



# Being, Nothingness and Anxiety

Mahon O'Brien

## 1 Being and Nothing

One of Heidegger's great disappointments in the immediate aftermath of the publication of *Being and Time* (*BT*), and something he bemoans frequently to the end of his life, are the myriad ways in which his early masterpiece was misread. Heidegger's 1927 text was misinterpreted variously as a kind of existentialism, as being nihilistic, preoccupied with the bleak nature of an absurd human condition in the face of an inevitable death, a contribution to philosophical anthropology, psychology, humanism, subjectivism—the list goes on and on. In some ways then, this paper is a modest attempt at a bit of housekeeping on Heidegger's behalf by returning to the question of the role of moods in *BT* as part of what has been a general strategy of mine in previous work, namely, to forestall or undermine readings of Heidegger in the literature which begin from the hermeneutic presupposition that the later Heidegger

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M. O'Brien (✉)

University of Sussex, Brighton, UK  
e-mail: [mahon.o-brien@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:mahon.o-brien@sussex.ac.uk)

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C. Hadjioannou (ed.), *Heidegger on Affect*, Philosophers in Depth,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-24639-6\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-24639-6_1)

exists only at the expense of the Heidegger that writes *BT*.<sup>1</sup> As Heidegger writes in his 1949 “Introduction to ‘What Is Metaphysics?’”:

If, as we unfold the question concerning the truth of Being, we speak of overcoming metaphysics, this means: recalling Being itself. Such recalling goes beyond the traditional failure to think the ground of the root of philosophy. The thinking attempted in *Being and Time* sets out on the way to prepare an overcoming of metaphysics, so understood. (*PM* 279)

In a 1943 “Postscript to ‘What Is Metaphysics?’” Heidegger suggests that his basic question “springs from a thinking that has already entered into the overcoming of metaphysics” (*PM* 231). Heidegger further argues (as he will again, famously, in “Letter on Humanism”<sup>2</sup>—though in a way that has been routinely misinterpreted) that any such attempts to overcome “must continue to speak the language of that which they help overcome” (*PM* 231). Furthermore, Heidegger, in returning to some of the key ideas animating *BT*, while re-assessing a lecture first delivered two years after he published that text, reminds his readers that his key question is related to the Leibnizian question.<sup>3</sup> He famously revisits the Leibnizian question in his 1935 lecture course, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (*IM*), (where he has routinely been thought to have effected a turn away from *BT*) identifying it as the fundamental question for Western metaphysics (which he has by now diagnosed as a metaphysics of presence)—a metaphysics that he wants to overcome. As he writes in another 1940s retrospective on the 1929 lecture:

Metaphysics does not ask this question [the Being question/*Seinsfrage*] because it thinks Being only by representing being as beings. It means beings as a whole, although it speaks of Being. It names Being and means beings as beings. From its beginning to its completion, the propositions of metaphysics have been strangely involved in a persistent confusion of beings and Being. (Introduction to “What Is Metaphysics?” in *PM* 281)

In the 1929 lecture, Heidegger anticipates much of what he will discuss in his famous 1935 lecture course concerning the question of the nothing and the related ways that he attempts to put pressure on the tradition. He dismisses again what he takes to be stock objections

which rely on the principle of non-contradiction since that approach, for Heidegger, has already conflated being with presence and has made a decision about the meaning of being, unwittingly or otherwise, which he wishes to call into question. In the 1935 lecture course where Heidegger began to try and unfold many of the motivating ideas and themes behind *BT*,<sup>4</sup> he begins with Leibniz's famous question:

Why are there beings at all instead of nothing? That is the question... this is obviously the first of all questions. Of course, it is not the first question in the chronological sense. Individuals as well as peoples ask many questions in the course of their historical passage through time. They explore, investigate, and test many sorts of things before they run into the question 'Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?' Many never run into this question at all, if running into the question means not only hearing and reading the interrogative sentence as uttered, but asking the question, that is, taking a stand on it, posing it, compelling oneself into the state of this questioning.

Heidegger is asking, when we pose this question of being and non-being or nothing, whether we have an adequate sense of 'being'? What do we mean by this word 'being'—what does this verb so commonly invoked bring to the party? Of course, the obvious answer is 'presence' and, for this reason, Leibniz's own question focuses on the simple issue of presence versus absence. As Heidegger says in one of the later reflections on his famous inaugural lecture ("What Is Metaphysics?"):

Is it perhaps from this that the as yet unshaken presumption has entered all metaphysics that an understanding of 'Being' may simply be taken for granted and that the Nothing can therefore be dealt with more easily than beings? That is indeed the situation regarding Being and Nothing. If it were different, then Leibniz could not have said in the same place by way of an explanation: 'Car le rien est plus simple et plus facile que quelque chose [For the nothing is simpler and easier than any thing]'. ("Introduction to 'What Is Metaphysics?'" *PM* 190)

Heidegger notes something that he considers both non-trivial and which he thinks the tradition has not adequately dealt with. We say

of many things that they 'are' in various ways when it is not clear that that means that they exist as fully *present* or actualized before us. For example, if I say that I see a clearing in the forest, or a gap in the hedge—I say that there 'is' a gap. But what does it mean to say that there is a 'gap', literally an absence of trees in one instance or foliage on the side of the road on the other? Someone might try to counter that that is just a trick of language; that all we mean is that there is a space where no trees are growing or no hedge is growing. But, think of how else we might express this—'there *are no trees* in that part of the forest' or 'there *is nothing* between those two pieces of hedge'.<sup>5</sup> What do we mean with this verb 'being'—what does the term itself actually *mean*? One might be tempted to go the route of First Order logic here and suggest that if we rewrite the sentences using existential quantifiers that this kind of problem dissolves but Heidegger believes that that is because the logician has already assumed that being means presence (understood here as continuous presence) and that any talk of 'the nothing' as somehow 'being' is literally nonsense. For the logician then, they might try to rewrite similar kinds of sentences by translating them into other sentences that appear to have the same meaning, which can, in turn, be translated using existential quantifiers. And, using something like this approach, one can say that there is no problem and that one does not have to posit the presence of absence in an ideal language in order to understand the statement that there is a gap or clearing in the forest. However, Heidegger is unsatisfied with this kind of approach and anticipates it and rejects it in *IM* as well as in his 1940s retrospectives on his 1929 essay ("What Is Metaphysics") which was famously attacked by Carnap in a 1932 paper (see Carnap 1932).<sup>6</sup> It is worth bearing in mind here that Heidegger had spent some time studying mathematics and logic and described himself as an 'ahistorical mathematician' before his breakthroughs in the 1920s. Of course, that is not to suggest that Heidegger was fully au fait with the latest developments in the philosophical logic of his day.<sup>7</sup> But neither is this the perversely vainglorious innumeracy or ill-informed prejudice of some literary crank with no real facility for mathematics or logic.

In his 1935 lecture course, in order to illustrate his point with respect to the role of the nothing in terms of what it means for anything 'to be', Heidegger takes an immediate example from the lecture hall—a piece of chalk:

The piece of chalk here is an extended, relatively stable, definitely formed, grayish-white thing, and furthermore, a thing for writing. As certainly as it belongs precisely to this thing to lie here, the capacity not to be here and not to be so big also belongs to it. The possibility of being drawn along the blackboard and used up is not something that we merely add onto the thing with our thought. The chalk itself, as this being, *is* in this possibility; otherwise it would not be chalk as a writing implement. Every being, in turn, has this Possible in it, in a different way in each case. This possible belongs to the chalk. (*IM* 32)

In other words, so Heidegger wants to say, what the chalk means, what we take it to mean when we say that the chalk 'is' in various ways, amounts to more than simply stating that the chalk is 'present' or 'actual'. Of course it *is* present in various ways, but it can also be understood in all manner of *possible* ways that involve more than what is actually present at any given moment. Moreover, this is a fundamental part of what it *means* for things to *be*. For Heidegger, the logician will be tempted to respond that when anyone says of the chalk that 'the chalk is' that this is adequately represented by the propositional form  $\exists xCx$ —there exists some entity/ $x$  such that that entity/ $x$  is a piece of chalk. Heidegger very clearly has Carnap and the logical positivists in mind here and explicitly targets the principle of non-contradiction:

Whoever talks about Nothing does not know what he is doing. In speaking about Nothing, he makes it into a something. By speaking this way, he speaks against what he means. He contradicts himself. But self-contradictory speech is an offense against the fundamental rule of speech (*logos*), against 'logic.' Talking about Nothing is illogical. Whoever talks and thinks illogically is an unscientific person. Now whoever goes so far as to talk about Nothing within philosophy, which after all is the home of logic, deserves all the more to be accused of offending against the fundamental rule of all thinking. Such talk about Nothing consists in utterly

senseless propositions. Moreover, whoever takes Nothing seriously takes the side of nullity. He obviously promotes the spirit of negation and serves disintegration. Talking about Nothing is not only completely contrary to thought, but it undermines all culture and faith. Whatever both disregards the fundamental law of thinking and also destroys faith and the will to construct is pure nihilism. (*IM* 25–26)

The obvious suggestion here is that one should perhaps simply ignore the question or issue of the Nothing. However, Heidegger notes that we already began with this question as a question that we received from the tradition and he further notes that the question of being was always posed in conjunction with the question of Nothingness from that same tradition:

Our introduction of talk about Nothing here is not a careless and overly enthusiastic manner of speaking, nor our own invention, but merely strict respect for the originary tradition regarding the sense of the fundamental question. (*IM* 26)

And yet, as Heidegger suggests, it may well be the case that the belief that this notion of 'Nothing' and/or any discussion of it as being tantamount to nihilism or a confounding of the fundamental and immutable laws of thinking rests on a misunderstanding. He reiterates then his opposition to the idea that rules of logic such as the principle of non-contradiction necessarily operate as the rules upon which any understanding of anything whatsoever must be based since this thinking itself rests upon a misunderstanding when it comes to the being question:

For it cannot be decided so readily whether logic and its fundamental rules can provide any measure for the question about beings as such. It could be the other way around, that the whole logic that we know and that we treat like a gift from heaven is grounded in a very definite answer to the question about beings, and that consequently any thinking that simply follows the laws of thought of established logic is intrinsically incapable of even beginning to understand the question about beings, much less of actually unfolding it and leading toward an answer. In truth, it is only an illusion of rigor and scientificity when one appeals to the principle of contradiction, and to logic in general, in order to prove that

all thinking and all talk about Nothing is contradictory and therefore senseless. 'Logic' is then taken as a tribunal, secure for all eternity, and it goes without saying that no rational human being will call into doubt its authority as the first and last court of appeal. Whoever speaks against logic is suspected, implicitly or explicitly, of arbitrariness. The mere suspicion already counts as an argument and an objection, and one takes oneself to be exempted from further, authentic reflection. (*JM 27*)

The question of nothingness has always, in our philosophical tradition, gone hand in hand with the question of being. We normally begin with 'beings' and, beings of course 'are':

They are given to us, they are in front of us and can thus be found before us at any time, and are also known to us within certain domains. Now the beings given to us in this way are immediately interrogated as to their ground. The question advances directly toward a ground. Such a method just broadens and enlarges, as it were, a procedure that is practised every day. Somewhere in the vineyard, for example, an infestation turns up, something indisputably present at hand. One asks: where does this come from, where and what is its ground? Similarly, as a whole, beings are present at hand. One asks: where and what is the ground? This kind of questioning is represented in the simple formula: Why are there beings? Where and what is their ground? Tacitly one is asking after another, higher being. But there the question does not pertain at all to beings as a whole and as such. (*JM 30*)

One can see then that Heidegger is trying to identify a misstep that we have commonly taken when it comes to thinking about being and beings. We begin with things that are there for us and immediately begin to wonder as to why they are there, what is the cause of these beings. And traditionally—one closed off that line of questioning with the idea of a higher being that caused all the other beings. But this misses something for Heidegger since it glosses over the question as to what we mean by 'being' and simply asks for the cause (the why) of things that are present. This is to assume that what 'being' means when we say that beings 'are' reduces to 'presence'—that is, 'existent', and thus we have taken for granted precisely the issues that Heidegger thinks are open to further questioning. If one considers the original question again "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?"—we

notice now that one cannot accept the prejudice concerning logic and non-contradiction since we cannot in this case simply take beings as given in the first place according to the scope of this originary question. Rather we have to consider the possibility of there not being beings. The addition of the nothing to our question in this instance:

Prevents us, in our questioning, from beginning directly with beings as unquestionably given, and having already begun, already moving on to the ground we are seeking which is also in being. Instead, these beings are held out in a questioning manner into the possibility of not-Being. (*JM 30*)

Heidegger is convinced that traditional approaches miss out on all of the possibilities inherent in what we 'mean', for example, when we say that the chalk *is* here, or there, or *is* something or other. Part of what it means for the chalk to be a particular piece of chalk is its possibility of being used up when drawn along the blackboard and thus to no longer be—this is part of what it means for the chalk to be—it 'is' in this possibility. But, Heidegger goes on to argue:

Of course, when we look for this Possible in the chalk, we are accustomed and inclined to say that we do not see it and do not grasp it. But that is a prejudice. The elimination of this prejudice is part of the unfolding of our question. For now, this question should just open up beings, in their wavering between not-Being and Being. Insofar as beings stand up against the extreme possibility of not-Being, they themselves stand in Being, and yet they have never thereby overtaken and overcome the possibility of not-Being. (*JM 32–33*)

Heidegger goes on to ask:

How are we even supposed to inquire into the ground for the Being of beings, let alone be able to find it out, if we have not adequately conceived, understood and grasped Being itself? This enterprise would be just as hopeless as if someone wanted to explain the cause and ground of a fire and declared that he need not bother with the course of the fire or the investigation of its scene.

So it turns out that the question 'Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?' forces us to the prior question: 'How does it stand with Being?' (*JM 34*)

Heidegger is convinced then that there is a fundamental problem which has led philosophy astray from the time of the Presocratic philosophers. In short, the Western tradition has taken the meaning of being itself to be self-evident and thus overlooked an important philosophical dimension to the way things become meaningful for us and how we in turn project meanings onto the world around us and this has generated a whole series of pseudo problems. Without getting too far ahead of ourselves, Heidegger believes that we have inherited a philosophical tradition, which, for all its variety, vagaries and conflicting views, is based on an underlying prejudice, namely, that things or objects given to us in experience, appear to us as continuously present. What is suppressed, however, is the role that *absence* or *nothingness* plays in our experience and how most of our experience involves a constant interplay of presence and absence. Nothing/no object is ever fully there and available to us as completely present in every particularity/possibility; indeed, Heidegger believes that this is obvious even in our experience of ordinary, everyday objects such as the chalk. When I say—'I see a piece of chalk over there'—I mean or intend *that* piece of chalk and *part* of what I mean or intend are aspects and possibilities of the chalk that are not actually present, or there, or continuously there before me. Heidegger is invoking a famous idea of Husserl's here, namely, the notion of 'intentionality'. Indeed, Heidegger believed this to be one of Husserl's most important philosophical insights. Husserl realized that the way things appear to us involves a significant amount of 'intentional' work done by us in terms of meaning or intending the things that we perceive. If one considers something in the room or place they are sitting for a moment—perhaps a lamp in the corner, a picture on the wall, a car passing by the window outside or in the distance; now consider what one *actually* perceives. One sees one particular side, perhaps, of a lampshade; a good deal of the object may actually be obscured from one's view and yet we don't say that we see a part of a conical surface attached to what appears to be a supporting stem—we say that we see a lamp. In other words, we imagine the rest of the lamp to exist, we fill out the profile of the lamp imaginatively and synthesize this with what we currently perceive such that our intentional experience is not of something partially obscured but a fully conceived thing. Similarly with the picture

on the wall, we imagine that it is three-dimensional, has depth and that there is a wall and hanging nail supporting the picture and the frame. In terms of the passing car, one might well say that they have heard a passing car, but what was actually given to them in terms of bare perception? It may only have been a sound or a series of sounds that reached one's ears and yet what they 'heard' was not a series of bare auditory sensations, what they 'heard' was a car that was not slowing down to turn into their driveway, rather they heard the sound of a car travelling with sufficient speed so as to suggest that it was driving on by the house. They *hear*, in that case, something very different to what they hear when they hear their spouse's car turning into the driveway, the unmistakable sound of the way they let the car idle before turning in and the full, vibrating baritone of the heavy diesel engine of that particular vehicle. As Heidegger explains in "The Origin of the Work of Art":

We never really first perceive a throng of sensations, e.g., tones and noises, in the appearance of things – as this thing-concept alleges; rather we hear the storm whistling in the chimney, we hear the three-motored plane, we hear the Mercedes in immediate distinction from the Volkswagen. Much closer to us than all sensations are the things themselves. We hear the door shut in the house and never hear acoustical sensations or even mere sounds. In order to hear a bare sound we have to listen away from things, divert our ear from them, i.e., listen abstractly. (BW 151–152)

Similarly with other objects which are 'experienced'—what the perceiver may actually be presented with is often a rather partial, obscured view and yet their imagination spontaneously fills out the rest of the profile of the thing which they don't actually see—the back of the lampshade which is absent is somehow made present by the imagination without actually being directly perceived during that experience. This insight fits nicely with Heidegger's belief that we artificially render everything as fully present to ourselves without realizing that some of the aspects and features which we make 'present' are not actually present in our experience, rather we project them onto our experience and, when we forget or suppress this activity, we are left with a skewed metaphysical picture whereby the temporal, historical character of existence is concealed from us.

## 2 Why Moods?

When introducing the traditional and, Heidegger suggests, 'first' question of metaphysics in the 1935 lecture course, that is, Leibniz's question, Heidegger claims that:

we are each touched once, maybe even now and then, by the concealed power of this question, without properly grasping what is happening to us. In great despair, for example, when all weight tends to dwindle away from things and the sense of things grows dark, the question looms. Perhaps it strikes only once, like the muffled tolling of a bell that resounds into Dasein and gradually fades away. The question is there in heartfelt joy, for then all things are transformed and surround us as if for the first time, as if it were easier to grasp that they were not than that they are, and are as they are. The question is there in a spell of boredom, when we are equally distant from despair and joy, but when the stubborn ordinariness of beings lays open a wasteland in which it makes no difference to us whether beings are or are not — and then, in a distinctive form, the question resonates again: Why are there beings at all instead of nothing? (JM 1–2)

Closely read, one can see that this passage contains a series of buried allusions to the role that 'bare moods' or states-of-mind/dispositions could play in terms of how they phenomenally attest to the manner in which Dasein is the open site for the interplay of presence and absence. That is, that again in this passage, what Heidegger is underlining is the phenomenal importance of moods in terms of how they disclose more than what is simply present. Instead, they are a constant source of evidence of movement and interplay between presence and absence.<sup>8</sup> He is trying that is, to show how there is a liminal awareness of 'more than this', 'more than what is just present' constantly attested to in our affectivity. Heidegger introduced this idea in *Being and Time*, and attempts to explain it more succinctly in 1935 and in the 1929 lecture through some simple examples involving the role that possibilities play in the manner in which anything can be taken by us to be.

In terms of Leibniz's question, Heidegger, as we saw, believes that he must pose another, deeper question—the question concerning the

meaning of Being which already demands a re-examination as evidenced by the way the 'nothing' in Leibniz's question is simply passed over. We need to return to this question, so Heidegger argues, unencumbered with the presuppositions of the metaphysics of presence. For Heidegger, then, the 'nothing' is dismissed as a result of a fateful prejudice concerning the meaning of Being which has dominated Western thought since the time of the Presocratics. Being has, since that time, been discussed always and everywhere in terms of beings and, thus, as reducing always and everywhere to 'presence'. The principle of non-contradiction is routinely invoked to dismiss all talk of the Nothing as simply wrong-headed, illogical, unscientific, in short, as contradictory. After all, to talk of Nothing as 'being' in any way is to treat it as a being and one simply cannot make nothingness into something—but again this is already to have conflated being with beings.<sup>9</sup> And again, for Heidegger, this is already to have decided in advance that being reduces to presence, that it is present, or that it is itself *a* being and not nothing.

In the 1929 lecture, when his sights are set squarely on the role of nothingness, Heidegger returns to his *BT* account of states-of-mind or the bare moods which all of our experience presupposes and which themselves attest to the way we find ourselves already thrown open as a site for the interplay of presence and absence as finite transcendences. Part of what we are held out into, even in this early account in *BT*, is the nothing and Heidegger returns to and defends this idea in 1929, in 1935 and again in his 1940s introduction and postscript to the 1929 lecture. And again, this seems to invite us to begin to think of *BT* itself as very much anticipating the continuing attempts to resist the metaphysics of presence for the rest of his career. In 1929, for example, Heidegger will state:

The founding mode of attunement [*die Befindlichkeit der Stimmung*] not only reveals beings as a whole in various ways, but this revealing — far from being merely incidental — is also the basic occurrence of our Da-sein. (BW 100)

Heidegger is quick to distinguish this notion, which is called a 'bare mood' or basic attunement in *BT*, from feelings which are in fact a way

of diverting us away from the 'nothing' which is what he is looking to investigate. Such feelings, psychic phenomena, directed or thematic moods, if you like, are taken up with things or matters in the world of everyday concern. Heidegger is looking for something else, however; he asks:

Does such an attunement, in which man is brought before the nothing itself, occur in human existence? This can and does occur, although rarely enough and only for a moment, in the fundamental mood of anxiety. By this anxiety we do not mean the quite common anxiousness, ultimately reducible to fearfulness, which all too readily comes over us. Anxiety is basically different from fear. We become afraid in the face of this or that particular being that threatens us in this or that particular respect. (BW 100)

Heidegger is thinking of a kind of anxiety that is not specifically directed then. He is thinking of a 'fundamental mood', something which is there, simmering away behind all our directed experience and which reaches up fully into our conscious awareness only rarely. But there is some sense of it whispering away in the background, just out of earshot, in a manner that we perhaps register as background noise that never leaves us entirely alone in any particular moment of existence. When anxiety comes into full view for us, we are not anxious in a specific way, we are anxious before nothing in particular; all things that normally have significance are suddenly robbed of that same significance, they recede from our concern and we are left anxious about, nothing in particular, anxious over, if you like, nothing. Heidegger believes in fact that in the most basic occurrence of Dasein, the nothing is revealed; this is what anxiety discloses, but anxiety understood now as a fundamental mood, a bare mood, a basic attunement of our awareness, a fundamental dispositional state. And, the nature of our everyday evasion, our absorption with things, is itself phenomenological testament to the nothingness which is disclosed in our most basic disposition/disposedness. We are normally turned toward things, we are preoccupied in one way or another and turned away from the prior experience of the Nothing. Our 'turned-awayness' testifies in fact to the

Nothing which we are held out into—the manner in which we are a transcendence in that we are already beyond beings as a whole. To be Dasein, is in a way, to be non-static, moving, thus there is this constant bare sense of 'more than now', 'more than this' constantly at work in our awareness.

This *seems* to be an uncontroversial gloss of some of the fundamental impulses behind Heidegger's thinking in the 1920s that he returns to and reinforces in the 1930s and 1940s. And yet, if these *are* uncontroversial pieces of analysis and summary, that is somewhat surprising, since the ramifications of this quick overview put pressure on some entrenched views concerning the discontinuity of the later Heidegger's project with the so-called early one and force us to take stock of and indeed rethink what, in fact, Heidegger's interest in moods might be! One of the claims that I wish to make then is that Heidegger had already carefully laid the groundwork for everything I've alluded to so far in this essay in *BT*. His 1927 text is thereby understood as, at least in part, a nascent attempt to overcome the metaphysics of presence. And, as it turns out, Heidegger goes to considerable lengths in the earlier text to unpack what he takes to be phenomenally evident in the barest experiences available to Dasein prior to all abstraction and which any engaged absorption in the world of our concern already presupposes and operates in the mode of a turning away from. Heidegger very much anticipates and introduces all of the key ideas and arguments that the later concerns with the nothing will be based on in his 1927 text.

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In *BT*, Heidegger introduces the concept of mood (*Stimmung*), in the context of what Macquarrie and Robinson translate as state-of-mind/disposition (*Befindlichkeit*). Heidegger's claim is that our basic state-of-mind, quite literally, the way we find ourselves, is such that we are always in some kind of bare mood. There is some kind of minimal affectivity to our awareness ever before we thematize that affect and what Heidegger will try to show is that it is already itself indicative of nothingness, even if the provisional notion that he focuses on in the earlier text is time.

Heidegger clarifies again at the beginning of his discussion

In the preparatory stage of the existential analytic of Dasein, we have for our leading theme this entity's basic state, Being-in-the-world. Our first aim is to bring into relief phenomenally the unitary primordial structure of Dasein's Being, in terms of which its possibilities and the ways for 'to be' are ontologically determined. (SZ 131)

The key thing to note here is the use of the term "possibilities" and the phrase "ways for it [Dasein] 'to be'". The importance of the role that possibility plays in *BT* cannot be overstated. Also important to note is the stated aim of getting the unitary primordial structure of Dasein's being into view since it is a state-of-mind which will attest to the fact (and when investigated will show how) that this happens by confronting Dasein with its 'there' before it actually turns toward anything specific within the world of its quotidian concern, which is typically a turning away from what is attested to in such bare moods. What allows us to get a view of the unitary primordial structure of Dasein's being is something like *angst*—which Heidegger, I believe, wants to characterize as a bare sense of 'more than this', 'more than what is present now', which is the most basic level of our affective awareness at any given moment into which we find ourselves thrown. And, the more than this, the more than now, the not now, and not here, points to the nothingness, the abyss which haunts the edges of presence, the nothing which is the necessary correlate of anything that is.

Heidegger makes another claim shortly afterwards, which is related to this and consistent with the idea that he is not looking here to make any kind of contribution to psychology or anthropology:

If need be, there still remains the possibility of broadening out the analysis by characterizing comparatively the variations of concern and its circumspection, of solicitude and the considerateness which goes with it; there is also the possibility of contrasting Dasein with entities whose character is not that of Dasein by a more precise explication of the Being of all possible entities within-the-world. Without question, there are still unfinished tasks lying in this field. What we have hitherto set forth needs to be rounded out in many ways by working out fully the existential *a*

*priori* of philosophical anthropology and taking a look at it. But this is not the aim of our investigation. *Its aim is one of fundamental ontology.* (SZ 131; Heidegger's emphasis)

Heidegger is *not* looking to contribute to an existentialism, humanism or psychology or to say anything specifically about the human condition. Of course, human beings will ultimately be affected by adequately posing the question concerning the meaning of being in general since humans are affected by the question and the answer; as Heidegger says a number of times, we are 'implicated' in the answer—one can find Heidegger reiterating this very point in his famous "Letter on Humanism". Notwithstanding, Heidegger is, even here, already interested in what is going to become his lifelong attempt to overcome the metaphysics of presence.<sup>10</sup> The goal is always then something like the meaning of being in general; it is not his intention or desire to simply contribute to psychology. Heidegger wants to overcome the metaphysics of presence. And, with this in mind, Heidegger is looking for phenomenal evidence that the being which is the subject of investigation in *BT*, Dasein, offers us some phenomenal clues or evidence as to how already, in the most basic state of Dasein's awareness, there is some sense of more than what is just present. This, in turn, leads Heidegger to look at the most basic affective state of our 'thereness'.<sup>11</sup>

The aspect of the existential constitution of the there that we are interested in, in particular, is being-there as a 'state-of-mind' (*Befindlichkeit*).<sup>12</sup> The way one 'finds' oneself (which is what the German term picks out quite literally) is clearly what most of us would mean when we ask after someone's state-of-mind, what is typically referred to in the literature today as 'disposition'. And, the answer, Heidegger suggests, is always going to involve a 'mood' or 'attunement' (*Stimmung*). Heidegger immediately qualifies the sense in which he is going to discuss moods and, again, stresses his interest in looking at moods as an existential, that is, as a basic structural component of Dasein, a way that it can be:

Prior to all psychology of moods, a field which in any case still lies fallow, it is necessary to see this phenomenon as a fundamental *existential*, and to outline its structure. (SZ 134)



A lot of the misconceptions concerning Heidegger's treatment of angst in *BT* and again in his 1929 inaugural lecture, then, are owing to a failure to see the context within which these analyses occur. As we can see from some of the passages already quoted, Heidegger continually emphasizes the fact that his goal in *BT* is not to contribute to anything like a discussion of our psychological states or feelings about *x* or *y*<sup>13</sup>; he is not trying to write about the human condition *per se*, this is *not* existentialism or humanism.<sup>14</sup> And again, it is worth noting that one of the most common interpretive viruses that infects new readers of *BT*, influenced by generations of carriers of this same interpretive contagion, is the assumption that the later Heidegger rejects *BT* owing to its excessive reliance on traditional subjectivity or that *BT* is a Dasein-oriented story, his humanist, existentialist phase and so on. Heidegger is interested in the question concerning the way being becomes meaningful and he first looks to tackle this question by looking at the being whose own being is an issue and is meaningful for it—Dasein. But even this task should not be taken as a Dasein-oriented story; the aim is the meaning of being in general. So, what we should be on the look out for, ultimately, are the ways in which Heidegger investigates the role that possibility (and thus 'absence') plays in Dasein's being-in-the-world such that he can find some phenomenal evidence to justify the attempt at a fundamental ontology, which, in turn, would be a departure from the metaphysics of presence. After all, this is what the question concerning the meaning of Being is concerned with. This interpretive failure on the part of readers of *BT* is not localized to this particular topic—it is one of the main reasons that the account of authenticity, for example, is routinely misinterpreted and it stands as the most consistent pattern of interpretive failure in terms of the general understanding of Heidegger's various accounts of being-in-the-world, the call of conscience, being-towards-death, anxiety and so on. To paraphrase his conclusion from above—the aim is a fundamental ontology, which, I am suggesting here, is a nascent attempt to get beyond the metaphysics of presence. To do so, Heidegger needs to find a way to identify the interplay of presence and absence in the way anything 'is' for Dasein, including Dasein's own self. This is going to involve identifying the role that 'possibility' plays in Dasein's self-understanding at any given moment, very much in the way that in 1935, Heidegger will famously characterize the features which lie as

possibilities for the chalk, but which are not currently 'present', as part of what it means for the chalk to be this or that piece of chalk. In terms of Dasein, anxiety is the mood which attests to the role that the not-yet, the possible, and thus the non-present or the Nothing play in Dasein's existence and it is from *this* standpoint that Heidegger is interested in anxiety:

In having a mood, Dasein is always disclosed moodwise as that entity to which it has been delivered over in its Being; and in this way it has been delivered over to the Being which, in existing, it has to be. 'To be disclosed' does not mean 'to be known as this sort of thing'. And even in the most indifferent and inoffensive everydayness the Being of Dasein can burst forth as a naked 'that it is and has to be'. The pure 'that it is' shows itself, but the 'whence' and the 'whither' remain in darkness. The fact that it is just as everyday a matter for Dasein not to 'give in' ['nachgeben'] to such moods — in other words, not to follow up [nacheht] their disclosure and allow itself to be brought before that which is disclosed — is no evidence *against* the phenomenal facts of the case, in which the Being of the 'there' is disclosed moodwise in its 'that-it-is', it is rather evidence for it. In an *ontico-existential* sense, Dasein for the most part evades the Being which is disclosed in the mood. In an *ontologico-existential* sense, this means that even in that to which a mood pays no attention, Dasein is unveiled in its Being-delivered-over to the 'there'. In the evasion itself the 'there' *is* something disclosed. (*SZ* 135)

Heidegger is introducing a feature of Dasein's being-in-the-world which is crucial to his account—namely 'thrownness' (*Geworfenheit*). We operate in such a way that it can often seem as though we are absorbed in one project before moving on to another, there is a surface story to our activities which we do not interrogate as to their ultimate significance since we normally look to avoid or evade what is disclosed to us in the basic, thrown character of the 'da' of everyday Dasein. Part of what is disclosed, is the nullity at the heart of Dasein. Heidegger will later say that Dasein is the null basis of a nullity and our underlying angst is a constant testament to that phenomenal fact. He will go further into this notion of anxiety in paragraph 40 of *BT*; this is what he will look to examine in his 1929 inaugural lecture, underline in the

1940s introduction and postscript to that lecture, and it emerges once again in the context of the fundamental question of metaphysics (Why are there beings at all instead of nothing) in his 1935 lecture course—*Introduction to Metaphysics*. Here, as he introduces the notion of throwness, Heidegger writes:

This characteristic of Dasein's being — this 'that it is' — is veiled in its 'whence' and 'whither', yet disclosed in itself all the more unveiledly; we call it the '*thrownness*' of this entity into its 'there'. The expression 'throwness' is meant to suggest the *facticity of its being delivered over*. (SZ 135)

Experiencing its 'there' is not the same as experiencing itself in terms of its thatness, where its thatness reduces to pure presence, i.e., where we are thinking the way we would of an object which is present-at-hand and can be posited as being there as a fully actualized object with properties. Again, this is always something that Heidegger is trying to move us away from. Instead then:

The 'that it is' which is disclosed in Dasein's state-of-mind must rather be conceived as an existential attribute of the entity which has Being-in-the-world as its way of Being. (SZ 135)

And to be-in-the-world, understood now as 'a way to be', is always going to be directional, a being-towards, absorbed for the most part in all kinds of projects. What we are, most basically then, before any abstraction, is always already thrown such that we are as a 'way to be' which means towards possibilities. Heidegger in turn is going to look for that bare mood which colours our basic thrown situation and which attests to the fundamental possibility which is constitutive of the way any other possibilities can be meaningful for us. In other words, as long as Dasein is, it has at least one constant possibility which constitutively shapes all of our other possibilities, namely, the possibility *not-to-be*. For the most part we are immersed in possibilities which, in a way, allow us to escape or evade the starkness of the nullity which is at the heart of the 'da' of Dasein. However, these possibilities in turn, phenomenally attest to the manner in which we are ultimately temporal,

historical, finite transcendences. His excavation of the basic underlying fact that we are always and ever delivered over to our 'there' such that we find ourselves in some kind of mood testifies to this.<sup>15</sup> To continue, one might well claim to be assured about where they are coming from and what they are up to, or be able to issue an exact theoretical account of what they are taken up with at any given moment. This does not entail, however, that what is disclosed by moods can be compared with "what Dasein is acquainted with, knows, and believes 'at the same time' when it has such a mood" (SZ 135–136). It is this notion of possibility, itself run through with nullity and nothingness, which Heidegger is alluding to when he mentions the "burdensome character of Dasein" even if, for the most part, in our inauthentic everydayness we turn away from the reality of this situation. Moreover, fundamental moods are prior to (if you like, they outstrip) any evasion or specific moods about things in the world and bring:

Dasein before the 'that-it-is' of its 'there', which, as such, stares it in the face with the inexorability of an enigma. From the existential-ontological point of view, there is not the slightest justification for minimizing what is 'evident' in states-of-mind, by measuring it against the apodictic certainty of a theoretical cognition of something which is purely present-at-hand. (SZ 136)

Heidegger has thus worked his way to a position where he can begin to examine states-of-mind in our everyday situation and thus determine phenomenologically, in keeping with the avowed goal of a hermeneutics of facticity, the role that nothingness and possibility play in the manner in which Dasein can understand anything to be or that anything can be meaningful for Dasein. Heidegger makes a further point that bears on how we think of the role of moods in his thinking at this structural, existential level:

From what has been said we can see already that a state-of-mind is very remote from anything like coming across a psychical condition by the kind of apprehending which first turns around and then back. Indeed it is so far from this, that only because the 'there' has already been disclosed in

a state-of-mind can immanent reflection come across 'Experiences' at all. The 'bare mood' discloses the 'there' more primordially, but correspondingly it *closes* it *off* more stubbornly than any *not*-perceiving. (SZ 136)

In other words, when we are taken up with a mood which is directed precisely within our world of immediate concern, a bad mood, perhaps, we are diverted away from the nature of mood as a primordial state-of-mind which phenomenally attests or discloses Being-in-the-world as a whole, which indicates, in turn, the absence that corresponds to the presence of anything or anybody within the world and the role that possibility plays in the meaning of anything which currently is taken to be in a specific way. Thus it is a mistake to simply conflate mood, in the sense that Heidegger is talking about here, a bare mood, a state-of-mind with the psychical. Mood, as a bare 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*. Having a mood is not related to the psychical in the first instance, and it is not an inner condition which then reaches forth in an enigmatical way and puts its mark on Things and persons. (SZ 137)

Before Heidegger turns specifically to anxiety, he offers a detailed examination of Dasein as it is in fallen everydayness where Dasein has fled from what he thinks it is faced with before we begin to reflect on things and as a result of which we immerse ourselves in a world of feigned continuous presence. In short, what is laid bare for us is ourselves as a thrown-openness for the emergence of being, a clearing in which presence and absence are interlinked. However, even if ordinarily we have turned away from that which we are faced with in our basic state-of-mind and its bare moods, that does not mean that we are not afforded phenomenal clues which cash out at the existential-ontological level:

Within the optical 'away from' which such turning-away implies, that in the face of which Dasein flees can be understood and conceptualized by 'turning-thither' in a way which is phenomenologically Interpretative. (SZ 185)

Anxiety then, at the level that Heidegger is discussing things, is not concerned with something specific within the world, some entity or other; that is, rather, fear, which for Heidegger is derivative insofar as it is parasitic on a disposition of that being that has *angst* as its most basic state-of-mind when it first finds itself as thrown being-in-the-world:

the turning-away of falling is not a fleeing that is founded upon a fear of entities within-the-world. Fleeing that is so grounded is still less a character of this turning-away, when what this turning-away does is precisely to *turn thither* towards entities within-the-world by absorbing itself in them. *This turning-away of falling is grounded rather in anxiety, which in turn is what first makes fear possible.*

To understand this talk about Dasein's fleeing in the face of itself in falling, we must recall that Being-in-the-world is a basic state of Dasein. *That in the face of which one has anxiety [das Wovor der Angst] is Being-in-the-world as such.* What is the difference phenomenally between that in the face of which anxiety is anxious [sich ängstet] and that in the face of which fear is afraid? That in the face of which one has anxiety is not an entity within-the-world. (SZ 186)

So, again, this is the anxiety that is there when Dasein is in a basic state-of-mind as simply thrown and disclosed as delivered over to its being-in-the-world and the sheer 'thatness' of what that entails, which involves more than just being that, that being, but is a constant sense of more than 'thatness' or 'thisness'. It is anxious in the face of the implications of its own situation and possibilities which are already implied in the way it is thrown into a situation bounded by temporal limits. Heidegger describes that in the face of which we are anxious as 'nothing in the world':

In that in the face of which one has anxiety, the 'It is nothing and nowhere' becomes manifest. The obstinacy of the 'nothing and nowhere within-the-world' means as a phenomenon that *the world as such is that in the face of which one has anxiety*. The utter insignificance which makes itself known in the 'nothing and nowhere', does not signify that the world

is absent, but tells us that entities within-the-world are of so little importance in themselves that on the basis of this *insignificance* of what is within-the-world, the world in its worldhood is all that still obtrudes itself.

What oppresses us is not this or that, nor is it the summation of everything present-at-hand; it is rather the *possibility* of the ready-to-hand in general; that is to say, it is the world itself. (SZ 186–187)

As ready-to-hand—things express their possible and timely character and thus point to the possibility of the nothing, of no longer being, which is all part of what it means for them to be. The ready-to-handness of anything points to its function for us as part of a project which we are immersed in as part of perhaps some grander network of projects in the service of various things in the future. The timely, directional character of this ready-to-hand network of involvements itself attests to the temporal, finite nature of our existence and the constant ‘passing away’ and ‘moving towards’ of our existence and the eventual cessation of our own existence. We are assailed by the nothing each and every moment when we consider our sheer throwness and the role that our possibilities as being-in-the-world play. Anxiety then is like a primordial sense that the nothing haunts each waking moment, even in diversion, since it is the constant feeling of the not-yet that pulls us out of any sense of one moment to the next. To be-in-the-world is to be thrown such that one is towards one’s possibilities and, part of what it means to be at any given moment, means to have been (which is no longer here) and to be towards (which is not yet here) and to be ultimately towards the main possibility of our being as human beings, to no longer be. Part of what it means to ‘be’ then, far from being opposed to nothing involves a confrontation with nothingness which itself is not a being, no more than being is itself a being. We are never quite there in the sense of being purely present. We are ever on the way and are as thrown since we were not here forever. The abyss of nothingness yawns all about us and, our being-in-the-world, even in its fallen evasion, is still structured according to the necessity of our being-towards-death. This ultimate possibility is constitutive of even our efforts to submerge ourselves in a tranquil everyday of phoney perpetual presence by way of evading our own necessary experience of the interplay of presence and absence.

And this is all that Heidegger wanted from his analysis of Dasein—from these and related insights concerning the being of that being whose own being is an issue for it, Heidegger hoped to embark on a destruction of the tradition of the metaphysics of presence. The attempts to get beyond, deconstruct or overcome the metaphysics of presence become Heidegger’s lifelong task and, thus, seem perfectly congruent with what he first began to develop in his 1927 book. To conclude with a line from *BT*:

The analytic of Dasein is not aimed at laying an ontological basis for anthropology; its purpose is one of fundamental ontology. (SZ 200)

## Notes

1. I noticed recently, for example, that Richard Copabianco tries to explain away a lot of the textual evidence which I will marshal in this paper by simply insisting that though Heidegger might have *wanted* to do what he claims to have done in his retrospectives on *Being and Time*, the fact of the matter is that it makes more sense to assume that the earlier text is mired in difficulties which require us to read the later Heidegger as discontinuous with the earlier Heidegger. For my part, I think this is a less than hermeneutically honest approach to a text and, what we find again, on the question of the role of angst in *Being and Time*, is that, read on its own terms, Heidegger’s work anticipates and remains consistent with later developments in ways that the ‘discontinuists’ refuse to acknowledge (see Copabianco 2010, chapter four).
2. See *PM* 249–250.
3. Why is there something rather than nothing?
4. It is worth bearing in mind that Heidegger recommended the lecture course as a sort of companion piece to *BT*.
5. For a masterful and compelling treatment of negation and the notion of negative facts see Dahlstrom (2010).
6. It is arguably somewhat unfair to target Carnap specifically since few, if any, contemporary analytic philosophers would hold him aloft as pointing the way forward for their views concerning the role of logic, language and the relevance or non-relevance of metaphysics. However, the idea here is not to suggest that this response to Carnap

is a devastating blow to critics of metaphysics and/or Heidegger's thought. Notwithstanding, since Carnap himself explicitly challenges Heidegger's thinking and, since this challenge was seen to be successful to the extent that numerous analytic thinkers think that they can dismiss Heidegger's philosophy as nonsense as a result of Carnap's critique—demonstrating the failure of that critique itself already delegitimizes the position of those who refuse to read Heidegger exclusively on Carnap's say so. Focusing on Carnap is also helpful in that he states his position, however unsuccessfully, in very clear terms, and it also seems clear that Heidegger is explicitly responding to Carnap's positivism in his 1935 lectures, and in his 1940s introduction and post-script to the 1929 lecture that Carnap attacked. Everything here seems to revolve around a series of assumptions and presuppositions which Carnap insists upon but which Heidegger himself would clearly call into question. In a sense then, Carnap's entire approach to Heidegger's philosophy is somewhat question begging and I genuinely think this is something that would have been easily made clear had the two philosophers ever come head to head. It is a question ultimately of ontology, which is what Heidegger insists that metaphysics is synonymous with from the outset, a fact that is sadly misunderstood by Carnap. But, for Heidegger, our current ontology, and this has been the case for some time, is deficient and wrongheaded insofar as part of what must be taken to 'be', part of what 'is', is not itself a thing, nor can it be said to 'exist'. So, not all of our ontology can be covered by the notion of being understood as thingness or presence. However, Carnap clearly thinks that all of these issues are non-issues, which, if he had taken the trouble to read the introduction to *Being and Time*, he might have realized was an overly reductive view of things.

7. Neither do I mean to suggest that Heidegger's understanding of logic would have corresponded exactly with what we would think of as the field of logic today. The notion of logic had a much broader scope in the early decades of the twentieth century than it does today. Notwithstanding, Heidegger's conception of logic, though different to ours, is still relevant to the concerns of the Vienna circle and the likes of Carnap. He explicitly refers to positivism in some of his writings in the 30s and 40s when returning to discuss his 1929 essay. Stephan Käufer makes a compelling case concerning the importance of the contextual backdrop to Heidegger's claims concerning logic as a graduate student and indeed in his early years as a lecturer—that is, prior to the

publication of *BT*. Käufer argues, plausibly, that the notion of logic that loomed largest for Heidegger was a neo-Kantian one which was still some ways from the symbolic logic which was about to take centre stage in the late 1920s and 1930s. However, a number of points are worth bearing in mind here. Heidegger fastens on the law of contradiction in his 1929 lecture in a manner that clearly pits itself against what were the stock views of the logical positivism which was beginning to emerge as a result of interpretations of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and the work of members of the Vienna Circle. Moreover, in subsequent lecture courses in the 1930s, where Heidegger returns to the question of the nothing, he responds to his positivist critics and directly refers to the 'positivism' of the day. Granted Käufer is quite right that Heidegger is not sponsoring irrationalism—but to suppose that *none* of what he was arguing in 1929 was in any way relevant to the positivism that was emerging from the Vienna circle and which was already (rightly or wrongly) associated with Wittgenstein's 1912 *Tractatus* is excessive and doesn't really stand up to scrutiny. See Stefan Käufer. "On Heidegger on Logic," *Continental Philosophy Review* 34 (2001): 455–476.

8. In *GA* 95 Heidegger again invokes the importance of movement (see Heidegger 2017, 99–100). Dahlstrom also makes some telling observations in a paper in *The Review of Metaphysics*: "It would appear that these naysayers of negative facts construe the experience of real things (including the complex of perceptions, apprehensions, and judgments that such experience entails) as a static affair. Yet we see – we do not infer – movements and changes in states of affairs. In doing so, we see precisely that things do not remain at a standstill, that they are never quite what they were a moment ago or quite what they are about to be. To the extent that we see that something is moving, we see properties and relations, part/whole complexes making up corresponding states of affairs, many of which are anything but constant. Even where one sensation is dominant in the experience, what we apprehend in perception can be a steady interplay of presences and absences. Thus, we see the changing color of paint as we add tint to it, we feel the sweat dripping from our forehead, we savor a wine's lingering aftertaste, and we hear the fading strings of a symphony's first movement. These facts of movement and change can only be adequately characterized by invoking negation, and in this sense negative facts underlie the judgments, the convictions and beliefs, that emerge from the perceptual apprehension

of these movements. The import of these considerations is patent: in seeing that something changes or moves, we see that negative facts obtain.” (Dahlstrom 2010, 266–267)

9. That is an offence against the much-revered principle of all principles, which is vouchsafed by the permanence of substance which, in turn, does not allow for any break in pure presence—a result that Kant relies on again in the first analogy of experience.

10. In *Being and Time* Heidegger hopes to find clues as to how to do as much from the phenomenal facts available from a hermeneutics of facticity.

11. Heidegger proposes to examine the ‘da’ of Dasein in two parts: “the existential Constitution of the ‘there;’” and the “everyday Being of the ‘there;’ and the falling of Dasein” (SZ 133). For our part, we are going to focus on the existential constitution of the there, of *our there-ness*.

12. State-of-mind in Macquarrie and Robinson translates ‘Befindlichkeit’ and though it is a translation which comes in for a certain amount of ‘flak’—I think it actually works just fine when one considers the colloquial use of the term which, as one can tell from the translator’s own notes on the phrase, is what they are trying to pick out.

13. In *GA 95*, for example, Heidegger writes that “*Being and Time* indicates the preparation of the decision toward *this possibility* by using the term ‘disposition’ [‘*Stimmung*’] to name the ‘feelings’. (At issue in that book is not a modification of the psychological-anthropological explanation of the emotional side of the human being, but rather a fundamental and different essential grounding of the human being in *Da-sein*, a grounding determined *purely* out of the question of being. The execution of this decisively recognized task was as defective as could be — but what is decisive remains the quite different questioning out of a quite different horizon.) Disposition (cf. winter semester 37 – 38) disposes the human being to his originary vocation of assignment in the stewardship of the truth of being. To be disposed does not mean to wallow in dispositions qua feeling and to feel these feelings; instead, it means: in appertaining to being, to *be* the ‘there’ qua the clearing of concealment as such. To feel feelings is to adhere obstinately to subjectivity; but to be disposed is to be transported into the open realm of the truth of being, such that being is thought not superveniently as the last pallor of what is represented as present-at-hand, but rather is first, constantly, and steadfastly experienced as the event (cf. *Beiträge*) and not objectively represented. The disposed human being receives

the vocation of his essence out of the basic disposition attuned to the event of appropriation. And the vocation is one toward *Da-sein*, toward being a ground for the truth of being. The essence of the human being now arises as essentially occurring out of being, and such essential occurrence is originary history — because arising out of the event itself” (Heidegger 2017, 119–120).

14. Heidegger makes one of many such disavowals pointedly in Volume 95 of the *Black Notebooks*: “Once and for all: I have nothing to do with the ‘philosophy of existence’” (Heidegger 2017, 131).

15. This will of course give rise to the discussion of fallenness in the sections that follow and this account of inauthenticity itself has enjoyed a great deal of discussion in the secondary literature; however, for the purposes of getting through this structural recapitulation of the argument, we must forgo a consideration of these colorful and fascinating sections.

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