The concept of

⁷⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 78-90.

⁷⁶ Heidegger, "On the Essence of Ground," 109-110.

⁷⁷ *Vorhandenheit*. This is a technical term employed by Heidegger, referring to a mode of encountering entities as objectively present. Treating entities as *present-at-hand* decontextualizes them and regards them as objects for observation and analysis.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 110-111.

⁷⁹ *Zuhandenheit*. This is a technical term employed by Heidegger, referring to the primary mode of encountering entities as practically available. Treating entities as *ready-to-hand* contextualizes them and regards them as objects for our meaningful use.

Being-in-the-world is just a preliminary account of fundamental ontology. Heidegger, at least in *Being in Time*, argues that an explication of the meaning of Being will provide that fundamental ontology that will ground any ontology with respect to entities.⁸⁰ I will return to this later. What is important to recognize is that, *preliminarily*, Being-in-the-world is the ground of grounding, because transcendence is what grounds ontological truth: it allows for the understanding of the Being of entities.

Heidegger has shown that inquiry into the essence of ground has led to the problem of ground from the principle of sufficient reason to the domain of transcendence. The task at hand now is to “illuminate the essence of ground from out of the transcendence of Dasein.”⁸¹ Heidegger reiterates that the transcendence of Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, is a surpassing by Dasein of entities to Being, and that, from an ontological interpretation of Dasein’s average everydayness, it is revealed that Dasein’s existentiells, its ontic states, define its Being.⁸² What transcendence is ultimately directed toward is the Being of Dasein, and this understanding of the Being of Dasein is in turn made possible by the various existentiells it chooses to live out. The ontical affairs of Dasein are *chosen*, which implies freedom—we are free to choose which ontical affairs we engage in; we choose which existentiells have meaning for our Being. For this reason, transcendence is identified as freedom.⁸³ Freedom allows a ‘world’ to be ‘projected’ by us so that Being is understood.⁸⁴ In this way, freedom is the origin of ground: it is what makes ground possible—it is a *grounding*.⁸⁵ This is the case insofar as freedom, by grounding, is able to ground or provide a reason for entities as such.

⁸⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 31.

⁸¹ Heidegger, “On the Essence of Ground,” 125.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 125-126.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

Freedom, as transcendence, as Being-in-the-world, is a grounding in three manifold ways: (1) grounding as establishing (*Stiften*), (2) grounding as taking up a basis (*Bodennehmen*), and (3) grounding as the grounding of something (*Begründen*).⁸⁶ These manifold ways of grounding are expressed as a unity belonging essentially to freedom/transcendence/Being-in-the-world. They express fundamental characteristics that Heidegger has already described. (1) Grounding as establishing is that characteristic of transcendence that allows for a ‘world’: transcendence *establishes* a world for Dasein in which Dasein encounters entities and projects itself among its ontic possibilities.⁸⁷ (2) Grounding as taking up a basis is that characteristic of transcendence in which a stance must be taken by Dasein in the face of projected possibility—this highlights the finite character of transcendence; transcendence is marked by taking a stance toward entities (an ontic stance).⁸⁸ Finally, (3) grounding as the grounding of something highlights the characteristic of transcendence whereby entities are determined as entities; it makes possible an understanding of the how-being of entities and allows for ontic truth.⁸⁹

Grounding as establishing puts before Dasein the possibilities of the world: the various existentiells it can take up in its project; it allows for projection. And as projecting, Dasein finds itself as such among entities and is attuned by them. Grounding as taking up a basis allows Dasein to seize or take possession of its projection and *choose* its existentiell project, in order that Being may be disclosed. The first two modes of grounding, Heidegger says, are “simultaneous.”⁹⁰ They are what characterize Dasein’s Being-in-the-world: in the first instance, as attunement and projection, and in the second instance, as disclosure. These two modes of

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 127-128.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 128-129.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 129.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 128.

grounding imply the third mode of grounding: grounding as establishing, which characterizes Being-in-the-world as comportment.⁹¹ All three “groundings” are unified in transcendence as the origin of ground as such.⁹² In accordance with the three “modes,” ground means: possibility (attunement and projection), basis (disclosure), and account (comportment).⁹³ Ontological truth (the understanding of the Being of entities, of the ontological difference), which is enabled by the first two modes of grounding, and ontic truth (our comportment toward entities as entities), which is enabled by the third mode of grounding, are made possible in the unity of transcendence as freedom to ground.⁹⁴ Again, Heidegger argues that the essence of ground is found in the enabling conditions of ground—it cannot be determined ontically or even by traditional ontology. For this reason, the essence of ground cannot be sought by “asking after a universal genus that is supposed to result by way of an abstraction.”⁹⁵

Finally, we are at the point of determining what, for Heidegger, the “essence” of ground is. Heidegger thinks of the essence of ground as the enabling condition for ground in general—what he identifies as transcendence. Transcendence is a threefold “grounding” that allows for any and all ontic grounds.⁹⁶ Heidegger takes us back to the point of departure for the investigation: the principle of sufficient reason (*Satz von Grunde*), to bring forth a new interpretive understanding in light of the ontology just developed. Heidegger claims that the principle of sufficient reason is an ontic principle—that is, one that applies to entities: no entity is without reason.⁹⁷ So, to take an ontic principle and treat it ontologically as a ‘first principle’ is

⁹¹ Ibid., 129.

⁹² Ibid., 130-131.

⁹³ Ibid., 131.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 131-132.

⁹⁶ “*The essence of ground is the transcendental springing forth of grounding, strewn threefold into projection of world, absorption within beings, and ontological grounding of beings.*” (ibid., 132).

⁹⁷ Ibid.

misguided because, as ontic, it cannot provide us with the conditions for what determines entities as entities—it cannot provide us with an understanding of Being.

However, why is the principle of sufficient reason valid for all entities? Why must entities have a ground? The reason, according to Heidegger, is that that which determines entities as entities—namely, Being—is intrinsically *grounding*, so that entities necessarily reflect this character in themselves.⁹⁸ The problematic of the principle of sufficient reason arises when it is treated as an ontological principle of what grounds entities, because the principle of sufficient reason is itself an entity. This problematic (as highlighted by the Agrippan trilemma) opens the door for Heidegger to ask what *enables* the principle of sufficient reason to be in the first place. He asks: what makes this principle possible? This is Heidegger's way of entering into a fundamental ontology: the providing of an explication of what determines an entity as an entity (i.e., Being).

Heidegger makes the discovery that the principle of sufficient reason actually presupposes a propositional interpretation of truth, where what is true is made true based on an identity with its predicate. A judgment, then, must be made in order for truth to arise. However, Heidegger claims that this presupposes yet another kind of truth: ontic truth, which is characterized by entities being manifest to us. But this manifestation of entities—where we can understand entities as the entities that they are—presupposes yet another kind of truth: ontological truth. Ontological truth is characterized as the comprehension of the Being of entities (a pre-ontological comprehension), which is necessary for ontic comportment—where entities are comprehended as the entities they are. Ontological truth implies ontic truth: they go together

⁹⁸ “Because ‘ground’ is a transcendental characteristic of the essence of *being in general*, the principle of reason [ground] is valid for *beings*. Ground, however, belongs to the essence of being because being (not beings) is given only in transcendence as a grounding that finds itself in a projecting of world.” (ibid.).

and are made possible by Being-in-the-world, which is transcendence. Dasein's constitution as Being-in-the-world means that Dasein is always already confronted with a world (thrownness) in which it is projected; that is, confronted with existentiell possibilities that can be meaningful for Dasein—possibilities that disclose its own Being. Owing to its finitude, Being-in-the-world conditions Dasein to 'take a stand,' to choose its existentiell projects, which involves a surpassing from entities to Being. This wholly unitary structure of Being-in-the-world (transcendence) implies ontological truth (understanding of the ontological difference) and ontic truth (understanding of entities as the entities they are). Being-in-the-world (transcendence) is thus the freedom to ground; it is freedom because it is essentially (in a fundamental ontological sense) grounding—by establishing, taking up, and grounding something (an entity). This structure is an *a priori* condition for ground as such, allowing for the possibility of ontic grounding exhibited by the principle of sufficient reason.

IV. Conclusion

Heidegger's methodology in "On the Essence of Ground" mirrors the methodology employed in his inquiry in *Being and Time*. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger articulates the formal structure of the question of Being: every inquiry is a seeking [*Suchen*], and every inquiry is guided by what is sought.⁹⁹ What is sought in *Being and Time* is an explication of the meaning of Being: to articulate the meaning of Being and conceptualize it. The inquiry is guided by Dasein's implicit (pre-ontological) understanding of Being. In order to explicate this understanding and bring it to a conceptual level, the inquirer directs attention to some entity because Being is always the Being of an entity. The entity Heidegger directs his attention to is Dasein; this entity is the privileged entity in which to begin the investigation because Dasein always already understands Being (albeit pre-ontologically).¹⁰⁰ The task is then to provide an explication of this implicit understanding of Being. This is where Heidegger employs hermeneutic phenomenology—Heidegger will examine Dasein as it exists proximally and for the most part in its average everydayness (to avoid importing traditional ontological concepts).¹⁰¹ Heidegger examines Dasein's existentiell modes of understanding phenomenologically—namely, what enables these existentiell modes of understanding—and provides a hermeneutic or *interpretation*

⁹⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 24.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 34.

¹⁰¹ "Thus an analytic of Dasein must remain our first requirement in the question of Being. But in that case the problem of obtaining and securing the kind of access which will lead to Dasein, becomes even more a burning one. To put it negatively, we have no right to resort to dogmatic constructions and to apply just any idea of Being and actuality to this entity, no matter how 'self-evident' that idea may be; nor may any of the 'categories' which such an idea prescribes be forced upon Dasein without proper ontological consideration. We must rather choose such a way of access and such a kind of interpretation that this entity can show itself in itself and from itself [an ihm selbst von ihm selbst her]. And this means that it is to be shown as it is *proximally and for the most part*—in its average *everydayness*." (ibid., 37-38).

of this understanding in order to conceptualize it, which brings him to the existential analytic of Dasein as Being-in-the-world.¹⁰²

In “On the Essence of Ground,” Heidegger is seeking something ontological—what the essence of ground *is*—which pertains to Being. As the investigators, we already have an understanding of Being, but we want to bring this understanding to a conceptual level that is suitable for an ontological investigation. Heidegger begins his investigation here with the principle of sufficient reason, which is an ontic principle—it pertains to entities and makes an assertion about entities: that that they are to be grounded, and that to know the truth of any entity is to know its ground.¹⁰³ Heidegger presses forward his investigation to determine what it is that makes this assertion possible. Heidegger claims that the principle of sufficient reason rests on a presupposition concerning the nature of truth—namely, truth understood as propositional truth.¹⁰⁴ This traditional conception of truth holds that a proposition is true only if its predicate is contained within its subject, so that the proposition becomes an identity statement where subject=predicate. The sufficient reason for a true proposition is this conceptual containment of subject and predicate.

Heidegger, employing his standard methodology, wants to determine what enables this conception of truth—what conditions allow for the possibility of truth conceived as such. Heidegger argues that predicate determination, the identity of a subject with a predicate, rests on more originary truth, the truth involving the pre-predicative manifestness of entities, which he calls “ontic truth.”¹⁰⁵ In order for a judgment to be made concerning the identity of some “subject” and its “predicate,” entities must always already be available, manifest, to the judgment

¹⁰² Ibid., 78.

¹⁰³ Heidegger, “On the Essence of Ground,” 100.

¹⁰⁴ Heidegger, “On the Essence of Ground,” 102.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 103.

maker: Dasein. Ontic truth describes Dasein's comportment (*Verhalten*) toward other entities, where entities are manifest and revealed for what they are.¹⁰⁶ However, ontic truth is not primary. Heidegger argues that ontic truth, the manifestness of entities, is made possible by ontological truth—namely, an understanding by Dasein of the ontological difference, or the Being of entities, since entities are revealed as entities only by this (pre-ontological) understanding.¹⁰⁷ Finally, Heidegger shows his concept of Being-in-the-world as the condition for ontological truth to arise and identifies Being-in-the-world with transcendence and freedom.¹⁰⁸ Being-in-the-world/transcendence/freedom is the condition for ontological/ontic truth and is thus *grounding*: the condition for ground in general.¹⁰⁹

Heidegger's methodology in *Being and Time* and "On the Essence of Ground" should be clear: in both texts, he begins his investigation with what is ontic and moves to provide an interpretation articulating what it is that enables/conditions the ontic state of affairs without relying on traditional ontological interpretations of Being. This is what makes up his hermeneutic phenomenology. As a response to the problem of foundations in section I of this thesis, "On the Essence of Ground" shows that Heidegger would diagnose the problem of foundations in the history of philosophy as treating *ontic* foundations (foundations pertaining to entities) as *ontological* (foundations pertaining to Being). He uses standard transcendental argumentation (what makes 'x' possible), starting from the ontic and moving to the ontological—from entities to Being—so that he can provide a conceptual interpretation of Being in general, which so far we only have an implicit understanding of as that which determines entities as entities.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 103-104.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 125-126.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 127.

In both *Being and Time* and “On the Essence of Ground,” Being-in-the-world is identified as a concept that makes possible Dasein’s understanding of Being, and therefore of entities. Is Heidegger thus committing the fatal error of epistemological foundationalism? For even though Being-in-the-world is an ontological concept (in Heidegger’s sense of ontological), it is still articulated as that which makes understanding of Being, and therefore entities, possible. It is for this reason that scholars argue that Heidegger’s thought in *Being and Time* is merely a form of transcendental philosophy, following the work of Kant and post-Kantian philosophers.¹¹⁰ I argue that, following Heidegger’s method found in *Being and Time* and “On the Essence of Ground,” Heidegger is not a transcendental thinker in line with Kant and post-Kantian philosophers because he is not a foundationalist: he does not conceive of Being-in-the-world as the Archimedean point that provides any epistemic justification for knowing itself.

Heidegger argues that an interpretation of Dasein’s ontological structure (Dasein’s Being) is necessary for an interpretation of the meaning of Being in general because Dasein always already has an implicit (pre-ontological) understanding of Being; such an understanding of Being is an essential characteristic of Dasein’s own Being.¹¹¹ Providing such an interpretation articulates and conceptualizes Dasein’s pre-ontological understanding of Being bringing this understanding to a more theoretical level.¹¹² Only when the meaning of Being is given a theoretical explication can ontological, and thereby ontic, investigations be properly grounded, since such inquiries currently rest on an unclarified understanding of Being.¹¹³ Thus, in *Being*

¹¹⁰ Again, see Blattner, William, “Heidegger’s Kantian idealism revisited,” *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 47, no. 4 (2004), 321-337; Crowell, Steven Galt & Malpas, Jeff (eds.), *Transcendental Heidegger* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Dahlstrom, Daniel, “Heidegger’s Transcendentalism,” *Research in Phenomenology* 35, no. 1 (2005), 29-54; Nelson, Eric S., “Heidegger’s Failure to Overcome Transcendental Philosophy,” in *Transcendental Inquiry: Its History, Methods and Critiques*, ed. Halla Kim and Steven Hoeltzel (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 159-179.

¹¹¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 34.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 38.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 31.

and Time, Heidegger aims to provide an existential analytic—an interpretation—of Dasein’s Being.¹¹⁴ The method he employs is hermeneutic phenomenology: an interpretive approach that seeks to uncover what it is that makes Dasein’s pre-ontological understanding of Being, in its average everydayness, possible.¹¹⁵

Through the method of hermeneutic phenomenology, Heidegger provides an interpretation of Dasein’s Being as Being-in-the-world. This interpretation captures what it is that makes Dasein’s pre-ontological understanding of Being possible.¹¹⁶ However, Being-in-the-world does not serve as the epistemic foundation for this understanding of Being; rather, it is a *preliminary* interpretation that has yet to reach the full conceptual articulation required for a theoretical account of the meaning of Being in general. In order to move toward this theoretical level, Heidegger’s method must involve a *reinterpretation* of Dasein’s Being in light of the initial interpretation of Dasein’s Being as Being-in-the-world.¹¹⁷ This recursive process of interpretation describes the method as a “hermeneutic circle,” which deliberately avoids the assumptions of epistemic foundationalism, which posits some indubitable, static foundation that ultimately grounds and justifies all understanding. Heidegger’s project of fundamental ontology, pursued through hermeneutic phenomenology, thus begins with an interpretation of an implicit understanding of Being, and this interpretation provides the basis for a reinterpretation of that understanding, gradually raising this understanding to a more explicit and conceptual level.

In *Being and Time*, Being-in-the-world, as an interpretation of Dasein’s Being, provides the basis for a reinterpretation of Dasein’s Being as *care* (*Sorge*), insofar as it reveals Dasein as

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 34.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 62.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 78.

¹¹⁷ “Once we have arrived at that horizon [for the Being of Dasein], this preparatory analytic of Dasein will have to be repeated on a higher and authentically ontological basis.” (ibid., 38). See also Heidegger’s discussion on “Understanding and Interpretation” in ¶32. (ibid., 188-195, brackets added).

always already involved and invested in the world through its projects, concerns, and practical engagements.¹¹⁸ An interpretation of care as Dasein's Being then provides the basis for a reinterpretation of Dasein's Being as *ecstatic temporality*, since care, in its structural unity of thrownness, projection, and fallenness, discloses the temporal dimensions through which Dasein exists already in a world, ahead of itself, and alongside others.¹¹⁹ This interpretation of Dasein's Being as temporality, however, is not an account of the meaning of Being in general.¹²⁰ The meaning of Being in general has not yet been worked out to its conclusion.

Heidegger, in the last section of *Being and Time*, acknowledges that while “something like ‘Being’” has been disclosed through the existential analytic of Dasein—with the interpretation of Dasein's Being as temporality—it has only been preliminarily conceptualized and does not provide the ultimate justification for Dasein's disclosive understanding of Being.¹²¹ Heidegger thus asks if we can continue down this interpretive route: if Dasein's Being is grounded in temporality, how is temporality itself to be interpreted? Can a more primordial interpretation of time lead to the meaning of Being as such? Heidegger's final remarks express that the investigation has yet to reach its conclusion. The investigation has yet to reach the

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 237ff.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 374ff.

¹²⁰ “We shall point to *temporality* as the meaning of Being of that entity which we call “Dasein”. If this is to be demonstrated, those structures of Dasein which we shall provisionally exhibit must be Interpreted over again as modes of temporality. In thus interpreting Dasein as temporality, however, we shall not give the answer to our leading question as to the meaning of Being in general. But the ground will have been prepared for obtaining such an answer.” (ibid., 38).

¹²¹ “Something like ‘Being’ has been disclosed in the understanding-of-Being which belongs to existent Dasein as a way in which it understands. Being has been disclosed in a preliminary way, though non-conceptually; and this makes it possible for Dasein as existent Being-in-the-world to comport itself *towards entities*—towards those which it encounters within-the-world as well as towards itself as existent. *How is this disclosive understanding of Being at all possible for Dasein?* Can this question be answered by going back to the *primordial constitution-of-Being* of that Dasein by which Being is understood? The existential-ontological constitution of Dasein's totality is grounded in temporality. Hence the ecstatic projection of Being must be made possible by some primordial way in which ecstatic temporality temporalizes. How is this mode of the temporalizing of temporality to be Interpreted? Is there a way which leads from primordial *time* to the meaning of *Being*? Does *time* itself manifest itself as the horizon of *Being*? (ibid., 488).

ultimate foundation for which proper ontological and ontic investigations can take place. We have yet to ‘justify’ our understanding of Being. From his final remarks, I suggest that Heidegger invites us to uptake his method and join in the path of his thinking in search of the ultimate foundation for philosophy: Being itself.

Heidegger, through his method, fundamentally transforms transcendental philosophy. Transcendental philosophy, following Kant, seeks the condition for the possibility of knowledge of experience and posits a foundation that adequately justifies such knowledge, which is some form of self-consciousness. Heidegger takes from transcendental philosophy a form of this argumentative strategy: he seeks the condition for the possibility of Dasein’s implicit understanding of Being in order to provide a *preliminary* foundation or ground for that understanding. The difference with Heidegger is that once he identifies the ground that makes understanding of Being possible, he interprets what is grounded by this ground (our implicit understanding of Being) in order to bring the ground to a higher conceptual level. This bidirectional approach of interpretation gets repeated until a final conceptual, theoretical level is articulated. In other words, Heidegger, unlike the transcendental philosophers of Kant and various post-Kantians, *seeks* a foundation that will ground all understanding. This foundation has not yet been posited; Heidegger has not yet theoretically articulated the meaning of Being in general. Thus, while indebted to the transcendental tradition, Heidegger is not a ‘transcendental thinker’ because he is not an epistemological foundationalist: he has not provided the ground for which all understanding of Being rests.

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