

Commentary on §4 of *Being and Time*

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Section 4: *The Ontical Priority of the Question of Being*

Recall that in section 2, H argued that:

- (A) An understanding of Dasein's being (through an 'analytic of Dasein') is necessary for properly formulating, and thus answering, the *Seinsfrage*.

And, recall that he raised, and then dismissed, the worry that such a project would require reasoning that is unacceptably *circular*. Here in section 4, H argues for the converse claim:

- (B) Answering the *Seinsfrage* is necessary for having a satisfactory understanding of Dasein's being.

He calls (B) the *ontical priority* of the *Seinsfrage*: the idea that answering the latter is necessary for answering a certain *ontical* question—a question about a particular kind of *entity*. Namely, it's necessary for answering a certain question about *us*: what *our* being consists in.

From this, we can see that H has in mind an inquiry that takes the form of, as it were, a *complete* circle. In other words, he proposes that we use our average understanding of being in general to illuminate our own being in particular, and our average understanding of our own being to illuminate being in general: back and forth, each helping to clarify the other until, at the end, we achieve a clear understanding of both. This is the inquiry that will take up the rest of *Being and Time*.

However, the title of section 4 is somewhat misleading. That is, he does indeed argue here for (B). However, he actually devotes more of the section to a *different* task: namely, *amplifying* on his argument for (A). In other words, he tries to deepen our understanding of why examining Dasein's being is so important for ontology.

H tries to accomplish this by giving us a preview of the overall picture of Dasein's being that he will systematically develop in Division One. Yet, this preview is *extremely* condensed - downright *cryptic*, in fact, unless you've read Division One first (which seems to defeat the purpose of an *introduction*). Thus, what I will do first in what follows is to draw on Division One in order to make H's picture of Dasein's being clear enough to understand the case he sketches for (A) and (B) here in section 4. This will also serve to introduce us to many of the ideas and concerns that dominate the book as a whole.

I. The being of Dasein

In order to transition from section 3's discussion of science, H begins by claiming that the practice of science is simply one manifestation of Dasein's 'manner of being'. But what manner of being is this?

Here we come to one of the key ideas of *Being and Time*, and perhaps the first place where it becomes clear just how innovative H's thought in this book is. So far, much of what H has had to say about being has fit fairly easily with what many previous philosophers have said about it—especially Aristotle and medieval philosophers influenced by Aristotle. However, as I indicated at the end of the commentary on section 1, H thinks previous philosophers doing ontology have missed something crucial about being that has led them to misunderstand the real stakes of the *Seinsfrage*. Because of Aristotle, many have understood that to answer it, we must tackle the problem of ambiguity. However, H thinks they've conceived of the problem of ambiguity in ways that have *left out* one key sense of being. In other words, H thinks that beyond senses (i)-(iv), there's *another* sense of being in the mix. And so, the problem of ambiguity isn't the problem of finding the unity merely among senses (i)-(iv), but among senses (i)-(iv) *together with* this other sense of being, which has, H thinks, an intimate connection to the being of Dasein.

H begins sketching Dasein's being by sketching out a series of claims that he'll develop in Division One:

- (1) First, it's part of our being to have a particular relationship to that being. Specifically Dasein "is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very being, that being is an *issue* for it" (p.32).¹
- (2) Further, in order for something to be an issue for us in the relevant sense—to seem to us or strike us as something in which we, as it were, have some *stake*—we must have some understanding of it. And so, it's part of our being to have some understanding of that being—as H also puts it, for our own being to be *disclosed* to us.
- (3) Lastly, since, as we've seen, understanding the being of some entity requires some understanding of being in general, this means it's part of our being to have some understanding of being in general. In other words, "Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it is ontological" (p.32), or rather *pre-ontological*. What he means by this is a claim he put forward earlier on the basis of different considerations: although it's of course not part of our being to do ontology the way professional philosophers do it, it's nevertheless part of our being to have some preliminary, average understanding of the very subject matter that ontologists like H study in depth: being.

But how should we understand this series of claims? (3) is based on considerations we've already discussed: to understand the being of a particular entity, we must have at least an

average understanding of being in general. However, what's behind (1) and (2)? And, what do they have to do with a distinct sense of being?

H gives an initial clue in saying that Dasein, in its being, "has its being to be" (p.33). So, let's turn to this claim in order to understand (1) and (2).

(1) The activity of existence

Notice first that according to (1), it's part of our being for us to bear a certain kind of relation *to ourselves*. In its broad strokes, this is a common idea, especially in modern western philosophy: that what's distinctive about us is a certain kind of self-relation—a form of *reflexivity*, as it's sometimes put. In philosophy, as well as culture more broadly, many have understood this special self-relation as some form of *self-consciousness*. H's idea here is *related* to this notion. However, he avoids talking in terms of self-consciousness because he thinks this would be a misleading way of expressing what he has in mind.

Why? When people talk about *consciousness* of something, they often have in mind being *aware* of it. Let's call something you're conscious of in this sense the *object* of your consciousness. For example, suppose the Eiffel Tower is such an object. There are various ways in which you can be aware of it. You could *perceive* it: e.g. if you're standing right in front of it *seeing* it. Or, you could *think about* it: e.g. while reading an article about its history. Or, you could *imagine* it: e.g. while planning a future trip to Paris, imagining how wonderful it will be to look at it up close. And so on: these and more are various ways in which we to speak have something 'in mind'—are aware or conscious of it.

However, the kind of self-relation that H has in mind isn't a matter of being aware of ourselves or having ourselves in mind in any of these ways. Rather, what's distinctive about Dasein is that it *asks and answers the question of who to be*. This is, as it were, the characteristic activity of Dasein, and it's what he means when he says that we 'have our being to be'. H calls the activity of asking and answering the question of who to be *existence*. In doing so, his terminology is somewhat odd. In ordinary language, that is, to say that something exists (e.g. God) simply means to say that it's a real, actual phenomenon in the world. However, in H's terminology, by definition only Dasein exists. To be Dasein is to be an entity all of whose activities are unified as aspects of a single activity: the activity of existence—of figuring out who to be. What, though, does H have in mind when he talks about existence in his sense?

Let's begin by sketching out how H thinks we *answer* the question of who to be. He gives a clue to this when he says that "[t]he question of existence never gets straightened out except through existing itself" (p.33). In other words, the fundamental way in which we answer the question of who to be is by *being* this or that way.

Consider a couple of examples: *belief* and *choice/intentional action*.

- Belief:

Suppose I come to form a belief that P (where P is some claim). For example, suppose I climb in my car, insert and turn the car key, but my car doesn't start. Because of the sluggish sound coming from the ignition, I come to believe that the car battery is dead. Here, P = the claim that my car battery is dead. How should we understand my forming this belief that P?

H will understand this occurrence—my forming this belief that P—as one way in which I'm answering the question of who to be. Now, this might strike us as odd. That is, if we think of this occurrence as my answering a certain question at all, wouldn't a better candidate for the question I'm answering be: whether P? In other words, isn't it as if I'm answering the question of *whether* my car battery is dead in the *affirmative*? Isn't coming to believe that my car battery is dead rather like me mentally answering 'yes' to this question?

H wouldn't deny this. In fact, as we'll see in Division One, in his notion of *world*, H attempts to accommodate intuitions just like this. However, embracing the above idea is fully consistent with H's idea. Even as you're answering the question of *whether P* by coming to believe that P, you're *also* answering the question of *who to be* in doing so. Think of it this way. Part of *who you are* is a matter of the *viewpoint* on the world that you embrace—in particular, your viewpoint on what claims about the world are *true* and *false*. So, in coming to believe that my car battery is dead, I've opted to embrace a certain viewpoint on the world—one in which my car battery is dead—and thus I've opted to *be* a certain kind of person: one who looks at the world—and my car in particular—as being a certain way.

Now, my belief that my car battery is dead is, in the grand scheme of things, a relatively minor belief. So, it might seem overly grandiose to say that in forming it, I'm answering this seemingly more profound question—the question of who to be. However, when we apply this view to *all* of our beliefs, taken together, I think we can see what H has in mind. My beliefs, taken together, make up an important part of who I am—my identity, so to speak. That is, they make up my overall view of what the world is like. The formation or abandonment of any particular belief might represent a minor change in who I am, but it's nevertheless a change. As I go through life, I'm constantly adopting beliefs, refraining from adopting others, and abandoning beliefs I previously had. Through this activity—one aspect of the broader activity of *existence* in H's sense—I'm actively shaping this important dimension of my identity, of who I am: my viewpoint on the world. I'm answering, on my own behalf, the question of who to be. As H puts it at one point, “only the particular Dasein decides its existence, whether it does so by taking hold [*e.g. adopting the belief that P*] or neglecting [*e.g. refraining from believing that P*] ” (p.33, italicized parts inserted by me).

- Choice/intentional action:

Suppose I choose to do some action A, and then carry out this choice—i.e. I intentionally do A. For example, having concluded that my car battery is dead, I decide to ask my neighbor to give me a jump, and then act on this decision by going next door and asking her. In this case, A = asking my neighbor to give me a jump. On analogy with what I said above about belief, we might think of my choice here as a way of answering a certain question: *whether to A*. Namely, I'm answering this question in the affirmative.

Just as with the case of belief, there's no reason H would deny this way of looking at my choice. However, even as I'm answering the question of whether to ask my neighbor for a jump in choosing to do so, at the same time I'm also answering another question—again, the question of who to be. And this is because, just as with my viewpoint on the world, my choices make up an important aspect of who I am. Thus, in choosing to do A, I'm effectively opting to be a certain kind of person—one who has, in forming the intention to ask my neighbor for a jump, has adopted a certain aim.

Again, as with the belief that my car battery is dead, my choice to ask my neighbor for a jump might seem pretty minor. However, suppose we apply this picture to all of my choices. My choices/intentions, taken together, constitute a very important dimension of who I am—again, of my identity. They help to make up the overall way in which I use my individual agency. As I go through life, I'm constantly making choices and thus forming intentions, refraining from choosing possible actions that occur to me, and abandoning intentions I previously had. And, I'm constantly following through on my intentions by carrying them out. Through this activity—another aspect of the broader activity of existence—I'm actively shaping another important dimension of my identity, of who I am: the way I choose to lead my life. I'm answering, on my own behalf, the question of who to be.

Let's bring these ideas together. In the case of both belief and intention, H would say, as I mentioned above, that I answer the question of who to be by *being* a certain way. In other words, I answer the question of who to be by *being* a person who has—i.e. has adopted—certain beliefs and intentions. Belief and choice are two important dimensions, as H would put it, of my *existence*: of the way in which I answer the question of who to be. And this helps, I think, to clarify the sense in which Dasein's being is an *issue* for it. What the world is like, and thus what beliefs to have about it, is a fundamental issue for each of us. We address this issue by trying to get a clear view of the world around us, and then adopting our beliefs accordingly. Likewise, what to do is a fundamental issue for each of us, and we each address this issue by making and revising choices, and then acting on the ones we've made.

Beyond belief and choice

Above, I've used the examples of belief and choice/intentional action to convey a sense for what H has in mind when he says Dasein's being is an issue for it, and that we address this issue through existing—through asking and answering the question of who to be. However, by themselves, these examples don't yet communicate a clear sense for the full scope of H's picture. To do so, we have to address at least a couple more issues.

The scope of existence

First of all, H thinks we figure out who to be through many more of our activities besides forming beliefs, making choices, and acting on them. For example, we do so through much of our *bodily comportment*—the style or manner in which we move through the world with our bodies, including nuances of gesture, expression, stance, and movement. Much of this doesn't rise to the level of intentional action—certainly not of the sort that I undertake when I go ask my neighbor for a jump. In the latter case, I make a conscious decision on the basis of reasons I've considered in a conscious process of reasoning. In contrast, many of our bodily nuances don't seem to be like that. Rather, we absorb certain nuances of bodily movement from our social environments, often enacting them without being consciously aware of them at all.

Let's consider a couple of examples:

- Interpersonal distance:

Different cultures have a different sense for how far it's appropriate to be from other people in various circumstances. For example, in many societies it's considered appropriate to stand much closer to people when you're on a crowded subway or in a crowded bar than it is when you're in a spacious courtyard. Or, it's considered appropriate to sit much closer to a dear friend than it is to sit next to someone you just met. Such a sense for interpersonal distance has a highly complex structure—so complex, in fact, that there's a branch of anthropology, known as *proxemics*, devoted to studying it and other socially significant ways that humans use space.

This sense of interpersonal distance is often so deeply ingrained, so instinctive and automatic, that people in a given culture wouldn't normally even notice that they're behaving in a highly structured way. Often, noticing such things only happens when you are thrown into a situation where people's sense of interpersonal distance is very different from your own. For example, when I first came to Korea, I was struck by how close people find it appropriate to stand to someone in the same line as them—say, at a store, cafe, or government office—which is much closer than is appropriate in much of the US. I quickly realized that the Korean sense of interpersonal distance is different from the American one, and began to notice aspects of my own instinctive, culturally ingrained sense of interpersonal distance.

- Gendered comportment:

Often, our social environments habituate us into bodily comportments that are associated with social roles that we occupy, or are at least typically *presumed* to occupy. One of these examples has to do with *gender*. At birth and throughout their lives, people are typically assigned a gender—usually, one of two: *man* and *woman*. Such assignments are based largely upon body morphology. And, gender assignments typically make a difference to the kind of bodily comportment into which a person is habituated by their social environments.

In her renowned essay “Throwing Like a Girl”, the philosopher Iris Marion Young describes the ways in which, in western societies, women are typically habituated by their social environments into styles of bodily comportment different from those of men. For example (to summarize the early portions of her essay), women are often not as open with their bodies: e.g. with shorter strides and little arm-swinging as they walk; with legs relatively close together and arms across their bodies as they sit; and with feet relatively close together, with arms touching or shielding their bodies as they stand. As they approach tasks that require force, strength and coordination, women often do not perceive themselves as capable of lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling, twisting, squeezing, etc.. They don’t put their whole bodies into physical tasks as readily as men, but focus on those parts most immediately connected with the task (e.g. not putting the power of their legs and shoulders into throwing a ball). This manifests itself in athletic activity: men often engage with freer motion than women. Women, for example, often don’t have as much bodily follow-through. They tend to plant themselves rather than throwing their bodies toward a task—waiting and reacting rather than taking the initiative in approach. Women are more likely to approach physical engagements with hesitation and timidity, due in part to greater fear of injury—experiencing the body as a fragile encumbrance rather than the medium for the enactment of their aims; checking to see if it is doing what they want it to rather than attending to what they want to do *through* their bodies.

As Young sees things, there is no evidence that any of this is ‘natural’—e.g. due to physiological differences between the sexes. Rather, these stereotypical—and fairly common—aspects of a ‘feminine’ style of bodily comportment are largely due to socialization. And, much of this isn’t *intentional*: most of the time, women who embody elements of this aren’t even aware their movements have this very specific character.

What behaviors like these *share* with intentional actions is that they’re all responsive to some sense that the agent has of what *matters* in their situation, and how it matters. In other words, because they have this sense of what matters in their situation, they take certain behaviors to be appropriate or inappropriate in that situation, and guide their behavior accordingly. However, in intentional action, this responsiveness concerns having conscious *reasons* for intending to do or doing something. In contrast, in these cases, H

would say, there is a different kind of responsiveness at work, which he will call a responsiveness these agents have to their *world* (where “world” is used in a special sense I will discuss more below).

Any time we do something in a way that is responsive to the way things matter in our situation as we see it, we are, in doing so, H thinks, answering the question of who to be. Think of it this way. Even though someone is not acting on conscious *intentions* when she stands a certain distance from you while you’re standing in line, or sits on the subway with her legs tightly closed and arms folded, she is ‘putting herself out there’ in the world in a certain way, guided by her sense of what matters in her situation, and thus her sense for what ways of moving through the world are the appropriate ones for her to enact. Thus, in doing so, she’s answering the question of who to be—in these cases, through nuances of her style of making her way through the world with her body.

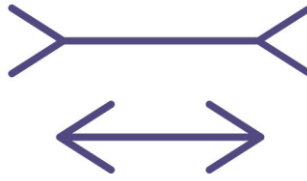
The background of existence

The above conveys something of just how many of our activities H thinks are aspects of this one overarching activity: existence. Beyond existing, though, we have many capacities that enable the activity of existence in its various forms. Let’s consider the kinds of examples we considered above to get a handle on what I mean here.

- Belief:

We form our beliefs on the basis of *reasons*—considerations we take to justify the truth of the claims we believe. For example, when I come to believe that my car battery is dead, I do so on the basis of evidence that is presented to me through my *senses*. I turned the key, and heard the sluggish sound, and on the basis of my perception of these things, together with my preexisting beliefs about how cars work, I come to the conclusion that my car battery is dead. In this example, we find an important *source* of reasons, of evidence for forming beliefs: sensory perception.

Now, when I perceive things through my senses, this by itself isn’t a case of existing in H’s sense. Perceiving isn’t existing. Of course, there *is* an important sense in which sensory perception gives us a viewpoint on the world. However, when I for example hear or see something, the viewpoint on things that my senses present to me isn’t really *my* viewpoint until I *accept* what my senses are telling me by *believing* that things are as my senses present or portray them to be. In the present example, when I see and feel the car key turning in the ignition, and hear the sluggish sound, I probably immediately accept that I’m perceiving the circumstances accurately. However, there are many cases in which we *don’t* accept what our senses are telling us. Suppose for example, that you’re looking at the famous Müller-Lyer illusion (below).



The top line visually *seems* to be longer than the bottom line. However, if you've been told about it before, you know it's an optical illusion, and that the two lines are *actually* the same length. And so, although it still visually *seems* like the top line is longer, you don't *believe* that it is. This example illustrates well the idea that there's *always* a certain gap between what things *seem* to be like through your senses—what viewpoint on the world *they* present to you—and what you accept as *your* viewpoint on the world: what sensory appearances you embrace or accept as truthful. Why is this gap important? Think of it this way. Although *perceiving* the world to be a certain way *presents* to you a certain viewpoint on the world, you haven't embraced this viewpoint until you've *assented* to what your senses are telling you—i.e. *come to believe* that things are as your senses portray them to be. Until you do, you haven't answered *on your own behalf* the question of what viewpoint on the world to embrace. For this reason, it seems like merely *perceiving* things to be a certain way through your senses is not a case of existing in H's sense.

Nevertheless, sensory perception is one of the things that *enables* you to form beliefs. It provides an important source of *evidence* that can serve as your *reasons* for coming to believe the things that you do. It might not be the *only* source of such evidence: historically, philosophers have been very divided on whether it is. However, the capacity for sense perception does provide us with one important example of a capacity that enables existence—specifically, when it takes the form of belief formation.

What is the lesson here? Remember what I said above: that H thinks all of the activities that are characteristic of us can be understood as *aspects* of the activity of existence—of figuring out who to be. When I said this, I didn't mean that all of our activities are *instances* of existence. Some of them are, but some of them—like sensory perception—are aspects of existence in another sense: they *enable* the activities that are themselves examples of our existence.

One more point before we move on to the other examples. As I already said, sensory perception enables belief-formation by providing *evidence* on the basis of which we can form beliefs. Because of this, sensory perception *matters* to us. More precisely, sensory perception presents the *world* as mattering to us in at least one particular way: namely, what the world looks like to us through our senses matters

to our activity of forming and revising our beliefs. It provides us a sense for what the world is like. That sense is sometimes misleading, yes, and because of this we must adjudicate the evidence of the senses in order to figure out what views about the world we will embrace and believe. Nevertheless, the world as disclosed to us through our senses provides for us an indispensable basis for figuring this out. To put the point another way: sensory perception discloses the world to us in a way that matters for our activity of figuring out who to be.

- Choice/intentional action:

As we do in the case of the beliefs we adopt, we base the choices we make on our sense of what *matters* in the world we face. Just as we talk about having reasons for believing the claims we do, we talk about having reasons for choosing the actions we do. And, just as is the case with belief, we figure out what reasons we have for choosing to do something by having the world disclosed to us. That is, just as the way the world shows up to us provides for us a sense for what claims about it are true, the way the world shows up to us provides for us a sense for what things are or are not worth doing—one that can, in particular, play a role in the process of considering possible reasons for and against various courses of action, and thereby being led to conscious choices made for conscious reasons.

We saw in the case of belief one way in which the world is disclosed to us as mattering for our activity of figuring out who to be: through sense perception. What about choice and intentional action?

Here, we come up against some tricky territory. There's a long philosophical tradition - stemming especially from the 18th century philosopher David Hume - of thinking that while the viewpoint on the world that we receive through sensory perception can provide us reasons for our *beliefs*, it can't, by itself, provide us with the motivations for our *choices*. We make choices, the Humean story goes, on the basis of our sense for what things are good and bad, right and wrong, what actions are worthy or unworthy, appropriate or inappropriate; and sense perception, in and of itself, doesn't present things as having any such characteristics. Instead, our sense for them stems from our *desires*. So, many philosophers in the Humean tradition would balk at the idea that we base our choices on how the world is disclosed to us through our senses.

This is probably one of the reasons *Being and Time* contains little talk about sensory perception, desire, or indeed even belief. For many readers—including especially philosophically trained ones, whose intuitions have been influenced by the philosophical tradition—such terms are likely to have been colonized by theoretical presuppositions like the Humean ones just mentioned.

To avoid getting tangled in such presuppositions, then, H often uses different terms from the philosophical tradition, or even invents his own. In the present case, he avoids using traditional terms like “sensory perception” and “desire”.

Instead, he points to a simple fact that we can recognize without using such terms: through whatever cognitive routes, the world is *disclosed* to us. And, it's disclosed to us in particular way—as a world in which things *matter*: specifically, in which things matter for our *existence*—for our activity of figuring out who to be. We can put the point in this way. We do not exist—that is, figure out who to be—in a vacuum. Rather, we tackle the question of who to be in *response* to the world as disclosed to us. Specifically, we *base* our existence on the way things in the world strike us as mattering. We try, in other words, to *acknowledge* the ways things matter in who we are - to get at the *right* answers to the question of who to be. Things in the world matter for our activity of figuring out who to be for this reason. In the case of belief, the world *seems* to be certain ways (e.g. through sensory perception), and this matters to us because in forming and revising our beliefs we are endeavoring to see the world *as it really is*. And, in the case of choice and action, things *seem* to be worth doing in various ways (e.g. through sensory perception and desire), and this matters to us because in making choices and acting on them we're endeavoring to doing things that are really worth doing.

Above, I've already been using the term “world” (German: *Welt*). We're now in a position to see what connotations this word has for H. When he talks about the *world*, he doesn't just mean the *universe*. Instead, he means something like: the universe, insofar as it is disclosed or shows up to us as *mattering* for our existence. Our answers to the question of who to be are attempts at *responding* to the world by *acknowledging* its character.

- Bodily comportment:

Examples like belief and choice could make it seem as if H's picture is of an individual thinking being facing the world and figuring out who to be in response to and acknowledgment of it. That is, forming a belief is usually thought of as a kind of *individual, mental* act. And although we often carry out our intentions through bodily activity, forming them through our choices is, again, often thought of as an individual mental act. However, H doesn't think that existence is primarily a matter of *thinking*, nor does he think it's always or even primarily something done by *individuals*. Rather, it's something primarily done through our bodily comportment, and at least much of it is done by *communities*. To refer back to the above examples, communities (e.g. cultures) often have a shared style of using interpersonal space, or a shared sense for how people occupying various social roles in the community (e.g. men vs. women).

Of course, *individuals* in that community express such a shared style, a shared sense, but so do *groups* within a community. Think, for example, of the different overall styles of bodily comportment that a group of people takes on when in a formal ceremony vs. a festive crowded bar vs. a political protest. As people sometimes put it, these different situations have very different ‘vibes’. Each individual in the crowd has, of course, their own individual intentions and beliefs.

However, each person also, through no particular intention of their own—‘unconsciously’, as we sometimes say—takes on a bodily comportment that is tuned into the ‘vibe’ of the situation. In the formal ceremony, for example, their movements might be contained, their voices hushed, their facial expressions solemn. In all likelihood, many or most of them have taken on this comportment, not through conscious reasoning and intention, but by effortlessly ‘tuning into the vibe’ of the situation.

I have used the language of ‘vibe’ and ‘tuning in’ because these English idioms correspond quite well to H’s term for what he regards as the most basic capacity that enables existence—what he calls, in German, *Stimmung*. In our translation, this word is translated as “mood”, and this captures an important fact about it—it has, as we shall see in Division One, an important connection to *emotion*. However, a translation that better captures the connotations of the German word that H wants to exploit is *attunement*. The German word *Stimmung* can refer to an emotional state, but also to the *tuning of a musical instrument*. The metaphor H has in mind is that, just as an instrument has the capacity to be in tune with the other instruments in an orchestra, we have the capacity to be ‘in tune’ with whatever situation we’re in. In our case, this means we have the capacity to *recognize* what matters in that situation. This capacity involves sensory perception, desire, emotion, and reasoning; but also our instinctive bodily dispositions and our bodily readiness. When, for example, I enter the scene of the solemn ceremony, I see things differently, *think* in different patterns, undergo a shift in my *emotional* state; my *bodily* dispositions change, and I become ready to engage with the specific situation of the ceremony. All of this is part of how I ‘get into the vibe’ of the situation: my whole bearing changes to allow me to recognize what matters therein, and *exist* in response to and acknowledgment of what I thereby recognize.

What I’ve tried to give above is a lengthy introduction to some central aspects the picture H will argue for in Division One, and which he (quite cryptically) alludes to here in section 4. Dasein is an entity that in a certain sense has *one* central activity—the activity of existence: of asking and answering the question of who to be. We answer this question by *being* certain ways—e.g. adopting certain beliefs, making certain choices, acting on those choices, and through our overall style of bodily comportment. Our answers are based on, and ways of trying to respond to and acknowledge, what matters in the *world* we encounter. And what enables this is our being *attuned* to the situations in which we find ourselves—i.e. our capacity to get in touch with and recognize what matters in those situations.

Now, how does existing put us into some relation to *ourselves*? Well, as H points out later (i.e. in section 9), the question of who to be, when posed by any particular Dasein, is a question about who *they themselves* are to be. Thus, in asking and answering this question *about* themselves, a particular Dasein (a particular *individual*, or even a particular *community*) is relating to themselves: grappling with the *issue* of who *they* are

to be. In this way, H embraces the traditional idea that what's distinctive about us is that we are *reflexive, self-relating* beings. And so, this is why H claims (1) is true.

(2) Existence and self-understanding

Next, in what sense does Dasein's existence involve an understanding of its own *being*?

H says: "Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence - in terms of a possibility of itself" (p.33). What he means by this is that the fundamental way in which we understand ourselves isn't by directly considering ourselves and our own nature, but rather by understanding *possible ways to be*. These possible ways to be, though, don't directly concern *ourselves*, but rather the *world* as we encounter it in existence. Once again, let's look at the examples of belief, choice/intentional action, and bodily comportment to bring this out.

Let's consider what might happen *after* the moment when I turn the key in my car, but *before* I come to believe that my car battery is dead. Let's suppose that, once I hear the sluggish sound, various *possibilities* occur to me—i.e. possible explanations for why my car isn't starting. Maybe, it occurs to me, there's no gas in the tank. Or, maybe the alternator is broken. Or, maybe the battery is dead. Then, on the basis of what I'm perceiving in the situation, I *opt* for one of these possibilities as the correct one: I come to believe that my car battery is dead.

This gives us a sense for what H has in mind. The various possibilities that occur to me at this moment don't directly concern *me*. Rather, they concern my *car*, and in particular the reason it won't start. However, as such, they are possibilities that bear upon a particular question about who to be: namely, a question about what view of this situation to embrace. Because of this, they give my endeavor to answer this question a certain *shape*. For this reason, my understanding of *them*, H will say, constitutes a kind of *self-understanding*. By understanding *them*, and how they bear on the question about my car I'm trying to answer, I understand precisely what's at issue *for me* in my own attempt to figure out what view of the world to embrace. The same goes for the range of possible *actions* from which I select when I choose to go to my neighbor and ask her for a jump, or the range of possible styles of bodily comportment that I become ready to express when I enter into a situation. That is, when I grasp such ranges of possibilities, it's a way of understanding what's at issue for me in trying to figure out who to be in this particular situation. Because such possibilities bear upon my existence in this way, we can call them *existential possibilities*.

Here, H introduces an important distinction: between *existentiell* (German: *existenziell*) and *existential* (German: *existenzial*) understanding. Existentiell understanding is understanding of a *particular* range of possibilities relevant for a *particular* question or group of questions about who to be. For example, my understanding of the range of possible reasons why my car won't start is an instance of existentiell understanding.

However, H thinks that existentiell understanding is made possible by *existential* understanding. Existential understanding is understanding of the general *structure* of existentiell understanding: what H calls *existentiality*. That is, when I understand a particular range of existential possibilities, this presupposes understanding them *as possible answers* to the question of who to be. Or, when I understand the relationships that particular existential possibilities bear to one another—for example, inferential relations among different possible claims, different possible objects of belief—this presupposes an understanding of how possibilities in general fit together: ultimately, to make up a *world* (in H's sense) of interrelated possibilities.

Such an understanding of existentiality—the way in which the world is ‘averagely intelligible’ to me as a world of interconnected existential possibilities, all of which bear upon my own project of figuring out who to be—is, H thinks, a kind of understanding of my own *being*. Why, though? Remember that the being of an entity is what determines the various ways in which the senses of being are applicable to it. But how can we apply this definition to *existential* understanding, as I’ve just characterized it?

The sense of being in existence

Here, we come to what I called above the *fifth* sense of being: the one that H thinks previous philosophers have neglected. This is the sense that H calls ‘Dasein’s *to be*’. Why, though, does H think this constitutes a sense of being distinct from senses (i)-(iv)?

Recall that what senses (i)-(iii) have in common is that they all apply to *entities*—i.e. what we refer to when employing use (iv) (the countable noun “being”). And because of this, we use our understanding of being whenever we’re concerned with the properties of entities (use (i)), which entities are which (use (ii)), and which entities there are (use (iii)). Now, this concern can take different forms. It can take the form of an *inquiry*—e.g. into whether an entity has certain properties. Or, it can take the form of a *presupposition* about entities (e.g. in a regional ontology)—e.g. that certain entities are numerically identical. Or, it can take the form of an attempt (e.g. in action) to *make something the case* concerning entities—e.g. that a certain entity comes into being. In all of these forms, though, what we’re concerned with is *what things (there) are*: i.e. with what things are in the sense of what properties they have (use (i)); with what things are in the sense of which things to which they’re numerically identical (use (ii)); and with what things there are in the sense of what things exist (in the ordinary sense, use (iii)).

Now, if H’s picture of Dasein is correct, then our concern for what things (there) are is one we have in the context of *existence*—i.e. of asking and answering the question of who *to be*. For example, we take an interest in *discovering* what things (there) are—what properties things have, which things are which, and which things there are in the world. This is the interest we take in *inquiry*. But what’s at issue for us as inquirers is *what to believe*. And, as we’ve seen, this is an interest in figuring out *who to be* in the sense of which viewpoints about the world to embrace. Or, to take another example, we take an interest in *making it the case* that the world is certain ways. This is the interest we take in the world as *agents*—as beings who can make a difference to what things (there) are. But

what's at issue for us as agents is *what to do*—how to exercise our agency. And again, this is an interest in figuring out who to be in the sense of how to lead our lives. These two examples help to clarify elements of H's picture as I presented it above: the reason why the world matters to us is, H thinks, because whenever we answer the question of who to be, we endeavor to acknowledge the way the world is—in the present terms, what things (there) are; and figuring out who to be is our *principal* activity: the activity around which our whole nature revolves.

However, although the issue of what things (there) are and the issue of who to be are essentially intertwined for us in this way, the two issues are radically different. We can think of the difference in terms of the distinction between different sorts of questions. Questions about what things (there) are are questions answered using *claims* expressed by declarative sentences. The question of who to be, though, is answered by *being* a certain way. Of course, one such way to be—one way of answering the question of who to be—is to *assent* to a claim about what things (there) are: i.e. forming a *belief*. However, the act of assenting to a claim is distinct from the claim itself. And, while the latter can be used to answer a question about what things (there) are, it takes something like the former—an act of Dasein—to answer the question of who to be. This fundamental difference is why H thinks that Dasein's to be is a distinct sense of being from senses (i)-(iv).

Each of us faces the question of who to be—who *we ourselves* are to be. It's in this sense that this fifth sense of being—'Dasein's to be'—*applies* to each of us in our own understanding of things. Think of it this way. Because we are constantly asking and answering the question of who to be, we each, at a very fundamental level, *understand* this question. In fact, if what I've said above is true, our understanding of this question provides the backdrop against which we concern ourselves with and thus understand what things (there) are.

This provides the key to why H thinks our existential understanding amounts to an understanding of our own being. First of all, remember how I characterized our *existentiell* understanding—our understanding of the particular range of possible answers we face when answering the question of who to be. At any given point, I am faced with *particular* questions about who to be: e.g. what to believe or choose in a *particular* situation. As I tackle such a question, the world discloses to me a *particular* range of possible answers to the question I'm tackling—particular claims I might believe, particular actions I might choose. When I grasp this range of possibilities, then, I grasp my endeavor of answering this particular question about who to be as having a definite *shape*, with specific things at issue—i.e. which out of *this* range of possibilities, if any, to opt for, and why.

But again, what makes this existentiell understanding possible is *existential* understanding—that is, a general understanding of what existential possibilities are, how they can relate to one another, and how all this bears upon the project of figuring out who to be. To understand such things is to understand how 'Dasein's to be' applies to

me—the general structure of the whole endeavor of existence. And, remember that this endeavor always involves making sense of what things (there) are in the *world*—specifically, how the character of the world can provide the *basis* on which I opt for various answers to the question of who to be. So, understanding this endeavor also involves an understanding of senses (i)-(iv) of being, and how the application of these senses bears upon my project of figuring out who to be. In this way, existential understanding presupposes an understanding of all five senses of being, and how they all relate to one another in *my* nature. It's for this reason that H thinks (2) is true: that engaging in the activity of existence requires some understanding my own *being*.

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Now that we've had this lengthy introduction to H's picture of Dasein's being, and why he thinks (1) and (2) are true on its basis, remember again why H thinks (3) is true. In order to have an understanding of the being of any particular entity, we must have some understanding of being as such. Thus, because it's part of our being to have an understanding of that being, it's part of our being to have an understanding of being as such.

With that, we're finally ready to see why H thinks (A) and (B) are true.

II. The argument for (B)

Remember that (B) is what's supposed to be the main idea of this section—at least, if we just look at the section's title. Namely, it's the claim that answering the *Seinsfrage* is necessary for having a satisfactory understanding of Dasein's being. In H's terms, the *Seinsfrage* has 'ontical priority'. However, remember also that H's title is *misleading*. In fact, H only really devotes three sentences to justifying (B): “By ‘existentiality’ we understand the state of being that is constitutive for those entities that exist. But in the idea of such a constitutive state of being, the idea of being is already included. And thus even the possibility of carrying through the analytic of Dasein depends on working out beforehand the question about the meaning of being in general” (p.33). All that H's really doing here is relying on an idea that came up in previous sections: that in order to understand the being of a particular entity—including Dasein—we've got to understand being in general or as such. The only things that his overview of Dasein's being adds to this is the idea that since it's part of Dasein's being to understand that being, “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” (p.35).

As I said before, *most* of the section is really devoted to amplifying on section 2's argument for (A)—for the claim that in order to answer the *Seinsfrage*, we will have to undertake an analytic of Dasein: an investigation into Dasein's being.

II. Amplifying the argument for (A)

More specifically, the other reason why H gives an ultra-condensed overview of his picture of Dasein's being here in section 4 is to attempt to clarify exactly what *impact* he

thinks his approach—an analytic of Dasein—will make on ontology. It promises, he thinks to *transform* the inquiry into being. And this is because he thinks that previous philosophers have *neglected* Dasein's to be when doing ontology. They have, by and large, focused only on senses (i)-(iv)—on those senses of being that concern what things (there) are.

H here gives the clue as to why he thinks taking account of Dasein's to be will dramatically transform ontology. What I noted above—the fact that Dasein's to be and the other senses of being are systematically interrelated in the context of Dasein's existence—is, he thinks, the key to understanding the unity of the various senses of being, and thus to solving the problem of ambiguity: as we noted in section 1, the signature problem of ontology. Thus, he thinks, Dasein has what he calls *ontico-ontological priority* over all other entities in ontology. What we must do is to understand exactly *how* the various senses of being are systematically interrelated in the activity of existence. And to do that, we must investigate *existentiality*—the general structure of this activity. We must, in other words, undertake an *existential* analytic of Dasein.

Endnotes

1. All page numbers refer to the translation of *Being and Time* by John McQuarrie & Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962). I have altered their translations in only one respect: where McQuarrie and Robinson routinely capitalize “being”, I have left it uncapitalized.