



Heidegger, Hermeneutics, and Hagiography

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I. Introduction

Being and Time is a difficult book, which makes assessing it all the more difficult. Did Martin Heidegger succeed in laying the groundwork for a new kind of metaphysics? Or did certain flaws in the work (or its author) hold it back and prevent the full unfolding of Being? In assessing these questions, it is important to first establish an evaluative framework with which we can approach Heidegger’s work on its own terms. In surveying *Being and Time*, there is nothing to be gained for evaluating Heidegger by standards to which he himself did not adhere. The criticism that he fails to follow a method guaranteed to give clear and indisputable proof of his claims, for example, will not hold, since clearly Heidegger had no such aim. (Cf. “A skeptic can no more be refuted than the Being of truth can be ‘proved.’ And if any skeptic of the kind who denies the truth, factually *is*, he does *not even need* to be refuted” [H. 229].)

At the same time, however, we must not fall into the trap of thinking that whatever Heidegger wrote must by definition accord with the overarching goal of the Heideggerian project and complete it. To the contrary, to the extent that we believe that

Heidegger in fact had a coherent project, we must be aware that this project had the possibility of ending in failure as well as the possibility of ending in success. Of course, the most likely outcome for any project is neither complete failure nor complete success, but a mixture of the two, with some areas showing greater strength than others.

Accordingly, the aim of this paper will be to build a framework within which a later, full assessment of the Heideggerian project can take place, and in so constructing a framework, to indicate certain areas of assessment (namely, the importance of an individual's life to the understanding and estimation of their work) that were downplayed by Heidegger himself but which are in keeping with the spirit of his project and would benefit the understanding of not only its overall outcome but also the relationship that his work has to other comparably philosophically significant works.

II. Understanding Heidegger's goal for *Being and Time*

In his *Letter on Humanism* written in 1947, Heidegger offers the following self-assessment of the project undertaken by *Being and Time* in 1927:

It is everywhere supposed that the attempt in *Being and Time* [to let "thinking enter into a questioning that experiences" and to let "the habitual opining of philosophy fall away"] ended in a blind alley. Let us not comment any further upon that opinion. The thinking that hazards a few steps in *Being and Time* has even today not advanced beyond that publication. (246)

Thus, Heidegger saw little progress as having been made by his contemporaries in nearly twenty years following its publication. Yet, it was not until 1953 that he added a new preface to *Being and Time* which admitted that a "second half could no longer be added" (17), and he formally abandoned the project. In later works like *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, published in 1969, we find Heidegger declaring that, "the name of the task of *Being and Time* will change" (431) for his future works as he struggled to remake the project from the ground up.

Though we may with charity assent that *Being and Time* did not end in a blind alley, nevertheless, our own understanding of the project must always be informed of the fact

that the task set forth in outline in the introduction to *Being and Time* was left incomplete, and the question of the work's final sentence ("Does *time* itself manifest itself as the horizon of *Being*?" [H. 437]) was left unanswered. As such, the project of *Being and Time* is in many ways still an open project, and one that it is up to its readers to complete for themselves. As this is the case, in order to appraise the work, we must apply a threefold method, which first grasps the project of *Being and Time*, then goes beyond it to its goal, and only then returns and assesses whether *Being and Time* truly succeeds as a starting point or whether it merely leads one down a wrong path.

Where then lies our starting point for the initial grasping of the purpose of *Being and Time*? A clue is offered by the definition of philosophy presented in the beginning of the book and quoted at its end:

Philosophy is universal phenomenological ontology, and takes its departure from the hermeneutic of Dasein, which, as an analytic of *existence*, has made fast the guiding-line for all philosophical inquiry at the point where it *arises* and to which it *returns*. (H. 38 and H.436)

In this quotation, Heidegger captures both the goal and the method of his philosophy. In other words, he sees philosophy as the general assessment of what things are phenomenologically for all, and he see the basis for this assessment in the iterative process of coming to understand conscious existence. The iterative process of understanding conscious existence ("hermeneutic") in turn contains the beginning and end of all philosophical inquiry, since as inquiry philosophy must begin and end by refining and testing its ideas in this same manner. Thus, what it is that we must share with Heidegger concerns both the nature of universal phenomenology and our own ability to refine our process of understanding. This phenomenological assessment of what has being must reveal what is truly common to all yet utterly concealed, "*the question of the meaning of Being*" (H. 1). Certainly, "Being" is a word which is used by all, but only philosophers—and not even all of those—concern themselves with its meaning. As Heidegger notes, "the meaning of Being must already be available to us in some way," but at

the same time, “We do not *know* what ‘Being’ means” (H. 5). It is only when we seek to explain Being that we realize our own incapacity to do so. Without such a prompting, we could easily remain ignorant of the signification of the question. However, once the question has been made explicit, it is inescapable, for as Heidegger asserts repeatedly, Dasein is a being for which, “Being is an *issue* for it” (H. 12 *et al.*). As such, any avoidance of the question of Being is a regrettable denial of our own natures, and investigations of human nature which do not attempt to address it, according to Heidegger, “have no right to claim that they *can* accomplish that for which they are basically striving” (H. 45).

To assess Heidegger’s project, we must share in Heidegger’s concerns, and quite plainly, the meaning of Being is Heidegger’s central preoccupation. *Being and Time* then stands or falls to the degree that it clarifies our understanding of the meaning of Being.

III. Method for understanding *Being and Time*

A. Importance of understanding hermeneutics

If the meaning of Being is fixed as our goal, then we next need to understand the method by which Heidegger intended to reach his goal. As stated above, for Heidegger, philosophy takes its departure from the hermeneutic of Dasein, and we see in the structure of *Being and Time* itself a process of hermeneutic refinement, as when, for example, Heidegger states that in order to account better for the centrality of temporality which had been uncovered during the initial analysis, “there arises for the existential analytic the task of *repeating* our analysis of Dasein” (H. 304). *Being and Time* is full of such repetitions and restatements. What is important to note about them is that their purpose is to drag the reader down the hermeneutic path by further refining the understanding that had been built up before.

For own purposes, a clear understanding of Heidegger’s conception of hermeneutics is crucial for two reasons. first, we have need of a method by which to interpret what Heidegger has written. Heidegger’s abuse of the German language is infamous, and he ends his second introduction with a muttered excuse for “the awkwardness and

'inelegance' of expression in the analyses to come" (H. 38). Meanwhile Macquarrie and Robinson feel the need to begin their translators' preface by calling claims that Heidegger is "untranslatable" merely "an exaggeration" (13). Accordingly, the hermeneutic method which Heidegger advances will be indispensable in cutting through the fog of words that surrounds *Being and Time* and coming to grasp with the meanings contained within it.

Second, a proper understanding of hermeneutics is necessary so that we are able to evaluate the veracity of the claims presented in *Being and Time*. Heidegger gives a threefold significance to hermeneutics in philosophy. first, as Dasein, in our own existence, we exhibit hermeneutics when "those basic structures of Being which Dasein itself possesses are *made known* to Dasein's understanding of Being" (H. 37). Second, hermeneutics is necessary for "working out the conditions on which the possibility of any ontological investigation depends" (H. 37). finally, hermeneutics is the basis of "an analytic of the existentiality of existence" (H. 38). (In addition to these roles in philosophy, Heidegger admits a role for hermeneutics as "the methodology of those humane sciences which are historiological in character" [H. 38].) Accordingly, if we are to evaluate the degree to which *Being and Time* was a success or failure, then we must be equipped with an understanding of hermeneutics which is capable of grasping the basic structures of Being, the conditions of ontology, and the analytic of existence and comparing the insight into them that was achieved in *Being and Time* to what one might expect from a philosopher of Heidegger's ambitions.

B. The hermeneutic circle

In order to do this, we will next examine what hermeneutics is. Friedrich Schleiermacher, one of the progenitors of hermeneutics, explains that it "begins with misunderstanding and searches out a precise understanding" (92). The hermeneutic method then is the only method that is appropriate for fundamental ontology, since in itself, any quest to define the nature of Being in order to provide the grounds for thought would be self-defeatingly

circular. The reason for this is if our goal in fundamental ontology were to begin with absolute nothing presupposed (as Descartes suggests) and from that position attempt to select first principles or even a methodology by which to produce first principles, then the process by which such a selection would be made would itself be either utterly arbitrary or based on the self-deception that one had truly cleared away all presuppositions, when in fact numerous presuppositions remained. Thus, if fundamental ontology is to be a meaningful pursuit then it must be, as Schleiermacher describes hermeneutics, a project not of radical foundation making, but a project by which the foundations which are already present in our ordinary understanding are brought to the fore and clarified, so that what edifies our thinking can be enhanced and what obscures our thinking can be removed.

Heidegger follows this same line of thought in *Being and Time*, explaining that,

Formal objections such as the argument about 'circular reasoning,' which can easily be cited at any time in the study of first principles, are always sterile when one is considering concrete ways of investigating. (H. 7) ...

But factually there is no circle at all in formulating our question as we have described. One can determine the nature of entities in their Being without necessarily having the explicit concept of the meaning of Being at one's disposal. Otherwise there could have been no ontological knowledge heretofore. (H. 8)

Thus, the concrete reality of the pre-existence of both our understanding of being and our method of inquiry make them suitable for further iterative refinement in the hermeneutic process. Further, that fact that we do have ontological knowledge prior to the commencement of the inquiry, further clarifies why our goal is not the goal of casting the foundations of our thought, but rather of bringing to the fore the foundations that are already there. Without at least some toehold on the universe, we could accomplish nothing philosophically or practically. Our practical footing then must be the stepping stone to a truly philosophical grounding.

C. Importance of context

With this background in mind, we can begin the process of refining our interpretive hermeneutic by focusing on specific factors which bear special significance in the understanding of a text, and particularly the text of *Being and Time*. Clearly, for any work, the contexts in which it is contained and that are contained within it are an important consideration for its initial evaluation. To provide a concrete example, suppose I made the claim that Kant believed in space aliens. By itself, my claim bears little weight. Some justification is needed for the claim. Thus, when I bring a citation to bear (“I would indeed bet all that I own—if this matter could be established through some experience—that there are inhabitants on at least one of the planets we see” [Kant B853]) then my claim becomes more plausible.

However, the reader should not be completely satisfied by my having quoted just one sentence or worse just part of a sentence in defense of my claim. Kant may have written a line earlier, “and here I will next demonstrate the idle opinions that may occupy reason when such is employed in the absence of possible experience, so as to illustrate its flight away from reality.” Thus, the reader is obliged to read the surrounding material in order to bring context to the sentence. However, clearly if one paragraph can indicate the nullity of a sentence in another, so too can one chapter indicate that another will be written in an ironic mode. Thus, the diligent student must read the whole book to be sure that no earlier or later statement contradicts the sense of the quotation. Yet, this too may be insufficient. Suppose the book was written under political or other duress such that a particular orthodox line had to be toed. In this case, one must read the author’s diaries and letters for clues as to the private thoughts that motivated the work to see where the author merely seemed to espouse a belief, while hoping the audience would draw its opposite conclusion on the basis of subtle clues. Thus, the student must read the entire corpus of an author in order to hold a justified opinion of one sentence. However, there also exists the fear that the entire corpus of the author was written in an ironizing

style. (And lest this be thought an idle concern, the reader is reminded that this is exactly the Straussian reading of much of Western philosophy.) Hence, the entire Western canon must be mastered in full before we can say with real confidence that Kant truly expressed a belief in life on other worlds.

Of course, this result is absurd. If we cannot understand a single sentence of Kant in isolation, we have even less chance of understanding the Western canon as a whole, for the canon is itself composed of innumerable such claims that would require similar grounds by which to understand them. Thus, in order to extricate ourselves from this circle of interdependent contexts, we must proceed by a hermeneutic method, in which neither the part nor the whole is taken as the prior ground of thought, but instead our workable if confused presuppositions are taken up as they are in order to be refined. What this case does illustrate, however, is that there is a practical need for some understanding of the context of a claim, even if the entire horizon of the context of a work can never be captured. Though one's understanding of the context of a claim may begin in confusion, to the extent that our understanding of the claim is to be brought to an acceptable level of quality, so too must our understanding of the context of the claim be brought up. The two modes of understanding work together hand in hand enhancing one another iteratively.

Schleiermacher distinguished between two specific areas of context that must always be taken into particular account when attempting to interpret a passage: the grammatical context and the psychological context. Since "discourse is the mediation of shareable thought" (86), it is necessary that the manner used to express the original thoughts of the author is one that is comprehensible for its intended audience. Being comprehensible, the author's discourse will express its ideas through the use of terms the signification of which is already known to the audience, but being original, it will present them with something they have never before considered. This is precisely what Heidegger expresses at the end of *The Origin of the Work of Art* where he writes,

There remains the unavoidable quandary to the reader, who naturally comes to the essay from without, will refrain at first and for a long time from perceiving and interpreting the matters at issue here in terms of the reticent domain that is the source of what has to be thought. For the author himself, however, there remains the quandary of always having to speak in the language most opportune for each of the various stations on his way. (211–212)

For the reader, the difficult is in entering completely into the mind of the author. For the author, the difficult is bringing the whole of his thought down into the language of the public realm. Thus, for Schleiermacher “every discourse has a two part reference, to the whole language and to the entire thought of its creator” (86). These two components of a discourse, “stand completely equal, and one could only with injustice claim that the grammatical interpretation is the inferior and the psychological the superior” (87). Accordingly, great care must be taken when interpreting an author in order to place proper emphasis on the grammatical or psychological element of a text as appropriate.

In the case of our Kant quotation, the grammatical aspect of the text clearly speaks toward the interpretation that he does believe in life on other planets. However, the psychological element of the text might lend us an opposing interpretation if, for example, we found Kant elsewhere leaving clues that would mitigate against such a possibility. (In this case, the psychological aspect seems to harmonize with the grammatical aspect, as Kant’s personal scientific proclivities increase the already great likelihood that he was speaking in earnest.) Of key importance, according to Schleiermacher, is the recognition that “something of grammatical insignificance does not necessarily have to be of psychological insignificance, and vice versa” (89). Only by giving proper weight to the parts of the text which inform our understanding of the whole will we ever really capture an adequate understanding of the text’s meaning.

Hence, our interpretation of *Being and Time* must be informed by both the plain readings of the German suggested by the grammatical world inhabited by Heidegger at the time of its composition and also by the fact that Heidegger spoke as a groundbreaking philosopher, and accordingly, many of his terms and constructions do not hold the

meaning that they would in other contexts. Moreover, in our actual evaluation of *Being and Time*, it is necessary that we bring a similarly bicontextual understanding in order to properly determine the plausibility and relevance of the claims presented within it.

D. Application as a means of taming circularity

However, we still face serious problems if our only guideline in thought is that we allow our understanding of the part and context to develop one another. Left to circle endlessly, nothing prevents our thought from retaining and enriching its faults rather than its strengths. If our thoughts merely circle and chase after clouds, nothing prevents them from becoming an increasingly meaningless and baroque projection of our flaws in thinking. Thus, we must add to our hermeneutic process a method of regularly testing the results of our inquiry with pragmatic evaluations of the success or failure of the proposed refinements to our understanding.

One area where we see this process of pragmatic grounding most clearly is in the physical sciences, in which experiments play a crucial role in checking the intuitions of scientists against the natural world itself. Modern science has been quite successful in spurring the rapid development of technology in recent centuries in part due to the hermeneuticity with which it refines its ideas. A new hypothesis is formed, experiments are proposed, and evidence is collected and interpreted according to preexisting theories. As Heidegger points out,

...theoretical research is not without a *praxis* of its own. Reading off the measurements which result from an experiment often requires a complicated 'technical' set-up for the experimental design. Observation with a microscope is dependent upon the production of 'preparations.' ... even in the most abstract way of working out problems and establishing what one has obtained, one manipulates equipment for writing, for example. (H. 358)

However, we must note that Heidegger is not writing approvingly when indicates the existence of such a fore-structure in the nature of science. It seems rather that his chief concern was to attack the positivists of his day who claimed that science was capable of

restricting itself to the bare facts. Hence, he continues his explication of science by noting that,

The 'grounding' of 'factual science' was possible only because the researchers understood that in principle there are no 'bare facts.' In the mathematical projection of Nature, moreover, what is decisive is that this projection *discloses something that is a priori* [H. 362]

Heidegger also expresses something like this in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, in which he writes,

[S]cience is not an original happening of truth, but always the cultivation of a domain of truth already opened, specifically by apprehending and confirming that which is shows itself to be possibly and necessarily correct within that field. (H. 187)

In each of the quotations, Heidegger clearly expresses that since the methods of science are prescribed in advance by the field itself, there are distinct limitations to the progress of science, when it is conceived of narrowly by its practitioners. As such, Heidegger never quite admits the hermeneuticity of the physical sciences. As he writes in *What Calls for Thinking?*,

[S]cience itself does not think, and cannot think—which is its good fortune, here meaning the assurance of its own appointed course. (373)

This statement demonstrates vividly his rejection of the physical sciences as a positive example of hermeneutics in action. Indeed, Heidegger was deeply conservative in his views about the impact of technology on the world, as seen for instance in *The Question Concerning Technology*, in which he connects the essence of technology with "danger." Perhaps the main reason that he feels that the process of inquiry utilized by the physical sciences is inferior to that of philosophy and the humane sciences is that, in Heidegger's view, physical science is too deeply committed to its ordinary assumptions ("its appointed course") to really allow for the kind of bottom up rethinking that takes place regularly in a critical hermeneutic investigation. The rethinkings that do occur in science happen only haphazardly at the prompting of groundbreaking scientists like Newton or

Einstein. While maintaining its commitments has allowed science to be truly fruitful in its narrowly defined fields, at the same time, it ensures that science will never fulfill its most basic promise, which is to reveal things as they really are.

E. The difficulty of grounding revolutionary science

The Kuhnian distinction between “normal science” and “revolutionary science” is useful to bear in mind at this point in order to grasp the difference between a narrowly scientific conception of iterative refinement and a truly hermeneutic one. In normal science, the field of study is enriched by the application of the methods endemic to it, e.g. measurements, routine experiments, field investigations, minor refinements of theories, and so on. As was also noted by Heidegger’s preceding comment about the a priori disclosure inherent in factual science, the use of these methods is rooted in the presuppositions of the field. However, as time goes on and the anomalies within a field becomes more numerous and compelling, normal science finds itself increasingly constrained in its attempts at resolving them and its solutions become ad hoc and byzantine. In such a situation, revolutionary science begins when an entirely new basis is put forward in order to ground future investigations within a field. Heidegger in his *Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics* points out something like this, when he shows how something as deeply unintuitive as Newton’s first Law of Motion could come to be embraced as axiomatic even against the evidence of the senses, because its use as the basis of Newtonian physics seemingly resolved a number of scientific difficulties in one elegant stroke.

Normal science always already has a methodology, but it is less clear what, if anything, justifies the movement of revolutionary science. Kuhn suggested that different paradigms for interpreting the world are “incommensurable,” although exactly what Kuhn meant by the term is matter of debate. On the surface, it would seem that if different paradigms cannot be compared, then there are no reasons for accepting one paradigm and rejecting another. On the other hand, Kuhn himself seemed to back away

from this interpretation and allowed that science has in fact progressed as its paradigms have shifted. Leaving aside the question of how to interpret Kuhn, our task is to specify the sort of meta-theoretical considerations that govern the acceptance or rejection of a proposed paradigm shift.

It would seem that one such factor in grounding revolutionary science is the desire for simplicity in one's model. Given two paradigms for interpreting a range of observations, Ockham's razor dictates that we choose the simpler of the two, the one that does away with unnecessarily posited entities. Unfortunately, the simplicity of a system is not an absolute, objectively quantifiable value. Rather, the simplicity of an explanation must be considered relative to the properties of the system in which it is being measured, and the simplicity of a system is must be considered relative to the other systems with which it interconnects. What is considered simple depends in part on what is considered complex, and for systems, complexity is in part a cultural construct. What seems more or less complex depends on the whole web of community engagements we find ourselves caught up in. Normal science has the advantage of possessing agreed upon means of testing its latest beliefs and thus guiding its hermeneutic engagement, but it can never really test its most important, core beliefs. To return to the example of Newton's first Law of Motion in *Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics*, Heidegger illustrates the impotence of normal science by asking of the "body left to itself",

Where do we find it? There is no such body. There is also no such experiment that could ever bring such a body to direct perception. (289)

Hence, revolutionary science proceeds not on the sole evidence of new experiments but on the radical reinterpretation of existing evidence and the suggestion of entirely new forms of evidence. For this reason, it is often remarked that new paradigms succeed not on the basis of persuading old scientists but through their replacement with a younger generation to which the revolutionary hypotheses no longer seem incomprehensibly

foreign. However, this explanation of the progress of revolutionary science still leaves unanswered the question of what it is that persuades the young to join the project of taming the revolutionary new science instead of pressing forward with the old normal science. It is useful then to notice that Heidegger also remarks in *Modern Science* that,

The greatness and superiority of natural science during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries rests in the fact that all the scientists were philosophers. They understood that there are no mere facts... Where genuine and discovering research is done [today] the situation is no different from that of three hundred years ago... the present leaders of atomic physics, Niels Bohr and Heisenberg, think in a thoroughly philosophical way, and only therefore create new ways of posing questions and, above all, hold out the questionable. (272)

Thus, one of useful aspects of philosophy as a discipline comes in its ability to open new paradigmatic vistas by questioning the common sense view of the existence of “mere facts” and creating new avenues for inquiry. While revolutionary science can only prosper if it is encountered by later generations as a “simpler” than its predecessors and so taken up and made ordinary, the initially sparking of the revolutionary impulse must originate in the will to philosophical insight and inquiry that is possessed by the great scientists of a particular historical era. What motivates these revolutionary scientists is a drive to formulate their science in such a way as to conform more closely with what they take to be the highest ideals of the field. How they measure their own progress is not by the endemic tools of the field as an ordinary scientist does, but according to their own philosophical vision of the essence of the field itself.

Of course, it is not only science that encounters difficulties that result in the need for a paradigm shift. The same problems plague the humanities (which as indicated earlier by Heidegger work hermeneutically), and most importantly for our purposes, it plagues philosophy. Normal philosophy works by refining the boundaries of a currently understood domain of discourse or by applying known philosophical frameworks for inquiry to new disciplines. It is the sort of work that commonly proceeds in classrooms and academic journals, which grounds itself through the common dialogue of its parti-

cipants and the inculcation of its values in the younger generation. However, the history of Western philosophy is for the most part the history of revolutionary philosophy. For in it, new thinkers regularly emerge in order to overturn the existing grounding of philosophy and create an entirely new way of understanding what it is that philosophy seeks to explain. Accordingly, understanding what, if anything, grounds paradigm shifts is all the more important in the philosophical realm. Unfortunately, the difficulties associated with revolutionary science are only all the more pronounced when we attempt to formulate revolutionary philosophy, since while revolutionary scientists have at least a particular conception of their field in mind as a guiding-line and the generation choosing between taming the revolutionary science and entering normal science has simplicity and elegance as a benchmark, it is not clear what would be an appropriate guiding-line for revolutionary philosophy or those who follow after revolutionary philosophy attempting to normalize it, since the aim of such philosophy is exactly to subvert all existing paradigms and replace them with one that is superior, but this 'superiority' is to be judged according to standards of evaluation that are contained within the new philosophy itself.

Indeed, in *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, Heidegger seems to suggest that no such grounds of comparison between great philosophers is possible, since,

Not only do we lack any criterion that would permit us to evaluate the perfection of an epoch of metaphysics as compared with any other epoch; the right to this kind of evaluation does not exist. Plato's thinking is no more perfect than Parmenides'. Hegel's philosophy is no more perfect than Kant's. Each epoch of philosophy has its own necessity. We simply have to acknowledge the fact that a philosophy is the way it is. It is not for us to prefer one to the other, as can be the case with regard to various *Weltanschauungen*. (432–433)

However, to concede this point to Heidegger is to abandon the project of making philosophical progress at all. If this paper is to serve as a guide to a future evaluation of Heidegger's work, then it is precisely necessary to find a means by which the "perfec-

tion” of Heidegger can be brought into relief next to the perfection of all of the other great philosophers of history. In the next section, we will suggest one such means of doing so.

Since Heidegger clearly intended himself to be taken as a revolutionary philosopher (the philosopher of an “epoch”), we must fully recognize the difficulties that this presents for us in both the interpretation and the evaluation of his work. Concerning the area of interpretation, we must be aware of the difference in concerns between Heidegger and prior philosophers in order to avoid painting him as merely, say, Aristotle with some minor refinements. In the area of evaluation, this paper has consistently urged the reader to evaluate *Being and Time* on its own grounds, while recognizing that doing so does not mean writing Heidegger a carte blanche. Rather, we must seek out the sort of basis on which any crediting or discrediting of the project of *Being and Time* is to be accounted both internally and comparatively. In this regard, this paper can be construed as an attempt at normalizing the philosophy conducted within the Heideggerian framework. To do this, we must uncover the basis on which the new paradigm is to be conducted. Thus, we are left with the central question of what could play the role of a pragmatic grounding for philosophy itself.

IV. Grounding philosophy itself

A. The question of Heidegger’s access to authenticity

In attempting to answer the question of what could ground philosophy in general, it is useful to begin with a more specific question: On what basis does Heidegger make the claims he does about the nature of authenticity, resoluteness, and so forth? While Heidegger does, of course, posit the possibility of authenticity, etc. as a part of the existential constitution of all human beings, at the same time, he is by no means inclined to agree with Kant that, “the highest philosophy cannot get further than can the guidance that nature has bestowed even upon the commonest understanding” (B858). To the contrary, Heidegger’s anti-democratic impulse will insist that while resoluteness is a possibility for all, only a select few ever pursue this possibility with the seriousness needed to

overcome the distractions of the “they.” Central to the Heideggerian project is the repudiation of the belief that all things and all people are fundamentally alike. To suppose such is to ignore the ontic, existentiell differences between individuals. In *Modern Science*, he decries that post-Newtonian physics has abandoned the distinguishing of things and places according to their nature, and clearly this same differentiation of nature applies to mankind as well. For the individual in their everydayness, the “who” of Dasein is the “they.” Only those who go beyond everydayness are entitled to speak about that which is beyond the ken of the “they”—namely, resoluteness.

Furthermore, Heidegger explicitly states that,

Resoluteness, by its ontological essence, is always the resoluteness of some factual Dasein at a particular time. (H. 298)

In a similar vein, he explains in his *Letter on Humanism* that *Being and Time* is “experienced from the fundamental experience of the oblivion of Being” (232). Thus, to speak about resoluteness accurately in its ontological essence is to speak about the real resoluteness of a particular person at a particular time. If this is the case, then we are entitled to surmise that if Heidegger has something meaning to say about resoluteness, he must have possessed it factually at some point. This being the case, the success of Heidegger’s project depends in part on whether or not he allowed resoluteness to become open to him in a manner that makes it possible for him to tell us about it in its depths, or whether his openness to resoluteness was somehow shallow or otherwise lacking. That Heidegger’s own life experiences should be important to his success as a philosopher is a natural outgrowth of the historicity Dasein. As he states, what is philosophically primary is, “the Interpretation of authentically historical entities as regards their historicity” (H. 10). If *Being and Time* is an existential analysis of Dasein in the service of the question of the meaning of Being, then the specific, authentically historical Dasein which is analyzed in *Being and Time* can be none other than Heidegger himself. Accordingly, the question

of whether Heidegger's Dasein is an instructive exemplar for philosophy is a legitimate and relevant avenue for overcoming the difficulty of grounding the evaluation of revolutionary philosophy.

B. Heidegger's attitude toward Dilthey and Yorck

It is instructive at this point to digress into an explication of Heidegger's views of the projects of Wilhelm Dilthey and Count Paul Graf Yorck von Wartenburg. Heidegger clearly held these hermeneutic forebears in regard, and remarks after his explanation of the historicity of Dasein that,

The analysis of the problem of history which we have just carried through has arisen in the process of appropriating the labors of Dilthey. It has been corroborated and at the same time strengthened, by the theses of Count Yorck, which are found scattered through his letters to him. (H. 397)

Concerning Dilthey, Heidegger felt that he was too often mistakenly seen as "the 'sensitive' interpreter of the history of spirit" (H. 397) who was disorganized in his thinking, when in fact,

What looks like disunity and an unsure, 'haphazard' way of 'trying things out,' is an elemental restlessness, the one goal of which is to understand 'life' philosophically and to secure a hermeneutic foundation in terms of 'life itself'. (H. 398)

In other words, Dilthey sought to establish a "philosophy of life." While Heidegger felt the expression "philosophy of life" is a redundant formulation, which "says about as much as 'the botany of plants'" (H. 46), he was nevertheless sympathetic to Dilthey's aims, the philosophic relevance of which lies "in the fact that in all this [Dilthey] was, *above all*, on his way towards the question of 'life'" (H. 46). Thus, we see the relevance of "life" to the project of *Being and Time*, though we have not yet captured the degree of relevance held by Heidegger's own life.

Yorck is not much remembered in the field of hermeneutics these days, but Heidegger finds his letters to Dilthey edifying and excerpts them after providing the absolute minimum of background material. One of Yorck's criticisms of Dilthey is that he does too

little to differentiate the ontic and the Historical (H. 399). (This is perhaps another reason that Heidegger does not see the physical sciences as a positive example of an applied hermeneutic circle.) For our purposes, it is interesting to note Heidegger's quotation of Yorck's claim that,

Just as physiology cannot be studied in abstraction from physics, neither can philosophy from historicity—especially if it is a critical philosophy. Behavior and historicity are like breathing and atmospheric pressure; and—this may sound rather paradoxical—it seems to me methodologically like a residue from metaphysics not to historicize one's philosophizing. (H. 402)

In other words, the attempt to talk about philosophy in isolation from its seemingly haphazard historical development is a folly of abstraction. As Yorck says much later, "The separation between systematic philosophy and Historical presentation is essentially incorrect" (H. 402). At the same time, Yorck is quick to stress that he does not put all his emphasis on the psychological side of hermeneutics. He explains that,

We must keep wholly aloof from all such rubbish, for instance, as how often Plato was in Magna Graecia or Syracuse. On this nothing vital depends. (H. 400)

Thus, for Yorck (and implicitly for Heidegger as well), there is a strict separation between the parts of a philosopher's life that count in the working out of the history of philosophy and the parts of a philosopher's life that are only of interest to the curious antiquarian and not the hermeneutist.

What emerges from this examination of Heidegger's interest in Dilthey and Yorck is an appreciation for the fact that philosophy, as an activity of Dasein, must be rooted in history though by no means its slave. It is for this reason, we find in *Letter on Humanism* Heidegger informing us that "Because it must think the ek-sistence of Da-sein, the thinking of *Being and Time* is essentially concerned that the historicity of Dasein be experienced" (239). If *Being and Time* concerns in part the lived, experiential historicity of Dasein, what larger impact might this have in the framing of its philosophical evaluation?

C. Philosophy as hagiography

With these considerations in mind, we propose that the historical canon of Western philosophy is correctly interpreted as a kind of “hagiography.” Since the history of philosophy is presented as a history of revolutions, it is necessary to find some element which can anchor what would otherwise be a panoply of wholly incommensurable paradigms. While, of course, any would-be evaluator of these conflicting paradigms is obliged to enter into each of them on its own terms, nevertheless, in order to adequately make comparative evaluations between them (to say nothing of understanding the individual work alone), it is necessary to bring an understanding of the lives of the individuals involved into the field of the evaluation.

We use the term hagiography here not pejoratively, but to emphasize the difference between our project and that of simple biography. A hagiography is an idealized biography of a saint. Unlike an ordinary biography, its purpose is the spiritual edification of the reader, rather than the accurate transmission of factual occurrences. Likewise our project here is “idealizing” of its subjects in the sense that it needs only concern itself with aspects of the individual’s life which turn out to have philosophical relevance for the reader’s evaluation of the philosopher’s work. It is not idealizing in the sense that the philosopher’s relevant faults are to be smoothed over. To the contrary, such faults are to be magnified, since by betraying the flaws in thinking of the philosopher, they aid the evaluator immeasurably. Likewise, in the life of a truly great philosopher, there will be incidents that demonstrate the adequacy of that thinker’s philosophical outlook.

Indeed, consider what happens (proximally and for the most part) in every introductory course taught in philosophy: the lecture begins by painting a brief picture of the time period and milieu of the philosopher under consideration, and only when this background is in place does the examination of the life of the individual begin. Why does this occur? Is this only to entertain undergraduates briefly before the start of the real meat of the lecture? Or is it philosophically relevant that Socrates was made to

drink hemlock? That Descartes and Leibniz were also mathematical innovators? That the people of Königsberg could set their clocks to Kant's daily walks? That Nietzsche's madness was used by his sister to create a grotesque philosophical sideshow attraction? These stories being so familiar to us is no accident. They are a part of our own understanding of the characters of these authors. We need these stories in part to help us interpret their work (using what Schleiermacher would call the "psychological" aspect), but also and just as importantly to help evaluate their work, since the lives of these authors are part of the authority with which they present their findings. If these authors intend to inform us about the nature of Being, then the mode of their own Being during their lifetimes is not wholly irrelevant to their assessment.

Heidegger's own practices here are somewhat mixed. On the one hand, he explicitly tells us a story from the life of Heraclitus in his *Letter on Humanism* (256–258) and another from the life of Socrates in *Modern Science* (276) apparently to help us perform such epoch crossing comparisons. On the other hand, according to one account,

His lecture course on Aristotle began, "Aristotle was born, worked, and died," thus giving all the biographical information he thought relevant and moving on to the philosophy. He saw himself in similar terms—as a vehicle for ideas... (De la Durantaye)

Thus, for Heidegger it is the ideas that matter more than the person. And indeed, this is the case for our analysis as well. However, given the historical nature of Dasein, the ideas that originate in Dasein cannot be so easily separated out into what is the idea on the one hand and what is the life of person on the other. The multiple contexts in which a work's content is to be found are too interdependent to be neatly severed into wholly separate components. For a great philosopher, the ideas are guides by which the life is made, and the life is a kind of demonstration, which validates the idea. Just as Heidegger uses an event, perhaps fictitious, from the life of Heraclitus to demonstrate his own ideas about the "abode of man" (258), and he uses the example of Socrates in the market place to demonstrate the value of saying, "the same thing about the same thing" (276), so too are

we entitled to use the life of Heidegger to make plausible (or discredit) his ideas about fundamental ontology and the meaning of Being. Given the fact that the philosophies of Heraclitus, Socrates, and Heidegger are in so many ways incommensurable, we are left with no choice but to turn our attention back to the lives that they lived in order to determine whether real value inhered in their thought. That is not to suggest that a brilliant person cannot live a valueless life, but if we expect our philosophers to present us with a “universal phenomenological ontology” which “takes its departure from the hermeneutic of Dasein,” then we should expect that same analytic insight to be demonstrated by the values they made phenomenologically real with their lives.

What it is that we get out of examining the life of the individual as a part of our evaluation of the individual’s thought is a concrete example of the mode of Being that the individual’s thought implies. Of course, no philosopher, no matter how great can be expected to live up to all their own ideals without fail, and again we do not mean to suggest by the term “hagiography” that revolutionary philosophers are without flaws, perhaps even serious flaws. However, when we do see shortcomings and a general failure to live up to the standards imposed by the thought of the individual, if anything this is even more valuable as a tool for the evaluation of what would otherwise be wholly incommensurable. If the originator of a school of thought is unable to fully embody it, what hope is there for us mere mortals? And if the mode of Being which is presented to us as an ideal is completely unobtainable, then we must be aware that however noble the motivating goal of that ideal is, some compromises will have to be made in working out of this philosophy a practical engagement with life and that the grounds for those compromises will need to be sought elsewhere, as the original thinker was not able to realize them for us. On the other side, we must be aware of the danger that a philosopher lived a life of worth, but this lifestyle was not informed by the ontology of the thinker, but rather opposed to it. However, this too serves as an example of the mutual interplay of ideas and actuality in a proper philosophical hagiography, for it demonstrates to us

again the weakness of the thought in effecting its own actual application. In either case, hagiography has an important role to play in the evaluation of revolutionary philosophy.

To be sure, Heidegger would probably find reason to dispute the conclusions being drawn here from his broader philosophy. However, if as he posits in *Origin*, “The artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist. Neither is without the other” (H. 143) then we are obliged when looking at the work of art to look also at the artist to see their mutual origin. Of course, in this same essay, Heidegger asserts that,

It is precisely in great art... that the artist remains inconsequential as compared with the work, almost like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge (166)

However, while recognizing that Heidegger does not share our approach, we submit that for the reader who wishes to return to the source of the work in order to fully assess its worth, it is necessary to reconstruct the passageway that led to its place of origin. This requires nothing less than looking past the seeming authorlessness of great art to find what circumstances allowed for its emergence and to recreate those circumstances. For this purpose, knowledge of the life of the author is indispensable.

This hagiography of philosophy must never allow itself to become limited to the mere surface facts of an individual’s actions in life. Nor should it allow biographical questions to dominate our understanding or evaluation of an individual to an exclusion of an understanding of the ideas they presented. Heidegger makes this point in *Origin* when he insists that the preservers of a work must not “drag it into the sphere of mere lived experience” (193). There is more to a work than the experience which informed it. As Yorck says, there are some parts of a thinker’s life on which “nothing vital depends” (H. 400). From Schleiermacher’s insistence that in the realm of interpretation the psychological must not crowd out the grammatical, we can learn that so too in the realm of evaluation, the life of the author is just one piece of data in an overall pattern. Hence, we must be very careful when examining an author not to over essentialize their life or

work, as Richard Rorty rightly points out in *Philosophy and Social Hope*. An individual's life cannot be completely encompassed by any one commitment, belief, or action no matter how portentous. For the purposes of evaluating a work, it is not the accidents of the author's life which matter or even the sanitized "essence," but the recurring themes which play out again and again, and in so doing help us to determine where the author and the work are most aptly matched. Thus, when we evaluate Heidegger's work we must not fall into the trap of believing, as Rorty does, that we can "keep selected items of Heidegger's imagery and jargon while shrugging off his world-historical pretensions" (191). If we remove Heidegger's words from their context, we risk making them meaningless, and thus no more than a mirror for our own thoughts. In doing that, we cripple ourselves by disallowing the possibility of crossing from one paradigm of philosophy to another. If philosophy does not allow us to see something new, we are better off without it. Though Rorty insists that we should not try to "assign thinkers and poets places in a world-historical narrative" (196), he forgets that if we fail to keep the historicity of a thinker in mind, our evaluation will be lead astray by the presumption that there is a clear cut division between the life and the work and that the life has no relevance on the evaluation of the work. If Rorty allows for the reverse possibility—that a work can enrich a life—he should also allow for the possibility elucidated here, which is that a full understanding of the work cannot entirely skip over the life behind it.

V. Conclusion

In this paper, we have conducted the preparatory groundwork for the hermeneutic process which needs to be entered into in order to conduct a proper evaluation of *Being and Time*. In assessing Heidegger's great, unfinished work fairly, it is necessary to enter the work in its own spirit in order to produce an evaluation that measures *Being and Time* in just those areas where Heidegger had his highest ambitions, namely getting at the meaning of Being through an analysis of Dasein. Entering this process, we natur-

ally find ourselves in need of a clear understanding of the context of the work, both psychologically and grammatically. However, due to its nature as a paradigm-shifting work of “revolutionary philosophy,” it is by no means simple to construct an evaluation that is useful for comparing it with other works of revolutionary philosophy or even with its own ambitions. In doing this, we find that one apparent ground available to us is Heidegger’s own life. Heidegger’s authority on the nature of resoluteness can stem from nothing other than his own ability to outpace the repressions of the “they,” and moreover, it is in keeping with the goals of a philosophy of life held by prior hermeneutists he respected, Dilthey and Yorck. Accordingly, in this case and in general, we should not resist letting the history of philosophy become “hagiography,” so long as we ensure that it becomes hagiography of the right kind. This means that we use the philosopher’s life as example of the possibilities and limitations of their philosophy, which can open us up to new ways of Being, and we do this without either reifying the life of the philosopher into a one dimensional portrait or compiling a mere compendium of biographical trivialities. Only if we can enter into a hermeneutic dialog with the work in this way will we truly be prepared to assess *Being and Time* or any other work of revolutionary philosophy on its own grounds, both internally and comparatively.

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