

# Heidegger and the ‘There Is’ of Being<sup>1</sup>

Forthcoming in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*

Kris McDaniel

Syracuse University

2-15-2015

## 1. Introduction

My focus will be on the following passages from *Being and Time*:

Entities *are*, quite independently of the experience by which they are disclosed, the acquaintance in which they are discovered, and the grasping in which their nature is ascertained. But Being ‘is’ only in the understanding of those entities to whose Being something like an understanding of Being belongs. . . . In ontological problematics *Being and truth* have, from time immemorial, been brought together if not entirely identified. This is evidence that there is a necessary connection between Being and understanding, even if it may perhaps be hidden in its primordial grounds. [§ 39, SZ: 183, BT: 228]

Of course, only as long as Da-sein *is* ... ‘is there’ [gibt es] being. When Da-sein does not exist, ‘independence’ is not either, nor ‘is’ the ‘in itself.’ In such a case, this sort of thing can be neither understood nor not understood. In such a case even entities within-the-world can neither be discovered, nor can they lie hidden. In such a case it cannot be said that beings are, nor can it be said that they are not. But *now*, as long as there is an understanding of being and therefore an understanding of presence-at-hand, it can indeed be said that *in this case* entities will still continue to be. [§ 43c, SZ: 212, BT: 255]

Being (not entities) is something which ‘there is’ only in so far as truth is. And truth *is* only in so far and as long as Dasein is. Being and truth ‘are’ equiprimordially. What does it signify that Being ‘is’, where Being is to be distinguished from every entity? One can ask this concretely only if the meaning of Being and the full scope of the understanding of the understanding of Being have been clarified. Only then can one also analyze primordially what belongs to the concept of a science *of Being as such*, and to its possibilities and its variations. [§44c SZ: 230, BT: 272]

One needn’t look hard for obscure passages in *Being and Time*, or elsewhere in Heidegger’s corpus, but many have found these passages especially enigmatic. These passages seem to commit Heidegger to an untenably inconsistent triad whose elements are as follows.

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<sup>1</sup> I thank William Blattner, Taylor Carman, Joshua Tepley, an anonymous referee for terrifically helpful feedback on earlier versions of this paper.

First, there are some entities that are modally independent of Dasein. For the purposes here, it suffices to preliminarily identify Daseins with human persons. By ‘modally independent’, I mean that it is possible that they exist in some way even if no human persons exist.

Second, Being itself is modally dependent on Dasein, so Being would not, in some sense, *be* unless Dasein also were.

But, third, nothing can be unless Being in some sense is. Of course Heidegger does not explicitly state this third claim, but *prima facie* it seems plausible. Consider by way of comparison: if redness exists *only* in possible situations in which human persons exist, then things are red only if human persons exist. (If redness exists *only* in our comprehension of redness, then things are not red independently of our comprehension of redness.)<sup>2</sup>

Since Heidegger does not explicitly endorse the third claim, an obvious interpretative strategy is to find a way for Heidegger to plausibly deny it. A number of interpreters of Heidegger advocate what is called *the intelligibility interpretation*, according to which what Heidegger means by ‘being’ just is intelligibility.<sup>3</sup> On the intelligibility interpretation, Heidegger’s question ‘what is the meaning of Being?’ really just is the question, ‘What makes entities *intelligible to us* as entities?’

The intelligibility interpretation provides an explanation of why Heidegger is entitled to reject the third claim. Since being, that is, the intelligibility of entities as entities, is something that characterizes entities only contingently, these entities can exist independently of whether being characterizes them. That is, there are things that can exist independently of whether they are intelligible to anything.<sup>4</sup>

As I will construe the intelligibility interpretation, it is the thesis that by ‘being’ Heidegger simply means ‘intelligibility’ rather than what pretty much everyone else means by ‘being’ (whatever that might be!). In short, the intelligibility interpretation takes Heidegger to attach a new, technical meaning to an old term, while retaining as well the older meaning of the term for occasional use.<sup>5</sup> We should contrast this construal of the intelligibility interpretation with a different one according to which Heidegger is not introducing a new meaning for the term

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<sup>2</sup> Many have noted this apparent inconsistency. One of the earliest critics was Max Scheler (1981, pp. 139-140). For more recent examples, see Schatzki (1992, pp. 92-93) and Carman (2003, pp. 200-203).

<sup>3</sup> Consider the following apparently representative statements of the intelligibility interpretation. Dreyfus (1991: xi-xii) writes, ‘*Sein* will be translated as *being* (with a lower-case *b*). Being is ‘that on the basis of which beings are already understood. Being is not a substance, process, an event, or anything that we normally come across; rather, it is a fundamental aspect of entities, viz. their intelligibility.’ Rouse (2005: 74) writes, ‘Drawing upon Greek and medieval philosophy, he [Heidegger] spoke of the ‘being’ of an entity as a way of considering its intelligibility as the entity it is.’ Sembera (2008, p. 45) writes, ‘The difference between Being and entities is neither mysterious nor mystical. It is as simple as the distinction between a criterion for meaningfulness (Being) and the meaningful thing itself (entities).’ Finally, Carman (2003, p. 17) writes, ‘The point is ... that being – that is, the intelligibility of entities, their making sense *as* entities depends on human beings...’ However, despite this passage, Carman (2003), is not clearly committed to what I am calling the intelligibility interpretation. See, e.g., p. 15, where he writes that, ‘Being ... is more fundamentally the intelligibility in virtue of which we treat things as the things they are.... Being is the intelligibility, or more precisely the condition of the intelligibility, of entities as entities.’ Since the condition of *x* in general is not always identical with *x*, Carman distances himself from the claim that ‘being’ is equivalent with ‘intelligibility’.

<sup>4</sup> Compare with Carman (2003, p. 168), Dreyfus (1991, p. 257), Olafson (1987, p. 136), and Polt (1999, pp. 81-82).

<sup>5</sup> This seems to be what Olafson (1987, p. 140) suggests. See also Phillipse (1998, p. 143). For a critical response, see Blattner (1999, pp. 3-7). Carman (2003, pp. 200-202) denies that Heidegger merely introduces a new technical meaning for an old term, but rather, on his account, deepens our understanding of what we meant by ‘being’ all along by explicating this understanding in terms of intelligibility.

‘being’ but rather is offering forth an identification of being with intelligibility. William Blattner (1999, pp. 1-8, 27) worries that some of the apparent friends of what I am calling the intelligibility interpretation are doing exactly this: they are equating what it is for an entity to be with what it is for an entity to be intelligible to us.<sup>6</sup> If ‘to be’ just means ‘to be understood by Dasein’, then it follows that something is only if some Dasein understands it. The Heidegger of *Being and Time* does not accept this.<sup>7</sup> Nor do I think that Heidegger identifies *being* with *intelligibility*, for by doing so he would be committed to the claim that an entity has being if and only if it is *intelligible to us*, and it is hard to square this bi-conditional with the claim that some entities are modally independent of us.<sup>8</sup>

Friends of the intelligibility interpretation draw support from these enigmatic passages. But foes of the intelligibility interpretation also have made use of these passages in their interpretations. Blattner (1999, p. 246) suggests that these passages indicate a substantive conclusion of Heidegger’s: ‘He does not just claim that being is intelligibility, and that intelligibility (trivially) depends on the one to whom things are intelligible. Rather, he argues that the structures in terms of which Dasein understands being are temporal structures, and that those structures - and not just the understanding of them - depend on Dasein. What can we conclude? The item picked out by ‘being’ depends on Dasein. That is, being depends on Dasein.’ It is clear that Blattner views these passages as containing the conclusion of a substantive argument, one for which its premises are the apt object of investigation.<sup>9</sup> Consider Blattner (1999, p. 242), ‘Aside from the shortcomings of this approach [the intelligibility interpretation] simply as an interpretation of Heidegger’s conception of being, also seriously deflates the argument in and about p. 212. In fact, p. 212 would ... not really be an argument at all. It would simply point out a triviality: if the being of an entity is that entity’s intelligibility to Dasein, and if Dasein does not exist, then the entity has no being, because it would not be, in that case, intelligible to Dasein.’

Like Blattner, I believe that the intelligibility interpretation is mistaken. I think the central interpretative error that has led to the intelligibility interpretation is the failure to take on their own terms the metaphysical and ontological themes that dominate *Being and Time*, the central task of which is to determine the meaning of ‘being’.

However, unlike Blattner, I am not convinced that Heidegger intends to be putting forth a conclusion in these enigmatic passages, the premises of which are located at disparate places in

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<sup>6</sup> Consider this passage from Frede (1993, p. 50): ‘If his work on Duns Scotus represents a decisive advance toward the realization that the meaning of being must be sought in human understanding (i.e., that to be means ‘to be understood as something’), Heidegger still had a long way to go in the development of his own fundamental ontology.’ If ‘to be’ simply meant ‘to be understood as something’, then nothing could be unless it were understood as something. By my lights, this is an extreme form of idealism, and we should hesitate to ascribe it to Heidegger without overwhelming textual evidence.

<sup>7</sup> The denial of this is explicitly expressed in the first passage quoted in this paper [§ 39, SZ: 183, BT: 228]. See also Blattner (1999, p. 3).

<sup>8</sup> Moreover, it is hard to square with the claim that some entities are essentially *unintelligible*. Heidegger seems to assert that present-at-hand entities are entities of this sort. [SZ: 153, BT: 194] Perhaps a friend of something like the intelligibility interpretation can allow that the being of nature is an unfulfilled condition for intelligibility, just as having a bank account is a condition for having money in the bank even though one can have a balance of zero. (I thank Taylor Carman for helpful discussion here and for suggesting this analogy.)

<sup>9</sup> By way of Contrast, Cerbone (2005, pp. 268-259) suggests that this enigmatic passage expresses the claim that certain things can be said about entities only if one has an understanding of the being of these entities. Similar remarks are made by Mullhall (2005, pp. 97-100). Gelven (1970, p. 126) also offers a deflationary reading, according to which all Heidegger is doing in this enigmatic passage is, ‘simply pointing out that to know what it means to be requires a self-conscious entity capable of this awareness.’ As it will emerge, I think more is going on in the enigmatic passages than this.

*Being and Time* and which must be articulated by a successful interpretation. Rather, my suspicion is that these passages do little work for Heidegger, and that he did not intend for them to be a focus of great controversy.<sup>10</sup> I can't hope to *demonstrate* this here – that's far too large of a task – though I will offer some preliminary considerations in favor of this suspicion. My primary goal is to provide an interesting alternative for understanding these passages that deflates their importance while not collapsing into the intelligibility interpretation. On this alternative interpretation, Being does depend on Dasein, and so what Blattner (1999) calls 'ontological idealism' is true – but *pace* Blattner (1999, p. 5), Heidegger does not view ontological idealism per se as a particularly important philosophical position. Specifically, on the interpretation to be articulated, ontological idealism is not the conclusion of an argument in which temporal idealism – the view that time modally depends on Dasein – figures crucially as a premise.<sup>11</sup>

A demonstration that these enigmatic passages contain neither a statement of a significant conclusion nor an important premise would require, among other things, extensively engaging with Blattner's (1999) case for both temporal idealism and the necessary connection between temporal idealism and ontological idealism. I do not do this here, and will instead have to merely present some preliminary reasons for my suspicions. First, there are comparatively few enigmatic passages of this sort, and my impression is that they have the character of an interesting side comment rather than a centrally important idea, that is, something more like a footnote but too lengthy in content to be lifted from the main body of the text. This impression is I think somewhat confirmed by the fact that only in a very few of the extant texts by Heidegger during this period do enigmatic passages of this sort even appear. (The extant texts to which I am referring are the various lecture notes for courses conducted by Heidegger during the 1920s.) The scarcity of such texts is somewhat surprising on the hypothesis that Heidegger expresses in them centrally important conclusions or premises.

These enigmatic passages appear in *Being and Time* in the context of an explicit discussion of topics such as the (alleged) problem of the external world, realism vs. idealism, and the nature of truth. It is tolerably clear that Heidegger thinks there is an important connection between being and truth – and this connection will be validated by the interpretation I will offer. However, because these enigmatic passages appear in a context in which the first two issues are discussed, one could be tempted to think that there is a deep connection between what is expressed by the enigmatic passages and the other issues discussed – that is the (alleged) problem of the external world and the controversy over realism vs. idealism. This temptation should be resisted if my interpretation is correct.

For this reason, it will be useful to contrast the context of the enigmatic passages in *Being and Time* with those of similar passages in other works. First, consider the context in which a similarly enigmatic passage appears in the *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*:

Every being to which we are related can be addressed and spoken of by saying 'it is' so and so, regardless of its specific mode of being. The being of beings meets with us in our understanding of being. .... 'There is' being only in the specific

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<sup>10</sup> This doesn't mean that the passages express *trivial* truths, that is, truths such that anyone who fully understood what these passages express would feel compelled to accept them. The intelligibility interpretation does seem to imply that these passages express trivial truths in this sense.

<sup>11</sup> Again, *pace* Blattner (1999, p. 27). Moreover, if I am right about this, then ontological idealism does not stand or fall with temporal idealism, *contra* Blattner (1999, p. 30).

disclosure that is characteristic of our understanding of being. .... ‘There is’ being only when disclosure is, that is, when truth is. But there is truth only if there is a being that discloses .... We ourselves are such a being. .... ‘There is’ being only when truth is, that is, when Dasein exists. [GS 24, pp. 24-25/ Heidegger 1988, pp. 18-19, my translation.]

This passage occurs amidst a discussion of the problem of the analogy of being, which briefly concerns the question of what the basic ways of being are and how they might be related.<sup>12</sup> The alleged problem of the external world is far from view, and there is no adjacent discussion of realism or idealism, temporal or otherwise. However, just as in the enigmatic passages in *Being and Time*, in this passage a connection between the conditions under which, in some sense, ‘there is’ being and truth is once again drawn. This connection is revisited substantially later when Heidegger (1998, pp. 222-223) asks, ‘How is the existence of truth related to being and to the manner in which there is being? Are being and truth essentially related to each other? Does the existence of being stand and fall with the existence of truth?’

A similar context surrounds these remarks from the *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*:

Closely linked with this problem of the ontological difference ... is the problem towards which we have been constantly moving, though from the opposite direction, as it were: the intrinsic connection of being and truth, the truth-character of being. [Heidegger 1984, p. 152] .... 1) Beings are in themselves the kinds of beings they are, and in the way they are, even if, for example, Dasein does not exist. 2) Being ‘is’ not, but being is there [es gibt], insofar as Dasein exists. In the essence of existence there is transcendence, i.e., a giving of world prior to and for all being-toward-and-among intra-worldly beings. 3) Only insofar as existing Dasein gives itself anything like being can beings emerge in their in-themselves.... [Heidegger 1984, p.153]

The problem of the analogy of being again prefaces this discussion, and there is a clear connection drawn again between being and truth. But the remainder of the discussion in this section is not similar to the texts surrounding the enigmatic passages in *Being and Time*.

I have been unable to locate other enigmatic texts of this type – that is, texts that in some way seem to assert that being depends on Dasein – in other extant lectures by Heidegger roughly in this period. Although I put little weight on this, the most significant absences of such texts seem to be in his *Logic: the Question of Truth* and *History of the Concept of Time*. In any event, I will focus on the enigmatic passages I have located.

It would be a grotesque hermeneutical error to insist that when interpreting a passage one must focus only on the immediate contexts in which that passage occurs. So let me be clear that I repudiate this error – sometimes a passage that occurs early in a text can be made sense of only by attending to later passages that are at some distance from it. If, for example, Blattner’s interpretation of these enigmatic passages is correct, then we can understand the justification for the remarks made relatively early in *Being and Time* only by seeing how they are consequences of the temporal idealism defended much later in the book. But let me also suggest that when a philosophical position appears to be articulated in multiple texts, it is worth entertaining hypotheses that make sense of why this position was in fact articulated in the respective local

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<sup>12</sup> I’ll have much more to say about the analogy of being in section 2.

contexts in which it occurs. In general, if an author intends to *conclude* that *P*, we do typically expect the rationale for *P* to be expressed proximally to the assertion that *P*. This is because, in general, an author who explicitly concludes that *P* does so with the intention of getting his or her readers to also accept that *P* – and arguments that are spread across disparate portions of a text that are not explicitly connected by the author are at the very least less apt to succeed in getting a reader to also accept that *P*. These sort of considerations provide a reason to prefer more ‘local interpretations’ when possible, although this reason is highly defeasible. Nonetheless it can motivate the search for an interpretation that makes sense of the local context of the text.

What is the common local context? Concerns about the analogy of being appear in *Being and Time* in many places, but of interest here is SZ: 201 / BT: 245, where Heidegger notes our pre-ontological understanding of being is not yet articulated in such a way that it corresponds to the various modes of being. (This passage appears as it were in between the two enigmatic texts quoted at the start of this paper.) And the concern with the analogy of being is also explicit in the enigmatic passage appearing in SZ: 230, BT: 272. So what is common to *all* of the enigmatic passages that appear in *Being in Time*, *the Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, and *the Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* is that these texts appear in a local context in which (i) a concern with the analogy of being is expressed and (ii) a link between being and truth is explicitly drawn. The context of these passages suggests that there is an important connection between the analogy of being, truth, and ontological idealism. But what is it?

Here is the plan for the rest of the paper. In section 2, I will first briefly discuss the analogy of being in Heidegger and his historical predecessors. After this brief discussion of the analogy of being, I turn to the status of what medieval philosophers called ‘beings of reason’. On the proposal I will put forward, when Heidegger employs abstract noun phrases that seem to stand for Being or one of its modes – such as ‘Being’, ‘Existenz’, and so forth – we should construe such talk to be referring to something roughly analogous to what the medievals called ‘beings of reason’.<sup>13</sup> Heidegger was certainly aware of traditional problems concerning beings of reason.<sup>14</sup> In section 3, I will develop this interpretation further, by distinguishing more carefully between beings of reason and beings of the understanding, where the understanding is construed not merely as a cognitive faculty for producing concepts or making judgment but rather is primarily a pre-cognitive ability to have dealings with entities of various sorts. And as we’ll see in section 3, construing what he is up to in these enigmatic passages in this way makes sense of what he says without thereby committing him to a problematic subjectivism. .

## 2. The Analogy of Being and Beings of Reason

Recently, several philosophers have defended the view that Heidegger’s project in *Being and Time* is motivated by the Aristotelian view that ‘being’ is said in many ways.<sup>15</sup> Briefly, and roughly, the view I attribute to Heidegger is that there are many fundamentally different ways to

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<sup>13</sup> Okrent (1988, pp. 185-188, pp. 215-216) suggests that, for Heidegger, Being is a merely intentional object. Okrent’s interpretation is in some ways close to what I will defend here, although he does not discuss the scholastic background to Heidegger’s views, and accordingly does not defend his interpretation via an appeal to this context.

<sup>14</sup> In general, the extensive discussion of medieval metaphysics and ontology in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (as well as in other works) indicate an extensive concern with ontology in the traditional sense. Thanks to anonymous referee for discussion here.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Carman (2013) and McDaniel (2009). Earlier antecedents include Inwood (1999: 26-28), Philipse (1998: 35), who thinks that concern with modes of being is at least one driving force in Heidegger’s thought.

be – there are modes of being – and corresponding to each of these fundamentally different ways to be are potential senses of ‘being’, senses which Heidegger attempts to articulate. The primary task of the discipline that Heidegger calls ‘fundamental ontology’ is to determine the meaning of ‘being’. In order to determine the meaning of ‘being’, for each mode of being, we need to understand what it is to be in that way, and we need to understand how these modes are related to each other. In this respect, Heidegger’s project is self-consciously neo-Aristotelian. Recall that Aristotle thought that the way in which a substance *is* is not the same way in which an accident *is*, although these ways of being are related to one another in such a way that it is appropriate to say that both a substance and an attribute *are*. Heidegger accepts this Aristotelian *framework* for considering ontological questions, but differs with Aristotle on whether the way of being enjoyed by substances should be thought of as the central mode of being in terms of which all others are to be understood. Rather, Heidegger focuses on *Existenz*, which is the mode of being of creatures like us, who Heidegger calls ‘Dasein’. Heidegger makes the provisional assumption that we should focus first on *Existenz* and see how other modes are related to it. The project of determining what it is to have *Existenz* as one’s mode of being is called ‘the existential analytic of Dasein’.

Aristotle, many important scholastic metaphysicians, and Franz Brentano during an early stage of his career, all accepted that being is said in many ways, and that for each distinct genuine ‘category of beings’, there is a correspondingly different mode of being.<sup>16</sup> But they also accepted a further distinction between senses of ‘being’ that is worth highlighting. For our purposes, it will be most useful to focus on the distinction between what I will call ‘categorical modes of being’ and ‘being in the sense of being true’. Categorical modes of being are the modes of being had by genuine entities that each fall under one of the Aristotelian categories. Consider again substances and accidents. Substances and accidents do not exist in the same way. Yet substances and accidents are both genuine beings – the modes of being enjoyed by substances and accidents respectively are metaphysically fundamental modes of being.

Now consider shadows, holes, and other privations such as blindness in an eye. Such entities do not fall under any of the categories. But in some sense there are such entities, since there are innumerable many true claims made about them.<sup>17</sup>

Here, for example, is what Aquinas says:

We must realize (with the Philosopher) that the term ‘a being’ in itself has two meanings. Taken one way it is divided by the ten categories; taken in the other way it signifies the truth of propositions. The difference between the two is that in the second sense anything can be called a being if an affirmative proposition can be formed about it, even though it is nothing positive in reality. [Aquinas 1968, pp. 29-30]

Notice that the first use of ‘being’ discussed by Aquinas is the one to use when one wishes to ‘posit something in reality’. Privations are not beings in this sense – there is no metaphysically fundamental way in which they are.

A similar distinction between senses of ‘being’ is drawn by Suarez:

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<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the connection between categories of being and modes of being, as well as relevant references, see chapter four of McDaniel (forthcoming).

<sup>17</sup> What follows in this section draws on McDaniel (2010, section 4) and McDaniel (2013b).

...we ...speak about being in two ways: in one way, as it comprehends only true real beings—and it transcends and contains under itself all of those. In another way, it is extended to many things which are not truly and intrinsically and which are called beings only by a certain extrinsic attribution, for example, privations, or beings which are entirely by accident, or beings of reason. [Suarez 2004, p. 70]

Finally, let's have on the table the following passage from Franz Brentano's *On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle*, which is of course a text with which Heidegger was intimately familiar.<sup>18</sup>

It is also certain that the 'to be' of the copula does not designate an actualization of being, a real attribute, since we make affirmative statements concerning negations and privations, purely fictitious relations and other altogether arbitrary mental constructions, as Aristotle points out in the above quoted passage from *Met.* IV.2: 'hence we say that non-being *is* a non-being.' We also say such things as 'every magnitude is equal to itself,' though we can certainly not find a relation like equality in the nature of things. Or we say 'centaurs are mythological monsters, Jupiter is a false God,' etc. It stands to reason that we do not concede any kind of reality by making these affirmations. Here, too, the 'is' designates nothing but 'it is true.' [p. 24] ... From this follows at once a wider extent for being as truth: now not only judgments belong to it, but concepts, too, are drawn into its domain whenever an affirmative assertion can be formed about them, and the being of the copula can be attributed to them. In this manner, ... every mental construct, i.e., everything which in our mind can objectively become the subject of a true affirmative assertion, will belong to it. Nothing we can form in our mind is so denuded of all reality that it is altogether excluded from the domain of the *on hos alethes*. Aristotle attests to this when he says in *Met.* V. 12. I019b6, 'in a manner of speaking, privation too is a property. If this is so, then everything will be something by virtue of the fact that something positive belongs to it. But 'being' is used equivocally.' [p. 25] ... But that a privation can be described as a state, and as something which one has, is due to the fact that 'being' is used equivocally, where in one mode even privation and negation are said to be things. This is precisely the mode of our *on hos alethes*.' [Brentano 1981, p. 25]

Here are the key ideas taken from these passages that I wish to focus on. First, there is also a sense of 'being' in which even non-entities such as privations and negations are said to be things. We must recognize this sense of 'being' because there are innumerable many true sentences like, 'there are seven holes in my slice of cheese' and 'there is blindness in his eye'. These sentences are true, and they are in some sense *about* holes, blindness, and so on. Privations are what these sentences are about. So in some sense of 'being', there must be privations. However, there is also a sense of 'being' in which there are no privations or negations, but in which only entities that fall within one of the categories of things is a being. This sense of 'being' is from the metaphysical perspective the better sense of 'being': the genuine or really real entities are those that fall under some category or other.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Frede (1993) for a discussion of Heidegger's familiarity with this text.

<sup>19</sup> For now, I will use 'being', 'thing', and 'entity' as interchangeable terms, and all of these will be taken to be applicable to anything that can be said to be in any sense of 'being'. In the next section, we will have a reason to be more careful with the terminology.



All genuine entities are also beings in the sense of being true. But not every being in the sense of being true is a genuine entity. Being in the sense of being true is, in a sense, a more comprehensive notion. Things that are beings *only* in the sense of being true are called *beings of reason* by members of this tradition.

Note that privations and absences are not the only beings of reason recognized by the tradition. In fact, Suarez's searching 54<sup>th</sup> *Metaphysical Disputation* is devoted to the topic of beings of reason, and includes a catalogue of a variety of such pseudo-beings. Consider the following remarks about beings of reason:

But it must be said that there are some beings of reason – which are not true and real beings, because they are not capable of true and real existence, nor do they have any true likeness with real beings, by reason of which both would share a common concept of being. .... Aristotle also, in *Metaphysics* [1017a], has distinguished two kinds of being: one which is truly in reality and another which is not always in reality, but only in the mind's apprehension. [Suarez 1995, p. 60]

... what is normally and rightfully defined as a being of reason is *that which has being only objectively in the intellect*, or is *that which is thought by reason as a being, even though it has no entity in itself*. [Suarez 1995, p. 62]

Beings of reason are not genuine beings – they are not parts of reality – but rather exist only in the mind's apprehension. They 'have no entity in themselves'. Suarez is clear that beings of reason do not exist in this sense in the mind of God.<sup>20</sup> Rather, they are the products of finite and deficient cognitive agents like us. This fact has direct modal consequences: were there to be no finite conscious beings, there would not be (in any sense of 'being') beings of reason.

So for these philosophers there are at least two senses of 'being', one of which is appropriate to use only when talking about genuine parts of reality, i.e., real beings, and one of which is appropriate to use even when talking about non-beings such as privations and negations. (Note that although all privations and negations are beings of reason, there are more beings of reason than there are privations.) Moreover, even in that second sense of 'being', beings of reason would not be if there were no finite persons. They exist 'only in the minds' of finite creatures.

Suppose that there is a hole in the center of the Earth. Holes are paradigmatic beings of reason: they are privations that exist when matter is perforated. On the position of Suarez just outlined, there would be no hole in the center of the Earth if there were no people. This suggests a strange sort of mind-dependence of the shape of the Earth on us because if the Earth were to lack a hole, wouldn't its shape have to be different from how it actually is? In which case is its shape not in some way objectionably mind-dependent?

Suarez and others in this tradition would reject this move. The shape of the Earth is not in any way dependent on our minds, and the Earth could very well have been perforated had no people existed, provided we understand perforation as a way of describing the shape of the Earth rather than directly committing us to holes. In short, there is a possible world in which the Earth exists with exactly the same shape as it actually has, but in which no people exist.<sup>21</sup> This is a

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<sup>20</sup> See Suarez (1995, pp. 79-84).

<sup>21</sup> In McDaniel (2010, p. 647 footnote #37), I claim that, if there are holes, then necessarily an object has a hole if and only if it is perforated – and hence this alleged possibility is impossible. I will be neutral here on the question of

possible world in which the Earth does not have a hole in its center. The fact that the Earth has a certain shape – that it is appropriately perforated – is a *necessary* condition for it to host a hole but it is not a sufficient condition. Its having that shape might be among the facts that ground the fact that it has a hole in it, but it is not the sole ground for this fact. We can think of the shape of the Earth as the objective foundation for its hosting a hole, but there is such a hole only if there are finite cognizers of a certain sort as well. We provide the additional ‘subjective’ grounds for the presence of holes. The objective foundations would exist even were we to have never been, and so the claim that holes are mind-dependent ‘beings’ does not have any sort idealistic consequences with respect to the shapes of mind-independent physical objects.

In short, even though they (in some sense) believed in holes, Suarez and other medieval philosophers who trucked in beings of reason were committed to denying the claim that, necessarily, an object hosts a hole if and only if it is perforated. Only insofar as Daseins are can holes be said (in some sense) to be.

### 3. Being as a Being of the Understanding

The following claims are data points that any interpretation of the enigmatic passages in *Being and Time* would be hard-pressed to contest.

First, Heidegger certainly employs abstract noun phrases such as ‘Being’, ‘Existenz’, and so on. These abstract noun phrases appear in numerous sentences that Heidegger sincerely asserts, i.e., takes to be true.

Second, despite the fact that these abstract noun phrases appear in numerous sentences that he takes to be true, Heidegger never unqualifiedly asserts ‘Being is’, but rather says things like, ‘Being only ‘is’ in the understanding of the entity to whose being such a thing as the understanding of being belongs’ [BT: 183] The ‘scare quotes’ clearly indicate that the sense ‘is’ that is employed in this sentence is not a sense of ‘is’ that would be appropriate to apply only to genuine beings, since of course Being is not a being.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, Heidegger is sincerely expressing a claim he takes to be true. So we ought to think that Heidegger recognizes a sense of ‘being’ in which in this sense even non-beings (such as Being!) can be said to be. We must not think of this sense of ‘being’ as one that corresponds to a metaphysically fundamental sense of ‘being’—and so is in this respect unlike *Existenz*, *readiness-to-hand*, *occurentness*, and so on, which are among Heidegger’s fundamental modes of being.<sup>23</sup> The scare-quotes provide a way of making sure that we do not treat being and the modes of being as if they were genuine entities, that is, within the range of the metaphysically fundamental senses of ‘being’.<sup>24</sup>

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whether I was right about this, since I raised that point in order to criticize the traditional way of thinking of beings of reasons, whereas my purpose here is merely to understand this tradition and to situate Heidegger within it.

<sup>22</sup> Strictly, Heidegger uses guillemets rather than quotation-marks, but translators uniformly have employed quotation-marks when translating these passages, presumably because the use of guillemets in this context serves the same rhetorical function as the use of scare-quotes.

<sup>23</sup> In McDaniel (2009), I claimed that this sense of ‘being’ is what corresponds to the unrestricted existential quantifier present in natural languages. Tepley (2014) claims that there is a highly generic mode of being that applies to everything, including things to which no specific mode of being applies. Carman (2013, pp. 90-91) holds that there is some sense of ‘being’ in which being and its modes are, but that this sense is not even analogously related to the fundamental senses of ‘being’ corresponding to Heidegger’s modes of being. In McDaniel (2010, 2013b), I argue that things not within the range of a metaphysically fundamental quantifier have a lesser degree of being than things within the range of a fundamental quantifier, and Carman (2013, pp. 88-89) suggests that being and its modes might enjoy a lesser amount of being than paradigmatic entities.

<sup>24</sup> Compare with Carman (2013, pp. 90-91).

Third, the sense of ‘being’ that is at issue here is one that Heidegger was aware of, and was important to many philosophers (such as Brentano and Suarez) that probably influenced him: it is one that must be recognized because there are various propositions the truth of which demands that there be (in some sense of ‘be’) beings for these propositions to be about. Given this fact, it is less surprising on my interpretation that the enigmatic passages all appear in contexts in which the nature of truth is under discussion. In order to glom on to why we need to recognize that there are beings in the sense of being true, we need to also understand that there are some true judgments that commit us to them. So a discussion of truth in this context would not be out of place. Moreover, we can see why there is a non-accidental connection between the enigmatic passages and the problem of the analogy of being. There is a sense of ‘being’ in play in these enigmatic passages and it is worth determining how this sense is related to the other senses of ‘being’ previously discussed. How it is related is something that we only know for sure once we have determined the meaning of ‘being’.<sup>25</sup>

Fourth, note that Heidegger says that being ‘is’ *only in* the understanding of certain entities, namely Daseins, who for Heidegger are essentially finite beings. So although in some sense of ‘being’, being is, nonetheless being is (in that sense) only given the existence of Daseins. Of course, we should not misunderstand what Heidegger means by ‘understanding’ – he does not mean, for example, a cognitive faculty of persons that produces concepts or theories, but rather indicates a faculty (in a suitably broad sense) that encompasses all the ways in which we can comport ourselves towards objects in our world – and many of these ways will be pre-theoretical attunements better described as ‘knowing how’ than knowing that. For this reason, it would be inapt to describe Heidegger as committing himself to beings of *reason* per se. Being is not a creature of Dasein’s *reason*, but nonetheless ‘is’ only insofar as Daseins are. Accordingly, it would be more apt to ascribe to Heidegger the view that being and modes of being are creatures of Dasein’s *understanding*. And this way of framing has the nice feature of mapping closely on to what Heidegger in fact does say in the enigmatic passages in *Being and Time*.

Heidegger emphatically denies that being and its modes are entities. How does this denial square with attributing to Heidegger a (metaphysically non-fundamental) sense of ‘being’ on which being and its modes are among the things that are? Isn’t there then some sense of ‘entities’ or ‘beings’ in which being and its modes are entities or beings?

We can concede that there are such senses of ‘entities’ and ‘beings’, provided we don’t also concede that Heidegger is employing those senses when he denies that being and its modes are entities or beings. But is there a reason to think that he is employing these senses in those contexts? On another perfectly reasonable use of these terms, something is an entity or a being only if it enjoys one of the fundamental modes of being.<sup>26</sup> Being and its modes are *not* entities on this way of using the terms.

Finally, Heidegger declines to draw any anti-realistic conclusions from the claim that being ‘is’ only if there are Daseins. Not all physical objects, for example, are modally dependent

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<sup>25</sup> As is stressed by Heidegger in one of the enigmatic passages under discussion, namely [§44c SZ: 230, BT: 272].

<sup>26</sup> Tepley (2014) hypothesizes that, for Heidegger, not everything is a being or an entity. Accordingly, Tepley opts to use the word ‘thing’ in such a way that that everything that can be said in some way to be is a thing. (This seems to be how Heidegger (1993, p. 147) uses ‘thing’.) Note that, if we follow Heidegger in not using ‘entity’ or ‘being’ to mean what Tepley means by ‘thing’, then we can also say that dependence is a relation that can relate beings or entities to things that are not beings or entities. Accordingly, we would reject Carman’s (2003, p. 157, footnote #4) claim that being and its modes cannot straightforwardly be said to stand in dependence relations since they are not entities or beings. In this context, note that Carman (2013, pp. 90-92) also grants that there is some sense of ‘being’ in which being is, but nonetheless this does not mean that being is an entity.

on the existence of Dasein, that is, there are possible situations in which physical objects exist and no Dasein does.<sup>27</sup> So even though being 'is' only if Dasein is, some beings can be independent of Dasein.

What is the objective foundation of talk of Being and its modes? With respect to other beings of reason, this question had a straightforward answer. The objective foundation of holes are perforated objects, the objective foundation of cases of blindness are damaged eyes, and so forth. We articulate the objective foundation of beings of reason by describing the properties of things that are not beings of reason. It is initially harder to see how to proceed here, especially if we do not wish to think of being and its modes as properties of things.<sup>28</sup>

I say that the 'objective foundations' of being and its modes are, in a sense, the various beings that are in different ways. But if we wish to carefully state the objective foundation we must do so in such a way that we do not even give the appearance of quantifying over Being or its modes. In McDaniel (2009), I articulated how one can make sense of the claim that there are things that exist in different ways without explicitly quantifying over ways of being. Very roughly, the basic idea is that we make use of a notion of metaphysical fundamentality that can apply to *expressions* rather than to things.<sup>29</sup> Some expressions 'cut closer to the metaphysical joints' than others. Among the expressions that cut closest are what I called 'semantically primitive quantifier expressions' that correspond to (possible) senses of 'being' that in turn correspond to Heidegger's fundamental modes of being. Let 'E<sub>p</sub>' be the quantifier that corresponds to presence-at-hand, a mode of being of entities that can exist independently of Dasein and its practices. Let 'A' be an arbitrarily chosen entity that has presence-at-hand as its mode of being. Let 'P' be an abstract noun that refers to presence-at-hand. We can now compactly express the following claims:

H1. P is only if there are Daseins.

H2. So A has P only if there are Daseins.

H3. But 'E<sub>p</sub>x (x = A)' could be true even if there were no Daseins.

H1 is true because P is a mere being of Dasein's understanding and as such is modally tied to the existence of Dasein. H1 in short is a consequence of Ontological Idealism properly understood. H2 is motivated by the general claim that something bears a relation to something else only if they both have being (in some sense or other of 'being'), and given this general claim, H2 is a consequence of H1. But H3 is what expresses the anti-idealistic claim that there are things that enjoy a way of being that permits these things to enjoy that way of being independently of us. And H3 expresses this claim in such a way that there is no appearance of quantifying over modes of being. This is why I said that a moment ago that, in a sense it is the things themselves that are the objective foundation – but not only that they are, but also how they are.

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<sup>27</sup> Heidegger does believe that some physical objects are modally dependent on the existence of Dasein. See, for example, Cerbone (1999) and McDaniel (2013) for defenses of this claim.

<sup>28</sup> Tepley (2014) in fact argues that we should think of being and its modes as properties of things. I'm going to set aside this position here, but it is worth pondering how to proceed if he is correct.

<sup>29</sup> McDaniel (2009) draws inspiration here from Sider (2009).

Accordingly, we can articulate the objective foundations of being and its various modes without explicitly invoking them. Given this, we can treat explicit acts of quantifying over and attributing properties to being and its modes as ones in which we traffic in beings of Dasein's understanding. When we say that 'being is', we use a sense of 'being' that 'posits nothing in reality' and hence our sentence is consistent with our flat-footed denial that Being and its modes are genuine entities. And finally, we can see how Heidegger could think that being depends on Dasein even though there are many entities that do not depend on Dasein.

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