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Reflexivity and Social Phenomenology

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Reflexivity and Social Phenomenology

by

Benjamin K. Hoffman

A thesis submitted to the Department of Philosophy
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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Abstract

This thesis develops an account of human understanding on the basis of an analysis of German philosopher Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, and in relation to the thought of the Kyoto School philosopher Watsuji Tetsurô. The aim is to describe shared human intelligibility as founded upon a historical tradition and maintained by concrete practices, and yet as expressed only by interpretive projections, and therefore always open to revision. An analysis of the significance of anxiety and authenticity in *Being and Time*, as aspects of the existential interpretive process of our lives, is accompanied by a philosophical description of everyday acts, which finds that the world is interpreted in relation to the others with whom the world is co-inhabited. This social relatedness between, on one hand, authentic, 'individualized' interpretation, and on the other hand, the everyday basis of intelligibility, is shown to support a potentially radical philosophy of social transformation. The first half of the text discusses the central significance of interpretation for Heidegger's phenomenology, and argues for a reading of authenticity as a contextual, practical and individualized project. The second half develops an account of social existence in reference to Watsuji's phenomenological ethics, and concludes with an examination of social opposition movements and the revision of the ground of intelligibility provided by a tradition and expressed in social practices.

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Introduction: Genealogy, Reflexivity, and Phenomenology

Nietzsche writes in *The Dawn*: “How did reason come into the world? As is fitting, in an irrational manner, by accident. One will have to guess at it as a riddle.”¹ In looking toward its own origins, reason *guesses at itself*, finding in its fundamental self-reference a riddle that it cannot overcome. If we turn toward our past, and identify that from which we emerged to be ‘irrational’ or purposeless, a constellation of accidents and contingent details, we can yet do so, and consider legitimate such an understanding of these accidents and details, only insofar as we ‘*posses*’ reason. Reason, that on the basis of which such a discovery is first possible, seems in that case to undermine its own legitimacy through its self-reference. On what basis can reason, finding itself to have arisen from an ‘irrational’ history, being an *accident* itself, proclaim its legitimacy? And yet, in the absence of such legitimacy, can reason even coherently make a claim *against* its legitimacy? Reason, finding the ‘irrational’ as its foundation, encounters this riddle, and can only ‘guess at it.’

In a section of *The Order of Things* titled “The Analytic of Finitude,” Foucault describes the first appearance of ‘man’ through the *episteme* of modernity: “Man appears in his ambiguous position as an object of knowledge and as a subject that knows; enslaved sovereign, observed spectator.”² ‘Man,’ that is, ‘appears’ as a subject-made-object, or an object-made-subject. Knowledge, in the modern *episteme*, depends on a knower, who is also the object of ‘his’ own

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1960), 81.

² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 312.

knowledge.³ Foucault identifies the *subject* here constituted as the necessary center of knowledge; as the precondition for knowledge; but also as presenting limits to knowledge.⁴

In *The Order of Things*, one might identify the subject as a *necessary* presence, appearing in the modern *episteme* as it emerged out of the classical *episteme*, for reasons that seem not entirely arbitrary, but determined by contradictions implicit in the latter. But the modern *episteme* creates only a new set of contradictions, in particular, in the dilemma of the subject as both the initial *condition* and the *limit* of knowledge. The foundational self-understanding of this subject confronts this dilemma: In its reflexivity, the subject objectifies itself, and so undermines its own subjectivity; but it is only *as subject* that self-objectification is possible.

In Foucault's genealogical analyses, he turns toward examinations of the history of practices as constitutive of particular modes of subjectivity. In a statement of his methodology, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Foucault writes:

A genealogy of values, morality, asceticism, and knowledge will never confuse itself with a quest for their 'origins,' will never neglect as inaccessible the vicissitudes of history. On the contrary, it will cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning; it will cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning; it will be scrupulously attentive to their petty malice.⁵

³ "By *episteme*, we mean . . . the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems." Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 191.

⁴ Dreyfus and Rabinow explain this as follows: "Foucault thinks that the study of human beings took a decisive turn as the end of the eighteenth century when human beings came to be interpreted as knowing subjects, and, at the same time, objects of their own knowledge. This Kantian interpretation defines 'man.' Kant introduced the idea that man is that unique being who is totally involved in nature (his body), society (historical, economic, and political relations), and language (his mother tongue), and who at the same time finds a firm foundation for all of these involvements in his meaning-giving, organizing activity." Michel Foucault, *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), xix.

⁵ Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Michel Foucault: Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. D. F. Bouchard (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 80. Regarding the motivation of his genealogical accounts, Foucault writes: "The object was to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently." *The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of the History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 5. The question of how thinking one's history can transform thinking, by making that which is implicit in thought explicit to thought, expresses the issue presented in this introduction.

Such a genealogy is itself an expression precisely of Nietzsche's riddle, of reason finding its own origins in the irrational, and *guessing* at that. It represents the perturbation of reason—the self-disruption of reason—in which reason manifests its own capacity toward the end of undermining its legitimacy. But the reflexive self-interrogation of reason by which reason challenges its legitimacy even itself presupposes that reason has the legitimacy to challenge its own legitimacy.

What capacity allows the individual interpreter to identify herself as the product of historical contingencies, of discipline, of *power*, and to what end does this capacity serve? Is the “riddle” identified by Nietzsche—reason's discovery of its own ground in the irrational—only an ‘absence’ that perturbs reason, and sets it against itself? We might ask: is reason which has thus identified itself, which is *perturbed*, the same as reason which *has not* identified its descent? And is there something ‘worthwhile’ in this ‘discovery,’ or perturbation? Foucault offers, perhaps conspicuously, no direct reply to these questions in his genealogical analysis *Discipline and Punish*.

That absence might haunt us, as we are perhaps haunted by the absence in the ‘center’ of “Las Meninas.”⁶ But, into this absence, it seems that no subject of knowledge can again step forward. It is not framed, as in “Las Meninas,” by ‘representation’ which calls forth a subject who represents. It is, rather, framed by practices, by the contingencies of history: and they frame that which they *constituted*, but also that which *examines* the frame. The subject was constituted by a history of practices ‘directed’ in their development by no transcendental or even consistent

⁶ Foucault examines in the first chapter of *The Order of Things* “Las Meninas,” a painting by Velázquez. For Foucault, it represents *representation*. Foucault discusses the content of the painting as indicating all of the modes of Classical representation: “representation undertakes to represent itself here in all its elements, with its images, the eyes to which it is offered, the faces it makes visible, the gestures that call it into being.” Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Random House, 1994), 16. That to which all attention is directed—the attention of a painter, pausing to examine his subjects; the gaze of a child; the reflection of a mirror—is an ‘absence:’ the ‘subject’ of the painting is absent except as it is reflected and signified by the gazes contained within the frame of the image. That which is *not* represented is the subject itself: the subject represented, and for whom representation is possible. The absence is that of the modern subject, about to be called forth in the modern episteme, as the being for whom representation is possible.

immanent telos, but in relation to historical contingencies and accidents. It is, of course, that same constituted subject which discovers its own genealogy.

There are a few directions that we might here take toward understanding this subject that has the capacity to uncover such a genealogy of its own constitution. *First*, we might suppose that the ontology of the subject is not exhausted by the *effect* of historical conditions through which it has ‘passed.’ The subject can be identified as attaining substantiality through some aspect of its constitution that is not defined by its historical situation. This might be a transcendental essence or capacity, or a more provincial notion of ‘the human’ as a biologically defined, but relatively stable category. Although there are many possible identifications of the subject that would fit this definition, we might as well identify it as an assertion of the modern subject. In taking such a view one confronts Foucault directly, and simply rejects his premises.⁷

There is a *second* general approach to this question of the constituted subject’s ‘capacity’ for identifying and responding to its genealogy. We simply forget about grounding the subject, or discovering in it any subsisting essence and rather *extend* our *genealogy* and follow it directly into our immediate present. We ask, therefore, what does this sort of discourse with which Foucault is engaged *do*, what sort of *practice* is this, and what are its consequences? To restate in different terms the question above asked about *reason*: Is the subject who questions her genealogy—who confronts this riddle—indeed the same as the subject who does not? Perhaps, by asking this, we are no longer quite engaged in genealogy. We are, rather, considering the immediate consequences of the genealogical method itself. What sort of ‘subjects’ are

⁷ Regarding this Foucault states, unambiguously: “Nothing in man—not even his body—is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men. The traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled.” “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 87-88.

constituted by the methodology of genealogy? Might we be *reconstituted* through the genealogical *method*?

We face the riddle posed by Nietzsche: we are confronted by the dilemma of ‘reason’ identifying its ‘non-rational’ foundation. What does it mean to guess at this riddle? Perhaps not simply *nothing*, to find nothing, but—in guessing, and *not* solving—to make a discovery that is, yet, not an answer. Supposing that the riddle is legitimately foundational—an *irresolvable* riddle—to guess at it might still have some productive consequence. In guessing at the riddle, we discover that we cannot catch hold of ourselves. We find ourselves split: There is that which is questioning itself, and the questioned. The former can never ‘catch up’ with itself, but finds itself in a relation of *ekstasis* to its own foundation, which it observes, even as it identifies it *as its foundation*. This is the dilemma of reason identifying its non-rational ground, and guessing at that riddle; and it is the dilemma that Foucault presents as the *foundational dilemma* that it is. We confront here the conspicuous *absence* in Foucault’s genealogy, into which we might have, first, naively, hoped for some subject ‘beyond the genealogically constituted subject’ to step.

We ought to wonder, considering the oppressive power of the institutionalized practices that Foucault identifies, what might allow for the transformation of these institutions. If it is the case that our self-understanding is always already established by a history of discourses and practices, on what *basis* can we identify and respond to those practices: how can they be transformed? We must identify some ‘capacity’ for reflexivity, through which the subject that arose from a history of practices can reflexively relate to those practices in such a way that opens a space for their transformation. But where might we find the locus of reflexivity? If it is not to be found in any *subject* standing both within and *beyond* its historical situation—a subsisting

entity that can be defined as having the capacity for reflexivity—how can such reflexivity be situated?

I suggest that a phenomenological approach to this question can reveal something significant. The ‘riddle’ of reflexivity, which is revealed by genealogy, has a *positive* phenomenological appearance. It is discovered precisely in Heidegger’s analytic of Dasein. But does not even the concept of Dasein describe an entity that has some determinate form persisting beyond its particular historical, social situation? Is not even this bare notion that ‘Being-in-a-world’ has certain existential characteristics, only a residue of the modern subject; only, even, the most subtle essence of the subject?

Further, perhaps as a consequence of this, does *Being and Time* present Dasein in any deep phenomenological relation to others, and indicate how it can transform the practices that constitute these relations? Is not Dasein, as a being which ‘is,’ defined somehow ‘as it is’ in a way which is ‘beyond’ the particular relations in which it exists, the discourse from which it attains some self-understanding, and the practices in which it is engaged?

To address this, I will present a reading of Heidegger which first takes up his ‘question of the meaning of Being,’ and reexamines what it means for something to ‘be.’ I will develop an account of Heidegger’s phenomenology which shows that the phenomenological and hermeneutical dimensions of his thought are mutually interdependent to such an extent that what it means for something to ‘be’ is always for it to be *as* something, which is, for it to be *interpreted*. This is the case no less for Dasein—the being for whom there ‘is’ Being—than for any other beings within the world. Dasein ‘is’ only ‘as’ it is interpreted, and nothing else besides; but, it is itself the interpreter of its own Being.

Heidegger presents interpretation as not a strictly *conceptual* activity: “The primordial ‘as’ of an interpretation which understands circumspectively we call the ‘existential-hermeneutical ‘as’” in distinction from the ‘apophantical ‘as’” of the assertion.”⁸ Something can be ‘understood’ ‘as’ something in its *use*, which is an ‘interpretation’ that is not conceptual, or theoretical: A pen is ‘interpreted’ in *writing*. In examining *theoretically* this activity of writing, in which the pen is ‘circumspectively’ interpreted, we are engaged in another mode of interpretation, in which we seek a ‘thematic’ account. There are many ‘levels’ of interpretation and understanding, between the most circumspect or everyday (such as *using* something as something), and the most conceptually abstract (such as ontological interpretation).⁹ The significance of asserting that these different activities are modes of interpretation is that each can be understood as expressing the *reflexivity* which is foundational to Dasein’s way of Being, and which is not merely, or initially, *conceptual* reflexivity.

Being and Time represents through and through an asking of the *question of the meaning of Being*. And Dasein is nothing other than, or beyond, the finite position from which any understanding and interpretation is possible. Therefore, the concept of Dasein can be distinguished from that of the *subject*, as the subject *is* only *as it understood* in a distinct way, and Dasein—Being in the world, as a *finite interpretive position*—is the condition even for the possibility of any concept of a subject. Where we would seek some concept of the subject that

⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 201.

⁹ “Between the kind of interpretation which is still wholly wrapped up in concerned understanding and the extreme opposite case of a theoretical assertion about something present-at-hand, there are many intermediate gradations: assertions about the happenings in the environment, accounts of the ready-to-hand, ‘reports on the Situation,’ the recording and fixing of the ‘facts of the case,’ the description of a state of affairs, the narration of something that has befallen. We cannot trace back these ‘sentences’ to theoretical statements without essentially perverting their meaning. Like the theoretical statements themselves, they have their ‘source’ in circumspective interpretation.” *Being and Time*, 201.

can provide a ground for the capacity for reflexivity, we have already overlooked that which is most phenomenologically ‘immediate.’

Heidegger’s fundamental ontology should be understood as uncovering that which is phenomenologically primordial, and this is precisely *interpretation*. We are, that is, always already engaged in interpretation, on the basis of some understanding, as soon as we identify, through, for instance, *use* or conceptual reference, ‘something as something.’ The ‘capacity’ for reflexivity is therefore, from a phenomenological perspective, that which least needs to be demonstrated as the capability of some being (a subject) which persists through and beyond the practices that define it.

The ‘riddle’ of reflexivity, that which is revealed by the most fundamental reflexive self-reference, as it is exemplified by the position of the genealogist seeking *conceptually* or ‘thematically’ to uncover her own foundations, appears phenomenologically, in its most primordial form, as *anxiety*. It is an interpreting being’s existential interpretation of itself, as finitely situated, and yet as the only basis for an understanding of Being. Heidegger identifies this as ‘individuating;’ but, what precisely is individuated? Is it the ‘self’? If so, can we find here evidence that Heidegger’s account, insofar as we take his presentation of authenticity as essential to his overall project, fails to provide a basis for an adequate *social* phenomenology?

I maintain, rather, that authentic Dasein is nothing other than authentic interpretive activity: that is, interpretation from a position which has turned back toward and interpreted itself, and identified its own finitude. Authenticity, understood thusly, is by no means the ‘individuating’ of a subjective self. As the analytic of Dasein constitutes *fundamental* ontology, interpretive activity is the phenomenological precondition for any such ‘ontic’ notion of a ‘self,’ and this as much as of ‘community.’ The significance of that which authenticity uncovers is that

any such understanding *is as* an interpretation from a particular, finite position. Further, the notion of authenticity in no way merely represents a distinct ‘existentialist’ *aspect* of *Being and Time*, separable from the analysis of the *everyday* in Division I, but is an essential dimension of the work, which illustrates, fundamentally, what Dasein ‘is.’

Dasein is the basis for social phenomenology. The relationship between the individual and society can be approached phenomenologically only from an interpretive perspective, the examination of which constitutes fundamental ontology. Heidegger does gesture toward social phenomenology, but it remains undeveloped in *Being and Time*. Not, however, because of any essential incompatibilities between his approach and a more robust social phenomenology.

My analysis of *Being and Time* will be followed by the development of an account of social phenomenology in reference to the Kyoto School philosopher Watsuji, whose *Ethics in Japan* responded to *Being and Time* and provided an account of sociality as phenomenologically primordial. I will present Dasein as the interpretive position which is the foundation for social phenomenology, but argue that this does not place the ‘ontic’ individual in a position of phenomenological priority.

The account of social phenomenology to be developed here will aim to present individuality and community as interdependent, as mutually determining, such that neither can be identified as having ontological priority over the other. However, because both ‘community’ and ‘individuality’ *are* only as they are interpreted from a finite interpretive position—Dasein—the reformation of social practices is possible always through the revised interpretation, the revaluation, of community and individuality. As *tradition* and ‘community,’ the living expression of tradition, are the basis of *intelligibility*—the basis upon which any understanding of anything is first possible—it is ‘from’ the understanding that Dasein first has, as received from

the tradition, that a projected reinterpretation is possible. This reinterpretation is therefore a reevaluation which does not project itself 'out of' the tradition and community, but *into it* as a revised interpretation of the tradition and a reformation of community. The basis of the possibility for social existence is also the basis of the possibility for its transformation.

I have two very general aims that correspond with the two halves of the following: Chapters one through three present a reading of *Being and Time* as providing a suitable foundation for social phenomenology, which yet takes individual reflexivity as a starting point. The first chapter examines the question of the meaning of Being, as the starting point of ontology, and as that which leads to the analytic of Dasein, as the perspective from which the question of Being is asked; the second examines interpretation generally; and the third argues that authenticity is a certain mode of interpretation. In the second half, parts four through six, I present an account of social phenomenology along with a discussion of the significance of the concept of authenticity and the possibility of social transformation. Chapter four argues that what is most phenomenologically immediate in everyday ways of Being is not the individual self, but relatedness, as expressed in practices; chapter five argues that the phenomenology of social relatedness does not constitute fundamental ontology, nor can it take its place, as even everyday social acts are interpretative and must be placed in relation to particular interpretive perspectives, which are foundational; chapter six further discusses reflexivity and social transformation.

I. Preliminary Notes on the Question of the Meaning of Being

1. *The question posed and the problem of under-standing*

Has a more obscure question ever been asked, than what ‘Being’ ‘is’? Perhaps, at least, a more *opaque* question cannot be posed. If that were so, might we consider the question, and at least learn something about *opacity*? If ‘Being’ resists ‘thematic’ conceptualization more than anything else to which we may direct our attention, this is perhaps because it is that which is always and most ‘immediately’ understood already; if, in fact, it can be said that it is ‘understood’ at all. Indeed, as Heidegger has formulated the question, there is ‘nothing’ which could ‘stand’ under it. Heidegger presents the *most foundational* question, which seems to have been always already answered, and perhaps without ever having first been asked.

On one hand, it might be said that Being is never in need of being ‘understood.’ Rather, it addresses ‘that which is,’ and ‘is,’ somehow distinct from the understanding *that* it ‘is.’ In other words, following this notion, there is no *particular* understanding involved in recognizing that ‘something is,’ aside from *the way* that it is understood *as* it is—and this latter understanding of something as a particular something, distinct from the fact that something is understood *at all*, is the only issue with which we can be concerned. It can be asked what it means for *this or that* particular *thing* to be, for a *person* to be, or whether there is a primordial ‘substance’ of which everything is ‘composed,’ or a God from which all was brought ‘into’ Being, but the ‘question of Being’ *as such* is incoherent.

But the question of the meaning of Being is not an inquiry regarding (only) the existence of particular beings, but seeks to find what it means for (any) beings ‘to be’ at all. And so, *on the*

other hand, it might be supposed that there is something significant about, or some particular understanding involved in recognizing, the fact that something ‘is’ at all, *aside* from or ‘over and above’ the particular recognition of something as a specific something-or-other.

In the first case, in which the notion of Being serves only to identify this or that, ‘as’ this or that, and yet has no essential significance of its own, it can be said that there is no question of the meaning of Being *beyond* asking what *this or that* in particular is. In the second case, in which ‘Being’ is considered to have some significance itself—that is, as the ‘bare fact’ of something Being at all *aside* from the particular way that something is (what it is, where it is, why it is, etc.)—the meaning of Being ‘*in general*’ can be taken as a subject of inquiry. Either approach overlooks the significance of the question as it has been posed, and each by overlooking the relation between ‘meaning’ and ‘Being.’

“Being is always the Being of an entity [of a particular being].”¹⁰ That is, there is no Being ‘beyond’ the particular beings which ‘are.’ Any determinate conceptual significance given to Being—any notion of Being as beyond but determining of beings—will deliver the question into the hands of a metaphysics which ‘looks away’ from beings.¹¹ The question of the meaning

¹⁰ *Being and Time*, 29.

¹¹ In his “Letter on Humanism,” Heidegger identifies metaphysics as the result of a misunderstanding of what he defines as the ‘ontological difference’ between beings (the particular beings which are found in the world) and Being. “Metaphysics does indeed represent beings in their Being, and so it thinks the Being of beings. But it does not think the difference of both. Metaphysics does not ask about the truth of Being itself.” *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 226. Therefore, because it does not ‘think the difference’ between Being and beings, a metaphysical position can claim for itself *absolute* truth, truth that is always *derived from beings* and then applied to Being as a totality. For instance, because in a certain way of looking, beings appear as constituted by ‘substance,’ Being itself might be identified as ‘substantiality.’ Yet, at the same time that ‘Being’ is always ‘the Being of an entity,’ “*Being is the transcendens pure and simple*. And the transcendence of Dasein’s Being is distinctive in that it implies the possibility and the necessity of the most radical *individuation*.” *Being and Time*, 62. The significance of this ‘individuation’ will be addressed below. The *transcendens* which ‘Being is,’ and its connection to the ‘radical individuation’ of Dasein, are both to be understood in reference to an account of Being as *intelligibility* in general, and to Dasein as the interpreting being for which something can be identified (is intelligible as) something. “Entities *are*, quite independently of the experience by which they are disclosed, the acquaintance in which they are discovered, and the grasping in which their nature is ascertained. But Being ‘is’ only in the understanding of those entities to whose Being something like an understanding of Being belongs. Hence Being can be something unconceptualized, but it never completely fails to be understood.” *Being and Time*, 228. This understanding of Being which is *unconceptualized* is that which constitutes ‘pre-ontological’

of Being asks what it *means* for beings *to be*, yet without supposing that there is some metaphysically *determinate way* which all beings necessarily are.

It might be suggested, in accordance with the first position noted above, that what ‘is’ is a matter initially distinct from understanding, only *acknowledged* by linguistic reference: it cannot be asked what it ‘means,’ in general, for anything ‘to be,’ but only how we arrive at the knowledge that this or that does actually exist. In this case, the question “What is Being” turns *the most empty* signifier back upon itself as though it contains some conceptual significance: a tautological question with no content, a boneless *ouroboros*.

If the bare notion that ‘this or that’ ‘is’ has no abstract significance, it means that ‘this or that’ exists always ‘as’ ‘this or that,’ and that the, perhaps implicit, ‘*as*’ holds all of the significance.¹² If one says “there is a stone,” what it means for something to be *a stone* could be evaluated: The speaker has some ‘criteria’ for identifying ‘a stone’ as a stone. ‘Stone’ can signify some particular set of entities in the world, and so is a formalizable. The only additional significance that the bare ‘fact’ that it ‘is’ has is situational: A stone is ‘on’ a path; it is ‘not’ a clump of dirt. But, to continue this line of reasoning, the *fact* that it ‘is,’ distinct from *what* it is, and *where* it is, cannot possibly mean anything.

The most concise formulation of the question is also the most apparently problematic: “What is Being?” Its form seems to demonstrate that the question cannot be asked without presupposing its answer. Here it is apparent that the question of the meaning of Being has a *circular* form.

understanding; ontological understanding, on the other hand, involves the conceptualization, or thematization, of pre-ontological understanding. This distinction is examined in detail below.

¹² “The primordial ‘as’ of interpretation which understands circumspectively we call the ‘existential-hermeneutical ‘as’” in distinction from the ‘apophantical’ ‘as’ of the assertion.” *Being and Time*, 201. This “primordial ‘as’” refers to the fundamental interpreting which is Dasein’s way of Being, as having an understanding of Being. It is ‘primordial’ because it defines the way that any being in the world can appear; therefore the examination of the existential-hermeneutical ‘as’ (what it means for something to appear as something: that is, for it to ‘be’) constitutes fundamental ontology, and is oriented toward the ‘analytic of Dasein.’

2. *Questioning and circularity*

But, Heidegger notes: “In the question of the meaning of Being there is no ‘circular reasoning’ but rather a ‘remarkable relatedness backward or forward’ which what we are asking about (Being) bears to the inquiry itself as a mode of Being of an entity.”¹³ This entity, which stands in a particular relation to the question of the meaning of Being, is Dasein—a being that is ‘there,’ in the world. Heidegger begins his preparatory analysis of the question with an examination of this being, for which Being is an issue.¹⁴ The question of the meaning of Being not only must begin with an analysis of the being *which can ask the question*, but, further, the question is “the radicalization of an essential tendency-of-Being which belongs to Dasein itself.”¹⁵

In other words, only Dasein can ask the question of the meaning of Being; the asking of that question is a particular *way of Being* for Dasein; and the question addresses the Being of that being who asks it. As Heidegger writes in “What is Metaphysics:” “Every metaphysical question can be asked only in such a way that the questioner as such is present together with the

¹³ *Being and Time*, 28. Italics mine. “It is quite impossible for there to be any ‘circular argument’ in formulating the question about the meaning of Being; for in answering this question, the issue is not one of grounding something by such a derivation; it is rather one of laying bare the grounds for it and exhibiting them.” Ibid. Also, see especially sections 31 and 32 of *Being and Time*, in which Heidegger examines the circular structure of understanding. Commenting on *Being and Time*, Derrida writes: “If one looks closely, it is the phenomenological opposition ‘implicit/explicit’ that permits Heidegger to reject the objection of the vicious circle, the circle that consists of first determining a [particular] being in its Being, and then of posing the question of Being on the basis of this ontological predetermination.” “The Ends of Man” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 126. Gadamer writes: “What Heidegger is working out here is not primarily a prescription for the practice of understanding, but a description of the way interpretive understanding is achieved. The point of Heidegger’s hermeneutical reflection is not so much to prove that there is a circle as to show that this circle possesses an ontologically positive significance . . . The process that Heidegger describes is that every revision of the fore-projection is capable of projecting before itself a new projection of meaning.” *Truth and Method* trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004), 269.

¹⁴ “Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it. But in that case, this is a constitutive state of Dasein’s Being, and this implies that Dasein, in its Being, has a relationship towards that Being—a relationship which itself is one of Being.” *Being and Time*, 32.

¹⁵ *Being and Time*, 35.

question.”¹⁶ The question of the meaning of Being can only be asked by a being that is ‘in the world:’ a particular being which ‘is’ always already in some determinate way—a way which involves having an understanding of its Being. Asking explicitly the question of Being is a mode (a radicalization) of the way of Being of the being which asks the question.

The understanding which Dasein *always already* has, is designated by the phrase ‘pre-ontological;’ the understanding sought by the explicitly posed question of the meaning of Being is ‘ontological.’¹⁷ Ontology, which seeks to obtain a ‘concept’ of Being, is an *extension* of pre-ontology. Each is an ‘understanding of Being:’ the former a thematization of the latter. The ‘relatedness backward or forward’ involved in the question of the meaning of Being is that *between* Dasein’s Being (which involves having an understanding of Being) and the explicit asking of the question of Being. To ask the question of what it means ‘to be’ is *to be* in a *certain way*.

The way that the question is (pre-ontologically) ‘answered’ is the way that Dasein understands its own Being; ‘asking the question’ is a mode of interpretation that ‘takes up’ pre-ontological understanding and opens it for revision. To ask the question of the meaning of Being is to ask the question *as* a being who ‘is’ and for which therefore the question has already been answered in some way. It is only on the basis of *being in some particular way* that the question can be asked, and asking the question is a way of Being for the being who asks the question. This describes the relatedness backward or forward between Dasein and the question of the meaning of Being.

¹⁶ Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 93.

¹⁷ “Dasein is ontically ‘closest’ to itself and ontologically farthest; but pre-ontologically it is surely not a stranger.” *Being and Time*, 37. Dasein is ontically ‘closest’ to itself because it ontically *is itself*. It is ontologically farthest from itself, because its most difficult interpretive task is to interpret itself, or, as the ‘clearing’ in which beings appear, there is no clearing beyond Dasein in which Dasein can appear to itself. And Dasein is ‘not a stranger’ pre-ontologically because it is *as what it is* in all of its worldly acts (of pre-ontological interpretation).

3. *Finitude and the opacity of the question*

The ouroboros revealed by the question of Being does indeed have ‘bones’ (conceptual content): they are constituted precisely by the particularity of the being who asks the question, its finitude.¹⁸ Beings can only ‘be’ ‘as they are’ for a being that is finite and particular. The question of the meaning of Being has always been answered in a particular way by the being who can ask the question. The question ‘What is Being?’ appears ‘*transparent*,’ empty in its circularity only *because* Being has already been understood in a *certain* way. Being, placed into a relation with itself in the question, is distinct, particular and finitely situated. ‘Being’ is least of all an *empty signifier*—Being ‘is’ always as particular beings are understood in a certain way by a finite, interpreting being.

However, Being is the foundation of all intelligibility. To ask the question of the meaning of Being is to look for ‘the meaning’ of that which is the possibility of all meaning. Or, it is to attempt to make intelligible that which allows all else to be intelligible. What is the meaning of Being? But all meaning depends first on Being, as the foundation of intelligibility.

Therefore, the question is ‘opaque.’ It is the *most opaque* question, because it relates that which is the *basis of all clarity* to itself, such that there is no more expansive *clearing* upon which the question of the meaning of Being can be positioned. Being, as ‘clearing,’ or the foundation of intelligibility upon which all phenomena appear, is founded upon nothing more fundamental than the Being of Dasein, which is a finite, particular being. This opacity has existential significance in Dasein’s encounter with its own Being, in *anxiety*, which is Dasein’s

¹⁸ The relationship between the *particularity* and *finitude* of Dasein is defined by this interdependence: Dasein is a *particular* being (as *thrown*, existing in a certain social and historical context, itself defined in a specific way, and having a perspective which is only its own), because it is *finite* (as ‘being towards death’). These attributes of Dasein are discussed further below.

discovery of its primordial interpretive relation to Being, and this, as founded upon Dasein's own finite particularity.

4. *Methodological comments on phenomenology and hermeneutics*

Heidegger's methodology for approaching the question of the meaning of Being is *phenomenology*, a method which aims directly at the 'things themselves.'¹⁹ This methodology, which Heidegger employs to uncover beings in their 'essence'—what they are '*as they are*'—will be discussed explicitly below, but only following a discussion of *hermeneutics*, for which it will have 'implicit' relevance. Heidegger's phenomenological method can be distinguished from Husserl's in part because the phenomena which it uncovers are hermeneutically situated.²⁰ The phenomenological *essence* of a being, what *it is as it is*, is always what it is *for* the being from which phenomenology begins—Dasein. As the phenomenological essence of Dasein is its understanding, everything which 'is,' *is as it is understood*. But as will be shown, this understanding is not fundamentally or *initially* 'conceptual,' or theoretical. It is carried through all of the ways that Dasein is (in its 'ways of Being'), which includes but is not limited to conceptual understanding.

¹⁹ "The term 'phenomenology' expresses a maxim which can be formulated as 'To the things themselves!' It is opposed to all free-floating constructions and accidental findings; it is opposed to taking over any conceptions which only seem to have been demonstrated." *Being and Time*, 50.

²⁰ "Our investigation itself will show that the meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in *interpretation*. . . . The phenomenology of Dasein is a *hermeneutic* in the primordial signification of this word, where it designates this business of interpreting. But to the extent that by uncovering the meaning of Being and the basic structures of Dasein in general we may exhibit the horizon for any further ontological study of those entities which do not have the character of Dasein, this hermeneutic also becomes a 'hermeneutic' in the sense of working out the conditions on which the possibility of any ontological investigation depends. . . . 'hermeneutic,' as an interpretation of Dasein's Being, has the third and specific sense of an analytic of the existentiality of existence; and this is the sense which is philosophically *primary*." *Being and Time*, 62.

The following chapter will examine what it means for Dasein to have understanding as its phenomenological essence, and will thereby explicate *fundamental hermeneutics* as the foundation for the chapters that follow. The phenomenological method will be implicit in the next chapters, which seek to define Dasein's hermeneutic essence, and show how it is carried through every way that Dasein is; phenomenology will be taken up more explicitly, as *social phenomenology*, after a discussion of hermeneutics, in an analysis which will extend and offer corrections to Heidegger's phenomenology, with the aim of further developing an ontological interpretation of Dasein.

II. Being as Intelligibility and Significance: Ontological and Pre-Ontological Interpretation

1. *Interpretation, understanding, and projection*

What the question of Being reveals as the starting point of ontology is the *essence* of Dasein's Being, *as ontological*.²¹ The thematic development of the concept of Being is only a development (a 'radicalization') of Dasein's *way of Being*, which is to have an understanding of its Being. What Dasein *is*, is its understanding of Being.²² The essence of Dasein is not divided between 'something that is' on one hand, and the self-understanding of that 'something' on the other.²³ The concept of Dasein primordially refers not to a being which has the 'capacity' of understanding itself, but to a being which '*is*,' as its essence, its understanding. And its *way of Being* is interpretive.

Ontological interpretation is, therefore, an interpretation *of interpretation*. This means to examine: the genealogy of how Being has been understood ontologically ('the task of destroying the history of ontology'); how it is understood pre-ontologically (as the everyday way of Being of Dasein); and how either understanding is *both the basis for and product of* interpretation.

²¹ "Dasein is itself 'ontological,' because existence is thus determinative for it." *Being and Time*, 34.

²² "In determining itself as an entity, Dasein always does so in the light of a possibility which it *is* itself and which, in its very Being, it somehow understands." *Being and Time*, 69. As will be discussed below, Dasein's 'possibilities' are always the possibilities which it understands itself to have. Dasein '*is*' as it understands itself. It can 'cover' its own possibilities, which means, fundamentally, that it can cover its own interpretive way of Being.

²³ "*Ontologically*, every idea of a 'subject'—unless refined by a previous ontological determination of its basic character—still posits the *subjectum* along with it, no matter how vigorous one's ontical protestations against the 'soul substance' or the 'reification of consciousness.'" *Being and Time*, 72. "But if the Self is conceived 'only' as a way of Being of this entity, this seems tantamount to volatilizing the real 'core' of Dasein. Any apprehensiveness however which one may have about this gets its nourishment from the perverse assumption that the entity in question has at bottom the kind of Being which belongs to something present-at-hand, even if one is far from attributing to it the solidity of an occurrent corporeal Thing. Yet man's '*substance*' is not spirit as a synthesis of soul and body; it is rather *existence*." *Ibid.*, 153. Dasein is a 'self' as a way of its Being, which means that Dasein's self is constituted by the self-understanding which Dasein maintains. As a phenomenological starting point for an investigation of 'self,' Dasein is the interpretive position from which 'oneself' can *be* in a certain way, as one understands oneself. Any 'substance' which defines *the subject* has always already been interpretively posited, and so presupposes Dasein.

The understanding that Dasein has of Being is not something which is *merely* ‘received’ from a tradition. Dasein ‘is’ its understanding, which is both the *beginning* and *end* of Dasein’s *way of Being*, as interpreting. The ‘pre-ontological’ understanding of Being, which is the starting point of ontological interpretation, is *an interpretation* of Being *on the basis* of the tradition. What Dasein ‘is,’ is not determined by its tradition; rather, Dasein exists as its own understanding, which is always an *interpretation of tradition*. Dasein relates itself to (understands itself in terms of) a tradition as it relates itself to (understands itself in terms of) its world. In each case, Dasein relates to itself and its world interpretively.

What it means, existentially, to be in a world, is to have an interpretive understanding of the world. Being-there means having an understanding, and interpreting. The question of the meaning of Being is both the most immediate, and the most circuitous question: immediate, because in everyday practices, that meaning is always already in play—the question is *answered* by every particular interpretation, which express (projects) an understood meaning of Being; it is circuitous, because the path by which question is approached *thematically*, for the purpose of explicating an ontology, moves through recursive interpretive circles. The ‘initial,’ or *everyday* circle of pre-ontological interpretation (Being in the world), is interpreted thematically, in relation to existing ontological concepts, with the aim of attaining ontological understanding.²⁴

²⁴ The methodological hermeneutic task which aims at a thematization of pre-ontological interpretation, must take the form presented by Gadamer: “*The hermeneutical task becomes itself a questioning of things* and is always in part so defined. This places hermeneutic work on a firm basis. A person trying to understand something will not resign himself from the start to relying on his own accidental fore-meanings, ignoring as consistently and stubbornly as possible the actual meaning of the text until the latter becomes so persistently audible that it breaks through what the interpreter imagines it to be.” *Truth and Method*, 271. As will be discussed below, *the questioning of things* is particularly difficult in the case of ontological interpretation, as that which is questioned is exactly the background understanding which is generally ‘implicit,’ and taken for granted, as the practices and discourses of a particular tradition. This is why Heidegger states that: “Dasein’s *kind of Being* thus *demand*s that any ontological Interpretation which sets itself the goal of exhibiting the phenomena in their primordially, *should capture the Being of this entity, in spite of this entity’s own tendency to cover things up*. Existential analysis, therefore, constantly has the character of *doing violence*, whether to the claims of the everyday interpretation, or to its complacency and its tranquilized obviousness.” *Being and Time*, 359.

To 'be there' is to have an understanding of the world, which is both the 'starting point' and the 'end' of interpretation. This relationship between interpretation and understanding is designated by '*projection*.'²⁵ Interpretation is 'projected understanding.' To 'be there' is to understand, and to interpret on the basis of that understanding. There is always already an understanding; However, this understanding is not 'static,' or fixed, but is the basis for interpretation, through which understanding is revised. In other words, there is a background of intelligibility, which is a condition for the possibility of the appearance of beings in a world (for something to be something); but this background is not *merely* 'there:' it exists as the 'beginning' and 'end' of interpretation. The background is continuously reshaped and transformed through interpretation.

2. *Interpretation as projected understanding*

Before a book has even been opened, the reader has some expectation of what the text will mean. Perhaps this expectation is determined by the title of the book, or by the place where it was found, or the person from whom it was received. Even if the book had no visible title, this itself would create some distinct expectation, though that expectation might be colored by perplexity (that here is a book with no title). And there is a bare expectation produced by the fact, alone, there here is a 'book.' So, a book is opened with at least some vague but perhaps very distinct expectation of its meaning. It might be suggested that, as this expectation will 'influence' the interpretation of the text, it should be 'put aside,' 'bracketed,' or somehow prevented from

²⁵ "Why does the understanding—whatever may be the essential dimensions of that which can be disclosed in it—always press forward into possibilities? It is because the understanding itself has the existential structure which we call '*projection*.' With equal primordially the understanding projects Dasein's Being both upon its 'for-the-sake-of-which' and upon significance, as the worldhood of its current world." *Being and Time*, 185.

influencing the reading. This is, of course, naïve: What is the appropriate extent of this ‘bracketing’? Need we only put aside expectation based on our knowledge of the author (based on, say, a previous familiarity with her work); should we also ignore what we know about the genre to which the book belongs? Or must we even forget our expectations about what *any* book might say, or what can be said in this or that language?

It is the case, rather, that any understanding to be arrived at will depend not on a bracketing of ‘presumptions,’ but a ‘back and forth’ movement between those ‘presumptions’ and the text as it is read: an ongoing revision of understanding.²⁶ There is, therefore, an ‘understanding’ of the text, which is always initially available, even before the first words have been read.²⁷ But, this understanding (what the text ‘is;’ what it ‘means’), though it is present immediately, is not *fixed*. It is brought forth in interpretation, the first act of which is opening the text (any consideration of the text), and through this it is revised. Regarding this, Gadamer writes:

The process that Heidegger describes is that every revision of the fore-projection is capable of projecting before itself a new projection of meaning; rival projects can emerge side by side until it becomes clearer what the unity of the meaning is; interpretation begins with fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones. This constant process of new projection constitutes the movement of understanding and interpretation.²⁸

²⁶ Gadamer writes: “A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there.” *Truth and Method*, 269.

²⁷ “Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us. . . . In an interpretive approach there lies such an assumption, as that which has been ‘taken for granted’ with the interpretation as such—that is to say, as that which has been presented in our fore-having, our fore-sight, and our fore-conception.” *Being and Time*, 191.

²⁸ *Truth and Method*, 269.

To read the text is to interpret it on the basis of an understanding of what it says, which is continuously revised. This interpretive process is defined by projection: an understanding is ‘projected’ upon the text, and is revised through the process of reading. A text can only be approached with some (‘fore-’)understanding of what it means, but *to read* a text—to interpret it—is to project an understanding provisionally, and to revise it continuously.²⁹

3. *The hermeneutic circle*

Any interpretation is a projection on the basis of some understanding, through which that understanding is brought into play (in relation to something which is understood) such that it may be revised. This describes the hermeneutic circle. Interpretation involves a ‘back and forth’ movement between ‘background’ understanding (the basis of intelligibility) and the particular something which is interpreted. The interpretive projection is necessarily provisional, because it is a projection of understanding which is *revised* in the act of interpretation.

In the broadest sense, the hermeneutic circle moves between generality (the background understanding through which something is understood as something; the foundation of intelligibility) and particularity (the specific something which is understood as such and such, and is a particular subject of interpretation).

In the case of a text, this means that the initial interpretive projection issues *forth* from some background of understanding (e.g., and most generally, what a, or any, text ‘is,’ what might be written in this or that language) and provides an interpretive ‘frame’ for reading the text. The

²⁹ An understanding is revised, for instance, as we discover that language is not used in the text in a way which we expect. Gadamer writes: “How do we discover that there is a difference between our own customary usage and that of the text? . . . I think we must say that generally we do so in the experience of being pulled up short by the text. Either it does not yield any meaning at all or its meaning is not compatible with what we had expected. This is what brings us up short and alerts us to a possible difference in usage.” *Truth and Method*, 270.

movement *back* involves the reformation of the background understanding (again, most generally, one's notion of what any text 'is,' what can be written in this or that language, is revised).

But the broader, or more fundamental, significance of this interpretive structure is only dimly exhibited in the example of interpreting a text. As an illustration of pre-ontological and ontological interpretation, it is limited in two ways, which will be considered in the following sections. First, as a particular example of, and general analogy for, *pre-ontological interpretation*, it is explicitly 'conceptual,' and so phenomenologically inadequate. Second, as an analogy for *ontological interpretation*, the example of a text is even more inadequate, because it allows for a separation between 'generality' (intelligibility in general, or background understanding) and 'particularity' (something understood as something) which cannot be maintained where the subject of interpretation is ontology.

4. *Pre-ontological interpretation*

The interpretive process involved in reading a text is a *particular* example of Dasein's *way of Being*. The hermeneutic circle is a structure that is recursively exhibited *in every way* that Dasein is. A thematic, explicitly 'conceptual' interpretation is only an illustration of Dasein's way of Being within a particular domain (of, for instance, textual interpretation). To be in the world is not to *thematically* interpret that world, although that is *a way* of Being in the world (ontologically interpreting). The pre-ontological understanding which always first defines Dasein's way of Being in a world is not (yet) explicitly conceptual for Dasein. Yet, it is *interpretive*.

If ontological interpretation involves making *conceptually* intelligible something which is, *as it is* (in its way of Being), pre-ontologically interpreting something may involve, for instance, *using* something *for* (in order to do) something.³⁰ The example of usefulness will serve here to illustrate pre-ontological interpretation generally, though it should be noted that this is taken as a starting point not because it is the most significant or fundamental mode of pre-ontological interpretation (the question of what mode, if any, is most significant, will be considered below). This is taken as a starting point because, first, usefulness is an easily explained example which will clarify the meaning of pre-ontological interpretation in preparation for a closer examination of the form of such interpretation; and, second, because it is the mode of pre-ontological interpretation which was examined in the most depth by Heidegger.

Something which is *useful* for something is pre-ontologically interpreted in *being used for* this or that purpose. Heidegger examines ‘equipment’ as an example of a class of entities which is *used for* something. As this ‘use for’ is the way that such an entity ‘is,’ *as it is*, such usefulness is not ‘reducible’ to some other way of Being. This is why Heidegger distinguishes between that which is ‘ready-to-hand’ (*zuhanden*) and ‘present-at-hand’ (*vorhanden*) in such a way that the Being of the former (qua usefulness, equipmentality) is not reducible to the latter (objective presence, as for instance and especially ‘substance’). Indeed, the ‘objective presence’ of something is *founded* upon ‘usefulness,’ as the way of Being which is *first* encountered.

A hammer is, *as it is*, in the interpretive use of the hammer for hammering a nail. In ‘hammering,’ the Being of the hammer, as a tool, is *understood*. The use of the hammer is its pre-ontological *interpretation*, which ‘takes up’ and *projects* an understanding of the hammer. What a hammer ‘is’ *as a hammer*, is to be found in ‘hammering.’ The mode of interpretation is

³⁰ Use of equipment involves ‘*concern*,’ one type of ‘*care*’ (the other being ‘*solicitude*,’ regarding Being-with others). *Being and Time*, 237. Care itself should be identified as an interpretive mode. It is directed always by understanding, and is expressed in interpretive acts.

in this case *use for* something: hammering a nail, fixing a shingle, stopping a leak. This means that, phenomenologically, a hammer *is as it is* in hammering a nail into a shingle, in order to fix a roof, etc.; and that therefore ‘what’ it is (qua hammer) is not, for instance, something *composed* of some material, discovered when the hammer is just ‘looked at.’ It is not understood as a hammer when the materials from which it is constructed are examined, when it is considered to be some-thing which is ‘made of’ substances.

Equipment is defined by its position in a relationship to other equipment: “Taken strictly, there ‘is’ no such thing as *an* equipment. To the Being of any equipment there always belongs a totality of equipment, in which it can be this equipment that it is.”³¹ The totality of equipment is the condition for the possibility of interpreting a particular tool, using it, in a certain way. The totality is the foundation of intelligibility, through which a particular equipmental entity can be as it is. A hammer is understood, and is therefore interpretable, only *as it is* in reference to nails, shingles, a roof, a house, etc.

Pre-ontological understanding exhibits the form of the hermeneutic circle generally: here, in the relation between the particular equipment and the totality in which it ‘is,’ which is the basis for its intelligibility. The hermeneutic structure of interpretation is exhibited in the relation between the particular equipmental entity, and the totality of equipment in which it is found. The latter is a background of intelligibility which allows the former, a foregrounded, particular entity, to be interpreted.

The interpretive *projection*, in this case, is found in the actual ‘project’ for which the equipment is put to use. An understanding of equipment is *put to use* in a certain way, equipment is *interpreted* in relation to the background of significance which is the relation of the equipment

³¹ *Being and Time*, 97. “The ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ signifies an ‘in-order-to’; this in turn, a ‘towards-this’; the latter an ‘in-which’ of letting something be involved; and that in turn, the ‘with-which’ of an involvement. These relationships are bound up with one another as a primordial totality.” *Ibid.*, 120.

to other equipment. An interpretation of the equipment is a projection of understanding. There is a back-and-forth movement between the actual use of equipment (its interpretation) and the understanding of the equipment and its relation to other equipment (its significance); and this back-and-forth relation describes the movement of projection, which is exhibited in the 'project' for which the equipment is put to use.

This means that the pre-ontological understanding of a hammer is no less 'provisional' than is an understanding of a text. Perhaps one is already more familiar with the hammer. But, it no less can provide occasions for the revision of understanding. One must first learn how to use a hammer: This involves developing a sense of its weight, of how to swing it, and of how to hold nails. One develops a 'feel' for using a hammer. In any particular use, the interpretation is provisional: In the swing of a hammer, the nail is sometimes missed. Or, the nail is not driven as deeply as was expected. It is then swung more to the right, or with more force. In this pre-ontological interpretation, an understanding of the hammer is put to use (it is tried out, the understanding is *projected*) and then the understanding is revised.

Through practice, one becomes more and more of an expert at using a hammer. 'Surprises' or 'inconsistencies' which occasion significant revisions of understanding happen less frequently. One misses or bends nails less often; the work goes more smoothly and quickly. Yet, this understanding is always again brought into play as an interpretive projection every time that the hammer is put to use. There is never a point at which one can be certain that a hammer is fully 'understood,' because every act of interpretation takes place within a particular referential context: of this particular hammer, using these nails, on this roof. Every act of hammering is a *particular* act, performed on the basis of some general but not perfectly generalizable understanding. Even the expert will make mistakes. It is the case, then, that there is no 'final'

pre-ontological understanding of equipment to be attained: every use of equipment is a new interpretive projection. But, the more consistent the context is (the more that one has used this particular hammer, and these nails, on this roof), the more nuanced and insubstantial the revisions are likely to be (that is, the ‘better’ that one will use the hammer).

This illustrates the significance of the relation between the pre-ontological interpretation of equipment, and the process of interpreting a text, described above. Between the extremes cases of, on one hand, encountering a text written in an entirely unfamiliar language, accompanied by no guide for translating it, and on the other, a return to a familiar text which has been already read many times, there is a continuum of degrees of likely interpretive revision. But, at either extreme, the interpretive process is no less a provisional projection of understanding which is thereby opened for revision. Whatever initial, tentative understanding of the unintelligible text one has will be revised radically if one begins to learn the language in which it was written. And whatever deeply familiar, reliable understanding that one has of the well-known text is nonetheless opened for revision in another reading, in which one discovers some passage that had been overlooked, or notices a connection between parts of the text that had not previously been apparent.

As illustrative of the basic form of interpretation (as a back-and-forth movement between a basis of intelligibility or significance and the particular something which is, on that basis first understood—however dimly—in an interpretation) both the example of textual interpretation and pre-ontological interpretation have in common the structure of the hermeneutic circle. However, there is the difference that one is explicitly conceptual and the other is not. It will be an important point for what follows, that interpretation is recognized as not always essentially or initially conceptual.

There is this distinct difference between the pre-ontological interpretation of equipment, and an interpretation of a text: The latter is almost entirely conceptually mediated, and the former is not (essentially). In the case of interpreting a text, the understanding which is brought into play (projected) is conceptually explicable in the very form which that understanding has: The understanding of a text is itself conceptual, and so is explainable ‘on its own terms.’ If asked what a text ‘says,’ we can ‘explain’ our understanding of the text, and that explanation *has the same form* as the understanding itself. The understanding of the text and the understanding of *that understanding* (expressed in an *explication* of the understanding) are both essentially conceptual. It is of course the case that we understand a text also in a way which is not strictly conceptual. We understand it, for instance, ‘as a book’ to be opened and read, and in this way, the book is *equipment*. Also, a text could, for instance, be interpreted as, (found to be) ‘beautiful’ in a way which is perhaps not entirely contained within a strictly conceptual understanding (which is not explicable). But, essentially, the understanding of a text, *as a text*, can be identified as conceptual understanding, and textual interpretation as a conceptual matter.

In the case of pre-ontologically interpreting equipment, understanding is *not* essentially conceptual. Rather, a hammer is interpreted in *its use*, and one’s understanding of the hammer is revised as it is put to use. Developing a ‘feel’ for using a hammer does not mean developing some set of applicable conceptual *rules* to be referenced in its use. One need not say, explicitly: “The hammer missed the nail because it was swung too far to the side. I should aim to the right.” One, rather, *just swings* the hammer more to the right. However, one *might* say: “I aimed too far to the right,” explicitly, and this is indeed a particular way of revising one’s use of the hammer.³²

³² It should be noted, though here only in passing, that there is a foundational relationship between the ‘hammer’ *qua* equipment and the concept (the word) ‘hammer.’ As there is a back-and-forth movement between an ‘interpretative projection’ and an ‘understanding’ of an equipmental entity in its *use*, there is also a back-and-forth movement between the conceptual signifier for the equipmental entity, and the entity itself (*as it is* in its use). Although the

In the pre-ontological interpretation of the hammer, the hammer as such ‘recedes’ phenomenologically.³³ That is, in its interpretation, the hammer is not explicitly apparent. It is ‘just used.’ As one hammers, there is no hammer apparent as such: there is an act of hammering, but perhaps what is most phenomenologically immediate is, rather than the hammer, ‘fixing a roof.’ In other words, as the hammer is *used for*, or in order to do something, its way of Being is to be phenomenologically ‘transparent.’³⁴

This means that the way in which a hammer is intelligible as a hammer is not as something *conceptually* understood as something. It is intelligible, rather, in being *used*. This is precisely unlike a text, which is intelligible as it is conceptually understood as meaning something. Unlike a text, understanding of equipment is not, therefore, *explicable* in a way that is identical to the form that the initial understanding itself has.³⁵ The understanding (itself) of a

examination of pre-ontological understanding involves attempting to uncover that which is a ‘background’ of conceptual understanding, and is not *explicitly* conceptual, the two domains are not clearly separable, or without influence upon each other; nor should one expect to find any one-directional causal relationship (e.g. that the conceptual ‘arises’ from the pre-ontological background of practices). The relationship between, for instance, equipment and the words that designate equipment involves movements with a structure analogous to that which exists between particular equipment and the equipmental totality. This could be described as a reversible figure-ground relationship: The word ‘hammer’ becomes implicit in the *use* of the hammer; and use is implicit in the word, and implicitly referenced when the word is spoken.

³³ “The ready-to-hand is not grasped theoretically at all, nor is it itself the sort of thing that circumspection takes proximally as a circumspective theme. The peculiarity of what is proximally ready-to-hand is that, in its readiness-to-hand, it must, as it were, withdrawal in order to be ready-to-hand quite authentically. That with which our everyday dealings proximally dwell is not the tools themselves. On the contrary, that with which we concern ourselves primarily is the work.” *Being and Time*, 99.

³⁴ This becomes ‘opacity’ (i.e. conspicuousness) as soon as something goes *wrong*, which indicates that the hammer is being *reinterpreted*. In its opacity, that is, its phenomenological appearance *as* a (malfunctioning) ‘hammer,’ rather than *for* hammering, it has ‘appeared’ in a distinct way, such that it can be reinterpreted conceptually. “In conspicuousness, obtrusiveness, and obstinacy, that which is ready-to-hand loses its readiness-to-hand in a certain way. But in our dealings with what is ready-to-hand, this readiness-to-hand is itself understood, though not thematically. It does not vanish simply, but takes its farewell, as it were, in the conspicuousness of the unusable.” *Being and Time*, 104.

³⁵ “This is the way in which everyday Dasein always *is*: when I open the door, for instance, I use the latch. The achieving of phenomenological access to the entities which we encounter, consists rather in thrusting aside our [theoretical] interpretive tendencies, which keep thrusting themselves upon us and running along with us, and which conceal . . . those entities themselves *as* encountered of their own accord *in* our concern with them.” *Being and Time*, 96. This describes the difficulty of ontological Interpretation. To gain phenomenological access to pre-ontological interpretation, one has to ‘thrust aside’ theoretical Interpretive tendencies which would not allow the pre-ontological interpretation of something to appear as it is (as in ‘using the latch to open a door’), such that it can inform a revision of ontological understanding.

text has the same essential form as the explicit, conceptual understanding *of understanding* the text. To make explicable the understanding one has of a text, or of the process of understanding texts generally, one uses concepts in a way that is similar to the way that concepts are first used to understand the text. However, in explicating the understanding one has of equipment, one moves between two distinct modes of understanding.³⁶

Therefore, in the case of interpreting pre-ontological interpretation, we find a form of interpretation that has a structure which is unlike that of pre-ontological interpretation itself. The interpretation of pre-ontological interpretation—*thematic* interpretation, with the aim of attaining a conceptual understanding of something which does not itself have the form of ‘thematic’ interpretation (pre-ontological interpretation)—is *ontological* interpretation. Ontological interpretation will be designated in the following as ‘Interpretation’ as distinguished from pre-ontological ‘interpretation.’³⁷ Ontological Interpretation is the thematic, conceptual Interpretation of interpretation. Ontological Interpretation aims to explicate fundamental interpretive structures (e.g. those which are constitutive of the world).

³⁶ To Interpret something which is ready-to-hand is to examine phenomenologically what it is to interpret, for instance, ‘equipment.’ But this involves Interpreting the interpretation of equipment in a way which keeps its distance from the pre-ontological interpretation which is to be examined. To phenomenologically examine, for instance, a ‘door latch,’ is to examine the phenomenon of the latch in its essence, which is ‘to open a door:’ that is, as it is ‘interpreted’ in opening a door. But to Interpret this phenomenon is to Interpret the (pre-ontological) interpretation (e.g. opening the door) without merely (i.e. unreflectively, non-conceptually) ‘interpreting’ (using the latch to open the door).

³⁷ Macquarrie and Robinson write: “Heidegger uses two words which might well be translated as ‘interpretation’: ‘Auslegung’ and ‘Interpretation.’ Though in many cases these may be regarded as synonyms, their connotations are not quite the same. ‘Auslegung’ seems to be used in a broad sense to cover any activity in which we interpret something ‘as’ something, whereas ‘Interpretation’ seems to apply to interpretations which are more theoretical or systematic, as in the exegesis of a text.” *Being and Time*, I. ‘Auslegung’ is translated as ‘interpretation,’ and ‘Interpretation’ as ‘Interpretation.’ I follow that usage here, and use ‘Interpretation’ to refer to ontological Interpretation and ‘interpretation’ to signify other modes of interpretation.

5. *Ontological Interpretation*

As stated above, ontological Interpretation is a ‘radicalization’ of (pre-ontological) interpretation generally. Both exhibit the structure of the hermeneutic circle, in which an understanding is projected as an interpretation, and thereby opened for revision. In ontological Interpretation, there is a back-and-forth movement between thematic conceptualization (founded on conceptual intelligibility generally) and pre-ontological interpretation.

Ontological Interpretation traces a hermeneutic circle which contains ‘epicycles.’ It moves between pre-ontological interpretation as its subject, and conceptual, thematic explication as the form of its understanding, which is its beginning and end; each pole of the circle itself constitutes a circle. Pre-ontological interpretation involves, for instance, the interpretation of that which is ready-to-hand, as exhibited in the above example of equipment, which involves a back-and-forth relation between a particular entity and its equipmental totality. The thematic explication of pre-ontological interpretation, its ontological Interpretation, involves examining the interpretive circle of pre-ontological interpretation in relation to the ontological concepts which are the product of Interpretation and the background of ontological understanding (the tradition of ontological thought which is to be revised in the process of ontological Interpretation).

The circle of ontological Interpretation is circumscribed in asking the question of the meaning of Being. There is, on one hand, the pre-ontological understanding of how and what things are, which is always already in play in our way of Being; and on the other hand, there is the tradition of ontological thought, which has sought to arrive at a *thematic* understanding of

Being. To ask the question of Being is to bring into play both interpretive circles and relate them to each other in the circle of ontological Interpretation.

In other words, ontological Interpretation seeks to make the basic (implicit) structure of intelligibility conceptually and explicitly intelligible. There is an initial everyday pre-ontological intelligibility which is to be made conceptually intelligible through explicit ontological concepts. The former does not initially or essentially have the form of ‘conceptual’ understanding (as evinced by the example of equipment), and so, in its Interpretation, is ‘translated’ into ontological concepts. The ontological concepts are the beginning and end of the understanding of a philosophical tradition (that from which it interprets and which is revised in its interpreting), which is to be subjected to Interpretation by the ontological interpreter—this is the second circle of interpretation within the Interpretive circle, to which Heidegger refers with the notion of ‘destroying the history of ontology.’³⁸ Ontological Interpretation therefore involves explicitly placing into a relation pre-ontological interpretation and an interpretation (‘destruction’) of the history of ontology.

³⁸ “If the question of Being is to have its own history made transparent, then this hardened tradition must be loosened up, and the concealments which it has brought about must be dissolved. We understand this task as one in which by taking *the question of Being as our clue*, we are to *destroy* the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being—the ways which have guided us ever since.” *Being and Time*, 44. The means interpreting the history of the ontological tradition, examining its *genealogy*, such that what it has provided—the ontological concepts which we are inclined to ‘take for granted,’ which are for us implicit—are to be made explicit, so that they can be opened to *revision*.

III. Interpretation and Authenticity

1. *Interpretation and understanding as authentic and inauthentic*

Heidegger writes: “[Our Interpretation] will make manifest . . . not only that Dasein is inclined to fall back upon its world (the world in which it is) and to interpret itself in terms of that world by its reflected light, but also that Dasein simultaneously falls prey to the tradition of which it has more or less explicitly taken hold. The tradition keeps it from providing its own guidance.”³⁹ Dasein’s ‘reflected light’ is the interpretive activity which is first apparent to Dasein only as it is ‘reflected’ by the beings within the world which it interprets. In (and only in) relation to these things within the world, disclosed as made intelligible by a tradition, does Dasein initially understand itself. As will be shown below, the ‘guidance’ to which Heidegger refers is nothing other than individualized (authentic) interpretation. Dasein cannot have some *intelligible* guidance which comes from ‘within’ itself (intelligibility which is *beyond* the intelligibility of the tradition), but rather it makes itself (and Being in general) intelligible to itself by interpreting its world and its tradition, and this it can do either ‘as itself’ (in authentic, individualized interpretation) or not, and ‘fall prey’ to its tradition and to its world.

The section of *Being and Time* titled “Being-there as Understanding,” contains the following distinction: “Understanding is either authentic, arising out of one’s own Self as such, or inauthentic.”⁴⁰ The recognition that understanding can be either authentic or inauthentic, depending on whether it “arises out of one’s own Self,” will be of essential significance for the notion of authenticity generally. The explicitly ‘existentialist’ sections of Division II of *Being*

³⁹ *Being and Time*, 42.

⁴⁰ *Being and Time*, 186.

and Time, in which Heidegger further develops a concept of authenticity, should be understood in relation to this initial statement, in which understanding is described in terms of authenticity. Only if authenticity is placed into the right relationship to ‘understanding,’ can the ontological significance of authenticity be apparent.

In the following, I will present an account of Heidegger’s notion of authenticity which aims at avoiding identifying Dasein’s ‘possibilities’ with something like its *freedom*, which it ‘has’ in a way which can be distinguished from its ‘situation.’ Such a reading of Heidegger conflates the ontic and the ontological (the ontic, ‘individual person,’ and ontological Dasein) and recapitulates precisely the sort of dualism which Heidegger intended to avoid. Further, and consequently, such a reading of Heidegger will tend toward either, one, a *communitarian* reading, in which the fore-structure of understanding is given priority (and Dasein is defined by the values of its tradition and community), or, two, an *existentialist* reading, in which Dasein’s capacity for the movement of authentic interpretation is given priority (and Dasein is identified as self-defining in a way that can enable it to define itself *apart from* its tradition and community).

To overcome these dichotomous readings, we should look more closely at what Dasein ‘is,’ how it might uncover itself, and how it ‘responds’ to, or what follows from, whatever confrontation with itself is possible. What I aim to show is that Heidegger’s notion of authenticity should not be understood to mean the individualizing of an ‘individual’ person, but that what *is* individualized in authenticity is only ‘interpretation’ itself.⁴¹ That which is

⁴¹ Heidegger does not state this explicitly. I extend here the notion of ‘interpretation’ so that the relationship between authentic and inauthentic Dasein can be made clearer, and so that the ontological significance of authenticity is apparent. That which individuates Dasein—*anxiety*—arises in Dasein’s confrontation with the ‘possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein’—*death*. *Being and Time*, 294. And anxiety reveals that “as long as Dasein is, there is in every case something still outstanding, which Dasein can be and will be. But to that which is thus outstanding, the ‘end’ itself belongs.” *Ibid.*, 276. There is always something still outstanding, because Dasein is as it ‘projects’ itself toward the future. The projection is identified by Heidegger as that of ‘care,’ which is ‘ahead-of-itself.’

individualized is *phenomenologically prior* to the distinction between ‘self’ and ‘community,’ either of which are *understood* only as they are interpreted, always from some particular, finite interpretive perspective. This perspective—Dasein—can perhaps authentically arrive at an understanding of itself as a discrete individual, or as existing in defining relationships with others. But authenticity itself does not determine one way or another which understanding Dasein will attain.

Further, the authentic interpretive projection is nothing other than a projected interpretation of *the fore-understanding* of tradition, embodied in the They.⁴² In other words, the projection of authentic Dasein—which I will here refer to as ‘*existential interpretation*’—is an interpretive movement which takes place within a particular tradition, but is projected ‘from’ a finite perspective, *which has reflexively identified itself as such*. If we do not understand appropriately the relation between these two aspects of the movement of authentic projection—*on one hand*, the tradition, the understanding of Being which is first given; *and on the other hand*, the finitely situated *interpretation* of that tradition—we may give priority either to the *fore-understanding*, the tradition, as defining what Dasein is, or to the *interpretation*, as allowing Dasein to define itself ‘beyond’ or ‘aside from’ its tradition.

Anxiety uncovers that Being-towards is always towards an *end*, and so that which Dasein is, its projectedness, is always toward death, and could not be otherwise. Thus, death is the ‘possibility’ of an ‘impossibility:’ the possibility of no further possibilities. Following Heidegger’s definition of Dasein as “an entity which, in its very Being, comports itself understandingly toward that Being,” I maintain that understanding and interpretation, in the broad sense in which I present them here, are the most significantly foundational existential characteristics of Dasein. Ibid., 78. ‘Care,’ therefore, is directed always by the understanding which Dasein has of itself, and of Being. The ‘possibilities’ which Dasein has are disclosed always by Dasein’s understanding. And taking up a possibility is an *interpretive* act. Therefore, although Heidegger does not describe authenticity using entirely hermeneutic terms, I maintain that understanding authenticity hermeneutically allows us to recognize the relationship between the different aspects of Heidegger’s account, and to identifying the full ontological significance of authenticity.

⁴² Tradition presents the problem of covering its origins, such that, as a source of intelligibility, it becomes ‘implicit,’ and is ‘taken for granted.’ Regarding “the task of destroying the history of ontology,” Heidegger writes: “When tradition . . . becomes master, it does so in such a way that what it ‘transmits’ is made so inaccessible, proximally and for the most part, that it rather becomes concealed. Tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence; it blocks our access to those primordial ‘sources’ from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part quite genuinely drawn.” *Being and Time*, 43.

2. *Existential interpretation*

There is a mode of interpretation that aims to make Being intelligible *qua* Being, yet does not remain within the domain of thematic conceptualization (Interpretation). The difficulty of the issue, to be noted here at the outset, is that in the present discussion the aim is a thematic Interpretation which presents an interpretive mode that concerns neither everyday ways of Being (pre-ontological interpretation) nor thematic conceptualization (ontological Interpretation). Heidegger does not present a concept of ‘existential interpretation’ as such. It is presented here for two reasons: *One*, to emphasize the continuity of the concept of authenticity with the rest of Heidegger’s account, by identifying it as an interpretive mode; and *two*, to distinguish this mode of interpretation, which begins with, or *projects from*, the phenomenological appearance of *anxiety*, from the pre-ontological interpreting of everyday comportment on one hand, and, on the other hand, ontological Interpretation, which seeks to attain a thematic conceptualization of pre-ontological interpretation. The project of thematically presenting (ontologically Interpreting) what is referred to here as existential interpretation is presented especially in Division II of *Being and Time*.

That which ‘*is*’ is that which is intelligible *as* this or that. Intelligibility is based on understanding, which is projected as an interpretation. Something is intelligible only *as it is interpreted*. A *world* is a domain of intelligibility (significance): To be in a world is to be making-intelligible that world; to be interpreting. Dasein, being-there, therefore ‘*is*’ interpreting *as its way of Being*. Ontological Interpretation involves thematically conceptualizing Dasein’s interpretive way of Being. The issue to be addressed here is: If Dasein ‘*is*’ interpretation, what does it mean for it to *interpret itself*, ‘*primordially*,’ or in its essence (which is ‘*interpretation*’)?

What does it mean for the being whose Being *is interpretive* to interpret itself, and thereby that which provides the possibility for Being (intelligibility) *in general*?

Pre-ontological interpretation has a ground of worldly significance (of, for instance, a referential totality of use-objects) upon which particular entities in the world are interpreted (such as *in their use*). Ontological Interpretation relates pre-ontological interpretation to the *history* of ontological Interpretation (to existing ontological concepts). Ontological Interpretation has this tradition—the tradition of ontology—as the initial ground of its own (conceptual) intelligibility. In ontological Interpretation, the tradition of ontology provides the initial basis for understanding, from which is projected an Interpretation of pre-ontological interpretation. But the ‘primordial,’ authentic, self-interpretation of Dasein can have no such ground of intelligibility to which it can relate itself. In its interpretive Being, it is that upon which all intelligibility depends, and so it cannot uncover any more fundamental ground of intelligibility to which it can relate itself interpretively. In other words, here is *the self-interpretive activity of that which ‘is’ its interpretive activity*. There is no background *understanding* which is projected in existential interpretation, yet the existential projection is interpretive.

Existential interpretation involves a projection from *anxiety*, as the ‘null-disclosure’ of a finite being’s self-interpretation. What is *interpreted* in the projection is Being. This means taking up some *way of Being* as one’s own. But, as that is possible only within the particular situation in which Dasein is, existential interpretation means revising one’s way of Being in the world, in relation to others. Existential interpretation relates, on one hand, the anxiety of primordial self-interpretation: null-disclosure, or *nullity*; and, on the other hand, intelligibility in general (the world, given intelligibility by the They), or *Being*.

3. *Anxiety and existential interpretation*

Dasein *always already*, or initially, understands itself, but this understanding is identified by Heidegger as *inauthentic*. Dasein is always first ‘one,’ or ‘the They.’ It understands itself only in terms of ‘others.’⁴³ What this means is that Dasein does not ‘own’ or take responsibility for its Being, but rather ‘covers’ its interpretive way of Being with some understanding, which is taken to be ‘foundational.’⁴⁴ Dasein understands itself first in terms of its world without realizing that its own interpretive way of Being makes possible that understanding of the world as it is continuously interpreted.

Authenticity demands, on the other hand, that Dasein identify (interpret) its interpretive way of Being. But there is no (background) *understanding* to which this foundational way of Being (interpretation) can be related. The uncovering involved (which, as will be discussed, means a phenomenologically positive way of ‘*not*’ *uncovering*) does *not* reveal anything which is understood, rather, it involves an encounter with *unintelligibility*, and the collapse of ordinary significance, in anxiety. Authenticity projects *from* this encounter with anxiety, which has a phenomenologically definable appearance, yet contains no specific *content*.

It is precisely in the recognition of *finitude* that such anxiety arises. It is when ‘one’ realizes that *one will die* that one understands oneself to be a *particular* being, which is in the world as it understands and interprets the world.⁴⁵ In other forms of interpretation a particular

⁴³ The expressions ‘The They’ and ‘The One,’ both of which are translations of *das Man*, will be used here interchangeably.

⁴⁴ “Idle talk and ambiguity, having seen everything, having understood everything, develop the supposition that Dasein’s disclosedness, which is so available and so prevalent, can guarantee to Dasein that all the possibilities of its Being will be secure, genuine, and full. Through the self-certainty and decidedness of the ‘they,’ it gets spread abroad increasingly that there is no need of authentic understanding or the state-of-mind that goes with it.” *Being and Time*, 222.

⁴⁵ “As long as Dasein is, there is in every case something still outstanding, which Dasein can be and will be. But to that which is thus outstanding, the ‘end’ itself belongs. The ‘end’ of Being-in-the-world is death. This end, which

something is interpreted in the projection of understanding from a background of intelligibility. But, in this case, there is no background upon which the particular can appear. The interpreted particular *is the interpreter*: the finite being whose way of Being is to be interpreting. Any understanding is revealed to be supported by the finite interpretive perspective of a particular being.

In anxiety, the circle of interpretation ‘*collapses*.’ It is not ‘broken’ as such (Dasein does not lose its interpretive way of Being), but it is reduced to a singular point (a ‘not’).⁴⁶ There is no ‘movement’ possible, because there is no general foundation of intelligibility upon which the particular something which is interpreted can appear—both the ‘general’ (the basis of intelligibility) and the ‘particular’ (the being who interprets) are bound together. What is interpreted is interpretation itself, and this has precisely the phenomenological form of anxiety—the absence of significance, in which the world is drained of intelligibility. There is no interpretive movement, but only the uncovering of interpretation as foundational, as founded upon nothing other than itself. Because Dasein discovers itself to be a finite, particular being that

belongs to the potentiality-for-Being—that is to say, to existence—limits and determines in every case whatever totality is possible for Dasein.” *Being and Time*, 277. Because Dasein is *Being-towards-death* it is a finite being in a particular situation. This finitude is both the basis for the possibility of Dasein’s possibilities, and also the limit of those possibilities. “The ‘ending’ which we have in view when we speak of death, does not signify Dasein’s Being-at-an-end, but a *Being-towards-the-end* of this entity. Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is.” Ibid., 289. Therefore, death, as that which indicates Dasein’s finitude, is fundamental to the way that Dasein is, as long as Dasein is, and regardless of how far away from death a particular Dasein might be.

⁴⁶ “‘Nullity’ does not signify anything like not-Being-present-at-hand or not-subsisting; what one has in view here is rather a ‘not’ which is constitutive for this *Being* of Dasein—its thrownness. The character of this ‘not’ as a ‘not’ may be defined existentially: in being its *Self*, Dasein is, as a *Self*, the entity which has been thrown.” *Being in Time*, 330. “In the structure of thrownness, as in that of projection, there lies essentially a nullity. This nullity is the basis for the possibility of *inauthentic* Dasein in its falling; and as falling, every *inauthentic* Dasein factually is. *Care itself, in its very essence, is permeated with nullity through and through*. Thus ‘care’—Dasein’s Being—means, as thrown projection, Being-the-basis of a nullity.” Ibid., 331. ‘Care,’ which I have identified as a type of *interpretation*, is ‘permeated with nullity’ because *it cannot disclose itself to itself as a whole*. In the hermeneutic terms that I am using here, this nullity is the null-disclosure of interpretation turned back onto itself, which is disclosed in anxiety. Anxiety discloses ‘nothing’ because it is the primordially self-interpretive activity of an interpretive being, and so has no *content*.

interprets, it finds itself to be *responsible* for its interpreting.⁴⁷ The foundation of all intelligibility is Dasein's interpretive activity, which cannot *appear* as something *interpreted* (as intelligible) as it is the condition for the possibility of intelligibility.

Dasein's interpretative way of Being is authentic when it is projected from the disclosure of its 'groundlessness,' (as having no intelligible ground *beyond itself* to which it can primordially relate itself) in anxiety. To be 'authentic' is to *authentically interpret*: To be this interpretive way of Being, without covering it with a general understanding taken to be more foundational than the interpretive way of Being (an understanding arrived at through an interpretive act, which *covers* its interpretive origin by appearing foundational). In anxiety, Dasein discovers that Being itself is *finite*, because Being and all beings can 'be' only for finite beings who interpret.

There are two aspects of the interpretive projection of authentic Dasein. First, there is 'anticipation:' the authentic way of Being towards death (anticipation of death).⁴⁸ It is founded upon anxiety, as the existential disclosure of finitude. Second, there is 'resoluteness:' an interpretation of Being projected from finitude (with the understanding that Dasein 'is' its interpretation, and is responsible for it).

Anticipation refers to Dasein's own interpreting Being, which is itself 'groundless,' as it is 'what Dasein is' and cannot 'get behind' (uncover some ground for). *Resoluteness* refers to the

⁴⁷ This 'responsibility' is what Heidegger identifies where he writes: "'Care'—Dasein's Being—means, as thrown projection, Being-the-basis of a nullity (and this Being-the-basis is itself null). This means that *Dasein as such is guilty*, if our formally existential definition of 'guilt' as 'Being-the-basis of a nullity' is indeed correct." *Being and Time*, 331. As Dasein is the interpreting activity by which it sustains itself, which it can never 'get behind' and be before it 'is' (meaning that Dasein can never get behind and guide its own interpreting, *before* it interprets), it is always already *responsible*, and this because of the 'nullity' which designates its incapacity to get itself before itself.

⁴⁸ "Being towards this possibility, as Being-towards-death, is so to comport ourselves towards *death* that in this Being, and for it, death reveals itself *as a possibility*. Our terminology for such Being towards this possibility is 'anticipation' of this possibility." *Being and Time*, 306. "The more unveiledly this possibility gets understood, the more purely does the understanding penetrate into it *as the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all*." *Being and Time*, 307. Finitude is encountered, in anticipation, as the 'possibility of the impossibility of any existence,' because it indicates the possibility of no further possibilities. In that sense, Dasein encounters itself as its *possibilities*, and yet as finite, and therefore containing the possibility of the end of possibilities.

reinterpretive movement of authentic projection, in relation to the understanding that Dasein always first has, as received from a tradition and maintained by the They. What distinguishes authentic Dasein is that it has, in identifying its finitude, collapsed the circle of interpretation in the ‘null’ interpretation of its own interpreting; and, from this—‘*anticipation*’—Dasein projects ‘as its own’—‘*resolutely*’—a reinterpretation.

The interpretive movement of existential interpretation can be defined as a *contraction and expansion* of the interpretive circle. Anxiety is the collapse of the circle of interpretation, in which interpretation closes upon itself in *not*-disclosing (the null-disclosure of its incapacity to interpret its interpreting), and resoluteness is the expansion again of the interpretive circle, in which some revised interpretation of intelligibility, of Being generally, is projected. The collapse of the hermeneutic circle is Dasein’s interpretation of itself as an interpreting being, a null-disclosure, which has the phenomenological form of anxiety. From this follows Dasein’s recognition of its responsibility for its own interpretive activity (its way of Being in the world) and the possibility of authentically individualized interpretation.

Heidegger writes: “The Self, which as such has to lay the basis for itself, can *never* get that basis into its power; and yet, as existing, it must take over Being-a-basis.”⁴⁹ The basis of the self is its existence, into which Dasein was *thrown* and has always already understood in some way. Dasein is its own interpretive foundation—it is the basis for all intelligibility—and therefore, though it must take responsibility for that basis, as its own, it cannot interpret its basis in relation to a more foundational intelligibility. Authentic Dasein, in *anticipatory resoluteness* projects an interpretation of Being. The projected interpretation is authentic Dasein’s *way of Being*.

⁴⁹ *Being and Time*, 330.

This can be described in reference to textual interpretation: An authentic approach to interpreting a text involves acknowledging one's own particular position in relation to the text. The reader does not assume that she can 'directly' understand the meaning by 'just reading.' Rather, the reader acknowledges that every understanding of the text is an interpretive projection, founded upon her own background understanding, and that such understanding is always therefore provisional. The understanding is, perhaps, likely to 'improve' to the extent that the reader acknowledges throughout the interpretive process that she has particular 'biases' which will inform her reading, and that the set of these biases—the background understanding from which she projects an interpretation of the text, and which is revised in reading—is the only basis for her own approach to the text. The back-and-forth movement between the background understanding which the reader brings into play, and the text read, describes the process of hermeneutic interpretation. The interpretative process is authentic to the extent that it involves the explicit acknowledgment that there is a background understanding (biases, a tradition) which is the basis for the interpretive projection. If the reader approaches the text without such an understanding of the interpretive process—that is, if she does not acknowledge her own initial background understanding, her biases, her tradition—then, in arriving at some understanding of the text 'as it is,' she is likely to unreflectively read her own biases into the text.

For Dasein, there is no deeper understanding from which an interpretation of itself 'as interpretation' can be projected. However, as the reader of a text interprets authentically to the extent that her projected interpretation takes up, explicitly, rather than only implicitly, the background understanding which is the precondition for approaching the text, Dasein projects an authentic interpretation of its own Being to the extent that it does so with an explicit recognition of its own finitude.

In all other cases of interpretation, what is to be interpreted is something which is understandable first on the basis of some general intelligibility. But interpretation in general is *possible* only because Dasein's way of Being is to understand itself and its world, and to project interpretively.⁵⁰ In existential interpretation, Dasein interprets interpretation itself. The primordial interpreting of interpretation is anxiety. It arises in the face of finitude, which reveals the absence of any foundation of intelligibility beneath Dasein's interpretive way of Being. What anxiety *reveals* is that Dasein is always projecting itself interpretively, and so, in response to (from) anxiety, Dasein *first projects authentically* (recognizing its interpretive way of Being). It projects an interpretation of Being which is authentic because, as the authentic reader recognizes the particularity of the background understanding which she brings to a text, Dasein understands its own particularity, which is the groundlessness of being a finite interpreting being. Dasein's uncovering of itself as a groundless interpretive activity is the 'collapse' of the hermeneutic circle in the primordial interpretation of interpretation, which is *anxiety*.

The *projection* of authentic Dasein is a projected interpretation of Being founded upon the 'nullity' of finitude. In authentically interpreting, Dasein *'takes up'* some *way of Being*, as its own. While ontological Interpretation is the most *'complex'* form of interpretation, because it relates several interpretive circles in its own 'Interpretive' circle, the interpretive projection of authentic Dasein is the most *'simple.'* While the question of the meaning of Being is taken up *conceptually* in ontological Interpretation, it is taken up *primordially*, that is, 'existentially,' in the interpretive projection of authentic Dasein. The question of Being is existentially *answered* in

⁵⁰ "The character of understanding as projection is constitutive for Being-in-the-world with regard to the disclosedness of its existentially constitutive state-of-Being . . . As thrown, Dasein is thrown into the kind of Being which we call 'projecting.' . . . Any Dasein has, as Dasein, already projected itself; and as long as it is, it is projecting." *Being and Time*, 185.

authenticity, but in the form of a projection from the null-disclosure of anxiety, which has no content which determines the answer.⁵¹

4. *Anxiety, thrownness, finitude*

Dasein's interpretive way of Being is not a consequence of something which Dasein 'is' *aside* from Being in the world. Dasein is not a being who *interprets* on one hand, and who *has a world*, on the other. Rather, the fact that Dasein interprets its Being is a consequence of its Being in the world as a particular factual being. It is because it is *thrown* into Being, with nothing 'behind' this, *that it interprets*. What authentic Being towards death uncovers, and 'takes up' in resoluteness, is Dasein's finite particularity, as a being in a particular situation.

From the basis of, and *as* such a situation, Being is understood in a certain way. If that understanding is taken for granted, and the particularity of its source covered, then Dasein is 'one,' or is as 'they are,' (as its interpretive mode, in *falling*) and is inauthentic. This way of Being is inauthentic not because the understanding of Being that it involves is parochially situated and bounded by finitude; rather, it is inauthentic because a situated and bounded understanding of Being is *not identified as such*. When 'one' acts as others do, and takes this for granted as what 'is done,' then the particularity of that way of Being is covered over.

Authenticity does not take Dasein out of this situation, nor provide any access to an understanding of Being which is not provincially situated, beyond involving the recognition that

⁵¹ "Resoluteness, by its ontological essence, is always the resoluteness of some factual Dasein at a particular time. The essence of Dasein as an entity is its existence. Resoluteness 'exists' only as a resolution which understandingly projects itself. But on what basis does Dasein disclose itself in resoluteness? On what is it to resolve? *Only* the resolution itself can give the answer." *Being and Time*, 345. Why can only resolution give the answer? Because 'anticipation' has nothing to say: it is an encounter with unintelligibility, in Dasein's existential interpretation of itself. Anxiety itself has no content which informs 'resolution,' and so only the resolution itself 'can give the answer' (as a projection).

interpretation is itself foundational to Being. What authenticity uncovers and expresses is the finitude on the basis of which all Being 'is.' In other words, the reason that Dasein 'is' its interpreting is only that Dasein *is as* it 'understands' always from some particular perspective. This means that Being 'is' for Dasein. On one hand, there is Being (qua intelligibility); and on the other, the finitude (thrownness) which is the foundation for Being—the only basis upon which understanding is possible. Authenticity only modifies this existential situation, such that Dasein first recognizes the situation as it is (it identifies its way of Being as interpretive), and so can project an individualized interpretation of Being.

A reader approaches a text with some particular background understanding, with biases which are determined by her own situation. Biases of some sort are what *make possible* reading a text. One does not even know a language without a certain 'way' of knowing the language (a particular way of understanding and relating words; a dialect; etc.). To understand a language is always to understand it in a certain way. Or, one has some reason for first approaching the text, which influences how the text is read. But, the extent to which such biases are not explicit correlates to the extent to which they will be read naively into the text and taken for granted (as what the text 'really says'). The authentic interpreter does not attempt to eliminate all biases, but rather allows them to the greatest extent to be 'read through,' though *explicitly*.

Similarly, Dasein will take for granted a certain understanding of Being, and of its own Being (and will be and understand as 'one' does), to the extent that it does not acknowledge its own particularity, its *thrownness*, as the basis for its understanding of Being. Authenticity is based only on a confrontation with this existential situation, such that it is taken up explicitly.

Unlike the textual interpreter, authentic Dasein's interpretation of Being and its own Being has no 'basis,' aside from the 'nullity' which Dasein encounters as the fact that it cannot

‘get behind’ its thrownness and find some more fundamental intelligibility. But from interpretation’s null-disclosure of itself, which reveals that Dasein cannot get behind its thrownness, Dasein can project re-interpretively.

5. *Unintelligibility and authentic projection*

If Being is the basis of intelligibility, and authentic Dasein discovers that Being ‘is’ only ever for itself, as a finite interpretive being, then anxiety—Dasein’s encounter with itself as an interpreting being responsible for its understanding, which it receives first from its tradition, embodied in the They—must involve a confrontation with *unintelligibility*.

Heidegger states that the ‘call of conscience’ which calls Dasein out of ‘the They,’ and to itself, says ‘nothing.’⁵² The call is ‘*reticent*.’ It “discourses in the uncanny mode of *keeping silent*.”⁵³ Yet, it calls Dasein *to itself* and to itself as ‘uncanny:’ “The caller is Dasein in its uncanniness: primordial, thrown Being-in-the-world as the ‘not-at-home’—the bare ‘that-it-is’ in the ‘nothing’ of the world.”⁵⁴ Dasein appears ‘uncanny’ to itself in anxiety, because it encounters itself as an interpreting being, and cannot interpret its interpreting.⁵⁵ Anxiety is the phenomenological appearance of the hermeneutical problem of interpreting that which provides the fundamental basis for interpretation.

⁵² “*What* does the conscience call to him to whom it appeals? Taken strictly, nothing. The call asserts nothing, gives no information about worldly-events, has nothing to tell.” *Being and Time*, 318.

⁵³ *Being and Time*, 322.

⁵⁴ *Being and Time*, 321.

⁵⁵ Foucault’s description of the problem: “It is not possible for us to describe our own archive, since it is from within these rules that we speak, since it is that which gives to what we can say . . . its modes of appearance, its forms of existence and coexistence, its system of accumulation, historicity, and disappearance.” *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 130.

“Anxiety robs us of speech. Because beings as a whole slip away, so that just the nothing crowds around, in the face of anxiety all utterance of the ‘is’ falls silent.”⁵⁶ ‘Uncanniness,’ or ‘reticence,’ is the phenomenological appearance of unintelligibility in Dasein’s anxiety. As what it means for something ‘to be’ is a product of an interpretive act, in anxiety “all utterance of the ‘is’ falls silent;” there is *nothing* which can be interpreted, that is, appear as something.

Anxiety discloses that what it means for something to be is founded always upon the intelligibility provided by a particular tradition and social context (the They), and that therefore there is no intelligibility ‘beyond’ that of a tradition and context. Yet anxiety further reveals that this foundation of intelligibility exists only as it is understood by Dasein in particular interpretive acts. In anxiety, the intelligible world ‘collapses,’ as it is maintained only by Dasein’s interpretive way of Being.

Dasein discovers that it is *nothing* other than its particularity, its ‘position’ in a world, into which it was ‘thrown.’ In other words, there is nothing to understand beyond or behind the understanding provided by a tradition and context, which is the basis for Dasein’s interpretive projections. Interpretation turned back toward itself encounters ‘nothing,’ i.e. unintelligibility. Anxiety has a phenomenologically positive appearance, though it is described in *negative* terms (uncanniness, reticence, nullity, etc.), because it has no *content* for hermeneutic interpretation. What is phenomenologically *revealed* is therefore the ontological significance of hermeneutics: that is, *that Being is as it is interpreted*. This is revealed by anxiety because it displays the fact that Dasein *is as it interprets* and cannot finally interpret itself, or ‘get behind’ its thrownness—the basis of intelligibility upon which understanding and interpretation is possible.

⁵⁶ “What is Metaphysics,” 101.

6. *Individual interpretation / the individual as such*

The projection of authentic Dasein is only a ‘modification’ of what Dasein already, and always, is. Authenticity means ‘taking responsibility’ for being a fundamentally interpreting being, and thereby projecting an interpretation as one’s own. This hermeneutic account of authenticity shows why authenticity cannot bring one *out of* or somehow distance one from ‘the world.’ It is only in an encounter with one’s own interpretive relationship to Being that authenticity arises. Authenticity is the authentic way that a certain being ‘is’ in a world. Authentic Dasein projects an interpretation of Being, of its own Being, and of its world.

Authenticity need not involve individualism in an *ontic* sense, of, for instance, holding oneself aloof from others, or defining oneself as having an existence which is ‘independent’ of others. Heidegger writes:

Resoluteness, *as authentic Being-one’s-Self*, does not detach Dasein from its world, nor does it isolate it so that it becomes a free-floating ‘I.’ And how should it, when resoluteness as authentic disclosedness, is *authentically* nothing else than *Being-in-the-world*? Resoluteness brings the self right into its current concerned Being-alongside what is ready-to-hand, and pushes it into solicitous Being with Others.⁵⁷

What *anticipation* reveals is that Dasein is a particular, finite perspective, for which and only on the basis of which can Being be understood. This means that Dasein is ‘responsible’ for its interpretation, because it ‘is’ that interpretation, whether it identifies it or not. But what is identified and taken up by Dasein is only its interpretive way of Being; it is not a substantive self or subject, both of which are ways that Dasein can understand itself. Being towards death discloses to Dasein its own particularity and finitude, within a specific situation, such that it

⁵⁷ *Being and Time*, 344.

realizes that Being ‘is’ only as it is interpreted. How much more, then, must authentic Dasein find that ‘self’ and ‘subject,’ and the relation between selves, are *possible* interpretations, and not ontologically certain beforehand?

The authentic interpretive projection indeed ‘individualizes’ Dasein, but only as having a particular interpretive perspective. Whatever ontical definition of individual *self-subsistence* follows is not determined by the particularity of, and the finite basis for, the projection. Indeed, the projection is ‘finite’ specifically in its situatedness, which is determined by the world in which Dasein is. It is only as a being in a world that Dasein can project an interpretation of that world, and of Being. To have an individual interpretive perspective is possible only for a finite being in the world—having such a perspective *means* to be in the world—and what authenticity discloses is this, that Being ‘is’ only from such a perspective.

7. *Possibility, nullity and projection*

The existential ground of Dasein’s interpretive openness is defined by Heidegger as ‘possibility.’⁵⁸ “Projection, in throwing, throws before itself . . . possibility as possibility, and lets it *be* as such. As projecting, understanding is the kind of Being of Dasein in which it *is* its possibilities as possibilities.”⁵⁹ There is a risk that this notion of ‘possibility’ can be dissociated from its appropriate interpretive context, in which it is the foundation of the possibility *for projection*. Possibility might then be reified, and identified as something like unbounded or *arbitrary* freedom. From this can follow the error of defining Dasein as a ‘free’ subject, founded upon pure possibility which is in some ‘secondary’ way constrained by the world in which it is.

⁵⁸ “As potentiality-for-Being, understanding is altogether permeated with possibility.” *Being and Time*, 186.

⁵⁹ *Being and Time*, 185

Possibility must rather be understood to signify that Dasein is interpretively open in its relation to the world. Possibility is always this or that *particular* possibility, and is understood only as the world is understood, as an interpretation is projected ‘upon’ it.⁶⁰

The mistake of identifying Dasein’s Being as ‘unbounded possibility’ is, further, the consequence of a misunderstanding of the phenomenon of *anxiety*, and therefore also a misunderstanding of the ‘nothing’ (nullity) which Dasein ‘is.’

The nullity we have in mind belongs to Dasein’s Being-free for its existential possibilities. Freedom, however, *is* only in the choice of one possibility—that is, in tolerating one’s not having chosen the others and one’s not being able to choose them. In the structure of thrownness, as in that of projection, there lies essentially a nullity.⁶¹

The nullity which Dasein uncovers ‘as’ its own foundation—or, more accurately, the ‘null’ disclosure which follows from Dasein’s attempt to interpret the (interpretive) basis of its own Being—could be understood as indicating that Dasein ‘is’ nothing, perhaps other than its free potentiality (for Being). This involves an incomplete understanding of Dasein’s interpretive way of Being.

It is rather the case that Dasein is so fundamentally an interpreting Being, that it can never *not* project an understanding of its own Being, and this to such an extent that it cannot *uncover* itself as a ‘free’ potentiality for Being.

In being a basis—that is, in existing as thrown—Dasein constantly lags behind its possibilities. It is never existent *before* its basis, but only *from it* and *as this basis*.

⁶⁰ “Because of the kind of Being which is constituted by the *existentiale* of projection, Dasein is constantly ‘more’ than it factually is, supposing that one might want to make an inventory of it . . . But Dasein is never more than it factually is, for to its facticity its potentiality-for-Being belongs essentially.” *Being and Time*, 185.

⁶¹ *Being and Time*, 331.

This 'Being-a-basis' means *never* to have power over one's ownmost Being from the ground up. This '*not*' belongs to the existential meaning of 'thrownness.'⁶²

In other words, Dasein can never 'get behind' that which it factually 'is,' *as it understands itself*, such that it could 'be' its possibilities in a way which is 'before' it actually 'is.' Dasein 'is' its basis, but *as its basis*, it is always 'projecting.' Dasein always is a particular Being who has been 'thrown' into the world; and as thrown, it is always projecting an interpretation of its own Being and its world.

Nullity appears as Dasein's null-disclosure of its own basis: It is because it cannot 'get behind' its basis that it confronts nullity. Dasein does not *uncover* its own basis *as* nullity. Rather, it *cannot uncover* its basis as 'something,' because the basis is Dasein's interpretive way of Being a particular, finite being. This 'nullity' is anxiety, which is not anxiety in the face of boundless potentiality, but of Being a particular being that is thrown into a world and projects an interpretation of that world. There is no way of Being to Dasein more foundational than projection, so nullity is the 'null' disclosure of an 'interpretation of interpretation.' Dasein cannot 'get behind' its own interpreting, such that it could find a basis for its interpreting: *it is that basis*, and 'nothing' besides.

From anxiety there is nowhere to go but toward resoluteness—*taking up* a way of Being—but this can be only a reinterpretation of the ground of intelligibility, and so, it is a reinterpretation of tradition, and of one's way of Being in the They.⁶³ Anxiety reveals that

⁶² *Being and Time*, 330.

⁶³ The alternative notion that authentic Dasein projects 'once and for all' some understanding of Being, that is, that it takes up a way of Being which must be maintained until its factual 'end,' could be wrong for two related reasons: One, it may involve a conflation of the ontic and ontological significances of Being towards an end (death). Only in Being towards an end does Dasein, in *anticipatory resoluteness*, encounter its finitude, and project a individualized interpretation of Being. But that does not mean that Dasein must ontically maintain its 'factual' project *until* its end. Two, such an interpretation of authenticity ignores the extent to which Dasein's projection remains situated within a tradition, and within a factual world. That is, in authenticity, 'one' does not 'lose the world,' or somehow redefine it

interpretation is always provisional, because it is projected always from some finite perspective. And so, even Dasein's authentic interpretive projection is a provisional projection, which is continuously revised. To be authentic means to have uncovered the finitude of one's own interpretive position, and to recognize it to be provisional and revisable. By uncovering its finitude, Dasein *first discovers* that all projections are provisional. They are provisional because they are always situated as particular, finite perspectives. This is *covered* insofar as Dasein is in The They. Authentic Dasein discovers that it cannot but interpret Being, but in discovering the provisional quality of interpretations, it 'takes up' some interpretation from its particular perspective, as its own. Understanding that its Being is interpretative, Dasein projects an interpretation with an understanding *that it is provisional*, and that there are no criteria which can provide any certain guidance for the interpretation.

8. *Essence, existence, ek-stasis*

The account presented here of authenticity as *authentic interpreting* shows that the 'existentialist' dimension of *Being and Time* does not present some division between the individual and her *situation*, nor does it presuppose some deeper ground of intelligibility to which authenticity gives access. Authenticity, as authentic interpreting—interpretation which is *individualized* in a confrontation with its finitude—does not involve the separation of the ontic individual from her situation. It is not through an encounter with something like its *freedom* that Dasein attains authenticity. 'Freedom' as such is always the freedom of particular selves, or subjects, which have already been understood in a certain way. Dasein is *condemned to interpret*,

solipsistically. This could hardly be less true, because the authentic project is possible specifically because Dasein discovers its finite particularity in relation to the tradition, and the world, and *on that basis* can project a unique interpretation.

because it is always already in a situation (a historically situated tradition, a social context), *through which* it understands Being, and itself, in a certain way. Dasein *is that understanding*, and *interprets* insofar as Dasein ‘is’ at all. As will be discussed below, this approach to authenticity allows it to be understood appropriately in relation to *sociality*, as both defining the understanding from which interpretation is projected, and as always re-formed in the interpretive projection. This is possible to the extent that the hermeneutic holism of Heidegger’s ontology is maintained, and carried into an understanding of authenticity. The difference between this approach and Sartre’s existentialism will be discussed here, in relation to Heidegger’s critique of Sartre, with the intent of further clarifying the significance of authenticity and individualized interpretation.

In his “Letter on Humanism,” Heidegger writes: “Sartre’s key proposition about the priority of *existentia* over *essentia* does . . . justify using the name ‘existentialism’ as an appropriate title for a philosophy of this sort. But the basic tenet of ‘existentialism’ has nothing at all in common with the statement from *Being and Time*.”⁶⁴ In “Existentialism is a Humanism,” Sartre identifies ‘existence’ with ‘thrownness,’ with a particular situation into which one was always thrown in advance, and ‘essence’ with the self-definition of a free subject.⁶⁵ The capacity for self-definition, for freedom, is presented as a statement of the ‘dignity’ of ‘man:’

This theory alone is compatible with the dignity of man, it is the only one which does not make man into an object. All kinds of materialism lead one to treat every man including oneself as an object—that is, as a set of pre-determined reactions, in no way different from the patterns of qualities and phenomena which constitute a table, or a

⁶⁴ “Letter on Humanism,” 232.

⁶⁵ “What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards.” “Existentialism is a Humanism,” in *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufman (New York: Penguin Group, 1975), 349.

chair or a stone. Our aim is precisely to establish the human kingdom as a pattern of values in distinction from the material world.⁶⁶

What distinguishes humanity from other existing *things* is that humans define their own essence. For a thing to have an essence is for it to have some purpose, a meaning for its existence; and this can be given only by a meaning-giving subject, of which there are no others than humans. Human subjectivity therefore has priority over all non-human beings, as that which can extend beyond ‘mere’ existence to *essence*. As it places humanity in a position of such priority, existentialism is a ‘humanism.’

Heidegger writes:

The highest determinations of the essence of man in humanism still do not realize the proper dignity of man. . . . Humanism is opposed because it does not set the *humanitas* of man high enough. Of course the essential worth of man does not consist in his being the substance of beings, as the ‘Subject’ among them, so that as the tyrant of Being he may deign to release the beingness of beings into an all too loudly bruted ‘objectivity.’ . . . *Man is rather ‘thrown’ from Being itself into the truth of Being*, so that ek-sisting in this fashion he might guard the truth of being, in order that beings might appear in the light of Being as the beings they are.⁶⁷

What defines ‘man’ is not that he is ‘over and above’ his *existence*, some *essence* which he defines for himself, but, that Dasein is the ‘clearing’ of Being in which beings appear.⁶⁸ Being ‘is’ only for Dasein. Dasein *ek-sists*. “As ek-sisting, man sustains Dasein in that he takes the *Da*,

⁶⁶ “Existentialism is a Humanism,” 361.

⁶⁷ “Letter on Humanism,” 234. Italics mine.

⁶⁸ “Ek-sistence, thought in terms of *ecstasis*, does not coincide with *existentia* in either form or content. In terms of content ek-sistence means standing out into the truth of Being. *Existentia* (*existence*) means in contrast *actualitas*, actuality as opposed to mere possibility as *Idea*. Ek-sistence identifies the determination of what man is in the destiny of truth. *Existentia* is the name for the realization of something that is as it appears in its *Idea*.” “Letter on Humanism,” 230.

the clearing of Being, into ‘care.’”⁶⁹ This *clearing* is Dasein’s primordial interpreting: Being ‘is’ for Dasein because only for Dasein can something be interpreted (appear) *as* something.

Sartre overlooks the significance of *ekstasis* in his examination of *existence*. That which exists, in-itself, is that which has ‘mere’ being. Following an identification of the human as first ‘existing,’ he identifies human Being as involving mere existence, the in-itself of immanence on one side, and freedom, from which a human establishes its essence, on the other side. Sartre does not begin from an appropriately primordial foundation: the *ekstasis*, the projectedness, of Dasein—its interpretive way of Being which establishes the *clearing* in which beings can appear; he does not consider deeply enough into the question of the meaning of Being, to discover that ‘existence’ no less than ‘essence’ have Being only for Dasein.

In other words, Sartre does not identify the depth of the ontological significance of what has been referred to here as ‘interpretation.’ The consequence of this is that through his thought runs a fissure between existence and essence, a division which recapitulates Descartes’ dualism. Despite his analysis of the particular ‘situation’ in which humans find themselves, as the space in which freedom is exercised as concrete choices, there is still preserved ‘freedom’ on one hand, and ‘situations’ on the other. Sartre looks beyond (presupposes some notion of) Being, and so misses the phenomenological significance of Dasein, as the interpretive foundation for the appearance of anything as anything.

The concept of interpretive authenticity, as it has here been developed, signifies an orientation of Dasein’s toward Being, such that, in anxiety, Dasein does not discover only that it is free to define itself through its choices. Rather, in anxiety, Dasein discovers that Being, its

⁶⁹ “Letter on Humanism,” 231.

own Being, and its world, 'are' for it only as it is an interpreter.⁷⁰ And the *human* is not only in an 'ontic' *situation*; Dasein is *thrown into Being*. It finds itself always already understanding Being, its world, itself; and in a way that precedes even any concept of the human. As Heidegger writes: "Sartre expresses . . . We are precisely in a situation in which there are only human beings. Thought from *Being and Time*, this should say instead: . . . We are precisely in a situation where principally there is Being."⁷¹

Sartre places the Being of the in-itself outside of 'subjectivity' (which he yet takes as a starting point), and so neglects Heidegger's notion of Being, as the Being of any beings which can appear for Dasein.⁷² Therefore, his notion of anxiety is of that of a being 'condemned' to make choices within some situation in which it finds itself. He does not account entirely for the significance that anxiety has for Heidegger:

We 'hover' in anxiety. More precisely, anxiety leaves us hanging because it induces the slipping away of beings as a whole. This implies that we ourselves—we humans who are in being—in the midst of beings slip away from ourselves. At bottom therefore it is not as though 'you' or 'I' feel ill at ease; rather, it is this way for some 'one.' In the altogether unsettling experience of this hovering where there is nothing to hold onto, pure Da-sein is all that is still there.⁷³

⁷⁰ "If we understand what *Being and Time* calls 'projection' as a representational positing, we take it to be an achievement of subjectivity and do not think it in the only way the 'understanding of Being' in the context of the 'existential analysis' of 'being-in-the-world' can be thought—namely, as the ecstatic relation to the clearing of Being." "Letter on Humanism," 231.

⁷¹ "Letter on Humanism," 237. Further: "What throws in projection is not man but Being itself, which sends man into the ek-sistence of Da-sein that is his essence." Ibid., 241. In other words, 'man' does not project an interpretation of Being, because 'man' is already something which 'is' (understood) in a certain way, on the basis of some (humanistic) tradition; the projection is from the interpretive perspective of Being-there (Dasein), which is prior to any particular notion of 'man' as a 'subject.'

⁷² "Our point of departure is, indeed, the subjectivity of the individual, and that for strictly philosophic reasons. It is not because we are bourgeois, but because we seek to base our teaching upon the truth, and not upon a collection of fine theories, full of hope but lacking real foundations. And at the point of departure there cannot be any other truth than this, *I think, therefore I am*, which is the absolute truth of consciousness as it attains to itself." "Existentialism is a Humanism," 361.

⁷³ "What is Metaphysics," 101.

This 'pure Da-sein' is bare *thereness*. This means being an interpreting being confronting its pure Being-there (understanding) as it is sustained by its own interpreting. It is, again, the existential interpretation of interpretation. The primordially of anxiety is such that the human confronts its 'pure Da-sein,' the bare fact of its Being-there, in a way which uncovers something which has phenomenological primordially over the understanding of the human as human. In other words, this is not the anxiety of a human being facing its own freedom: it is anxiety in the face of the finitude of Being; of the particularity of any interpretive position from which beings can 'be.' This anxiety calls Dasein not *only* to ontic action, to making some decision, but toward taking responsibility for its own interpretive way of Being. Anxiety, as that which discloses Dasein to itself as the interpretive foundation of Being, points not essentially toward Dasein's *freedom to make choices within a situation*, but to its own responsibility for whatever understanding it always already has, as sustained only through interpretive projection, yet which was never first 'chosen' in advance, because it was always initially sustained by the intelligible world (qua the understanding of Being maintained by a tradition) into which Dasein was thrown.

IV. Preparation for the Development of a Hermeneutical Ethics: Social Phenomenology, Heidegger, and Watsuji

1. *Ethics and ontology*

Watsuji Tetsuro's *Ethics in Japan* offers a critique and extension of Heidegger's phenomenology on the basis that Heidegger's analytic of Dasein overlooked the foundational *sociality* of the human way of Being. In his previous work, *Climate and Culture*, itself a direct response to *Being and Time*, Watsuji writes: "From the standpoint of the dual structure—both individual and social—of human existence, [Heidegger] did not advance beyond an abstraction of a single aspect."⁷⁴ Watsuji understood Heidegger's analytic of Dasein as an illustration of only the 'individual' aspect of human Being, which is, more comprehensively understood, a 'movement' *in-between* individuality and community. Watsuji's phenomenological method aims, therefore, at *ethics*—the 'way' that human beings are, as they are socially—*in place of* ontology. Rather than an analysis of Dasein (Being-there), Watsuji examines *ningen* (Being-between), as the appropriate foundation for understanding the human way of Being. The *individual* human is understood by Watsuji to be one side of a dialectical movement 'between' individuality and community.⁷⁵ The examination of this dual movement constitutes the foundation of his study of ethics.

Watsuji identified traditional Western philosophical approaches to ethics as taking for a starting point 'isolated subjectivity.' "Such problems as the independence of the self over against

⁷⁴ Watsuji Tetsuro, *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study*, trans. Geoffrey Bownas (New York: Greenwood Press, 1961), vi.

⁷⁵ "Individualism attempts to consider the notion of the individual that constitutes only one moment of human existence and then substitutes it for the notion of the totality of *ningen*." Watsuji Tetsuro, *Ethics in Japan*, trans. Yamamoto Seisaku and Robert E. Carter (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 9.

nature, or the sway of the self over the self itself, or the satisfaction of the desires of the self, and so on are of central importance to ethics.”⁷⁶ Watsuji suggests that these problems cannot be resolved from a perspective that begins with individual subjectivity. The appropriate starting point for ethics is, rather, *betweenness*—sociality. There are two central concepts in this account: ‘*ningen*,’ which corresponds with ‘human being,’ but in a dual sense of signifying both individual human beings as well as communities; and ‘*sonzai*,’ which indicates roughly (as will be explained, not very well) the way of Being which is *ningen*’s. The study of *sonzai*, as the way of Being-between (*ningen*), is the foundation for the study of ethics. *Ningen*’s *sonzai* is the “constantly moving interconnection of acts” which constitutes human Being. Watsuji notes that his “study of *sonzai* is . . . not equivalent to Ontology.”⁷⁷ The examination of the interconnection of acts is to be given priority over the question of Being, which Watsuji identifies as addressing only one side of the dialectic of human Being, a dialectic which moves from “being to nothingness, and from nothingness to being.”⁷⁸ Watsuji notes that *sonzai* had been the conventional translation of *Sein* (Being), and challenges this, suggesting that the significance of *sonzai* is not at all equivalent to that of *Sein*.⁷⁹

In the following, an account of social phenomenology will be developed first with reference to the passages in *Being and Time* which explicate, perhaps roughly and incompletely, the publicness of the world, and the primordially of Being with. This will be developed further through Watsuji’s account of social phenomenology, first in its continuity with *Being and Time*,

⁷⁶ *Ethics in Japan*, 10.

⁷⁷ *Ethics in Japan*, 19.

⁷⁸ *Ethics in Japan*, 19. “The science of ethics is the study of *ningen* regarded as that of *ningen sonzai*. By virtue of the fact that this study probes into the practical basis of ‘being’ and ‘the consciousness of the ought’ and so forth, it claims a basic status over against ‘the study of being’ and ‘the study concerning the consciousness of the ought to be.’” *Ethics in Japan*, 22.

⁷⁹ *Ethics in Japan*, 20.

and then with a focus on its discontinuity, in which the question of the legitimacy of the prioritization of ‘ethics’ over ‘Being’ will be addressed.

2. *Being with, Being alongside, and the publicness of the world*

In his examination of the way in which equipmental entities in the world *are* for Dasein, Heidegger states:

The work produced refers not only to the ‘towards-which’ of its useability and the “whereof” of which it consists: under simple craft conditions it also has an assignment to the person who is to use it or wear it. The work is cut to his figure; he ‘is’ there along with it as the work emerges. Even when goods are produced by the dozen, this constitutive assignment is by no means lacking; it is merely indefinite, and points to the random, the average. Thus along with the work, we encounter not only entities ready-to-hand but also entities with Dasein’s kind of being. . . . Any work with which one concerns oneself is ready-to-hand not only in the domestic world of the workshop but also in the *public world*.⁸⁰

Something is used or made always in reference to others. Equipment *references* others. The hammer was bought at this or that store, or borrowed from a friend; perhaps the roof to be repaired shelters one’s family, or is unsightly to one’s neighbors. One uses a hammer as one was first taught by a friend. The hammer was made to be grasped by a hand: probably in such a way that it could be held by *any* hand, and so is public in a generalized sense. Even a solitary worker in an isolated workshop is surrounded by tools which *could be* used by another, which were perhaps made to be used by ‘anyone.’ Equipment is interpreted, that is, put to use, in its publicness. The interpretation (its use) involves reference to others. One always first uses a

⁸⁰ *Being and Time*, 100.

hammer as ‘one’ uses a hammer—on the basis of the intelligibility provided by ‘the They,’ which is the background of understanding ‘how’ things are to be used, and what for.

As ‘the They’ is the foundation upon which equipment can be understood, it can be asked if Heidegger has indeed placed Dasein’s relation to equipment and to others in the appropriate order when he says: “In existing entities sight [understand existentially] ‘themselves’ only insofar as they have become *transparent* to themselves with equal primordially in those items which are constitutive for their existence: their Being-alongside the world [e.g. using equipment] and their Being-with Others.”⁸¹ Is it the case that the use of equipment and ‘Being-with Others’ are *equally primordial* in one’s existential self-understanding?

It would appear, rather, that *being with others* is the foundation for using equipment, and that *self-understanding* is more primordially based on ‘Being-with’ others, than it is on ‘Being-alongside’ equipment. If equipment is understood only on the basis of the intelligibility provided to it by *the They*—that is, if equipment is interpreted always in relation to others, and in relation to some public understanding of what equipment is, what it is for—then is it not the case that equipment is founded upon Being with others? Is equipment not *first* public, and in such a way that ‘the public’ must be understood as its foundation (as that which is more primordial)? Being alongside appears to be founded upon Being with, as publicness is the basis for the intelligibility of equipment.

We should consider what precisely is meant by ‘*transparency*,’ as ‘knowledge of the Self.’ Heidegger writes:

In its projective character, understanding goes to make up existentially what we call Dasein’s “*sight*.” With the disclosedness of the “there,” this sight is existentially; and Dasein *is* this sight in each of those basic ways of its Being which we have already

⁸¹ *Being and Time*, 187. Italics mine.

noted [*circumspection*, e.g. using equipment; *considerateness*, i.e. relating to others] and as that sight which is directed upon Being as such, for the sake of which any Dasein is as it is. . . . The sight which is related primarily and on the whole to existence we call “*transparency*.”⁸²

The particular mode of ‘sight’ which Heidegger designates with the term ‘transparency,’ is *sight which penetrates into Dasein’s existence*. It is Dasein’s understanding of ‘what it is, as it is,’ which is its way of Being as *interpreting*. Such an understanding of ‘transparency’ provides the insight we need to understand correctly the passage above, in which Heidegger claims that Dasein can be equally transparent to itself in both its Being alongside and Being with. In its Being with others no less than its Being alongside entities (equipment), Dasein ‘is’ as it interprets. This interpreting way of Being is that which is most foundational, and can itself be therefore *made transparent with equal primordially in all of the ways which Dasein is*. In other words, the issue here is not one of the comparative primordially of Being with and Being alongside—rather, what Heidegger identifies is the interpretive foundation of both Being with and Being alongside, and this foundation, as what Dasein *is*.

This interpretive way of Being is more primordial to Dasein than is its ‘self,’ insofar as Dasein is the basis for any *understanding* of self. It is the basis, even, for any initial, general understanding of self and other, and for individuality and community. Yet, at the same time, such interpretation always begins from an understanding which Dasein *already has* of itself, as being in a certain situation, in relation to others and to entities in the world. Dasein’s way of Being must be identified strictly with the interpretative projection which is carried through in all that Dasein factually ‘does.’

⁸²*Being and Time*, 186. “We choose this term to designate ‘knowledge of the Self’ in a sense which is well understood, so as to indicate that here it is not a matter of perceptually tracking down and inspecting a point called the ‘Self,’ but rather one of seizing upon full disclosedness of Being-in-the-world *throughout all* the constitutive items which are essential to it, and doing so with understanding.” *Ibid.*, 186-187.

Heidegger states that “Dasein in itself is essentially Being-with.”⁸³ Even being alone is only a modification of ‘Being-with,’ which Dasein ‘is’ essentially, as one of its existential attributes. In other words, Dasein is always in some relation to others, *as* what it is. Even the use of equipment in the ‘absence’ of any immediately present others *essentially references* others. And equipment is intelligible only on the basis of the foundation of understanding which is provided by ‘the They:’ ‘One’ uses a hammer in such-and-such a way; for this and not that purpose; etc. This being so, we might question why Heidegger first and more closely examines Dasein’s use of *equipment* rather than Dasein’s *relation to others*. Heidegger’s analysis of Being with others is primarily *through* equipment, and hardly stands on its own. Heidegger does not, for instance, consider in any detail phenomena which involve immediate relatedness between particular Daseins (i.e. actual human relationships). The phenomenology of Being alongside is thoroughly developed, while that of Being with is barely considered, except insofar as it relates to Being alongside. The following sections, therefore, further develop the phenomenology of Being with.

3. *Thinking as private and public*

Watsuji’s phenomenological investigation of everyday events finds that what are always most immediate are the relations which are referenced in any act, and this ‘before’ and in a way

⁸³ “One must not fail to notice that we use the term ‘Dasein-with’ to designate that Being for which the Others who are freed within-the-world. This Dasein-with of the Others is disclosed within-the-world for a Dasein, and so too for those who are Daseins with us, only because Dasein in itself is essentially Being-with . . . Being-with is an existential characteristic of Dasein even when factually no Other is present-at-hand or perceived.” *Being and Time*, 156. Even if Dasein is ‘alone’ this is only a modification of existential Being with. Being alone is possible only because Dasein is ‘with Others’ primordially. Heidegger uses the term Dasein-with to refer to factually Being with actual others (Dasein-with is therefore founded upon Being with).

that is foundational to any notion of individual subjectivity. He notes that one who engages in philosophical contemplation might be accustomed to

being alone in his study, or to taking a solitary ramble along a quiet road. One deals with things most familiar, such as a desk, a piece of paper, a pencil, an ink box, a book, a window, an outside street, a field, a mountain, or woods. These things exist outside of us, and each of them reveals its own features. We perceive these features and use them in some way. They are considered to have something to do with facts at the ‘natural level’ and to which no theoretical constructs are added. There, what is called *our consciousness* or what it means ‘to be in the world’ becomes a starting point of our consideration. But the question is this: Are these ordinary things really the facts most familiar to us?⁸⁴

Perhaps, that is to say, there is an odd bias which is likely to follow from this situation, for the philosopher who contemplates and writes, maybe with an eye to the everyday, but from the perspective of a somewhat *unusual* mode of the everyday. The writer perhaps sits alone, with her equipment for writing, and to the extent that she looks toward the phenomenology of the world at all, notes first and foremost the way that she uses her writing equipment.⁸⁵

One who is in such a situation might be compelled to make claims which are even more bound to the particularities of her unusual situation, of being alone and contemplating. From such a circumstance, the solitary thinker could find that what is most immediately present to her contemplation is her ‘subjective consciousness,’ and from there suppose that such is the starting point for *all* doing and thinking. Perhaps she will find even that the evidence for anything *other* than this consciousness is inadequate, and proclaim: “only my own existence is certain.” Indeed,

⁸⁴ *Ethics in Japan*, 49.

⁸⁵ Heidegger can be critiqued on this basis, for having taken as a starting point for his phenomenological analysis of social relatedness the use of tools: “We can say that [Heidegger] set the pattern for explicating the subjective meaning of what is called the *world*. But in his philosophy, the relation between person and person lies hidden behind the relation between person and tools. It is obvious that the former relation was overlooked, in spite of his assurance that he had not neglected it.” *Ethics in Japan*, 17.

this *statement* might be found even worthy of being recorded, and so find its way into some written work, with the hope that it be fit for *publishing*.

[Such authors], even though writing about the evidence for the I, did not simultaneously realize the evidence for the other *I*. Is one justified in holding that the operation of writing has developed without anticipating its readers? To write that ‘only I am evident’ is itself contradictory. For writing is an expression of words, and words are what have come to shape themselves in anticipation of partners who live and talk together.⁸⁶

The very act of writing references others. In writing this sentence, I myself am supposing that it will be read, and address my readers. Moreover, the fact that I have language with which to express myself references the sociality from which language emerges, and which it mediates. The notion that ‘only I am evident,’ even before it has been written, is possible only because of the words from which it is composed. Language is learned first only through relations with others, in which it is *spoken*, or written, in communicating.

The point is not, of course, that the preceding constitutes some proof against solipsism. Rather, it is that the notion of solipsism would seem to occur to one who is in an *unusual* situation, of being alone and contemplating. The point is that the tendency exhibited by certain philosophical traditions, to take as a starting point individual subjectivity, may be a consequence of the particular, practical form which contemplation has taken within those traditions. For one who is ‘alone in his study’ it might be reasonable to begin with one’s own consciousness as that which is most immediately given, and least in need of proving. But this may reveal more about this philosophical contemplation than it does about existence *in general*. With this in mind, Watsuji, as does Heidegger, turns toward ‘the everyday’ as a starting point. The following will

⁸⁶ *Ethics in Japan*, 49-50. “A reader, however much he persistently ponders the solitude of the ego, cannot get out of this relationship with the author, once having embarked upon reading the authored work. This is the destiny from which every philosopher who has written on the ego has been unable to escape.” *Ibid.*, 51.

examine how particular everyday phenomena are revealed from this orientation, which finds sociality, and reference to others, to be that which is most phenomenologically foundational.

4. *The everyday body*

One foundation upon which the independence of individual subjectivity might be established, is the independence of the individual *body*. It is apparently the case that subjective consciousness is ‘bound’ to a body, from which it cannot ‘escape.’ The body can be examined as an individual organism, and so too might therefore the subjective consciousness which arises from the body be identified as initially individual, and only in some *secondary* way capable of *interacting* with other conscious subjects. But why ought we begin with the body understood as ‘an organism’? From what *perspective* does the body appear thusly, as an independent ‘physical’ organism?

As Watsuji suggests: “The question to ask is whether in our daily life we actually deal with our body as an object of physiology. Is it true to say, when we meet a friend and exchange greetings, that we take for granted that the meeting of our partner is a movement of our physiological body?”⁸⁷ A friend is not first encountered, in our everyday interactions with her, as ‘a body.’ When a friend approaches, we do not observe the approach of her ‘body,’ nor do we ‘use’ our own body to greet her. Rather, it is the case that, simply, *we meet a friend*.

No more do we first encounter a friend as a body, than, as Heidegger writes in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” do we

first perceive a throng of sensations, e.g., tones and noises, in the appearance of things . . . rather we hear the storm whistling in the chimney, we hear the three-

⁸⁷ *Ethics in Japan*, 59.

motored plane, we hear the Mercedes in immediate distinction from the Volkswagen. Much closer to us than all sensations are the things themselves.⁸⁸

A whistling chimney is immediately understood as ‘a whistling chimney,’ or if it is not, perhaps one listens in alarm, and supposes first that the noise is this or that, and is *uncertain*. But, what is in any event phenomenologically *closest*, or what is ‘most immediately’ understood, is ordinarily not some ‘sound,’ but ‘a whistling chimney,’ or ‘a plane.’ This is the same as to say that the essence of a hammer is not an ‘object’ made of some substances, but is its *use* in hammering. Or, it is to say that a door latch is, as it is, in ‘opening the door.’ However, it is *possible* to hear ‘just’ a sound; or to examine the wood and metal from which a hammer is composed; or to contemplate the mechanism of a door latch. In every case, the consideration of the ‘thing’ takes place through a particular way of ‘just listening,’ or ‘just looking,’ which is not the way that entities in the world are generally first encountered.

Similarly, of course ‘a body’ can be *observed* ‘as a body,’ and not as ‘a friend,’ or as this or that person.

The strict physiological viewpoint is more readily apparent in a procedure that treats the human body purely as a physiological object. A surgeon treats a patient on the

⁸⁸ “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 151-152. Or, consider a conversation: One person speaks, another responds, and the first speaks again. How might the ‘most immediate’ content of this experience be understood? Does one hear ‘a sound’ that is ‘identified’ to be the voice of the other? Does one hear ‘a voice’ that is then ‘understood’ as words that have a certain meaning? From the perspective maintained here, both notions lead distinctly away from that which is most phenomenologically immediate. The second is at least somewhat closer: It is more phenomenologically accurate to state that one ‘hears a voice,’ than it is to say that a sound is first heard, and then *recognized* to be a voice. The first, that a ‘sound is heard’ may better approximate a description of the physiological process by which vocal cords vibrate air, and thereby the mechanisms of the ear, and so allow the meaning of what one person says to be understood by another. However, the phenomenology of a conversation least of all involves the vibration of air, or the hearing of a sound. Indeed, even the voice of the other speaker is not that to which the hearer is ‘closest.’ Moreover, it is not even the words spoken that are most phenomenologically immediate. Rather, in an engaging conversation, one simply *understands* what the other *means*. The most ‘immediate’ content of the ‘experience’ of conversation does not consist of *awareness* of sound, or even of a voice. There is, rather, the phenomena of meaning, understood immediately. That does not mean that there is no measurable span of time between the speaking of a word and one’s understanding of its meaning. It means, rather, that at the center of one’s awareness is the speaker’s meaning, and not ‘a voice,’ or ‘a sound.’

operating table in such a way. Otherwise the operation could not be performed dispassionately. However, for an operation to be undertaken dispassionately, the framework of ‘the operation’ needs to be carefully set up in advance.⁸⁹

It is perhaps necessary for the surgeon who performs an operation to look at a person’s body as ‘just a body,’ and so treat it as a physiological ‘thing.’ But this approach to the body is one which takes place only in particular, circumscribed domains. It is otherwise and ordinarily the case that we encounter *persons*; only by abstracting from this is the ‘body’ of another person encountered as a physiological thing.⁹⁰

Phenomenologically, the body is always *first* public. For the most part, the body *is, as it is*, in meeting a friend, and by shaking her hand; or in walking down a street, visiting a store, returning home. When we greet a friend, we do not grasp a ‘hand-thing,’ but *shake our friend’s hand*. Even this, perhaps, is done in such a way that it is not noticed explicitly: the shaking of hands is, as it is as, simply in ‘greeting a friend.’ Further, to encounter the body as a physiological *thing* depends itself on some particular understanding of the body, through which it can be interpreted as ‘composed’ of certain types of ‘tissues.’ It is as such for the surgeon who works within a hospital, within a context such that bodies can be (de)contextualized in a specific way, distinct from their ordinary way of Being. In other words, the body, in its Being, is interpreted immediately, and *is* as it is only on the basis of an understanding which is first public. The friend’s hand is interpreted spontaneously in the greeting, as it is ‘shaken.’

⁸⁹ *Ethics in Japan*, 60.

⁹⁰ “To regard a human body as a mere physical solid is nothing but a provisional supposition set up for the sake of medical treatment. Apart from the purpose of concretely curing ‘a person,’ this supposition has no validity. Moreover, the reason why the viewing of a human body merely as a material solid has been influential lies in our having become accustomed to thinking of a human body as if it were graspable by merely looking at it [as present-at-hand], instead of through a variety of practical considerations. . . . This distinctive way of looking at things arises only within a position in which the practical attitude has become completely eliminated and thus is not in accordance with actual everyday reality.” *Ethics in Japan*, 64.

To take the body as a first isolated, distinct thing, from which subjectivity emerges and so is bound, and bounded by the body's limits, is to 'examine' the body from a perspective which is already an abstraction from the way that the body is in its everyday acts. To the same extent that we find, in private contemplation, that the locus of our own consciousness is centered always in a body, in public engagement the body is 'for' others, as it is seen and felt by others. And it is thereby the interface which is always first, publically, 'between' selves—in a greeting, or an exchange, or in walking along a road, visible to others.

5. 'Sensations'

There is yet another, more compelling, reason to take the individualized body as the starting point for phenomenological investigation. Is it not the case that bodily sensations are always one's own, and only secondarily interpretable by others through the medium of *empathy*? Do we not always *first* 'feel' our own body, and only *secondarily* understand what others might feel? For instance, one's *physical pain* is felt to be 'one's own,' and another's pain is not felt as one's own. But, under what conditions do we simply have '*pain*' in some abstract sense? Is it not the case that, rather, one hurts one's leg, is nauseated from eating poorly prepared food, or is sick with a cold? Is not the pain, while it is 'one's own,' always *within* a public space in which there are things which cause pain and other persons to whom we might describe the pain? In other words, is not pain always immediately interpreted as taking place within a shared world, and this in such a way which is more immediate than just 'having a sensation'?

Regarding empathy, Heidegger writes:

Disclosure of the Other [in solicitude] easily becomes the phenomenon which proximally comes into view when one considers the theoretical problematic of

understanding the ‘psychical life of Others.’ In this phenomenally ‘proximal’ manner it thus presents a way of Being with one another understandingly; but at the same time it gets taken as that which, proximally and ‘in the beginning,’ constitutes Being towards others and makes it possible at all. This phenomenon, which is none too happily designated as ‘*empathy*,’ is then supposed, as it were, to provide the first ontological bridge from one’s own subject, which is given proximally as alone, to the other subject, which is proximally quite closed off.⁹¹

This notion of empathy to which Heidegger is referring describes a ‘capacity’ which allows a person to share, in some way, the *inner state* of another person. Empathy, so understood, is a psychological event, by which the subjective consciousness of one person responds to that of another. An ontic psychology which follows from an ontology which defines persons as individual subjects must account for empathy as occurring ‘on top of’ a foundation of individual subjectivity, and as mediated by some kind of communication between subjects. Heidegger’s ontology, which identifies Being with as an existential aspect of Dasein, identifies as foundational the sort of relatedness towards which ‘empathy’ circuitously points.

Watsuji examines the phenomenology of such ‘empathic’ relatedness in detail. Regarding the ‘sharing’ of physical sensations, he writes:

We are far from having even roundabout methods with which to infer another person’s bodily sensations from facial expressions alone, to take a single instance (i.e., to analogically infer that it is the same with the other, in comparison with one’s own facial expressions, and the bodily sensations they represent). Rather, we assume that we feel the same bodily sensation. Therefore, those who together feel the heat can simultaneously say that it is hot. Or, when one says that it is hot, the other can readily consent without delay.⁹²

⁹¹ *Being and Time*, 161-162.

⁹² *Ethics in Japan*, 63.

When we stand with others together in the heat, we do not first feel the heat on our own skin, and then infer that others must feel that heat too. We ‘feel the heat’ together. Indeed, we no less have to infer that others feel the heat as we do, then must we infer from the feeling of warmth on our skin, and the dripping of sweat, that it is hot ‘outside.’ One feels the heat; and with others, all are hot together. In other words, again, in the everyday world of practical actions, we *share* public space; and when that space is a certain way, we do not first ‘determine’ how it is for ourselves, and then infer that it must be likewise for others. When one uses the word ‘hot’ in such a way, one does so understanding that this is immediately understood by others.

6. *State of mind; emotion*

In light of and to further develop the preceding critique of ‘empathy,’ as a capacity which allows one subject to share the feeling of another, *emotion* in general should be considered here more closely. Can emotion be identified as something like a ‘state of mind’ which a person *has*, as a response to and as a way of acting toward some-thing in the world, which may have ‘inspired’ the emotion, and which one acts toward in a certain affective way? Or has such a definition already looked away from the everyday phenomenon of emotion?

Regarding *mood*, Heidegger writes: “*The mood has already disclosed, in every case, Being-in the-world as a whole, and makes it possible first of all to direct oneself towards something.*”⁹³ A mood is *world-disclosing*, it is a ‘way’ of interpreting the world: “State-of-mind [that upon which ‘having a mood’ is founded] is *one* of the existential structures in which the Being of the ‘there’ maintains itself. Equiprimordial with it in constituting this Being is

⁹³ *Being and Time*, 176.

understanding.”⁹⁴ In other words, the world is understood along with some *mood*. Dasein has always a ‘state of mind’ (this is perhaps a problematic translation, as what is addressed here is neither ‘mind,’ nor some ‘state’ which it might have) along with which it understands the world.⁹⁵ Moods are not *secondary* to the understanding that Dasein has of its world. An understanding of something in the world is always accompanied equiprimordially by a mood: In our everyday way of acting, things always have significance which deeply involves (is inseparable from) our ‘affective orientation’ toward them.⁹⁶

Something is disclosed as something, as it is understood, accompanied by a mood. Although Heidegger’s statement regarding the ‘equiprimordially’ of these two existential structures could be interpreted as identifying two distinct ways of Dasein’s Being-there, which exist always *together*, it would be more accurate to interpret this equiprimordially to mean, rather, that Dasein understands always in some distinct *way* (state of mind); that understanding is not a pure ‘beholding’ which is *affected* secondarily (by a mood).⁹⁷ We ‘have’ a mood, for the most part, *not as something* which we ‘have.’ It is as understanding is *attuned* in a certain way

⁹⁴ *Being and Time*, 182.

⁹⁵ An emotion can be described as something not only ‘felt’ in response to experienced events, but as something ‘through which’ one is oriented toward something in a particular way, and through which *the world* appears in a distinct way. An affective orientation is phenomenologically ‘deep.’ Through a certain mood one’s own experience of self-identity—what one feels about oneself, or the memories that one is most likely to recall—is oriented a particular way; perceptions—that which is noticed and ignored—are given a certain order; personal relationships have a distinct meaning. To understand these effects as consequences of an experienced ‘feeling’ is analogous to the notion that we experience a door as a wooden object of a certain color, rather than as something ‘to walk through.’ It is of course true that we *can* experience the feeling, and the perception of the object as such, but we do not generally. Indeed, it is only through a very particular type of examination, perhaps inspired by some interruption, or when something *goes wrong*, that we consider a door as a wooden object, or an emotion as a feeling that we have. Rather, a door is usually something that is walked through; An emotion is something through which a situation is disclosed in a particular way.

⁹⁶ Of course, one may sometimes say that one is not feeling any particular emotion. There are two points to be made about this: first of all, ‘not feeling any emotion’ can sometimes mean boredom, or lethargy, it can mean contentment, or subtle malaise. Or, indeed, it can mean that one is thoroughly engaged with some task, that one is engrossed. That is, secondly, it is difficult to define some *entirely* ‘neutral’ state. This is not to deny that extreme states of emotion are significantly distinct from more mild, or ambiguous moods. But they are not divergences from some ‘normal’ state: there is no clearly identifiable ‘baseline’ of experience.

⁹⁷ “Even the purest . . . theory has not left all moods behind it; even when we look theoretically at what is just present-at-hand, it does not show itself purely as it looks unless this [theory] lets it come towards us in a *tranquil* tarrying alongside.” *Being and Time*, 177.

that things appear as they do. Something is noticed with interest, or irritation. It is in anger, sadness, frustration, anticipation, etc. (some state of mind) that understanding discloses the world. As a ready-to-hand object can become present-at-hand when its *use* is interrupted, in the case of something ‘breaking,’ or malfunctioning, a mood *can* appear as ‘a feeling,’ which inspires a certain way of understanding, and interpreting—a way of acting.

Consider, for instance, a conversation that becomes an argument: Perhaps neither person thinks “I am angry,” or is explicitly aware of the *feeling* involved in being angry; but one person says something to which the other responds with surprised silence. And then both persons find themselves first aware of their anger as ‘a feeling’ that appears to have motivated a certain way of speaking. Maybe one then identifies that anger as something that ‘influenced’ a ‘perception’ of the situation, that inspired a ‘way of thinking,’ and resulted in an inappropriate or hurtful response. In the same way that a door is usually that which is ‘walked through,’ and is not present to awareness as a distinct ‘object,’ emotion is ordinarily that through which a situation appears in a certain way, and not as a particular ‘feeling.’⁹⁸

Comparably, a joyful mood can be, and so often is, interrupted as soon as it becomes explicit apparent as such. One identifies one’s happiness, as a ‘feeling,’ and it then ceases to be world-disclosing. Rather than *understanding happily*, one *understands happiness*, as a *feeling*, and it has thus ceased to be a ‘way’ of understanding, and becomes something present-at-hand.

⁹⁸ The opposition which constitutes the angry affect is experienced as something like, perhaps, a ‘push’ or pressure against the other. And the other person is perceived in a way that is determined significantly by the anger—memories of past encounters are ordered on the basis of this anger. What is ‘noticed’ about the person is defined by ‘being angry’ with that person. It is, again, when the mood is broken—when one realizes that one has been ‘unreasonable,’ for instance—that anger may then appear as a feeling which motivated action, influenced perception, and perhaps ‘distorted’ thinking. At that point, anger appears to be a ‘response’ of oneself toward the other person. But in the mood of anger, there is not an awareness of anger as some response: It is ‘behind’ the perceptions and actions; and, further, it is *between* oneself and the other person. Anger discloses a particular relationship between oneself and the other person. In an angry mood, one does not have an awareness of the relationship on one hand, and an awareness of an angry feeling on the other. Indeed, it is only when the mood has been ‘broken,’ that such a distinction appears. Otherwise, there is opposition to the other, who appears in a certain way, through this mood of anger. Perception of the other is ‘foregrounded’ upon the background of anger. The relationship is disclosed through the mood.

The ‘feeling’ is then nothing other than the residual effect (affect) of the state of mind which has been interrupted, and quickly fades.

There is a further significance of emotion, which is identified by Watsuji:

The interpenetration of the consciousness of self and other is conspicuously recognizable in emotion. . . . We share the same emotions as others in situations in which the relationship between oneself and the other is quite intimate and in which a sense of community is to a considerable extent realized. For parents who have lost a child, concern for their child is shared by both. In such cases the independence of the consciousness of the ego is almost completely lost sight of.⁹⁹

Watsuji does not mean here that both parents feel independent but similar emotions toward their lost child. He directs our attention to the space between ‘individual’ persons, which is always already shared and inhabited. Shared grief makes that space particularly apparent. In the grief of the parents, there is not an awareness of the ‘feeling’ of sadness, arising from one’s individual sense of loss, toward a person who is no longer in one’s life. The phenomenology of this shared grief is such that the parents simply ‘grieve together.’

Compare the preceding description of the shared grief of parents to Judith Butler’s account of grieving:

Something takes hold, but is this something coming from the self, from the outside, or from some region where the difference between the two is indeterminable? What is it that claims us at such moments, such that we are not the masters of ourselves? To what are we tied? And by what are we seized? . . . It could be that in this experience something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that those ties constitute a sense of self, compose who we are, and that when we lose them, we lose our composure in some fundamental sense.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ *Ethics in Japan*, 70.

¹⁰⁰ *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 18-19. Regarding the death of others, Heidegger writes: The ‘deceased’ as distinct from the dead person, has been torn away from those who have ‘remained behind,’ and is an object of ‘concern’ in the ways of funeral rites, interment, and the cult of graves. . . . In tarrying alongside him in

Grief is not experienced as a ‘feeling’ that arises from one’s self, as a ‘stable’ self that can feel this or that. In grief, we “lose our composure;” one no longer feels oneself to be ‘the same,’ because one is confronted by a loss so great that it has ruptured one’s identity. Following the above account, Butler adds: “We’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing something.”¹⁰¹ In an experience of grief we ‘come undone.’ For Butler, in grieving, one realizes the extent to which one is constituted by relationships. A broken relation is a loose thread that can allow self-identity to become unraveled entirely.

Phenomenologically examined, emotions have their locus not in the subjectivity of individual consciousnesses. They are, *first*, and again, *world-disclosing*, in that they allow a world to appear in a distinct way (they are, as possible states of mind, the way that understanding always ‘is,’ in disclosing); and, *second*, they may have their locus *in-between* persons. Emotions can be identified not as ‘shareable’ (as contagious) through a capacity for ‘empathy,’ but as shared in the basic essence of what they are.

When Watsuji discusses the shared experience of grief, he does not mean to point only to a mode of empathy through which emotions are communicated between persons, or to the concurrence of emotional responses to an event. What Watsuji identifies in his account of grief, is that emotions are always already within a shared space. The parents do not have to share their distinct and separate experiences of grief through some medium, because the grief already occupies a shared space, which is uncovered through their loss. In a state of grief such as that described by Butler, one’s world can nearly ‘collapse.’ In the description of the phenomenology

their mourning and commemoration, those who have remained behind *are with him*, in a mode of respectful solicitude. Thus the relationship-of-Being which one has towards the dead is not to be taken as a *concernful* Being-alongside something ready-to-hand. . . . The deceased has abandoned our ‘world’ and left it behind. But *in terms of that world* those who remain can still *be with him*.” *Being and Time*, 282. In other words, and in support of Butler’s point, with the deceased we continue to have the sort of relationship to which we would have with ‘living’ Others. Yet this relationship is defined by *absence*. Therefore, grieving involves an absence not *of* but *in* our way of Being with others.

¹⁰¹ *Undoing Gender*, 19.

of anger it was identified that in an angry state one's awareness becomes fixated on a 'feeling of opposition,' around which the rest of one's experience becomes oriented. In the example of grief, that which 'fixates' awareness is an *absence* where some constitutive relationship once was. That absence gives no center to, or provides no substantive 'background' for, one's world to be ordered. And so the world is disclosed with an absence at its center. Perceptions seem 'distant' or 'insignificant;' one has trouble thinking about anything, or being interested in anything; and one feels disinclined to act at all.

In certain moments of profound 'empathy,' individuality is backgrounded in relation to a foreground of community.

Scheler refers to the consciousness of identification between oneself and the other prevalent among primitives and recognized in totemism, or *Extasis* as found in the mystic cults of ancient religions, or in sexual intercourse in intimate love affairs, or in that love which terminates in the unity of self and other as found between mother and child, and so forth. These are instances in which the consciousness of ego perishes, so to speak.¹⁰²

Such moments need not involve a loss *altogether* of any awareness of individuality, but it has become the background of awareness. It is phenomenologically 'distant,' and what is closest rather is 'togetherness,' a 'pure' mode of relationality, which overwhelms even an awareness of the individuality of those *who are in* that relation. If grief uncovers the depth of relations through absence, and discloses (or rather, nearly or actually 'collapses') a world with that absence at its center, profound modes of 'empathy' disclose relationality through its overwhelming presence. Relationality thus similarly appears as that through which the world is disclosed, and similarly threatens at its extremes to collapse that world through *ekstasis*. One is 'beyond' *one-self* so thoroughly that there is no awareness of a particular self for whom the world is disclosed. Such

¹⁰² *Ethics in Japan*, 71-72.

ecstatic empathy points to the purest phenomenological essence of relationality, which, for Watsuji, is the ground of ‘empathy’ generally.

7. *The primordiality of sociality*

The notion of ‘in-betweenness’ (*ningen*), as illustrated by the preceding examples, is identified by Watsuji as that which is phenomenologically most foundational to human Being. If we take as a starting point the practical acts of persons in their engagements with each other, we find that what is most phenomenologically immediate is never first a subjective self, which can then secondarily relate to others. On the basis of this understanding of human existence, Watsuji takes, as a starting point (as ‘*first philosophy*’), ‘ethics’ (rather than ontology), meaning that the phenomenological foundation of Being is the way of Being of those who are in relation to each other. Individuality and community are both to be understood as arising from a primordial sociality.

This primordial sociality is identified by Watsuji as a double movement of negation:

On the one hand, the standpoint of an acting ‘individual’ comes to be established only in some way as a negation of the totality of *ningen*. An individual who does not imply that meaning of negation, that is, an essentially self-sufficient individual, is nothing but an imaginative construction. On the other hand, the totality of *ningen* comes to be established as the negation of individuality. A totality that does not include the individual negatively is also nothing but a product of the imagination. These two negations constitute the dual character of a human being. And what is more, they constitute a single movement.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ *Ethics in Japan*, 22.

Human Being is therefore an ongoing dialectical movement between individuality and community. The individual *exists* as it is asserted over against a community, as the negation of the community. Community exists, similarly, only as it is affirmed through a negation of the individuals who compose it. The back-and-forth movement between these two negative movements constitutes human Being, and is the basic foundation of ethics.

Phenomenological ‘primordially’ should here be examined more closely. A phenomenon, defined as primordial in relation to other phenomena, is *exhibited throughout* the phenomena that are secondary in relation to the more primordial phenomenon.

Phenomenological primordially is determined by considering what aspect of a phenomenon is most ‘essential,’ or foundational, and so most necessarily exhibited in particular examples of the phenomenon in question.

In the case of, for instance, ‘equipment,’ Heidegger finds that ready to handedness is foundational, meaning that all equipment is as something which is ready to hand—something which is ‘picked up and used.’ Presence at hand, or the ‘objective presence’ of some-*thing* which is as an ‘object,’ is phenomenologically secondary to ‘handiness,’ as things are for the most part encountered first in their *use*. It is only secondarily—if, for instance, a use-object malfunctions—that it can appear as something which merely ‘is,’ and is just ‘looked at.’ What is *most* phenomenologically primordial to Dasein is the structure of interpretation and understanding. This means that, in *all of the ways that Dasein is*, it projects interpretively.

Watsuji is making a claim of the same sort, in his account of the dialectic of sociality which constitutes human Being. The sort of primordially which ‘betweenness’ has in relation to the particular individual as well as the community, is not, for instance, some kind of temporal or historical priority. ‘Betweenness,’ as a phenomenological concept, is primordial in that it runs

through all of the phenomenal appearances of individuality and community. This means that although the dialectic of sociality has an ontic form, in, for instance, the affirmation of factual communities, and factual individual assertion over against communities, the dialectic, as ontological, is exhibited throughout *all of the ways* that humans are.

This can be compared to Heidegger's distinction between Being with and Dasein with: the latter is the ontological, existential basis for the former. Dasein is always 'with' others in that its existence depends on a relation to others—only in relating itself to 'others' in some way, does Dasein understand itself, and thereby have a *self*. This can be distinguished from being in the *presence* of other persons or having a factual relationship with another person, which Heidegger designates as Dasein with. So, similarly, *ningen* 'is' always as the dialectical movements between individuality and community; the factual 'events' of the development of actual communities, or the self-assertion of individual persons, are founded upon betweenness as the way that *ningen* is.

The dialectic presented by Watsuji identifies the individual as nothing other than the negation of a community, and community as nothing other than the negation of individuality. Individuality is as it stands against a background of community, which is 'negated' in the standing-forth of the individual. It is only on the basis of the community that an individual can appear at all. Yet, at the same time, only as the negation of the individuals which always could stand-out, *is* a community. But, Watsuji further states that these two movements constitute *a single movement*. The absolute poles of 'individuality' and 'community' are abstractions, and nothing in themselves, but have existence only as 'directions' of movement, and the movement in any direction is only ever possible because of the potential for a movement in the other direction.

These movements could be represented as directions upon a circle, such that a continued movement leads always back around. Individuality and community are abstractions which are *off of the circle*, because they never actually *appear* in any pure form. The relationship between individuality and community can be represented as a circle describing *ningen's sonzai*, which is drawn between 'individuality' on one side, and 'community' on the other, as poles which are not actually points upon the circle. A movement, therefore, towards individuality, never attains the pole, but at the point at which it is closest begins its movement back, towards community. As movements 'around' the circle, both directions of movement could thus be understood 'as a single movement.' The movement in either direction expresses the fundamental interdependence of each movement.¹⁰⁴

The movement is 'single' because individuality is possible only on the basis of community, and community is possible only on the basis of individuality—individuality is a function of community, and community is a function of individuality—and in such a way that, by the assertion of the individual, communities are transformed; and by the affirmation of their communities, individuals are transformed. The movement of individuality is therefore a movement toward the transformation of community; and the movement of community is a movement toward the transformation of individuals. As will be discussed below, the phenomenal

¹⁰⁴ Watsuji uses also, but differently, an analogy of a circle to represent dialectical sociality. "Yoshida conceived of [a circle with an infinite radius]. His view is that each center indicates the individuality of personality, and the circle, with an infinite radius, indicates the infinity of personality. In infinity, all phases of discrimination terminate in identity. However, Yoshida's harmony of identity and difference was applied to the relation between the individual and the infinite . . . Any kind of society is a finite human reality, and therefore, to amplify the metaphor, the circle that represents this fact must have a finite radius. . . . We can think of a circle with a finite radius, as a determination of a circle with an infinite radius. If the infinite radius turns out to be finite through its negation, then a finite circle is established as the realization of an infinite circle. In this case, the relation of the same circle, with different centers, as is the case with an infinite circle, is also materialized in a finite circle. Such a thing may be inconceivable geometrically, but human existence possesses precisely this sort of structure. Here the finite circle, based on the infinite one, exactly specifies a society. Although centers are the negation of a circle insofar as they are points and are individuals separated from each other, they are, as centers, the centers of the same circle." *Ethics in Japan*, 16.

form of this interdependence of ‘individuality’ and ‘community’ should be described in relation to interpretation and understanding.

Again, these movements are not expressed only ontically, in factual ‘social movements.’ They are the movements between which all of *ningen*’s actions take place. The examples in the previous section are intended to illustrate that even in such an example of *using equipment*, social relatedness is expressed. Actions are always social, such that even privateness is only a mode of sociality.¹⁰⁵ The phenomenological foundation of everyday actions generally is the dual-movement of individuality and community.

Therefore, even in the case of hammering nails into a roof, that which is phenomenologically most primordial is the sociality of the action, which is the dual movement between community and individuality. On one hand, the intelligibility of the hammer is dependent on a community in which hammers have significance. And on the other hand, hammering is not possible except as an action performed by some particular person. The individual interprets the hammer on the basis of a shared understanding, which is provided by the community. The hammer is taken up by one as ‘oneself,’ but the hammering is always a reference to others, ‘for whom’ the roof will be fixed, for instance, and in whom, as the They, the tradition which is the basis for the intelligibility of equipment is maintained. Even if there are no others who are immediately present—if one is repairing the roof of an isolated cabin—this being-alone is itself felt, and has positive significance; and the work is possible only because of

¹⁰⁵ Heidegger writes: “The Other can *be missing* only *in and for* a Being-with. Being-alone is a deficient mode of Being-with; its very possibility is the proof of this. On the other hand, factual Being-alone is not obviated by the occurrence of a second example of a human being ‘beside’ me, or by ten such examples. Even if these and more are present-at-hand, Dasein can still be alone.” *Being and Time*, 157. The phenomenon of ‘aloneness’ or its absence is not to be identified entirely with the ‘present at hand’ absence of occurrence of others. To be alone is to be in a privative mode of Being-with—aloneness is possible because Dasein is ‘with others’ in its way of Being, and in such a way that is not reducible to the factual presence or absence of others. This difference between the ontological way of Dasein’s Being and the ontic presence or absence of others is designated by Heidegger with the distinction between ‘Being-with’ and ‘Dasein-with,’ respectively.

the community in which such acts are intelligible. Even *using a tool* takes place in a phenomenological space which is ‘between’ individuality and community. In the act there is a movement between individuality in the particular act of hammering, and community in the reference that the act has to the community in which such acts have significance.

Watsuji’s claim is that *ningen’s sonzai*—the way of Being between—has such phenomenologically primordially, that it must be taken as the starting point of any investigation of human Being, and runs through all that humans do. One way of summarizing this point, is to say that Watsuji is challenging, on phenomenological grounds, philosophical methodology that begins with individual, subjective consciousness. He suggests that what has been overlooked, and is uncovered by a careful phenomenological analysis of everyday acts, is that such acts are positioned between persons, and between individuals and community. One particularly significant aspect of this account, is that, at least in its foundational premises (there is a question of whether Watsuji maintains this view consistently), it can be taken as a critique of positions which begin with the *individual* as well as positions which take *community* as their starting point. Either position overlooks ‘betweenness’ as such.

In the one case, which begins with individuality, it is necessary to show in a *secondary* way how individuals relate to each other. In the other case, which begins with community, it may be assumed the community determines and has priority over individuals.¹⁰⁶ Neither approach takes as its starting point practical actions, which do not have their locus strictly in the abstracted individual, nor in the community, but are always between these two poles of sociality. What may

¹⁰⁶ Although Watsuji’s account sometimes appears to be straightforwardly communitarian, his basic approach does not give fundamental priority to the community ‘over’ individuals: “Something whole that precedes individuals and prescribes them as such, namely, such a thing as ‘the great whole,’ does not really exist. It is not justifiable for us to insist on the existence of a social group’s independence. In an attempt to come to grips with something whole, we are led to confront individual persons who are destined to be restricted and negated, contrary to our intention.” *Ethics in Japan*, 99.

be overlooked as the insubstantial, fleeting interstices between individuals, across which their practical acts pass, are here taken to be the background upon which individuals can appear, and further, upon which the relation generally between individuality and community can appear. That which Watsuji would consider to have been neglected by Western philosophy as what is most insubstantial, the diminutive space—really ‘nothing’—produced where individuals act toward each other, is shown here to be the very background upon which the *acting individuals first appear as such*. But, again, this background is not even ‘community’ as such, but primordial ‘sociality’ upon which both community and individuality are founded.

Watsuji’s account of this dialectic will here have its greatest relevance in its applicability to the factual self-transformation of communities which takes place through the movements of individuality and community, which together constitute the re-formation of communities. But, in advance of a discussion of this application, a further examination of the basic structure of the dialectical movements of sociality is called for, and for this it will be necessary to consider more closely the background of this dialectical approach.

8. *Emptiness and the absolute*

Watsuji is drawing deeply from the tradition of Japanese thought, and without direct reference here to the content of that tradition, some of the issues may be incoherent. What is perhaps most important is the Buddhist notion of emptiness, which is explicitly discussed at points in *Ethics in Japan*, but is implicit throughout. Watsuji writes:

Now, that *ningen’s sonzai* is, fundamentally speaking, a movement of negation makes it clear that the basis of *ningen’s sonzai* is negation as such, that is, absolute negation. The true reality of an individual, as well as of totality, is ‘emptiness,’ and this

emptiness is the absolute totality. Out of this ground, from the fact that this emptiness is emptied, emerges *ningen's sonzai* as a movement of negation. The negation of negation is the self-returning and self-realizing movement of the absolute totality that is precisely social ethics. Therefore, the basic principle of social ethics is the realization of totality (as the negation of negation) through the individual, (that is, the negation of totality).¹⁰⁷

For this to be intelligible, the meaning of *emptiness* must be here discussed. It is a concept central to the tradition of Mahayana Buddhism, which means that all entities and concepts are without self-subsistence, are 'empty,' and have existence only through that to which they stand in some relation. This is expressed by the metaphor of 'Indra's Net:' an infinite 'net' or grid of lines, with 'jewels' appearing at every point at which the lines converge. Each jewel is perfectly reflective. Therefore, in each jewel, every other jewel is reflected. Further, every jewel is contained in every reflection: One could magnify a particular jewel, and then, further, magnify a jewel reflected in that jewel, *ad inf.* The jewels themselves have no existence aside from that which they reflect. This expresses abstractly the notion of 'absolute interdependence' which is the meaning of 'emptiness.' It illustrates the idea that everything is 'empty' of self-existence, and exists as it references everything else.

The notion of emptiness has also for Buddhist thought the significance that 'transcendence' and 'immanence' are mutually interdependent, such that neither has meaning aside from reference to the other. That is, as a Buddhist soteriological concept, emptiness means that '*transcendence*' of the world is dependent upon—has significance only in relation to—the concrete existence of the world. This has the consequence for Buddhist philosophy of inspiring a

¹⁰⁷ *Ethics in Japan*, 23.

reevaluation of ‘transcendence,’ such that it could no longer be understood as any sort of end in itself, separable from its relation to immanence.¹⁰⁸

Buddhist emptiness is therefore not a negation of the reality of everyday phenomena. It is a response to the early Buddhist position that itself more closely approximates such a negation. Buddhist emptiness can be understood as the complete realization of the Buddhist refutation of abiding selfhood—it is the extension of a concept of no-self to a total rejection of the self-subsistence of any-thing, being, or position; including any ‘position’ outside of the world from which it could be negated. The earlier *abhidharma* system deconstructed the self, but did not deny the ‘self’-subsistence of its particular constituents. A concrete difference remained between the ordinary condition of self-grasping worldliness and the salvation that is freedom from this condition.

The Heart Sutra contains the following: “There is no suffering, no origination, no stopping, no path. There is no cognition, no attainment and no nonattainment.”¹⁰⁹ The position of absolute emptiness makes impossible a judgment of the ultimate reality of any particular phenomena, or of identifying any-thing whatsoever as self-subsisting. Anything that ‘is,’ any claim, position, or being, cannot exist in isolation: the ‘deepest’ reality is interdependence. Perhaps more accurately stated, to look for that which is most fundamental is always to find interdependence. Emptiness, then, is an *absolute* negation that negates even relative negations (it is in this sense equivalent to an absolute affirmation)—it is a statement of the absence of any static ground on the basis of which the final ‘reality’ of any-thing can be absolutely affirmed or

¹⁰⁸ For a detailed analysis of the meaning of emptiness, see: Frederick J. Streng, *Emptiness: A study in Religious Meaning*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1967).

¹⁰⁹ Edward Conze, *Buddhist Wisdom: The Diamond Sutra and the Heart Sutra* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 97.

negated. It has thus been interpreted as a call to affirm the world as the expression, or perfect manifestation, of absolute emptiness. Nishitani explains this as follows:

All attachment is negated: both the subject and the way in which “things” appear as objects of attachment are emptied. Everything is now truly empty, and this means that all things make themselves present here and now, just as they are, in their original reality. They present themselves in their suchness, their *tathata*. This is non-attachment.¹¹⁰

The immediate relevance of this point is that the relative existence, or the appearance, of beings is not negated by their interdependence. Where we look for the basis of Being, what is uncovered is a matrix of contingency (thrownness); fully understood, the infinity of these contingent relationships can be described as emptiness. But the very concept of emptiness allows no bias toward the reality of bases (or a lack thereof) over that of their expressions. It could be said that to look for a basis is to discover interdependence (emptiness), and to examine interdependence is to find the particular phenomena of which it is, from an equally valid point of view, composed. Emptiness self-negates; otherwise it has become reified, and represents exactly the sort of privileged position or final *static* truth of which it is a negation. One way in which this is expressed is in the assertion that Buddhist salvation—a relative negation of a false sense of self—is, from the perspective of absolute emptiness, inseparable from everyday worldliness. Emptiness makes impossible the sort of judgment that would allow relative negation to have anything other than contextual, provisional meaning.

¹¹⁰ Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan Van Bragt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 34.

9. *Being and interbeing*

The notion of emptiness is foundational to Watsuji's account of the negative movements which constitute the *sonzai* of *ningen*. The basic premise which supports such an account is that all entities are without self-subsistence but *exist* as they are related to other entities. The foundation of Being is, in such an account, relatedness: The *ways* in which entities are interrelated have priority over the things themselves. This could be defined as something like a *relational ontology*, except that, insofar as ontology address Being, it is not an appropriate term. "[The] way of being, which is particular to *ningen*, or to be more precise, this transformation from being to nothingness, and from nothingness to being (hence, this way of becoming a human being), we attempt to express by the Japanese concept of *sonzai*."¹¹¹ *Sonzai* is therefore not 'Being,' because it references also 'non-Being,' and in such a way that it describes a movement from Being to nothingness. *Sonzai* is bound to the notion of emptiness, as an expression of interdependence, which at its most foundational is the interdependence of Being and nothingness (or, in Buddhist soteriology, immanence and transcendence).

As does Heidegger, Watsuji begins his analysis with an examination of everyday acts. But, where Heidegger's investigation is motivated by the question of Being, Watsuji's is oriented, rather, toward the interconnectedness expressed by practical acts. The significance of taking *ningen* as a starting point, rather than *Dasein*, is that *ningen* is not 'there,' thrown into Being, but is *between*, as an expression of emptiness. Where Watsuji describes community as the negation of individuality, and individuality as the negation of community, he is referencing this interdependence, which indicates that both individuality and community each are 'empty' and

¹¹¹ *Ethics in Japan*, 19.

have existence only because of each other.¹¹² Therefore, it is the ‘movement’ or relation between the two which is taken as a starting point of Watsuji’s phenomenological method.

The relation between Watsuji and Heidegger’s basic orientations, can now be phrased, roughly, as a question of the priority of Being and ‘interbeing.’ Heidegger begins with the question of what it means for something to be; and Watsuji begins with the question of how entities are related, and arise from a matrix of relationality. Both approaches are oriented toward an analysis of everyday acts; but where Heidegger seeks to identify the way of Being which is Dasein’s, and the entities which appear in Dasein’s world, Watsuji looks toward practical acts of relatedness, which express the interdependence of persons, and of individuality and community.

Watsuji attempts to place the very issue of Being, and the analysis of the being who asks this question (Dasein), within a more primordial dialectic in which Being ‘is’ always in relation to non-Being, and the being who asks the question is always ‘between,’ in the movements of sociality. For Watsuji, therefore, the question of Being arises from a more basic foundation of practical acts, which expresses a primordial interrelatedness. In Watsuji’s view, Heidegger overlooked the dependence of ontology on a foundation of practical, ethical acts.

This issue of whether the examination of ‘interbeing,’ which is interpreted by Watsuji as *ethics*, should be identified as first philosophy must be addressed through a return to Heidegger’s question of the meaning of Being, and a clarification of the significance of ‘Being’ which the

¹¹² Regarding this, Watsuji writes: “If this wholeness [of community] is the negation of discrimination, then ‘absolute wholeness,’ which transcends the finite and relative whole, is the absolute negation of discrimination. Because of its being absolute, it must be that nondiscriminateness which negates the distinction between discriminateness and nondiscriminateness. Hence, absolute wholeness is absolute negation and absolute emptiness. The infinite that lies behind all of the kinds of finite wholeness must be absolute emptiness. Conversely, the unity of difference and sameness that appears in all finite wholeness stands only on the basis of this absolute emptiness. Therefore, every community of human beings, that is, the whole in human beings, can become manifest only to the extent that emptiness is realized among individual human beings.” *Ethics in Japan*, 99. The significance of this must be understood in relation to the discussion of ‘emptiness’ in general, presented above. Watsuji is stating that that, as is any-thing, the ‘essence’ of the human being is ‘emptiness,’ and in the realization of this ‘emptiness’—the space through which all of the constitutive relations of the human ‘appear’ as what the human ‘is’—community is affirmed. At the same time, the general concepts of ‘community’ and ‘individuality’ are likewise ‘empty:’ as *absolute* extremes, either exists only as the negation of the other.

question reveals. This will be the subject of the following chapter, which will begin with a discussion of the social significance of inquiry generally, and the question of the meaning of Being

V. Intelligibility, Ethics, and the Phenomenological Priority of the Question of the Meaning of Being

1. *Introduction*

Watsuji's account of social phenomenology addresses that which is perhaps most conspicuously absent from *Being and Time*. What Watsuji shows, as was discussed in the previous chapter, is that individual interpretation is always oriented in relation to others. That which is phenomenologically most immediate in everyday ways of Being is not the individual *self*, but the space between selves in which practical actions take place. Watsuji's phenomenological account of sociality presents the individual self as one aspect of a primordial social dialectic which moves between individuality and community. Heidegger's account of Dasein is considered by Watsuji to be an analysis of only the *individuality* side of his social dialectic. As will be discussed in the following, this is problematic: Dasein should be identified as an interpretive position, not as an *ontic* individual. By positioning Dasein *within* his social dialectic, Watsuji positions that dialectic *beyond interpretation*. This is methodologically problematic, and displaces the phenomenologically foundational significance of reflexivity presented here in the chapters addressing Heidegger's phenomenology. It has the following additional consequence: Although Watsuji presents the *dialect* of sociality (as the movements of individuality and community) as phenomenologically primordial, at points he seems to be affirming a more strictly communitarian view of values. If sociality is phenomenologically primordial, and has some *determinate form* beyond interpretation, then it is not entirely open to

reformation.¹¹³ It is both more accurate phenomenologically, as well as important ethically, to understand the dialectic of sociality in relation to the interpretation and understanding of Dasein, as the position from which an understanding of sociality is possible.

As has been maintained in the preceding, individuality and community *are* only as they are understood from particular interpretive perspectives. Such an interpretive perspective—Dasein—is not the individual *self*, as self ‘is’ only as an *understanding* of selfhood generally, other selves, or ‘oneself,’ which are sustained interpretively. Similarly, community ‘is’ only as it is understood from a particular perspective. And yet, as has been discussed, everyday interpretation is oriented always first in relation to others. The *ethical* significance of identifying interpretation as that which is phenomenologically foundational to both individuality and community is that a *reinterpretation* of community and individuality is always possible. As will be discussed in the next chapter, this is the phenomenological basis for the possibility of opposition movements that project reinterpretations through which society is re-formed. What will be addressed here are basic issues of Being, interpretation, and ethics in Watsuji and Heidegger.

2. *The question of Being; questioning as an everyday way of Being*

Watsuji orients his approach to the ‘method of ethics as the study of *ningen*’ with a discussion of the phenomenology of *inquiry* generally. He notes, first, that “learning in general, that is, ‘to ask,’ already belongs to the *sonzai* of *ningen*.”¹¹⁴ The possibility of inquiry in general is founded on the *sonzai*—the ‘way of Being’—of *ningen* (human Being, as being-between.)

¹¹³ An important aspect of the problem with this can be conceived if one considers how such a notion of the primordially of social order could support discourse intended to legitimize *particular* social practices.

¹¹⁴ *Ethics in Japan*, 29.

Inquiry is always first an act that takes place within a context of relatedness, in everyday acts: another is asked a question about this or that. Questioning expresses already a relation to the other, from whom a response is expected.

Asking a question about, for instance, a philosophical problem, through the development of a written text, is understood by Watsuji to be founded phenomenologically upon inquiry as an everyday mode of relatedness, in which *asking* expresses a relation: it seeks to learn something from the other; or, perhaps it only serves to give expression to an existing relationship (such as in the asking of a question which serves only as a greeting or an acknowledgment of the other).

Questioning, as an everyday act, is to ask another person *this or that* particular question, perhaps to *learn how* to do something. In Japanese, the same word which signifies ‘asking’ can mean just ‘paying a visit.’¹¹⁵ Questioning is identified by Watsuji as always first a social act, which may be a request to be taught something by the other.¹¹⁶ “Originally, ‘to learn’ meant ‘to imitate.’ In other words, it meant to follow another person who already had the ability to do something and learn how to do it by imitation.”¹¹⁷ Inquiry seeks to *learn*, and learning is first *imitation*. Learning, as an everyday social act, is not initially oriented toward ‘thematic’ understanding (to know-what), but, rather, to *know-how to act*.

As Heidegger asks the question of the meaning of Being, and considers first the being who asks the question of Being (Dasein), Watsuji examines *questioning as a social act*, and, as such, an expression of betweenness.¹¹⁸ Inquiry is social in at least two ways: *First*, questioning,

¹¹⁵ “If we eliminate for the moment noematic moments, and stick with noetic ones, we are able to say that learning is a relation of giving and receiving, face to face, between person and person. In the same vein, *to* (i.e. ‘to ask’) means in Japanese also to pay a visit to someone, as well as to inquire about something.” *Ethics in Japan*, 29.

¹¹⁶ “Learning as well as questioning is an activity of *ningen* . . . and is not an isolated person’s contemplation. A ‘thing’ pursued exists publically in the betweenness of human beings. That is to say, *to ask* is, essentially speaking, ‘a question of *ningen*.’” *Ethics in Japan*, 30.

¹¹⁷ *Ethics in Japan*, 29.

¹¹⁸ “The very act of asking any question at all, as the question must be “composed of words of signs, . . . is already a question that concerns community.” *Ethics in Japan*, 30.

as an everyday act means asking a certain question so that something might be learned from another; or, it may even only give expression to a relationship (as when one asks another ‘how are you?’) *Second*, even questioning which aims to attain some thematic, or conceptual understanding, is possible only as it is composed of particular words, and these are always the words of a shared language.¹¹⁹ For Watsuji, even thematic, philosophical inquiry is founded upon (perhaps a *privative mode of*) everyday inquiry.

Where Heidegger recognizes that ontological Interpretation is founded upon Dasein’s everyday way of interpreting, and is a ‘radicalization’ of this everyday interpretation, Watsuji maintains that philosophical inquiry is a development or extension of inquiry as it is expressed in the everyday acts of *ningen*’s relation to others. Watsuji is thereby suggesting that what Heidegger takes to be the most *primordial question* (the question of the meaning of Being) is possible only on the basis of the everyday relatedness of human beings, in which inquiry serves first as an expression of betweenness. Watsuji turns to *ethics*, as the study of the everyday acts of betweenness, as *first philosophy*; as, that is, the foundation for ontology, as it provides the basis for any particular mode of inquiry (including that through which an account of ontology can arise).

Regarding his methodology, Watsuji writes: “If it is true that ethics must use expressions [e.g. the things of daily life] as its medium, so that it may grasp subjective *ningen* subjectively, then the hermeneutic method will have to be adopted as its only method.”¹²⁰ In other words, because that which is to be examined is not simply a set of propositions, or given *facts*, but the ‘subjective’ way of Being which is *ningen*’s (in its everyday acts, its ‘expressions’), and this is to

¹¹⁹ “Although we can think alone, yet even in this case, we think alone about a communal problem.” *Ethics in Japan*, 31. Any problem which can be posed is posed in a shared language; is intelligible only through that language; and is available to others members of the community.

¹²⁰ *Ethics in Japan*, 42.

be made available to ('subjective') interpretive understanding, only *hermeneutics* is an appropriate method for examining ethics.

Watsuji's approach to ethics aims therefore to say something about the everyday practical acts which constitute the *sonzai* of *ningen*, through a *hermeneutic method*, as providing access to a thematic understanding of those everyday acts, and thereby, to an understanding generally of *ningen's sonzai*. The possibility for that inquiry is founded upon *inquiring* as a way of *ningen's sonzai*. Therefore, it is *as ningen*, in its capacity for 'inquiry,' as a way of its 'Being,' that *ningen's sonzai* is to be evaluated.

Although *ningen* 'is' not strictly identified as something which 'is' (because it is identified as containing both 'Being' and 'non-being,' and beyond *ontology* as such) Watsuji can, insofar as he intends to present a thematic account, only offer a description of what and how *ningen's sonzai* 'is' ('as' it has been interpreted). Watsuji gives his inquiry priority over the question of Being, and yet it is only in a hermeneutic interpretation of what *ningen* is that he can develop his account of ethics.

But the question of the meaning of Being is concerned with what it means for something to be, and so is the point of departure for any inquiry into even 'inquiry as a practical act.' Heidegger's analysis of the question of the meaning of Being reveals that beings 'are' always as they are interpreted: something 'is' always 'as' this or that. This is the necessary starting point for phenomenology, because it asks the question of what it 'means' for something to *be*, that is, to appear *as something*, at all. And it finds that what it means for something to be is always *what it means* for the being for whom Being *can be* a question.

In displacing the priority of phenomenological (and hermeneutical) ontology with phenomenological ethics, Watsuji makes *implicit* in his account the Being of that which is

examined. The consequence of this is that Watsuji's ethics appears *uncritical*. Watsuji attempts to present, through hermeneutical-phenomenological investigation, *ningen's sonzai*; but he can attain no certainty that he has established the appropriate foundation for his investigation. Watsuji identifies, as his means of access to the subject of his analysis (ethics) *inquiry* as founded upon ethical, everyday acts, and these acts are presented to us only through Watsuji's inquiry into what human Being 'is.'

While Watsuji takes hermeneutics as *a methodology*, he does not take it as a *foundation*. He attempts to present *ethics* as his foundation, but he has access to this only through the methodology of hermeneutics. What he overlooks is that, as only hermeneutics can provide access to the subject of his inquiry, hermeneutic interpretation actually provides his phenomenological starting point.

Watsuji's phenomenological account of inquiry, as founded upon everyday practical acts of asking particular questions, is already an interpretation of inquiry. Watsuji situates the foundation of inquiry, as a practical act, beyond his own methodological inquiry through which he has attained phenomenological access to inquiry (as a practical act). Watsuji cannot demonstrate the priority of his dialectic of sociality (ethics) over hermeneutic (interpretive) ontology. *The question of Being is a necessary starting point* for phenomenological inquiry, because it addresses the possibility of something appearing *as something* at all, and it reveals Dasein, as the being who understands and interprets. Watsuji subsumes Dasein into his dialectic, as the movement of (ontic) *individuality*, without acknowledging that individuality and community both '*are*' *only as they are interpreted*, and that Heidegger's analytic of Dasein is only an analysis of the position from which such interpretation is possible.

The examination of inquiry as a practical act already presupposes some more fundamental mode of inquiry than the everyday expressions of inquiring. Otherwise, a *problematic* circularity results: The questioning of what something 'is,' is taken to be possible on the basis of inquiry *as a mode* of sociality, which is described as having some *determinate form*. What Watsuji overlooks is the *finitude* or particularity of the interpretive perspective from which some account of sociality is possible. Watsuji places the dialectic of sociality *beyond* the particular interpretive perspective from which that dialectic can be understood in a certain way. He positions Dasein, the finite interpretive perspective, *within* that dialectic, without explaining how an account of 'what is' (e.g. his dialectic of sociality) is possible beyond the particular perspectives from which something is understood as something.

3. *The priority of the question of the meaning of Being*

Watsuji critiques phenomenology for beginning with 'intentionality.'¹²¹ "What is called *intentional activity* is nothing more than the product of an abstraction that first of all excludes the relational elements from our acts and then posits the residue as an activity of individual consciousness."¹²² Although Heidegger clearly acknowledges the 'relational elements' of acts, in, for instance, the chains of in-order-to references in which equipment is used, *Being and Time* does not present a detailed analysis of the 'elements' of relationality *to others* which are involved in acts. Heidegger does not examine the foundational references to others involved in everyday acts, as Watsuji does, in identifying *betweenness* in which acts take place.

¹²¹ "Intentionality is the structure of individual consciousness, and it cannot pass judgment on the betweenness of person and person. Hence, she who deals with ethics from the standpoint of intentionality becomes satisfied with an analysis of the structure of value consciousness." *Ethics in Japan*, 33.

¹²² *Ethics in Japan*, 34.

What Heidegger is addressing in his analysis of Being is the foundation of intelligibility—that upon which the ‘appearance’ of something as something depends. Heidegger does not develop an account of social phenomenology, and this is perhaps a problematic absence in *Being and Time*. However, social phenomenology can be distinguished from fundamental ontology, which, as it examines the basis upon which anything can be at all—the foundation upon which any account of individuals, communities, and social actions depends—is the point of departure for phenomenology generally. Dasein, as the being who understands and interprets, is the necessary foundation for phenomenology.

The analysis of Dasein does not itself say anything in particular about what it is to be a *human being*, or what relation exists between individuals, or between individuals and communities. What it identifies is the starting point for any possible analysis of such questions, in an examination of the structures of interpretation. What it finds is that the starting point is, necessarily, a *finite interpretive perspective*. Any understanding of Being can only be the understanding of a finite being in a particular situation.

The phenomenological approaches of both Heidegger and Watsuji contain at their center circular self-reference: Heidegger’s question of the meaning of Being reveals a back-and-forth relation between the being who can ask the question of Being as a way of its Being, and the understanding of Being which that being has. Watsuji begins with a notion of inquiry as a practical act, which he describes, along with the other practical acts which constitute *ningen’s sonzai*, through phenomenological inquiry. His phenomenological inquiry is a *modification*, therefore, of inquiry as a *practical act* which takes place in a context of relations.

Watsuji identifies interpretation as a mode of *ningen’s sonzai*, as founded upon everyday inquiry, and thereby gives *ningen’s sonzai* priority over interpretation. Because Watsuji attempts

to identify questioning as a capacity which is founded upon a structure which is yet more fundamental, he places something phenomenologically '*beyond*' interpretation; that is, out of the interpretive circle which is the basis for Heidegger's fundamental ontology. By giving the study of the *sonzai* of *ningen* phenomenological priority over the question of the meaning of Being, Watsuji separates interpretation and that which he identifies as the condition for the possibility for interpretation. The *sonzai* of *ningen* 'is,' unlike 'Being,' not 'as' it is interpreted. It is *distinct from* how it is interpreted, yet provides the foundation for interpretation. Interpretation is a mode of *ningen's sonzai*, but the *sonzai* of *ningen* is not foundationally an interpretive way of Being.

4. *Individualized interpretation, individuality, and community*

It may be that Watsuji's identification of Dasein with the *ontic* individual is inspired by the analysis of authenticity in Division II of *Being and Time*, in which the existential *individuating* of Dasein is described. Indeed, as Dasein's possibility for authenticity follows from its confrontation with its own finitude, in being towards death, it does encounter precisely its *particularity*. As was discussed in the preceding analysis of authenticity and interpretation, the 'projection' of authentic Dasein should be understood hermeneutically, as a *projected interpretation* of Dasein's own Being, and Being in general. In its encounter with finitude (its being towards death), Dasein discovers that it 'is'—it understands itself—as a projected interpretation of its own Being. This is 'individuating' because, in its encounter with finitude, Dasein confronts its responsibility for its own interpreting. On that basis, Dasein can first 'take up' its Being, and project an interpretation which is 'its own.'

But what ‘Dasein’ signifies is only the interpretive activity which is what it means to be in the world. That which ‘is’ is that which is intelligible, is understood and interpreted from the particular ‘perspective’ of Being there. Being only ‘is’ as it ‘is’ from a finite, particular perspective. But that itself does not mean that this interpreting being is *an individual as such*. From the particularity of interpretive perspective, it does not follow that the self-interpretation of interpretation must identify itself as, first and essentially, an individual who only secondarily relates to other individuals. There is no reason why authentic Dasein cannot interpret itself as a being that exists fundamentally in relation to others. In taking responsibility for its projected interpretation, Dasein does not ‘ontically’ individuate itself, and separate itself from others; rather, it *ontologically* individuates itself, and as its ontological foundation is interpretation, it individuates itself only in projecting an interpretation of Being on the basis of the particularity of its interpretive position.

Further, in projecting, Dasein projects an interpretation of its relation to others. As it is always *with others*, and in a community (even if not ontically), authentic Dasein’s interpretation of these are no less aspects of its projected interpretation of Being than is its own Being. Where Heidegger identifies the condition of ‘falling’ in ‘the they’ from which authentic Dasein ‘individuates’ itself, he does not mean, or should not mean, that Dasein defines itself ‘apart from’ community, or somehow isolates itself.¹²³ Dasein, in *falling*, is inauthentic not because it has failed to attain ‘ontic’ individuality (separation from a community). Falling Dasein is inauthentic because it does not identify itself as a particular interpretive perspective; it is no less fundamentally a finite interpreter. But, it ‘covers’ its interpretative essence, it understands as

¹²³ “As the non-relation possibility, death individualizes—but only in such a manner that, as the possibility which is not to be outstripped, it makes Dasein, as Being-with, have some understanding of the potentiality-for-Being of Others.” *Being and Time*, 309.

‘they,’ or as ‘one’ understands, and does not realize that it is responsible for its understanding, which is maintained only by its own ongoing interpretive activity.

The They is not *community* as such, but the foundation of intelligibility which is always first available, in which everything is understood in a certain way. Dasein is not an *individual* which stands out against the They, but the finite interpretive perspective which even *maintains* the intelligibility of the They, always first in a way which does not involve an understanding of itself as sustaining that understanding, through interpretation. But this perspective has always the capacity to turn its own interpretive way of Being back toward itself (interpret its interpreting), and in ‘anxiety’ discover that it ‘is’ its interpreting, and project authentically.

5. Two conceptions of the call of conscience, intelligibility, goodness, badness, and evil

Regarding the call of conscience, Heidegger writes:

Because Dasein is *lost* in the ‘they,’ it must first *find* itself. In order to find *itself* at all, it must be ‘shown’ to itself in its possible authenticity. In terms of its *possibility*, Dasein *is* already a potentiality-for-Being-its-Self, but it needs to have this potentiality attested. In the following Interpretation we shall claim that this potentiality is attested by that which, in Dasein’s everyday interpretation of itself, is familiar to us as the ‘*voice of conscience*.’¹²⁴

Should we take this to mean that, for Heidegger, the call of conscience is only the individualizing call of Dasein to assert its *individuality*? There is a sense in which this is precisely the case, but we err if we identify Dasein with the individual *person*. Toward what does conscience call Dasein? What does the call *say*?

¹²⁴ *Being and Time*, 313.

“Only in keeping silent does the conscience call; that is to say, the call comes from the soundlessness of uncanniness, and the Dasein which it summons is called back into the stillness of itself.”¹²⁵ The ‘reticence’ of the call, we can identify as its *unintelligibility*. Its peculiar significance is that it is a ‘call’ which has nothing to ‘say.’ This is because it is a call toward what Dasein ‘is,’ and that is *as it understands itself*, as it ‘cares.’ We can understand the primordial call as this ‘caring’ itself, as *understanding*, calling itself to itself, such that it has no *determinate* form. The call uncovers *anxiety*, which is Dasein’s encounter with itself as an interpreting Being, thrown into some understanding, ‘beneath’ which there is nothing but which is yet maintained only as it is continuously interpreted by Dasein. That which calls otherwise always already *speaks*, in the form of a particular understanding and interpretation; in calling, it speaks only to itself. Yet, in so doing, it reveals itself to itself: Dasein, in anxiety, encounters itself as a being that ‘is’ always as it understands itself, and beings, interpretatively.

In the first chapter of his *Ethics*, Watsuji presents the following contrary and particularly enigmatic formulation: “Conscience is the call of the original totality; freedom is none other than the negativity itself of the movement of negation; and good and evil consist respectively in going back into and going against the direction of this movement.”¹²⁶ Consider here that Watsuji does not identify conscience with a call toward the movement which *affirms* community. If the call is ‘the original totality’ which includes the movements of both affirming community and asserting individuality, then toward *what* does conscience call? And what do ‘good’ and ‘evil,’ as “going back into” and “going against” the direction of the movement of negation, signify?

The ‘movement of negation’ is a movement of primordial sociality, which Watsuji identifies as the foundation of ethics and human Being generally: it is an expression of

¹²⁵ *Being and Time*, 343.

¹²⁶ *Ethics in Japan*, 23.

‘emptiness,’ of the absence of self-subsistence which is the ‘essence’ of both individuality and community, each of which exists only in relation to the other. If “going back into” this movement means *just as much* the affirmation of community as it does the assertion of individuality, over against and as the negation of community, then what Watsuji is here identifying as ‘evil’ is not simply that which opposes the values of the community, and the call of conscience speaks not merely from communal values.

We should consider what this voice of the community *does* say, when it speaks most loudly:

In revolting against one community or another, one revolts against one’s own foundation. As an act, the movement of this rebellion is toward the destruction of community as well as being a revolt against one’s own foundation. This is why this movement is not approved of by the other participants in the community, any more than it is approved by one’s own innermost essence.¹²⁷

Watsuji acknowledges that the foundation of values is always the community, and yet that one can revolt against one’s foundation: that the values of the community can be challenged, opposed, and perhaps opened for revision. The movement of opposition is here identified as ‘badness:’ that against which the voice of the community speaks. This is the movement of *individuality*, which is embodied in practical acts which challenge the established values of the community, and ‘stands forth’ as a negation of the community.¹²⁸ One’s own foundation is that

¹²⁷ *Ethics in Japan*, 133.

¹²⁸ “Egoism is never, of necessity, accompanied by the establishment of ego consciousness. A primitive person who falls in love with another and in the process violates a taboo is likely to be an egoist, yet without thereby possessing the consciousness of ego. Through practical acts, the ego becomes isolated by revolting against the whole. Only on this basis does the consciousness of ego come to be established.” *Ethics in Japan*, 134 Consider, in relation to Watsuji’s notion of badness, Nietzsche’s comments regarding ‘evil:’ “The strongest and most evil spirits have so far advanced humanity the most: they have always rekindled the drowsing passions—all ordered society puts the passions to sleep; they have always reawakened the sense of comparison, of contradiction, of joy in the new, the daring, and the untried; the force men to meet opinion with opinion, model with model. For the most part by arms, by the overthrow of boundary stones, and by offense to the pieties, but also by new religions and moralities. The same ‘malice’ is to be found in every teacher and preacher of the ‘new . . . The new is always *the evil*, as that which

of sociality, understood always first in terms of the intelligibility provided by a particular community; therefore the revolt is ‘toward the destruction of community’ which is also a ‘revolt against one’s own foundation.’

Alternatively, Watsuji states: “obedience to gods or to the authority of the whole, that is, the abandonment of individual independence, and the manifestation of love, devotion, or service have always been proclaimed as ‘goodness.’”¹²⁹ But Watsuji is not making a normative statement regarding the unity of the communal side of sociality. “Insofar as the movement of negation makes a dynamic advancement and does not come to a standstill, there is no badness that does not change into goodness.”¹³⁰ Goodness and badness are here identified as respective movements toward community and individuality, and interdependent.

The law that presides over a human being, however, consists in the movement of absolute negativity returning back to itself. A person who has turned his back on his own foundation in revolting against one community or another may then try to return to his own foundation by negating this revolt once more. This return may also be achieved by recognizing another community.¹³¹

Generally, then, the assertion of individuality is embedded in a dialectical movement which further negates itself in an affirmation of community. ‘Badness,’ in other words, is a movement which tends toward ‘goodness:’ the reaffirmation of community.

This can be rephrased: The devaluation of communal values is always a *revaluation*, which is a movement that expresses, as does any valuation, some reference to *others*. In the act

wants to conquer, to overthrow the old boundary stones and the old pieties; and only the old is the good.” *The Portable Nietzsche*, 93. What Nietzsche identifies as the ‘strongest and most evil spirits’ are those who are most capable of becoming *individualized*.

¹²⁹ *Ethics in Japan*, 134.

¹³⁰ *Ethics in Japan*, 135.

¹³¹ “The acts constituting this movement signify the sublimation of individuality, the realization of socio-ethical unity, or the return to one’s own foundation. Therefore it is approved not only by those who participate in the community but also by one’s own innermost essence. This is ‘goodness.’” *Ethics in Japan*, 134.

of negating the values of a particular community, we are engaged in a revaluation that references others—we redefine that which is ‘valuable,’ and in so doing move *already* toward a reformation of communal values.¹³² The act of negating community in the assertion of individuality is a revaluative movement, through which community can be re-formed.

For Watsuji, ‘conscience’ therefore is the call of primordial sociality which contains both ‘goodness’ and ‘badness,’ in calling toward the primordial ground of sociality, which contains the movements of both individuality and community.¹³³ Both ‘badness’ and ‘goodness’ exist, then, only in reference to communal values, and are ‘relative’ to each other. ‘Goodness’ is valued in relation to ‘badness,’ and badness can take place only as an opposition to the goodness of the community. Conscience calls either toward the affirmation of the already established values of the community, where, for instance one feels ‘guilty’ in having violated them; or, conscience speaks against the community, in the assertion of individuality against established values, and thereby into *revaluation*.¹³⁴

Watsuji makes a normative statement opposed to that which *halts* the movements of sociality. There is, on one hand, the possibility of halting the movement at the communal side of the community: “A human being loses his self-conscious essence when he stops the movement of independence and spends hours in idle slumber in a community, falling victim to ‘the

¹³² Sartre makes a relevant point in his acknowledgment that in any particular commitment, one asserts some particular valuation, and as there is no foundational source of the ‘purpose’ of human being, every individual act of commitment asserts, sets forth, some notion of the *purpose* of, or an ‘*image of ‘man.’* “The existentialist frankly states that man is in anguish. His meaning is as follows: When a man commits himself to anything, fully realising that he is not only choosing what he will be, but is thereby at the same time a legislator deciding for the whole of mankind – in such a moment a man cannot escape from the sense of complete and profound responsibility.” “Existentialism is a Humanism,” 50.

¹³³ “If badness or goodness is the movement of the negation of absolute negativity, then is the conclusion to be drawn that even badness becomes authorized by the Absolute by reason of its being grounded on it? Certainly so. The movement of absolute negativity, which is a return to itself, is impossible apart from the moment of self-rebellion.” *Ethics in Japan*, 134.

¹³⁴ “The phenomenon called *the voice of conscience* consists of our accusing ourselves of attitudes which we once assumed or of acts we once performed or in prohibiting ourselves from attitudes we might come to assume or acts we might well perform. It can also mean that we do not feel ashamed of ourselves or that we feel confident of the appropriateness of our acts or attitudes.” *Ethics in Japan*, 136.

crowd.”¹³⁵ On the other hand, there is possibility of halting the dialectic at the individual side of individuality: “there enters onto the scene the sublimation of independence . . . and hence individuals that look like atoms existing side by side.”¹³⁶ In either case, the dialectical interdependence of the two movements is *covered*, and one is reified and taken to be foundational. *Evil*, or radical evil, in contrast to ‘badness,’ is the ‘revolt’ of the movement of individuality isolated from the dialectical progression in which individuality would negate itself, in the (re)affirmation of community.

The normative significance of this is supported by Watsuji’s notion of what human Being is, as the dialectical betweenness of sociality. This is informed by his understanding of the (Buddhist) absolute—the absolute is ultimately ‘self-negating’ in its essence, such that the fulfillment of individuality is in its self-negation, and reaffirmation of community; and the fulfillment of community consists in its self-negation in the form of individuality.

6. *Revaluation and the being to whom conscience calls*

Aside from the movements of goodness and badness, which express the dialectic totality of sociality, there is that which *prevents* the movements—which *fixes*, and holds back the individual such that it cannot negate the community; or holds out the individual, such that it cannot return to or reform community. Watsuji writes:

A human being who comes to a standstill without being able to revolt is unable to return. That is to say, he who cannot stand badness cannot achieve goodness. A human being loses his self-conscious essence when he stops the movement of

¹³⁵ *Ethics in Japan*, 135.

¹³⁶ “Here is a standpoint that stops at the spearhead of individualization and looks back in such a way as to recognize meaning only in the movement of revolt. This standpoint consists in letting the movement of negation come to a stop in its primary negation.” *Ethics in Japan*, 135.

independence and spends hours in idle slumber in a community, falling victim to ‘the crowd.’¹³⁷

But what is this ‘holding back:’ how does the “human being . . . come to a standstill”? How does she *stop* “the movement of independence”? If the dialectic of sociality is the primordial ground of human being, then from what perspective can its movements be halted? If there is ‘no *one*’ who stands beyond, or outside of the dialectic—and if ‘individuality’ consists only in the negation of community, as one side of a movement which is ‘single’ (which, that is, leads always from the furthest extensions of individuality back toward community)—how can the individual herself *halt* that movement? On the other hand, how might even the community, which exists only insofar as it is ‘composed,’ and the negation of, individuals, halt this movement?

In *Being and Time*, *falling* refers to a primordial *mode of interpretation*. As was suggested above, falling, as inauthentic interpreting, means that Dasein does not project ‘as its own’ an interpretation (of Being, of itself, of others, *of its world*). The primordial call of conscience calls Dasein out of its falling, and into a confrontation with its own finitude, as a particular interpretive perspective, from which it thereby projects *as its own* an interpretation. It is only in projecting *from* an encounter with this finitude, that Dasein can take *responsibility* for its interpretation. Therefore, such interpretive authenticity is a condition for the possibility of authentic Being towards others, and *valuation* in the most general sense. In the total absence of such interpretive authenticity, Dasein, ontically: “stops the movement of independence and spends hours in idle slumber in a community, falling victim to ‘the crowd.’” One does *as ‘one’ does*. From such an orientation, *one cannot even yet* act ethically, as one has not taken

¹³⁷ *Ethics in Japan*, 135.

responsibility for, as one's own, the finite perspective from which both individuality and community are understood.

The movements of sociality are halted when the process of interpretation is halted. That which *fixes* the dialectic is that which prevents the ongoing interpretive process through which communities continuously reform. The subjects of the next chapter are reflexivity and this reformative process. If Watsuji's dialectic of sociality is understood in the appropriate relation to Heidegger's fundamental ontology, it becomes apparent that what he describes as the movements of individuality and community can be understood as a socially embodied interpretive process. The movement of 'individuality' is that in which communal values are reflexively opened for revaluation; and as soon as values take intelligible form, they have already become 'communal,' whether they are *embraced* by a particular community or not.

VI. Reflexivity, Social Self-Transformation, Opposition

1. Introduction

In the preceding chapters, I presented an interpretation of *Being of Time* which argues, on one hand, for an irreducible reflexivity as that from which phenomenology must explicitly begin, and, on the other hand, for a more robust social phenomenology than is developed by Heidegger, but which is compatible with the phenomenology of *Being and Time*. I have suggested that Heidegger's account of everyday ways of Being, in which a social phenomenology is indicated though significantly underdeveloped, and his account of authenticity—the 'existentialist' dimension of *Being and Time*—are more deeply related than might first be apparent.

Specifically, I have attempted to show the following: That which 'is' always *is as it is understood* in a particular way; a way which, in Heidegger's account, need not be first 'conceptual,' but could involve *using* something for something. The basis for this understanding, or the source of intelligibility, is the set of practices and the history of discourses which constitute a tradition. Additionally, everyday understanding (of the self, the body, of particular relationships with others, or of equipment which is used) always references a totality of social relations, such that social relatedness is the phenomenological foundation for everyday ways of Being. The foundation of understanding is therefore social in two ways: First, all intelligibility is founded upon a background of practices and discourses which constitute a historical tradition; second, everyday understanding always begins with social relatedness. Further, perhaps apparently contradictorily, understanding is possible only as it is maintained by particular, finite, interpretive perspectives. For this reason, the essential starting point of phenomenology is

necessarily this interpretive way of Being, which is Dasein. Authenticity means authentic interpreting—interpretation which follows from an understanding of the finitude of its own perspective, which is uncovered in *anxiety*. On one hand, all understanding is social, and intelligibility is founded upon tradition, and on the other hand, understanding is possible only for particular beings whose way of Being is interpretive.

Additionally, I have maintained that phenomenologically primordial ways of a being's Being should be understood as pervading everything that being does, in a recursive way. Foundational ontological structures are not, therefore, to be associated strictly with something like primordial *experiences*, but pervade ways of Being generally. Interpretation runs through all that Dasein does. Anxiety reveals to Dasein that which it always is (a finite interpreting being), and in such a way that it cannot ever get 'behind' it. I have suggested that the dialectic of sociality presented by Watsuji similarly pervades our way of Being, though it does not provide the appropriate foundational starting point for phenomenology, because it presupposes a particular interpretive position for which some understanding of sociality, of community and individuality, is possible. But I have maintained that this does not lead necessarily to 'individualistic' phenomenology, and that Heidegger's approach, though it begins with Dasein, should not be understood as such.

The significance of this is the following: on one hand, sociality is interpretive, and interpretation is always finally the interpretive projection of particular finite beings; and on the other hand, authenticity, which I have described as authentic interpretive projection (interpretation projected from an encounter with the finitude and particularity of its perspective), must be understood in relation to sociality. There is no understanding except that which is supported by the intelligibility given by a particular tradition, and so Dasein's authentic

interpretive projection can only be a revised interpretation of that which is first and only ever understood through the foundation of intelligibility, which is the tradition, alive in a social world. It is Dasein's encounter with *unintelligibility*, or 'nullity'—its own finitude (in anxiety)—which uncovers the possibility for foundational reinterpretation.

Because the form of understanding with which I am concerned is not limited to, or first, 'conceptual' understanding, but addresses also the phenomenological appearance of something as something in its usefulness, and includes social practices, 'reinterpretation' does not mean strictly conceptual revision (though it will involve this), but a revised *way of Being*. It means *acting* differently, and always in some relation to others.

Finally, though such interpretive projection is exemplified in particular moments of opposition, and in social revolution, it is even aside from this always ongoing. Watsuji identifies this, perhaps obliquely, with his dialectical account of sociality. The movement toward *individuality*, which he identifies as the only side of this primordial dialectic which was considered by Heidegger, can be redefined here as the movement of finite interpretive projection; and the movement toward *community* can be redefined as the existing understanding, founded upon tradition, which is *revised*. The preceding critique of Watsuji's methodology, as not taking interpretation as a starting point, has the following consequences: First, because Watsuji attempts to position dialectical sociality (ethics) *in place of* ontology, as foundational, he cannot give a proper account of the phenomenology of that dialectic, which therefore appears to be uncritically asserted; Second, because Watsuji does not give interpretation its appropriately foundational status, he does not offer an adequate account of the possibility of social revolution.

In the following, I will attempt to develop an account of the social significance of authentic interpretive projection as the basis for transformation. Watsuji's social dialectic will be

given an appropriate phenomenological account, by identifying the movements of individuality and community with interpretive movements. The aim here is to show that a sort of primordial reflexivity is foundational to society, to the development and revision of practices and discourses. I bounded my analysis in my introduction with the ‘riddle’ of reflexivity presented by Nietzsche, and Foucault’s structurally similar analytic of finitude. Here I hope to show that the dilemma represented by each, of self-reference, conceived as not only a problem for discursive rationality but of all understanding (i.e. including that which is involved in ‘background’ practices; in *using* something for something; in everyday ways of relating to others), has potentially revolutionary significance.

2. Reflexivity and objectification, absorption and interruption: Mead, Foucault, Benjamin

The account of Dasein which has been presented is intended to show that what is phenomenological foundational is the finite interpretive perspective from which phenomenological analysis is itself possible. *Anxiety* is the rock-bottom self-relation of Dasein, its ‘existential interpretation’ of itself, in which what is interpreted is nothing other than its interpretive way of Being. Authenticity has been described as interpretation projected from the null-disclosure of anxiety, as the phenomenological appearance of interpretation’s incapacity to interpret itself in its essence (i.e. for Dasein to ‘get behind its thrownness’). In the following, the self-relation of interpretation will be presented again as it appears in Foucault, and then developed in reference to Mead’s social pragmatism. The issue of the reflexivity of reason which has no transcendental ground, but identifies itself as arising from a history of practices, is presented clearly in Foucault’s genealogical accounts. The aim here is to further show how this

problem can be identified as both foundational and irresolvable, and yet productive. Mead's account of the 'me' and the 'I' describes the division which appears in the reflexivity of a mind that emerges from social relations. The division cannot be *resolved*, and yet it makes possible the self-transformation of the self, and of society.

Foucault states, regarding Nietzsche's genealogy: "Finally, descent attaches itself to the body. It inscribes itself in the nervous system, in temperament, in the digestive apparatus; it appears in faulty respiration, in improper diets, in the debilitated and prostrate bodies of those whose ancestors committed errors."¹³⁸ Genealogy involves a study of *descent* rather than origins, of contingencies rather than necessities, of accident rather than teleology; and these are examined, especially, as they are written upon the *body*. The history of the subject is the history of bodies observed, defined and manipulated: of disciplined bodies. We find, therefore in *Discipline and Punish* a genealogical account of the history of the subject, as constituted through 'details and accidents' written upon the body, the ground of the history of the subject.¹³⁹ The subject appears, in *Discipline and Punish*, as an object of observation, defined by normalizing practices. The individual is 'produced' by 'power.' "We must seek once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: It 'excludes,' it 'represses,' it 'censors,' . . . In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual

¹³⁸ "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 82.

¹³⁹ Foucault's analysis of punishment was rather specifically foreshadowed, or perhaps even directly inspired by Nietzsche: "Let us add a word here concerning the origin and aim of punishment—two problems which are, or should be, distinct. Unfortunately they are usually confounded. . . . We must distinguish two things: first, the relatively *enduring* aspect, the custom, the act, the 'drama,' a certain strict succession of procedures; on the other hand, the fluid aspect, the meaning, the aim, the expectation which attends the execution of these procedures. . . . Today it is impossible to say definitely *why* punishment is meted out: all concepts in which a whole process is comprehended semiotically, escape definition; only what has no history is definable." "Toward a Genealogy of Morals," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, 452-3.

and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.”¹⁴⁰ We ought to ask this narrator: Who are you, and to whom do you speak?

Mead examines ‘mind’ as arising through certain types of social exchanges which take place in a person’s development. In an analysis of the concept of the ‘gesture’ and the arising of mind, Mead writes: “The primitive situation is that of the social act which involves the interaction of different forms, which involves, therefore, the adjustment of the conduct of these different forms to each other, in carrying out the social process.”¹⁴¹ This process is constituted by gestures which are involved in a play of stimuli and responses. An action on the part of one ‘form’ is an occasion for a response by another, which in turn becomes an occasion for another action on the part of the first ‘form.’ It is through the play of gestures and responses, which take the form of *language*, that mind and self arise.

Consider the divided self identified by Mead:

[The real self is that] living act which never gets directly into reflective experience. It is only after the act has taken place that we can catch it in our memory and place it in terms of that which we have done. It is that “I” which we may be said to be continually trying to realize, and to realize through actual conduct itself. One does not ever get it fully before himself.¹⁴²

What one can get fully before oneself is, rather, only ever the “me.” The self can never become an object to itself except as its own history, in its memory. And yet, Mead realizes that the self is defined by its history; that it is a *process* embedded in relationships; and that it is constituted,

¹⁴⁰ *Discipline and Punish*, 194.

¹⁴¹ George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* ed. Charles W. Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 45.

¹⁴² *Mind, Self, and Society*, 203. Further: “It is because of the ‘I’ that we say that we are never fully aware of what we are, that we surprise ourselves by our own action. It is as we act that we are aware of ourselves. It is in memory that the ‘I’ is constantly present in experience.” *Ibid.*, 174. Similarly, Watsuji writes: “Reflection does not consist in the fact that we directly turn toward ourselves. Insofar as we remain a subject to the very end and refuse to become an object, it is impossible for us to turn toward ourselves. The subject objectifies itself so as to become the other and then returns to itself by reacting against the other.” *Ethics in Japan*, 36.

apparently without residue, through interactions with others. The “I” which acts, and which can reflect upon itself as “me,” does not consist of any substantial essence beyond the ‘mind’ that arises through interactions. The self is, in itself, unified, as a process which emerges from social interactions. But, for itself, it is always divided: It can never get itself fully ‘before’ itself. The self is always a ‘riddle’ to itself. It is constituted through social processes which it identifies in itself as “me,” as its history, as internalized norms, and as practices which shaped it in a distinct way. But it stands forth, *ekstatic*, and always ahead of itself, and as the acting “I” examines itself as an object.¹⁴³ Regarding pain, Mead writes: “If we can get, so to speak, outside of the thing, dissociating it from the eye that is regarding it, we may find that it has lost a great deal of its unendurable character. The unendurableness of pain is a reaction against it.”¹⁴⁴

Foucault’s ‘lighthearted’ genealogical takes this approach toward historical descent: In *Discipline and Punish* we confront the history of the modern subject, which could only be regarded as a tragedy if Foucault had not dissolved all of its narrative power. He presents that history with an eye to details, accidents, and contingencies, rather than narrative continuity. “Genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times.”¹⁴⁵ The story of the modern subject has not even the narrative coherence to be a tragedy. Foucault attempts to examine it with a relentless *objectivity* which deconstructs *post facto* narrative impositions of progress and development, and finds, rather, particular, parochial accidents and contingencies. This approach to genealogy, at the same time that it constitutes a

¹⁴³ “How can an individual get outside of himself (experientially) in such a way as to become an object to himself? This is the essential psychological problem of selfhood or of self-consciousness; and its solution is to be found by referring to the process of social conduct or activity in which the given person or individual is implicated.” *Mind, Self, and Society*, 138.

¹⁴⁴ *Mind, Self, and Society*, 169.

¹⁴⁵ “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 76.

certain history, *constitutes the genealogist*; it represents a certain attitude. It is the attitude of the suffering self objectifying its own suffering, and so finding an attitude of light-heartedness through terrors.

Walter Benjamin's historical method represents this approach:

Method of this project: literary montage. I needn't *say* anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse—these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making us of them.¹⁴⁶

For Benjamin, the 'rags' and 'refuse' remained un-inventoried because categories of *inventory*, e.g. narratives of progress, represent historical 'continuity,' which is only ever the apparent continuity of domination.¹⁴⁷ History is to be *objectified*; and continuity should be 'interrupted.' Benjamin compared his literary technique of montage to Brecht's theatre, which confronts the audience with interruptions, elisions, and narrative disruptions. It is intended to 'distance' its audience, to remain lighthearted, to encourage critical awareness, reflexivity rather than absorption. It is 'gestural' and fragmented: "[The] strict, frame-like, enclosed nature of each moment of an attitude which, after all, is as a whole in a state of living flux, is one of the basic dialectical characteristics of the gesture. This leads to an important conclusion: the more frequently we interrupt someone engaged in an action, the more gestures we obtain."¹⁴⁸

Regarding opposition, Mead writes: "A person may reach a point of going against the whole world about him; he may stand out by himself against it. But to do that he has to speak

¹⁴⁶ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 460.

¹⁴⁷ "It may be considered one of the methodological objectives of this work to demonstrate a historical materialism which has annihilated within itself the idea of progress. Just here, historical materialism has every reason to distinguish itself from bourgeois habits of thought." *The Arcades Project*, 460.

¹⁴⁸ Walter Benjamin, "What is Epic Theatre? [First version]" in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: NLB, 1973), 3.

with the voice of reason to himself. He has to comprehend the voices of the past and future.”¹⁴⁹

What is this voice of reason, and how does one speak it? It is ‘spoken’ precisely in the self-objectification of the self. To the extent that the “I” *reflects* upon the “me” it is distanced from its absorption. To the extent that the “me” is made an object, the “I” stands forth, ecstatically. This least of all means, of course, that the “I” *metaphysically* transcends the “me.” The “I” is, indeed, only the “me” as it *acts*; just as the “me” is only the “I” as it *has acted*. But in the objectifying reflexivity of the self, it loses its absorption in its past ways of acting. Indeed, then, ‘gestures’ appear *as such*; the self can identify itself with the history of its gestural exchanges, which lose their appearance of *inevitability*. The objectified self discovers its own history as significantly constituted by accidents and contingencies. Self-objectification distances it from its identification with the narratives in which it had been absorbed, and fragments its history. This is “the voice of reason.” It speaks against the suffering of identification with pain; of identification with ‘substantiality’ which was only an appearance sustained by *absorption*, and interrupted here in *reflexivity*.¹⁵⁰ The “voices of the past and future” represent history objectified, as particular voices and ongoing gestural exchanges, rather than narrative continuity.

The narrator of *Discipline and Punish* is precisely this historically constituted subject engaged in self-objectification. It is lighthearted, because it interrupts its absorbed identification with the appearance of substantiality; it is distanced from the pain which constituted it, because it is self-objectifying. The *absence* here, like that of the subject of “Las Meninas,” but framed by practices rather than representation, is the “riddle” that is guessed at. Foucault shows us that this guessing, reflexivity, which *interrupts*, also *reconstitutes*. As the genealogical method identifies

¹⁴⁹ *Mind, Self, and Society*, 168.

¹⁵⁰ “There is, of course, a current distinction between consciousness and self-consciousness: consciousness answering to certain experiences such as those of pain or pleasure, self-consciousness referring to a recognition or appearance of a self as an object.” *Mind, Self, and Society*, 169.

the constitution of the subject, it reconstitutes the subject. Genealogy is transformative, because it interrupts; it breaks absorption; it fragments narratives into the accidents of history, and it objectifies, such that identity is discovered in a historically situated field of *gestures*.

Just as genealogy identifies the practices which are its objects of examination as *clearings*, as cleared fields, which are not only *bounded* by ‘repressive’ power, but which become always also productive *spaces* upon which discourse, knowledge, and identities can play, *genealogy itself* clears a space. Genealogy confronts the subject with self-objectification, which breaks the spells of historical progress and narrative continuity. It presents the subject to itself, always *incompletely*, because the subject cannot get ‘before’ itself, and so it directs attention to precisely that remainder, the absence, which cannot be *captured*, which is not “me” but rather that which is always ahead of “me,” already acting. Genealogy presents to the self the riddle of its own reflexivity. It clears a reflexive space, bounded by the oscillations of *guessing* at that riddle, in which the “I” discovers the “me” and wonders at the elision between them. This space, opened by the riddle of reflexive subjectivity, creates the field of agency. It is a space in which the self can re-form its identity by breaking its absorption in its “me.” And it motivates the self-transformation of the social, which, objectified, is revealed as a field of performed gestures, which were conditioned by a history of accidents and contingent details. The appearance of ‘inevabilities’ is shattered. The field of the social is *flattened*, the illusion of ‘depth’ broken by objectification. The performativity, and therefore mutability, of practices and identity, displace substantiality. The field is opened by *ekstasis*, in which it is discovered that the ground from which one steps forth was never even first substantial, but indeed *only ekstasis* covered by absorption in narratives and the appearance of continuity.

“The ‘I’ is the response of the individual to the attitude of the community as this appears in his own experience. His response to that organized attitude in turn changes it.”¹⁵¹ As the ‘organized attitude,’ the “me,” changes, so also changes the responses of the individual to others. Reflexivity is always a social act, because it changes the self in its relations. Genealogy expands the space of this reflexivity. It clears a field of reflexivity. It does not simply extend agency, such that values can be revalued, or identities reformed: fixity is challenged altogether, such that it no longer appears as any sort of beginning or end. We can thus identify the mutability of practices and norms, as not only opening them to *particular* transformations, but as always indicating their *essential* fluidity. The deep reflexivity which arises through genealogical understanding can open a social space for greater fluidity of practices and norms generally.

Judith Butler asks:

How might we encounter the difference that calls our grids of intelligibility into question without trying to foreclose the challenge that the difference delivers? What might it mean to learn to live in the anxiety of that challenge, to feel the surety of one’s epistemological and ontological anchor go, but to be willing, in the name of the human, to allow the human to become something other than what it is traditionally assumed to be? ¹⁵²

It means guessing at Nietzsche’s riddle. It means being in the space of reflexivity opened by the dilemma of the self’s self-relation. It means valuing revaluation, as an ongoing process. Butler’s answer: “This means that we must learn to live and to embrace the destruction and rearticulation of the human in the name of a more capacious, and, finally, less violent world.”¹⁵³ The self confronted by the dilemma of its self-relation, posed by an encounter with its genealogy, finds in its groundlessness a new space of freedom: To transform itself, it need not first find some

¹⁵¹ *Mind, Self, and Society*, 196.

¹⁵² Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 35.

¹⁵³ *Undoing Gender*, 35.

substantial essence from which it can attain leverage over that which is mutable. There is no essence to be found, and yet through the irreducible riddle of its reflexivity, the self can make an object of itself, and it can act differently. And by realizing this, the self can “encounter the difference that calls our grids of intelligibility into question without trying to foreclose the challenge that the difference delivers.” There is no essence to be challenged by that difference, and our grids of intelligibility are always continuously re-formed.

There an irony to this, that in discovering that it is constituted by an arbitrary history of practices and discourses motivated by power and influenced by accidents, the subject finds a new space of agency. But, this is precisely because the subject is otherwise identified with its “me,” with certain discourses of knowledge and practices from which it is constituted, and absorbed in historical narratives. When this absorption is broken, although no-thing (no substantiality) of the subject remains apparent, the limits of reflexivity have been correspondingly expanded. The self finds that essences it took to be immutable are rather only conventions, perhaps sustained by ‘performativity,’ and are therefore fluid through and through. It has no position ‘outside’ of this, but it can become an ‘object’ to itself, and ‘objectify’ its history. Such reflexivity produces a space in which ‘the human’ can be ‘destroyed’ and ‘rearticulated,’ such that it is continuously freed from the violence of normalization.

Interruption and *absorption* correspond with the phenomenology of interpretation and understanding. The moment of interruption, in which the “I” reflects upon the “me,” represented by the objectification of the historically-constituted ‘subject’ in its genealogical self-analysis, is the movement of reinterpretation. What Heidegger identifies as *falling*, absorption in the They, is an *interpretive mode* engaged in covering its interpretive activity. It is understanding which obscures the interpreting through which it is sustained. And the alternative identified by

Heidegger, *authenticity*, corresponds with the interpretive movement, which is an *interruption*. Anxiety interrupts, or *is* interruption. But, in interrupting, it reshapes the absorption which is interrupted.

Benjamin focuses particularly on the moment of interruption, as he identifies absorption, *continuity*, with the continuity of a history of continuous tragedy. Benjamin expresses his intent to “annihilate Heidegger” in a letter about a reading group that he and Brecht planned to form; in another letter, Benjamin describes the *shock* of the encounter between himself and Heidegger, in relation to their “very different ways of looking at history.”¹⁵⁴ David S. Ferris suggests that what is to be *annihilated* in the ‘shock’ of their encounter is the historical *continuity* which Heidegger’s phenomenological ‘essences’ represent.¹⁵⁵ Ferris writes, further:

Because of the difficulty posed by this attempt to distinguish a moment of discontinuity within the continuity of history (a difficulty that is at the basis of the attempt to distinguish historicity from history), one is forced to speak about this moment as if it were a flash, a shock, even an *entrechoc*, whose condition of existence is its immediate decay or disintegration. This is why Benjamin’s understanding of the historical is useless to political organization: such an understanding is the testimony of an event, that is, of a dialectical image, that must last long enough to be critical, but be cut off from what it criticizes, lest the dialectical complicity of its ground be revealed.¹⁵⁶

The issue is that interruption, the pure moment of reinterpretation, cannot stand alone without a relation to absorption, to the understanding of a tradition, as historically developed and expressed

¹⁵⁴ Walter Benjamin, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, eds. Gershom Scholem and Theodore W. Adorno, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 365. Benjamin writes: “An introduction that discusses epistemology is necessary—especially for this book, a discussion of the theory of historical knowledge. This is where I will find Heidegger, and I expect sparks will fly from the shock of the confrontation between our two very different ways of looking at history.” *Ibid.*, 359-360.

¹⁵⁵ “Heidegger comes to represent a history as continuous as that of the aura, which by the time of the Baudelaire essay no longer undergoes mere decay, but suffers the shattering that Benjamin sought to do to Heidegger: ‘the shattering of the aura in the experience of shock.’” David Ferris, “Aura, Resistance, and the Event of History,” in *Walter Benjamin: Theoretical Questions*, ed. David Ferris (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 23.

¹⁵⁶ “Aura, Resistance, and the Event of History,” 24.

in practices and discourse. The moment of interruption stands only against the background of absorption, of that which is interrupted; and interruption always involves a revision of the background understanding. But, further, *interruption*, as the *standing out* of something against a background, or in the appearance of something in its *opacity*, is that by which the background is formed, and is that which sustains it. Understanding is constituted by a history of the interpretive revisions of understanding.

Mead's analysis of the self-reference of the self in the relation between the "I" and the "me" examines how the self can reform itself through self-objectification: Mead addresses the relationship of the self to itself in reflexivity, but does not address the self's confrontation *with its self-relation*, and the 'nullity' or elision which this latter confrontation reveals. Anxiety is the self's confrontation with its incapacity to get itself fully before itself, or to 'get behind' itself (its thrownness). Mead examines the division of the self (into the 'I' and the 'me'), but not the self's encounter *with this division*, which it cannot overcome, in anxiety. The phenomenological appearance of the division itself is not examined. The division, uncovered in 'existential interpretation,' is the primordial interpretation of interpretation, which appears as anxiety, and is 'unintelligible.'

It is always in relation to this unintelligibility, which is 'disclosed' in the fundamental null-relation of the self to itself, that revised interpretation is possible. In complete *dependence* upon the tradition—with no deeper primordial source of intelligibility—the 'self' could reinterpret itself and its world, as made intelligible through its own tradition, only in relation to *some other tradition*, and there could be nothing besides or beyond this. The 'field of agency' described here as produced in the oscillations between the "I" and the "me" is precisely the 'nothing,' the null-disclosure, of anxiety. This is primordial self-reference, and reveals Dasein to

itself as an interpretive perspective from which reinterpretation can be projected. There is, beyond the capacity of the self to make an object of itself, the capacity of the self to recognize this capacity. Such recognition is that from which reinterpretation which realizes the provisionality of interpretive projections is possible.

Anxiety, as it has been presented here, has a phenomenological appearance which is not bound to any particular theoretical orientation. As it is the appearance of primordial reflexivity, it is a possibility wherever there is Dasein. Anxiety, in the formal sense which it has been given (as the primordial interpretation of interpretation), is a potentiality of all interpretation, by which interpretation reveals itself to itself. Various 'levels' of interpretive activity can therefore be referred to anxiety, as not only the ontical anxiety of a particular being, but as the *ontological possibility* of anxiety which runs through all interpretation.

The self-transformation of communities which is supported by the possibility of reinterpretive projections is, further, described by Watsuji in his dialectic of community-individuality, which has been identified here as founded upon the interpretive ontological structures of Dasein. The individual, for Watsuji, is that which stands forth from community, in challenging its values, or posing over against it some reinterpretation of communal fore-understanding. The movement of individuality is opposed to the community in the unintelligibility of its appearance to the community.

3. Death and the space of death: healing, and folk mythology as critique

Heidegger identifies death as that in the face of which Dasein encounters anxiety. Death, as Dasein's 'ownmost potentiality,' is that which authentic Dasein 'anticipates.' It reveals the

finitude of the interpretive perspective from which Being is understood, and so, in anxiety, the finite aspect of Being itself appears. But ‘anxiety’ can appear also as pervading a social *space*: as not strictly unintelligibility encountered by a particular being in its being-towards-death, but in the imposition of unintelligibility, as, for instance and especially, *terror*. There is, in this case a ‘call’ not necessarily toward another mode of intelligibility, but toward uncovering the order of oppression in its *unintelligibility*, in, for instance, “the way that healing can mobilize terror in order to subvert it, not through heavenly catharses but through the tripping up of power in its own disorderliness.”¹⁵⁷

Michael Taussig, in his history and ethnography of the Putumayo region of Colombia, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, writes that the ‘space of death’ is “preeminently a space of transformation: through the experience of coming close to death there can come not only a growth of self-consciousness but also fragmentation, then loss of self conforming to authority.”¹⁵⁸

Taussig, who takes inspiration from Walter Benjamin, examines folk mythology and ritual in the Putumayo as responses to colonial order. He describes the local practices of marginalized communities which manifested in response to colonialism, to terror imposed by military dictatorships, and to exploitative capitalist economic practices, as critical revaluations and as reconfigurations of the historical. Taussig’s description of the ‘space of death’ refers not strictly to the anxiety of a particular being’s confrontation with being towards death; rather, it

¹⁵⁷ Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987). xiii.

¹⁵⁸ *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 7. “The colonized space of death has a colonizing function, maintaining the hegemony or cultural stability of norms and desires that facilitate the way the rulers rule the rules in the land of the living. Yet the space of death is notoriously conflict-ridden and contradictory; a privileged domain of metamorphosis, the space par excellence for uncertainty and terror to stun permanently, yet also revive and empower with new life. In Western tradition we are well aware of how death and life, evil and salvation, are therein conflated. So in northwest Amazonian indigenous tradition the space of death is a privileged zone of transformation and metamorphosis.” *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 374.

refers also to the ‘spaces’ in which communities are submitted continuously to extreme oppression, to terror and the persisting specter of torture and death. And, Taussig maintains, responses of such communities expressed in mythology and in ritual practices are not sublimations or dissociations from the material ground of oppression, but involve critical reinterpretations, which may, indeed, in their ‘surrealism’ and apparent disorderliness, respond more *directly* to the order of the oppression to which they are responses than could other modes of discourse.¹⁵⁹

There are a few reasons why Taussig’s account is interesting in the context of the present discussion: First, he examines the ‘*space of death*,’ of terror and oppression, as inspiring reinterpretive (critical) responses on the part of the oppressed (this is compellingly analogous to the relation between being towards death and reinterpretive projection, but considers death as a social space); second, these responses have a form of not only theoretical critique, but of idiosyncratic critical praxis. Following an account of ‘A Case of Fortune and Misfortune,’ a story of folk healing, which demonstrates the indigenous rearticulation and reappropriation of colonialist concepts such as ‘wildness,’ and institutions such as economic class hierarchy, Taussig writes:

[The] magic and religious faith involved in this are neither mystical nor pragmatic, and certainly not blind adherence to blinding doctrine. Instead, they constitute an imageric epistemology splicing certainty with doubt, and despair with hope, in which dreaming—in this case of poor country people—reworks the significance of imagery

¹⁵⁹ “For me the problem of interpretation grew every larger until I realized that this problem of interpretation is decisive for terror, not only making effective counterdiscourse so difficult but also making the terribleness of death squads, disappearances, and torture all the more effective in crippling of people’s capacity to resist. The problem of interpretation turned out to be an essential component of what had to be interpreted, just as resistance was necessary for control. Deeply dependent on sense and interpretation, terror nourished itself by destroying sense.” *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 128.

that ruling class institutions such as the Church have appropriated for the task of colonizing utopian fantasies.¹⁶⁰

That ‘imageric epistemology’ of folk healing ritual:

Montage: alterations, cracks, displacements, and swerves all evening long—the sudden interruptions, always interruptions to what at first appears the order of ritual and then later on takes on little more than an excuse of order, and then dissolves in a battering of wave after wave of interruptedness into illusory order, mocked order, colonial order in the looking glass.¹⁶¹

Taussig’s account addresses the oppositional power of the oppressed to appropriate and to mock the practices and discourses of their oppressors, often through rearticulations of myth and ritual praxis. The opposition of the communities that Taussig discusses takes the form of revised practices which reinterpret the social conditions from which they emerge. ‘Implicit’ myths, such as the ‘wild’ Indian, are objectified through practices which rearticulate and appropriate such myths, such that their power can be disrupted.

In the folk myths and rituals examined by Taussig, the narrative order of established colonial power is interrupted. In response to the ‘space of death,’ to the ‘social anxiety’ of terror and oppression, the intelligibility of oppressive practices to themselves, their narrative logic and the reality which they maintain, is challenged. The ‘imageric epistemology’ of folk myth challenges the intelligibility of established power by disrupting its narrative power. In a series of contradictory folk stories of ‘virginal historiography,’ in which popular icons of the Virgin Mary are told to have been received first by the Indians, and then stolen by the Church; or brought by the Church and stolen by Indians; or as exchanged repeatedly back-and-forth, there is represented:

¹⁶⁰ *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 165.

¹⁶¹ *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 441.

the joke-work and semiotic play in the dreaming of popular iconography. I am thinking here not merely of the strumming of the string of defeat and salvation that creates multiplicity of versions concerning the Virgin, this juggling with the semiotic of the miracle. I am also thinking of the way that the heavy tone and mystical authority of the official voice of the past is brought down to earth and familiarized with gentle and sometimes saucy wit. The evidence indicates that the profusion of variation that knits and unknits a diverse reality is the work of play that deflates systematicity—a stratagem of *paroles* teasing, with all their multiplicity and double epistemologies, the pretensions of a master *language* not merely manifested but claimed by ruling classes.¹⁶²

Taussig sees the legitimizing myths of oppression as always open to revision and rearticulation by those whose oppression is legitimized. In the imageric, ‘surrealist,’ folk rearticulations of the sober myths of the Church, or of capitalism, those myths are rearranged through wit and humor. Folk mythology, in its pluralism, contradictions, and its rapid and ongoing revision, challenges the very notion of enduring narrative coherence.

There is, in Taussig’s account, a representation of a rapid play between understanding and interpretation. It is inspired, likely, because the *understanding* which is continuously reinterpreted is so clearly represented in a history of oppressive practices and their corresponding legitimizing discourse. Where both oppressed and oppressors identify themselves through myths shared by both, without access to some further ground of intelligibility, there is space at least to *play* with the myths, to cut them with levity and rearrange them, and, especially, to show the interdependence of the images of the oppressed and the oppressors.¹⁶³

¹⁶² *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 202.

¹⁶³ “The healer’s power is incumbent upon a dialectical relationship with disease and misfortune. Evil empowers, and that is why a healer by necessity attends the ‘poor,’ meaning the economically poor and those struck by misfortune. It is possible to understand the relation between God and the devil in this way, for they can stand not merely in opposition, but as a mutually empowering synergism. Dante’s realization of paradise is only achieved by and after he has journeyed through the inferno and encountered Satan.” *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 159.

Taussig's account points to the irreducible reflexivity at the heart of sociality. It is not only through recourse to other sources of intelligibility—to external traditions or philosophical systems—that communities find oppositional leverage. Because the understanding of a society, its history of practices and discourse, is sustained only as it is continuously interpreted, and always in relation to the possibility for radical reinterpretation, there is at the ground of the social the possibility for its self re-formation. But, to examine this reformation, we have to consider not only the moment of interruption, but also the moment of absorption. Transformation is not effected through the one side of the interpretive projection—the projection *from*—but in the dual movement which includes the *return*, the revision of the understanding from which interpretation is projected.

4. 'Existential communitarian' revaluation

The phenomenology of Watsuji's dialectic of sociality is perhaps most apparent in the example of oppositional *communities*. In the formation of community around an oppressed identity for the sake of reevaluating the position of that identity within a field of power relationships, the assertion of individuality and the affirmation of community are brought together in a single movement. There is, on one hand, the background intelligibility (the tradition; the social field) in which an identity has first some determinate form. On the other hand, there is the ongoing (individual) interpretive activity which sustains the form of an identity. These two movements are mutually interdependent. They are represented phenomenologically by the structures of understanding and interpretation. As reinterpretive projections, opposition movements involve a communal re-formation of the ground of their own

intelligibility—their ‘*thrown*’ social identity, which is ‘taken up’ and interpretively *projected*.

Opposition to established structures of power involves a dual movement: of critique, of deconstruction; and of constitution: a *reconstitution* through opposition. The tension between these two moments constitutes an apparent dilemma. A coherent, shared identity is the basis for solidarity; and yet, that identity was first constructed *within* the oppressive structure, and so its perpetuation threatens the perpetuation also of the power structure which the community opposes. There are two ideal modes of discourse which correspond to these two concerns for, first, solidarity, and second, critique: The first identifies, or constructs, a subject of discourse, which it seeks to emancipate from oppressive structures; the second *deconstructs* its subject.¹⁶⁴ These tensions within emancipatory discourse are dialectically related: Opposition involves an ongoing process of deconstruction and reconstitution. Oppositional movements depend upon solidarity; and yet the basis for that solidarity—the shared identity which provides a foundation for the community—is renegotiated through the development of the movement.

An approach which supports the critical reconstitution involves the formation of what Ann Ferguson describes as *oppositional communities*.¹⁶⁵ Ferguson presents an ‘existential communitarian’ account of the revaluation of values.

Those of us who want to challenge the presuppositions and privileges involved in social roles that perpetuate social inequality are faced with a Nietzschean existential choice to rebuild ourselves and our virtues . . . This starting point acknowledges that human identities are importantly defined by our relation to the social order. Thus

¹⁶⁴ The first of these two modes of discourse can perhaps be associated roughly with ‘radical feminism.’ Chilla Bulbeck writes: “Put baldly, radical feminists see women treated as much the same everywhere, and it is badly. There is an independent oppression based on sex, and it occurs across time and tides.” *Re-Orienting Western Feminisms* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 7. The second mode can be associated, and perhaps this is less procrustean, with post-modern/post-structural feminism. Judith Butler’s deconstruction of sex is exemplary.

¹⁶⁵ “Such communities are attempts to partially realize some of our ideals in the present as we struggle to change the world in the future. They are spaces in which we can both empower and strengthen ourselves to struggle against those who wish to maintain the status quo outside of this space.” Ann Ferguson, “Feminist Communities and Moral Revolution,” in *Feminism and Community*, ed. Penny A. Weiss and Marilyn Friedman (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 372.

feminists, uppity women, and profeminist men cannot change ourselves individually by “pulling ourselves up by our own individual bootstraps.” Instead, we will require alternative supporting communal frameworks to deconstruct our internalized sexism, racism, heterosexism, and class attitudes.¹⁶⁶

The starting point, or the material with which these communities work, can be described in reference to Iris Young’s concept of ‘social groups:’ “A social group involves first of all an affinity with other persons by which they identify with one another, and by which other people identify them.”¹⁶⁷ Such a group is of course not yet an oppositional community: “Group affinity . . . has the character of what Heidegger calls ‘thrownness:’ one finds oneself as a member of a group, whose existence and relations one experiences as always already having been.”¹⁶⁸ An oppositional community could be defined as a social group which has ‘taken up’ its thrownness. It has organized around the identity into which it found itself *thrown*, for the purpose of *revaluating* that identity. It is in this process that a community collectively takes up its thrown foundation—the category or categories by which it first found itself defined—and re-forms them through revaluation. The community thereby becomes its own project—it *projects* itself by ‘taking up’ the categories into which it was first thrown and re-forming them.

Thrownness here means that one finds oneself in a ‘situation’ (with some *understanding*) which was not first *chosen*. One appears in a world which is marked by ‘facticity:’ Living at a certain time in history, within a particular tradition, speaking a certain language, belonging to a class. Categories of social identity are therefore always first marked by thrownness. But, in addition to thrownness, there is projection; one ‘has’ projects; or is a *projection from* the thrown background. And so, although as existing, one cannot ever get behind the background of

¹⁶⁶ “Feminist Communities and Moral Revolution,” 370.

¹⁶⁷ Iris Marion Young, “Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship,” in *Contemporary Political Philosophy: an Anthology* ed. Robert E. Goodin (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), 253.

¹⁶⁸ “Polity and Group Difference,” 253.

thrownness, one can ‘take up’ that thrown foundation as a project. This projecting contrasts with ‘falling.’ The latter describes the state in which one identifies oneself entirely with the identity in which one has been thrown, and has not ‘taken up’ this thrown identity and ‘projected’ oneself.

Hoagland’s account of lesbian feminist communities exemplifies Ferguson’s existential communitarianism: “From lesbian lives, I think we can find another way of approaching choice. For from our lives we realize that nothing that exists is ours (not even a subordinate position of service). What exists that is lesbian we’ve created out of nothing (with not even seed nor sperm as catalyst). What exists that is lesbian exists because we’ve made it happen.”¹⁶⁹ Ferguson summarizes Hoagland’s position as follows: “She argues that we can transform autonomy and community, which are values usually thought to oppose each other, into a synthesis of autonomy-in-community, or what she calls ‘autokoeneny.’”¹⁷⁰

But, although the valuing of community and autonomy may often be thought to be opposed, it is certainly not only in particular types of communities that community and autonomy are synthesized. Rather, they are always already bound together in such a way that either exists only in reference to the other. This is the significance of Watsuji’s dialectic, and, more generally, of the relationship between understanding and interpretation. Further, it is the point of Giddens’ account of *structuration*, as that from which ‘structure’ and ‘agency’ can be *abstracted*.¹⁷¹ The types of oppositional communities described by Hoagland and Ferguson do make apparent in a unique way the interdependence of agency and structure, or autonomy and community. They represent the movement of *thrown projection*, in which an understanding—here represented by the identity into which the members of a group find themselves thrown—is

¹⁶⁹ Sarah Lucia Hoagland “Why Lesbian Ethics,” in *Adventures in Lesbian Philosophy* ed. Claudia Card (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1994), 202.

¹⁷⁰ “Feminist Communities and Moral Revolution,” 370.

¹⁷¹ “Structure and Agency,” in *Contemporary Sociological Theory* ed. Craig Calhoun et al (Malden, Ma: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 232-244.

revised through reinterpretation. The group takes up its identity and re-forms it: it embraces both ‘interruption’ and ‘absorption.’

Watsuji writes: “Conscience is the call of the original totality.”¹⁷² The ‘original totality’ is not the thrown self, but the social dialectic of community-individual:

Totality is said to arise in the negation of individuality, but it is not able to appear through the negation of one individual alone. Individuals are the many, and the totality as community existence arises at the point where there are many individuals become one by forsaking their individuality. But in any totality whatsoever, individuality is not extinguished without residue. As soon as an individual is negated, it negates the totality so as to become an individual once more. In this way, it repeats the movement of negation. Totality subsists only in this movement.¹⁷³

This call of the conscience is not even a call for the negation of the individual for the sake of the community. It is, rather, a call to the ‘totality’ which involves an ongoing dialectical process in which the individual asserts herself against the community and then through this assertion is lead back to an affirmation of community.

The social dialectic can be described here as a reconstitution of community through ‘a project’ in which the moment of ‘individuality’ is directed back at the reconstitution, the affirmation of, community. Oppositional communities involve the two moments of challenging and reconstituting their own foundation: the category which serves as both the basis for their solidarity and the subject of their revaluative process. Watsuji’s call of conscience is a call toward not the community as it *already* is, but a call toward ‘the totality,’ which can be identified with the dialectic of communal re-formation. The call of conscience is the call toward the

¹⁷² *Ethics in Japan*, 23.

¹⁷³ *Ethics in Japan*, 23.

ongoing revaluative process which constitutes the totality, containing the two moments of 'deconstruction' and 'reconstitution.'

Conclusion: Interpretation and Sociality

My central aim here has been to develop an account of social reflexivity, and to indicate how this provides a space for social transformation. By describing the fundamental relation between phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ontology, I have argued that what ‘is’ for us is *as* it appears interpretively, in relation to an existing context of intelligibility—a historical tradition, expressed in a particular social field. As this background of intelligibility (‘Being’) is produced and sustained, as *understanding*, only through *ongoing interpretation*, it is not only always open for revision, but is always already a process of being-revised. Interpretation is always interpretation from a particular perspective, and this particularity is revealed to itself (Dasein) in *anxiety*, which discloses finitude (as the ‘null’ disclosure of interpretation’s self-interpretation). By the formal definition which I have given it here, anxiety, as exemplified by that which arises in the face of *death* (finitude), is an interpretive movement. Anxiety does not take one outside of, or *beyond* a tradition, but reveals the particularity and contingency of understanding to itself, by indicating that understanding is sustained always interpretively. The hermeneutic significance of the notion of anxiety is that it reveals interpretative activity to itself, not by discovering some position *beyond* interpretation, but in the fundamental *self-reference* of interpretation. But as interpretation is a projection from an understanding, which is always socially produced and contextualized, authenticity is social, and indicates that which (interpretation) supports the possibility of social transformation.

There are three distinguishable aspects of my aim in this project:

First, in chapters one through three, I presented an interpretation of Heidegger's *Being and Time* which shows a thematic unity between the two divisions of the text (the first, with its focus on everyday ways of being; and the second, which develops an account of 'authenticity,' as a distinct way of Being). As I have shown, it is by recognizing the fundamental relation between phenomenology and hermeneutics, and identifying authenticity as interpretive, that we discover a depth to the thematic unity of *Being and Time* which has perhaps been often overlooked. My analysis of *Being and Time*, which constitutes the first half of this work, establishes the ontological foundation for the second half.

Second, in reference to Watsuji's phenomenological study, *Ethics in Japan*—which itself responded to *Being and Time*—I have developed, in chapter four, an account of social phenomenology with the aim of showing that sociality is, in everyday ways of being, phenomenologically primordial (which means that interpretation is always initially socially oriented). To this end, I have presented several case studies that examine phenomena which are perhaps most likely to be identified as essentially private, and as indicative of the phenomenological primordially of individual subjectivity. I have argued that the *body*, *sensations* in general, and *emotion*, are not, in everyday ways of being, 'experienced' as personal, private phenomena, but are *always already* public, except for certain unusual and *privative* modes (e.g. for a surgeon who examines a body as a 'physiological thing' for the sake of performing an operation). As I suggest, Heidegger does, in *Being and Time*, gesture toward the possibility for such a social phenomenology, but does not there develop it. Therefore, my account of social phenomenology can be described as an extension of Heidegger's thought into a domain which he, as Watsuji rightly acknowledges, neglects. However, as I discuss in chapter

five, Watsuji's attempt to position ethics as *first philosophy* leaps over Heidegger's hermeneutic ontology, which Watsuji's own account must be understood in relation to, as its foundation.

Third, in chapter six, I return explicitly to the theoretical frame which, in my introduction, I first established: the issues of reflexivity, genealogy, and social transformation in Nietzsche and Foucault; further, I present the relation of my account of social reflexivity to Mead's social pragmatist account of reflexivity and the notion of *interruption* in Benjamin's thought; and, finally, I show how my theory of social reflexivity can provide a frame for an analysis of the examples of: folk mythology as critique (which demonstrates, especially, the 'interruptive' power of social reflexivity) and oppositional communities (which express the dialectical relationship between 'interruption' and 'absorption,' or interpretation and understanding, and agency and structure).

My analysis of social reflexivity is intended to show how we can take sociality as a starting point, and find there *irreducible* agency, as a source of novelty and social transformation generally, and as a potential ground of opposition to normalizing discourse and practices and oppressive social institutions. I have attempted to accomplish this by showing that what has been identified as the 'existentialist' dimension of Heidegger's thought, represented in division two of *Being and Time*, which describes the individuation of Dasein and its distancing from 'the They' through confrontation with 'nullity' (in its self-reference) and 'uncanniness' (involving, for one thing, the appearance that oneself and one's world could have been other than they are, and are permeated by apparent contingencies), and the 'communitarian' aspect of *Being and Time*, which identifies tradition as the basis of intelligibility (of Being, of the possibility of something appearing as something), should be identified as deeply interrelated.

On one hand, authenticity is dependent upon tradition as the existing basis of all intelligibility. As I have maintained, authentic Dasein is interpretation which has confronted its own particularity; this is particularity within some historical tradition, which provides always already an understanding of *what is*. The concept of authentic Dasein can be applied to any interpretive process which projects from an encounter with its own particularity. As this interpretive particularity is nothing other than the particularity of a position within a tradition and social field, it is only on the basis of an existing understanding that authentic interpretation is possible. What distinguishes authentic interpretation is not that it has *freed* itself somehow from the general understanding *from which it projects*, but that it has projected from an understanding of the particularity of its position within a tradition and social field. And it is only this particularity, the specificity of an interpretive position, which supports the potential for novelty and change through authentic interpretation.

On the other hand, tradition, or background understanding, is dependent upon ongoing interpretation, of which authenticity is the fundamental form. There is no understanding except that which is brought into play in particular interpretive acts. The background understanding of a tradition subsists in no abstractable space, or ethereal realm, but in the concrete practices and specific discursive acts which constitute a social field; and the stability of these practices, as social *structure*, is sustained only through the *agency* of actors who constitute a society. The ontological background for the interdependency of social structure and agency is the hermeneutical relation between understanding and interpretation. Every social action is an interpretive act projected from an understanding, and opens that background understanding to revision. Social structure is nothing other than the present face of a history of agency; understanding is the immediate form of a history of interpretive acts. The tradition, from which

interpretation is projected, and which is opened for revision in the projection, is nothing other than a history of such acts of interpretive revision. Authenticity, as ‘existential interpretation’—interpretation which identifies and projects from its own interpretive particularity—reveals that which is at the heart of that which it projects from (interpretation), and which is revised in its own projection (understanding).

To show the depth of the significance of this interpretive ontology, and its relation to social transformation, I extended Heidegger’s phenomenology into a robust social phenomenology. Through an examination of Watsuji’s thought I developed an account of the phenomenological primordially of social ‘betweenness.’ There are two related ways that interpretation and understanding—i.e. *Being*—are/is social: First, a social field, as the immediate form of a tradition, is the basis of intelligibility (the possibility of identifying something as something at all); Second, in everyday ways of Being, interpretation always already relates to the others with whom one shares a social space. Heidegger thoroughly develops an account of this *first* significance of sociality to Being, in his analysis of Being as phenomenological intelligibility which is founded upon a historical tradition. But the *second* relation between sociality and Being, in the ways that beings in a world always first appear *as* something within social relations, is suggested but not systematically explored in *Being and Time*. This second significance of sociality, which concerns the phenomenology of what Heidegger identifies as the existential structure of ‘Being-with,’ and, for example, the publicness of equipment (and of all worldly beings), is closely examined by Watsuji, as betweenness.

But, while Watsuji’s social phenomenology does demonstrate that the beings within a world exist always as they are understood through social relations, and that the everyday self-

understanding of Dasein is an understanding of itself as it is in relation to others, Watsuji problematically neglects the foundational ontological significance of interpretation: He positions his dialectic of sociality beyond and as the basis for interpretation. Where, in Heidegger's account, the foundational ontological disclosure is that of *anxiety*, which reveals interpretation to itself and so indicates—in the contingent, 'uncanny' appearance of the world as revealed by anxiety—reinterpretive possibilities, in Watsuji's account the most foundational disclosure is that of interdependence, and this, especially, of that between the individual and the community. The issue is that Watsuji does not identify the fundamental relationship between hermeneutics and phenomenology: his phenomenological method is not sufficiently hermeneutical, and so terminates in something like a primordial *experience* (of interdependence), as the rock-bottom phenomenological fact of existence. Anxiety, as it has been defined here, brings together phenomenological and hermeneutical disclosure, in the *not-appearing* of interpretation to itself, in the face of its own finitude (in relation to death).

The methodological problem is that Watsuji's phenomenological account is already interpretive, but his account of the dialectic of sociality as the *foundation* for interpretation attempts to free itself from the interpretive position from which that 'foundation' can appear at all. My substantial concern with this aspect of Watsuji's approach is that it does not acknowledge the extent to which sociality is always open to transformation and continually transformed, as it is sustained by and expressed in interpretive acts. Therefore, Watsuji's social dialectic should be identified as interpretive through and through, and as *corresponding*, in its positing of the interrelated 'negative movements' of individuality and community, to interpretation and understanding. Watsuji's concern that Heidegger examines only the 'one side' of the dialectic of sociality is a consequence of his misidentification of Dasein as an ontical individual, rather than

an ontological interpretive process. Dasein sustains itself as interpretive projection from a foundation of understanding, and *is* therefore only *as* it projects *from its understanding*, which is always *social* understanding.

In this description of the relation between interpretation and sociality, my aim has been to show how the resources for social transformation are contained in the very heart of sociality. I bounded my account with a discussion of Nietzsche's riddle of reflexive reason, and Foucault's analytic of finitude, to indicate that the resources for social transformation will not be discovered by looking *beyond* sociality, to some substantial ground (e.g. the subsisting or transcending individual subject, or the biological) from which social relations emerge. The question which I have asked here is: How can we identify the possibility of social transformation without recourse to some external point of leverage by which opposition and social re-formation are supported?

My response is that sociality and interpretation are entirely bound together, and that, in the very *dilemma* of its self-reference (the impossibility of getting itself fully before itself), interpretation opens a space of potential transformation. This dilemma is anxiety, formally defined as Dasein's fundamental self-interpretation, or that which reveals itself to itself as an interpreting being. It is in the face of its particularity and finitude, of death, that Dasein identifies itself as having a specific interpretive position, which is founded upon a tradition (as Dasein is *thrown* into a world) and yet is responsible for itself. Anxiety describes the foundational self-reference of interpretation—that which reveals interpretation to itself. By identifying itself as interpretive, the otherwise potentially taken-for-granted background understanding from which Dasein projects is colored by 'uncanniness' and the appearance of contingency and, therefore, mutability. As it has been defined here, anxiety describes not, strictly, an '*experience of anxiety*,' but, generally, *interpretive self-referentiality*. There are, perhaps, varied degrees and types of

anxiety, within different interpretive domains, which share the strict formal definition of some foundational interpretive self-reference, and support the possibility of reinterpretation within whatever domain they appear. The importance of the concept of anxiety is that it identifies a resource for interpretive transformation within a social domain, without recourse to an *external* point of reference.

Such interpretive self-reference *objectifies* and distances the act of interpreting from that which it otherwise takes for granted as an understanding which may appear immutable.

Objectification has the phenomenological character of *uncanniness*: that which appears is permeated with the character of contingency; and it is apparent that what is could be otherwise. This is what Mead's "I" experiences in its self-objectifying examination of itself as "me;" and it is the appearance of history to the genealogist, who examines historical narratives with an eye toward the influence of the accidental and the contingent. This is the gaze that *interrupts*, by indicating that what may have been taken as coherent historical narrative, or as the orderly self-understanding of a tradition or society, is constituted by accidents and contingencies which have been cobbled together, and paved over by an averaging of inconsistencies. But historical narratives and social understanding are the basis of the interpretive movement which identifies the *thrownness* of its own position. Interruption is possible only in relation to the interpretive self-disclosure of interpretation projected *from* an understanding, which is that into which interpretation is first 'absorbed,' and which is revised in the 'interruptive' movement of reinterpretive projection.

The self-objectification of the "I," as "me," reveals to itself that there is something always outstanding—it discloses the *ek-static* interpretive position which stands-out and cannot objectify itself. Self-objectification reveals to the self that there is always something that cannot

be objectified, because it is that which *objectifies*. Ontologically, this is to say that, in anxiety, Dasein discovers that it cannot get itself fully before itself, or ‘get behind its *thrownness*,’ and so discloses to itself—as *nullity*—that which cannot be disclosed, which is its own *projectedness*. But this, which cannot be disclosed (is *unintelligible*), *becomes* continuously only through the ongoing interpretive revision of understanding. Therefore, the interpretive movement, which has its foundational form in *authenticity* (interpretation projected from its self-interpretation in anxiety), is always oriented back toward an understanding, which is the *beginning and end* of interpretation. Authenticity has therefore always social significance, as it involves, in interpretive projecting, the revision of the social understanding from which it projects. Authenticity means taking up some way of Being in relation to the tradition from which and into which the authentic interpretation is projected, and in relation to the others in a social field in relation to whom one understands oneself.

In my discussions of Taussig’s analysis of folk mythology, and feminist oppositional communities, I show how the preceding frame provides a resource for understanding social opposition and transformation. Taussig’s ethnography of Colombian folk practices considers, in relation to Benjamin’s thought, how those subjected to a history of terror and oppression can find novel modes of objectifying and interrupting the discourses which legitimize their oppression. My analysis of feminist oppositional communities, and Ferguson’s model of existential communitarian opposition, indicates the dialectical complexity of the relation between individuality and community, or, generally, social understanding and reinterpretation, revealed by oppositional movements. Taussig’s account shows, especially, how the interruptive moment can emerge out of the social, as a mode of objectifying self-reference; my discussion of feminist

oppositional communities is intended to further show the relation of the interruptive moment to the absorptive, in relation to the issue of self-reconstituting oppositional communities.

The general aim of my analysis of opposition is to demonstrate how the ontological account developed here provides a frame for understanding social transformational process. This analysis is intended to be meta-ethical—to describe a normative space of transformation while leaving it significantly undefined, or without making particular normative claims about what happens within that space. Social reinterpetive processes have always normative *significance*, as they involve revised ways of understanding and acting in relation to others. But I have left open the question of how exactly we might understand these processes to be normatively oriented, and whether some abstract normative frame could be applied to evaluate such social transformational processes generally. Here I can at least gesture toward the sort of normative account which might be founded upon the meta-ethical analysis which has been developed. The following would provide a basic foundation:

First, as Being qua intelligibility is sustained by ‘individual’ interpretative positions (Dasein), which can uncover their own finitude and the absence of any finally determining, essential foundation from which they project (their groundlessness), one has this interpretive responsibility for ‘what’ and ‘how’ one is. Second, as interpretation is *projected from* an understanding, one is indebted first to that understanding, which is expressed in a social field, and discovered in one’s relations with others, as providing the social basis from which interpretation is projected, and to which it stands always in relation.

In relation to, on one hand, an existing *understanding*, one who acknowledges that understanding is social understanding—that Being is social, meaning that what ‘is,’ including

oneself, can *be* only as it is understood in relation to others—recognizes that one's own existence is dependent on the existence of others. On the other hand, in relation to *interpretation*, one who has identified one's own interpretive way of Being should thereby recognize that others share also this way of Being and capacity for reinterpretation. It is likely that interpretive openness, and the potential fluidity of understanding, depends significantly upon a community which recognizes its interpretive foundations, and thereby remains open to interpretive movements within itself.

What I have defined as interpretation, in the most fundamental sense, is the ontological foundation for agency. In Heidegger's hermeneutical ontology, action has always an interpretive structure within many possible levels of interpretation (e.g. from pre-ontological interpretation to ontological Interpretation). One who has identified one's own interpretive way of Being and thereby recognized that others share this way of Being, should realize also that the openness of this interpretive capacity in any individual is supported through mutually supportive recognition of interpretive openness. This is the ontological correspondent of the ontical idea that the agency of individuals within a society is deeply interdependent—that the extent of one's own agency is ultimately bound to the agency of the others with whom one shares a social space. One might, therefore, suppose that hermeneutical openness involves something like an imperative to support the interpretive openness of others. This would indicate that perhaps there is a contradiction of sorts involved in (authentic) ontological interpretive projections which do not serve to support the interpretive openness of others. The capacity for social reinterpretation could be said to demand that the reinterpret movement be supportive of further reinterpretation. Ontically, this would mean acting in a way that supports and extends the agency of others. If authenticity involves interpretation's uncovering of itself as ontological (in anxiety), along with a projected

reinterpretation, this reinterpetive projection might be identified as bound to that which anxiety discloses such that it ought to involve a way of Being which supports also the interpretive way of Being of others.

An implication of this interpretive openness would be a general tolerance toward, and even explicit support of, that which appears *unintelligible*. As reinterpretation involves, from the perspective of the understanding from which the interpretation is projected, an aspect of unintelligibility, a positive orientation toward interpretive openness must involve tolerance towards, perhaps even a special interest in, that which appears unintelligible. Therefore, ways of being within a social field which are not immediately or entirely intelligible in relation to the tradition which is the background understanding of that world—that is, ways of being which do not fit into existing categories of intelligibility—can be supported and appreciated as expressions of the interpretive vitality of the tradition, in its mutability, which is a condition for the possibility of the *existence* of the tradition.

A primary intention here has been to show that Heidegger's *Being and Time* presents the ontological foundation for a robust, and potentially radical, social philosophy. Heidegger's attention to the ontological significance of finitude, and the particularity of interpretive positions, is not only *not* simply 'individualistic,' in the sense of encouraging the isolation or solipsistic self-definition of the individual, but indeed provides a resource for social thought which looks toward possibilities of radical social transformation. The significance of this approach is that it provides an account of transformative potentialities which exist at the heart of sociality, without recourse to any position beyond sociality, but in the self-reference of interpretive positions within a social field. In other words, finitude and particularity, recognized as such, have

revolutionary potential, and we need look no further to find the basis for the possibility of social transformation.

Anxiety is nothing other than the appearance of finitude and particularity to itself. I have presented anxiety here as nothing other than a potential of all interpretation—the turning back of interpretation toward itself, and identifying itself *as* interpretation. In the absence of historical teleology, a rational order which is foundational to traditions, or recourse to some substantial position beyond or subsisting within traditions, the most foundational phenomenological disclosure is only the anxiety of interpretation's identification of itself, and the corresponding realization of the contingent aspect of that which happens to be and appears such that it could have been otherwise.

This is perhaps an unfortunate fact of social existence, that it appears not to be ordered by any rational teleology. As Sartre suggests that the existentialist is embarrassed by the absence of *God*, the social philosopher concerned with transformation might well be embarrassed by the absence of historical teleology. Yet, this embarrassment is only one side of, or one possible response to, a revelation which discloses the openness of sociality to transformation. The other side of this embarrassment is the individual's sense of *responsibility* for her ongoing interpretation of the social field—for her way of Being, which is always already affirming or rejecting particular social norms. I have attempted here to describe the phenomenology of this responsibility, in reference to anxiety, and identify it as a resource for social transformation. There remains, further, the question of what general normative form this responsibility might take—of how social transformational process are to be guided in reference to particular norms. I have suggested briefly the direction that such a normative account might have, but it remains here undeveloped. My intention has been to describe the ontological space in which social

transformational processes take place. What I have maintained is that the finitude and particularity of the positions from which Being is understood and interpreted provide in their self-disclosure (anxiety) a groundless ground upon which reinterpetive projections—socially transformative processes—are projected.

However, following the very general normative criteria identified above, in relation to the moments of interpretation and understanding, social movements specifically can be evaluated in reference to their ‘authenticity.’ There are three general criteria which could be suggested for evaluating social movements in relation to the hermeneutic social phenomenology presented here: First, the self-recognition of a movement *as* interpretive—that is, without recourse to a finally fixed and essentialized ground as providing the content for its projection (with a corresponding avoidance of epistemic authoritarianism). Second, the recognition of the sociality of understanding—the identification of the social ground for the interpretive projection, and an acknowledgment of the relation *back* to this understanding, as transformed through the interpretive movement. Third, as a synthesis and extension of the preceding two criteria, the transformation of understanding such that it does not constrain or *cover* the interpretive capacity which transformed it (not interpreting such that the interpretation is itself covered).

This means that the (interpretively) authentic social movement is one which understands itself as transforming existing order, and as having this capacity not because of any essential discovery which it has made about itself (e.g. about its history, as fixed and determining of what it is and ought to be), but through a recognition of its ‘thrownness’—the situation in which it finds itself—and which it cannot ‘get behind,’ but must relate to interpretively. And, because its own projection is supported by its ‘anxious’ discovery of its interpretive finitude (nullity,

groundlessness), it should not project in such a way that it covers that which provided the possibility for its own existence (interpretive particularity). In relation to the point above, regarding the interpretive responsibility to support others in their own interpretive authenticity, the corresponding point here is that the authentic social movement develops such that it continuously supports its own interpretive openness. Again, in ontic terms, this means that, as the movement is dependent upon its own agency, it should be directed toward sustaining and extending agency.

But such commitment to expanding agency cannot involve a straightforward privileging of individuality over community—to do so ignores their dialectic interdependence (and is likely to fail to extend agency, in failing to recognize that agency exists only in relation to, is made possible by, particular social practices). As has been maintained here, ‘individuality’ and ‘community’ are ontical in relation to ontological interpretation and understanding, to which they correspond. What the individual finds herself to *be* (encounters herself *as*), fundamentally, is (in anxiety—interpretive self-reference) her finitude and particularity as an interpreting being, from which Being is understood in a certain way. But this means that what it is to be an individual is to be *thrown* into some particular understanding (a tradition, a social world), which itself exists only as the history of ongoing interpreting, sustained by individual interpretive perspectives, and which is therefore revised along with the individual’s reinterpreting. This corresponds to the ‘dual movement’ of human Being (betweenness) described by Watsuji, as involving a back-and-forth movement between individuality and community—which are really ‘one movement’ because either can be described as the movement *of* the other: the community transforms itself through the assertion of individual members over against the community; the individual transforms herself in the affirmation of community.

As it recognizes the interdependent relationship between interpretation and understanding, the authentic social movement ought not give priority to either individuality or community. Opposition movements which aim to transform existing social conditions can be engaged in a reformation of the categories of identity, such that, for instance, what constitutes an intelligible member of a community is revised. This cannot involve a simple assertion of individuality, because, for one, this presupposes some certain and conclusive notion of the ontical individual (which was defined in advance by the very pre-understanding which is to be opened for revision); and, second, because the understanding which would be revised in such an assertion is social understanding, maintained by a community. In the assertion of individuality, there is, therefore, already reference to the community and its norms, to which the appeal or opposition is directed, and which the assertion seeks to modify.

The authentic social movement is one which is an expression of hermeneutic reflexivity, both in the ontological sense of identifying its own interpretive foundation, and the relation between interpretation and understanding; and in the ontical sense of identifying the corresponding dialectical relationship between individuality and community. Such a movement aims toward an expansion of interpretive openness generally: it does not cover itself (qua interpretation) with a fixed understanding of what it is (e.g. a static notion of its own identity category), and it holds itself responsible therefore for recognizing the interpretive capacity of others. Unlike some notions of freedom, such a concept of interpretive openness cannot be opposed to the situation—the tradition and social world—in which it is found; rather, it is only possible as a projection from that situation. It is therefore in the dual recognition of interpretation and the understanding from which it is projected that social conditions can be transformed. A

movement which is oriented toward a recognition and expansion of interpretive openness cannot give final priority to either the individual or the community.

My account of social movements is intended first to indicate how the ontological analysis that preceded it can provide a novel way of understanding social transformation. Here I have suggested also some criteria, derived from my ontological analysis, that support the normative evaluation of social movements. It is of course not the case that a social movement must understand itself conceptually in the *terms* presented here, to be considered ‘authentic.’¹⁷⁴ Though its self understanding need not explicitly involve the conceptual frame presented here, a movement can be evaluated on the basis of: its interpretive openness, or epistemic closure (its reference to fixed and essentialized concepts); to its acknowledgment of the provisionality of whatever particular concepts provide its guidance, or its epistemic authoritarianism; to its recognition of and openness to dialogue with alternative perspectives (especially those which are not entirely within its frames of intelligibility); to its acknowledgment of the background understanding which is the basis for its own interpretive projection, and is to be opened for revision; and, finally, especially, a movement can be evaluated on the basis of the extent to which it is motivated by and apparently moving towards a general expansion of interpretive openness (this, in reference to the extent to which, on one hand, it avoids covering its own

¹⁷⁴ Regarding the self understanding of social movements, it can be emphasized here further that the suggested normative criteria for examining social movements are by no means intended to preclude the development of specific *goals* or norms in relation to which a movement orients itself. As a very general analysis of the self understanding of social movements, I am here describing only what a social movement’s appropriate relationship to its own aims might be, and that is as responses to the specific situation in which the movement finds itself. The ‘interpretive’ process is even *arrested* by the absence of commitment generally, as it is perverted by conclusions which are taken as complete, fixed, or as finally beyond the interpretation from which they emerged. (This corresponds to Watsuji’s discussion of the two ways that the movements of sociality can be halted: at the point of community which eclipses individuality entirely, or at that of the assertion of individuality which leads not to a reaffirmation of community.) The emphasis here is that the ‘authenticity’ of a movement depends on its acknowledgment of its *responsibility* for the particular norms and aims by which it directs itself, which are maintained as they are continuously valued.

interpretive foundation with a fixed understanding, and on the other hand—but necessarily at the same time—it recognizes and respects the interpretive openness of others).

Aside from offering a frame for *evaluating* social movements, the account presented here suggests conceptual tools that could be taken up explicitly by social movements. Though a full development of the implications and practical applicability of this approach is beyond the scope of this conclusion, this project is intended to provide support for critical reflexivity directed at the revision of existing social practices and discourse. For those who, for instance, take seriously Foucault's genealogical accounts of the development of oppressive and normalizing social practices, and seek to identify a theoretical background to support opposition movements, I have suggested that it is necessary to find some ground for opposition to that which has been historically constituted precisely in the heart of the historically constituted. I have offered, as an analysis of that ground, an account of *Being and Time* which identifies, at the center of sociality, as constituted by the historical descent of a tradition, irreducible interpretive openness. Though I have attempted here to constrain my focus mostly to the ontological dimensions of the phenomena of interpretation and sociality, this is least of all because I am concerned foremost with presenting an account which remains socially disengaged, or disinterested. Indeed, this analysis is intended as a direct challenge to the *modus operandi* of discourses and practices which normalize, which devalue the incompletely intelligible, and which support oppression and domination by covering their interpretive foundations, and presenting themselves as the essential and the 'taken for granted' *foundation* of the social. To summarize my ontological approach: Being is as it is interpreted and interpretation is always social. Therefore, also, Being is always social Being, and sociality is interpretive. An understanding of the relationship between interpretation and sociality, between hermeneutics and (social) phenomenology, provides a basis

for opposition to oppression sustained by historically-constituted traditions, without recourse to some position beyond that which is historically-constituted; additionally, such an account is already fundamentally opposed to the forms of opposition which cover their contingent background with an appearance of necessity, inevitability, or in being entirely taken for granted.

I have attempted to develop an account of social relatedness that opposes orientations that give priority to individual subjectivity, yet without describing the individual as defined in a straightforward way by the community. In this analysis of ontology as hermeneutic social phenomenology, my intent has been to describe the ontological foundation for individuality and community, and to show that this foundation—as interpretive—challenges a straightforwardly communitarian understanding of social existence. The social understanding which provides the basis for intelligibility was formed interpretively over time, is maintained in practices and discourse only as it is continuously interpreted, and is open always to significant reinterpretation. Such interpretive activity is the ontological basis for individuality. ‘Authentic’ interpretation is the fundamental and exemplary interpretive mode. This approach is intended to provide a frame for understanding social existence generally and for describing social movements. Further, as I have discussed in this conclusion, certain normative criteria for evaluating social phenomena could be derived from this ontological account. Even without specifically defined criteria, my approach here is generally and fundamentally opposed to an important dimension of oppressive discourse and practices: interpretation’s self-covering, in which a certain understanding is taken for granted as immutable or necessary. The everyday starting point of understanding in general is social relatedness, but the social relations are open always and fundamentally to change, and this significantly to the extent that the essential mutability of those relations is recognized.

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