The Necessity and Impossibility

of Pure Delineation in *Being and Time*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Quite often, I think, philosophy and its projects are intent on formulating limits and borders. Plato, for example, based his conception of knowledge on the line between the sensible and the supersensible worlds. The supersensible world contains the true Forms of things, so true knowledge is predicated upon one’s capacity to compare and judge the resemblance of things in the sensible world with their proper Forms in the supersensible world.\(^1\) In a similar but distinct manner, Kant is concerned in the *Critique of Pure Reason* with determining the limits of knowledge; that is, he delineates what we can know with absolute and necessary certainty—in pure reason—from what we can only speculate and argue about—in practical reason. Kant’s formulation of the *noumenon* or *ding an sich* (thing-in-itself) serves as a boundary concept between what we can and cannot know;\(^2\) it is “the line,” as it were. Again in a similar manner, I think, Heidegger in *Being and Time* delineates *being as such* from its more common (but ultimately incorrect) interpretation in terms of *particular* beings. More generally, Heidegger’s fundamental ontology aims to rethink the discipline in a more original way than any classical ontology that precedes it.

So, Heidegger sees a fundamental prejudice in the tradition toward beings, whereas any systematic study of *being as such*—the being of beings—is markedly absent. *Being and Time*, as such, is largely devoted to this task. Heidegger begins by questioning the tradition’s conception of the *meaning of being*—but soon argues that we do not even understand or know how to formulate the very question that asks about being

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\(^1\) Cf. Plato, *Republic*.
in the first place. Heidegger’s project, therefore, is concerned both with the clarification of this question and some pursuit of its answer. Ultimately, Heidegger’s fundamental ontology leads to formulating the meaning of being as *temporality*. Heidegger’s discussion of *death*—or, more precisely, *being-toward-death* in what he will call *anticipatory resoluteness*—bears witness to temporality as the meaning of being.

Temporality, as such, is strictly distinguished from our common conception of time. It is precisely this line that I want to follow through Heidegger’s analysis: namely, that of the distinction between *a being* and *being* and, likewise, between common (what Heidegger will term “vulgar”) time and “authentic” temporality. The purity of this border, I think, is critical to the success of Heidegger’s project.

In several articles and lectures, Derrida discusses a similar line of thought in *Being and Time*. Generally speaking, Derrida problematizes Heidegger’s formulation of this border, especially between time and temporality (though, as we will see, being and temporality for Heidegger are irrevocably bound up together). Ultimately, Derrida opens the door to shaking the foundationalism inherent to Heidegger’s most central project.

In what follows, I explicate Heidegger’s fundamental ontology with an aim toward his formulation of authenticity and the border that is constructed between it and our common, “average everyday” conceptions of being and time. I follow that with an analysis of Derrida’s critique of Heidegger, and then offer some concluding remarks in response to Derrida’s argument.
II. HEIDEGGER’S FUNDAMENTAL ONTOLOGY

1. Introduction to the task of fundamental ontology

In the initial pages of Being and Time, Heidegger frames his forthcoming remarks on being in the context of classical ontology. Classical ontology—the Western tradition’s attempt at the study of being—has failed to think being, Heidegger argues, in its most original sense. Point by point, Heidegger goes through several of the misinterpretations and prejudices that he accuses the tradition of having toward being. Almost all ontology, Heidegger thinks, has prematurely dismissed the real study of being as a consequence of these misinterpretations and prejudices.\(^4\) The question of being, Heidegger writes, “sustained the avid research of Plato and Aristotle but from then on ceased to be heard as a thematic question of actual investigation.”\(^5\)

The prejudices that Heidegger lays out are threefold: (1) “‘Being’ is the most ‘universal’ concept.”\(^6\) Being has been and is still often understood as the most general, abstract, and all-encompassing concept: everything is and there is no thing that is not. As such, the concept of being resists definition; there is no “other” category of the same magnitude to compare with being. This has been, Heidegger points out, one of the “excuses” employed in dismissing the question of being. In reality, being’s pervasive and universal character makes it the “most obscure of all,” Heidegger argues, and precisely not the most clear and apparent.\(^7\) (2) “The concept of ‘being’ is indefinable.”\(^8\) This prejudice is often founded on the foregoing: since being is the most universal concept of

\(^5\) Heidegger, p. 1 (2).
\(^6\) Heidegger, p. 2 (3).
\(^7\) Heidegger, p. 2 (3).
\(^8\) Heidegger, p. 2 (4).
all, there is nothing higher from which we can derive it, nor can we legitimately deduce it from something lower. This means, in sum, that “being” is not something like a being.”

Heidegger concurs with this conclusion, but sees how its truth actually necessitates further ontology, rather than precluding it. (3) “‘Being’ is the self-evident concept.”

We employ an understanding of being, Heidegger points out, in every phrase that describes a relation or attaches a predicate to a subject. Phrases like “the table is flat” and “the lights are bright” already operate with an understanding of the relation that being constitutes between two things. We do not, however, Heidegger thinks, actually have a sense of what this means. All of this leads, Heidegger concludes, to disclose that we not only misunderstand being as such, but also misunderstand the very question that asks about it in the first place.

I want to emphasize here Heidegger’s second point, that being as such is nothing like a being. The point here is that there is a fundamental difference between discrete things or entities in the world, and the way in which those things actually are in the first place. Heidegger’s project, I think, is largely interested in disclosing differences in ways or modes of being. Heidegger continues, “The being of beings ‘is’ itself not a being. The first philosophical step in understanding the problem of being consists in avoiding the mython tina diēgeisthai, in not “telling a story,” that is, not determining beings as beings by tracing them back in their origins to another being—as if being had the character of a possible being.”

There is a distinct difference between being and a being, the importance of which it is impossible to overemphasize. Heidegger’s project, I think, is largely concerned with delineating this distinction.

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9 Heidegger, p. 3 (4), emphasis added.
10 Heidegger, pp. 2-3 (3-4).
11 Heidegger, p. 5 (6).
While Heidegger says that ontology (and the bulk of the tradition that employs its understanding of being) inevitably presupposes something about \textit{being as such}, he is careful to make clear that it does not presuppose the \textit{concept} of what is disclosed in the analysis of being.\footnote{12 Cf. \textit{Being and Time}, §2.} At the same time, however, Heidegger seems to think that ontology absent of a true understanding of being is largely without ground: “\textit{All ontology, no matter how rich and tightly knit a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains fundamentally blind and perverts its innermost intent if it has not previously clarified the meaning of being sufficiently and grasped this clarification as its fundamental task.}”\footnote{13 Heidegger, p. 9 (11).} Classical ontology, Heidegger thinks, can gain legitimacy only by way of the task that he has proposed for \textit{Being and Time}. Classical ontology does not presuppose the concepts produced by fundamental ontology per se, but it misunderstands and avoids its own goal if it fails to aim at fundamental ontology.\footnote{14 Cf. \textit{Being and Time}, §3.}

\textbf{2. Da-sein}

If we are going to have any access to \textit{being as such} in the first place, that access must be a possibility inherent to being itself—more precisely, to the being of \textit{our} being. As such, Heidegger’s starting point in the project of fundamental ontology is nothing other than the \textit{being of our being}—what Heidegger terms \textit{Da-sein}. Da-sein is not \textit{a} human objectively present, nor is it the being of present-at-hand entities in the world, nor is it \textit{any} sort of \textit{entity} in the first place. Now before proceeding further, I want to distinguish my reading of Heidegger from a portion of the secondary literature available on \textit{Being and Time}. Despite the complexity of its network of concepts, I think \textit{Being and Time} makes clear from the very beginning the distinction between \textit{being} and \textit{a being}. The
pursuit of an understanding of being must take *being as such* as its focus, and avoid interpreting being as a being, a thing, or an entity of any kind. Despite this qualification, generally speaking, a significant portion of the secondary literature on *Being and Time* consistently discusses Da-sein *as if* it were a being. It is true that—when talking about Da-sein—one almost inevitably falls into this trap, but there are still precautions one can take to avoid misinterpreting Heidegger’s project.

For example, in the initial passage of “Human Mortality: Heidegger on How to Portray the Impossible Possibility of Dasein,” Stephen Mulhall writes, “[Heidegger’s] initial introduction of ‘Dasein’ as the being who questions, and hence as the being for whom being is an issue, quickly leads to the claim that Dasein’s being is being-in-the-world.”15 While talking about “Da-sein” is not easy to do—indeed, sometimes Heidegger himself is not wholly consistent—it is clear here, I think, that Mulhall is thinking of Da-sein as a being (“who questions” and “for whom being is an issue”). Shortly afterward, Mulhall writes, “For there [in chapter 6] Heidegger tells us that there is a specific state-of-mind through which Dasein discloses itself to itself in a simplified way.”16 Mulhall, unfortunately, has seemingly conflated the ideas of Dasein and human being—as if we as human beings can consciously take over the being of our being and live “as Da-sein.” We cannot accept Mulhall’s usage of Da-sein, I think, if we remain faithful to Heidegger’s conception of Da-sein and fundamental ontology in general.

In a similar manner, William Blattner writes in “The concept of death in Being and Time”: “Dasein understands itself by throwing itself into possible ways to be Dasein

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16 Mulhall, p. 297.
— being a teacher, being a student, being a mother or father, etc. — for the sake of which it undertakes the subsidiary tasks it does — writing a lecture, going to a soccer game, etc. — and wield the paraphernalia it does – pens and paper, cars, soccer balls, etc." While in a sense Blattner may be correct, projects such as these—as I will explain later—are “inauthentic” according to Heidegger and comprise what he calls Da-sein’s “lostness in the they.” Furthermore, one cannot “be” Da-sein, as Da-sein is the very being of that to-be in the first place. In short, Blattner misses the real point of Heidegger’s analysis—that is, of coming toward being in a more fundamental way than we can achieve by talking about people and what they do in the world.

Da-sein is founded in self-concern; that is, it is being that is concerned about its being in its being. This formulation has a twofold meaning: (1) Da-sein always already has an understanding of being in its being that is prior to any thematic ontology. So, any true ontology must be grounded in pure disclosure of this understanding (as opposed to contriving and applying some external framework of being). By framing ontology as such, Heidegger overcomes Kant’s problem of describing the transcendental subject. Throughout the text, Heidegger is conscious of this issue and consistently frames the interpretation of Da-sein in terms of its own self-concern and inherent understanding of being. (2) Self-concern can also comprise self-interest; and in this case it does. In a more accurate reading of Heidegger, Mulhall writes, “as long as Dasein exists, it can never achieve wholeness; it will always be ahead of itself, essentially related to a possibility, to

18 Cf. Being and Time, §27.
something that it is not yet.” Da-sein is always already interested in the possibilities of its being; it is always already being-ahead-of-itself as possibility. In this sense, Da-sein is “pure potentiality-of-being;” it always already is what it is not yet.

Heidegger thinks that classical ontology is primarily caught up in trying to know the things that are objectively present in the world. Clearly—if we accept Heidegger’s formulation of being as prior to a being—this variety of ontology ultimately fails to achieve any sort of foundational goal. The reason is that classical ontology operates under gravely mistaken presuppositions about the nature of our relationship to the world. In its perpetual project of acquiring knowledge about the world, it proceeds to systematically examine objects. Or Kant, for example, attempts to enumerate the conditions that make knowledge possible for us in the first place. In either case, the relationship of human to thing is assumed to be one of knowledge. According to Heidegger, however, this formulation misses something far more primordial about being. Heidegger intends to show how knowing is merely a mode of being that is not at all constitutive of Da-sein, but is instead predicated upon a far more original and authentic mode of being. To get a sense of what this more original and “authentic” mode of being means for Heidegger, we need to turn to his discussion of death.

3. Death

Heidegger frames the interpretation of death in the context of Da-sein’s potential for being whole. If Da-sein always already is what it is not yet—as we noted above due to Da-sein’s self-concern—as existing it always includes possibilities and is essentially

20 Mulhall, p. 298.
21 Cf. Being and Time, §9, §31, §41, and §48 (among others).
22 For Heidegger’s discussion of knowing, see Being and Time, §13.
23 Cf. Being and Time, §46-49.
not “whole.” At the same time, Da-sein is not a container that we, as existing, slowly fill up over time to its completion, nor is Da-sein’s “wholeness” an “ideal form” that we all can strive to achieve. Death is the possibility of the end of Da-sein’s possibilities; more succinctly, it is the possibility of an impossibility. Again, my reading of Heidegger differs from that of Mulhall:

> Yet it is plain that Dasein does have an end, and hence is brought to a certain kind of completion or totality – and one that ultimately cannot be separated from the very feature of its being that appears to threaten its possible completeness . . . [Dasein] also understands itself as relating to – as standing out toward – its own future completion, toward a point at which there will be nothing of itself outstanding.

While Mulhall offers what is perhaps an interesting reading of Heidegger’s conception of death, in the end, I think, he does not employ a proper understanding of possibility (and consequently, temporality, which we will discuss shortly). As Iain Thomson writes in “Can I die? Derrida on Heidegger on Death,” “To begin with, what Heidegger means by ‘possibility’ [Möglichkeit]—in ‘the possibility of an impossibility’—is by no means straightforward . . . [and] Heidegger’s understanding of death turns on his distinctive (and peculiar) understanding of possibility.” In a footnote to this last sentence, Thomson adds, “We could extrapolate a further claim from this one; namely, that a failure to understand what Heidegger means by ‘possibility’ will leave any exegesis of the phenomenological analysis of death (as the possibility of an impossibility) hopelessly convoluted.” Mulhall’s analysis, unfortunately so, may seem ‘hopelessly convoluted.’

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25 Mulhall, p. 298.
27 Thomson, p. 40 (endnote no. 28).
Still, Heidegger’s conception of possibility is hard to think at best. A possibility—or, more precisely, *Möglichsein*, being-possible—is not some discrete event that we may or may not achieve in time. In the above quotation Mulhall seems to be thinking about death—Da-sein’s “end”—as an event approaching in time. Instead, Heidegger wants us to think *possibility* purely as *possibility*:

As long as it is, Da-sein has always understood itself and will understand itself in terms of possibilities. Furthermore, the project character of understanding means that understanding does not thematically grasp that upon which it projects, the possibilities themselves. Such a grasp precisely takes its character of possibility away from what is projected, it degrades it to the level of a given, intended content, whereas in projecting project throws possibility before itself as possibility, and as such lets it *be*. As projecting, understanding is the mode of being of Da-sein in which it *is* its possibilities as possibilities. \(^\text{28}\)

Heidegger’s claim, I think, is that our common conception of possibility always reverts to thinking a “possible actuality”—that is, of conceiving of possibilities in terms of their future actuality. Conceptualizing or theorizing a possibility brings it into the domain of knowledge and posits it as a potential actuality—which is no longer possibility as possibility. As Thomson says rather colloquially, Da-sein is “[living through] possibilities rather than grasping them theoretically.” \(^\text{29}\) In a way, Heidegger wants to restore purity to possibility as such.

The most individual and most extreme possibility of Da-sein is death. Insofar as it constitutes the end of Da-sein’s possibilities, death is strictly Da-sein’s own:

Every Da-sein must itself actually take dying upon itself. Insofar as it “is,” death is always essentially my own. And it indeed signifies a peculiar possibility of being in which it is absolutely a matter of the being of my own Da-sein. In dying, it becomes evident that death is ontologically constituted by mineness and existence. Dying is not an event, but a phenomenon to be understood existentially in an eminent sense still to be delineated more closely. \(^\text{30}\)

\(^\text{28}\) Heidegger, p. 136 (145).
\(^\text{29}\) Thomson, p. 32.
\(^\text{30}\) Heidegger, p. 223 (240).
Da-sein initially and for the most part interprets its own being in terms of objectively present things in the world that it takes care of. Da-sein tends, as such, to understand its death in the way that it sees the death of others in the world.\(^{31}\) Death, however, in its most primordial sense is not something that we can experience vicariously;\(^ {32}\) it is Da-sein’s ‘ownmost’ possibility. Death is not an event in time that awaits our arrival in the future, but it is a possibility that is always already ‘constantly certain’ but also ‘indefinite’ with respect to its determination.\(^ {33}\) It is ‘eminent’ insofar as it is the most extreme possibility of Da-sein and ‘imminent’ insofar as it is always a possibility now. So, insofar as Da-sein is possibility and death is a possibility of Da-sein, in death Da-sein becomes imminent to itself. Death, then, is ‘nonrelational’ insofar as it abolishes all relation to things and others. Likewise, it is not something that can be overcome or ‘bypassed,’ but belongs irrevocably as a possibility to every Da-sein. In sum, certain but indefinite, death, as eminent imminence, is Da-sein’s “ownmost nonrelational possibility not to be bypassed.”\(^ {34}\)

In sum, Heidegger strictly distinguishes the death of Da-sein from the death of people and animals as we experience it in the world. As Blattner writes, “Death is not the ending of a human life, whether authentically confronted or inauthentically, nor is it one’s understanding of such an ending.”\(^ {35}\) Death is not one’s completion or fulfillment that occurs in time as an event and determines humans qua objectively present beings to “stop moving,” as it were. As Da-sein’s ownmost—most individuating—possibility, Da-sein relates to death in anticipation. This does not mean, again, that Da-sein is

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\(^{31}\) Cf. *Being and Time*, §47.

\(^{32}\) “No one can take the other’s dying away from him,” Heidegger, p. 223 (240).

\(^{33}\) Cf. *Being and Time*, §50.

\(^{34}\) Heidegger, p. 232 (251). Also cf. §50 in general

\(^{35}\) Blattner, “Concept,” p. 57.
anticipating the approaching moment of its demise. It means, rather, than in anticipating death—in *being-toward-death* as such—Da-sein is disclosed to itself most individually and authentically. How, then, does or can Da-sein relate to death, and how, moreover, does this relation contribute to the meaning of being?

4. Temporality

In ‘being-toward-death’ Da-sein comes to terms with its being, Heidegger thinks, in the *most authentic way possible*. This authentic mode of anticipating death, Heidegger thinks, is precisely what the entire history of philosophy preceding him was ignorant to. He explains this ignorance as a consequence of philosophy’s preoccupation with the present—that is, a preoccupation with things objectively present in the world and with time as a series of now present points—which effected avoidance of the being-futurally toward one’s most individual possibility (which is requisite for authenticity). So, the meaning of Da-sein begins to come into view as *temporality*, due in part to the fact that Da-sein is essentially being-futurally. Temporality here maintains the same qualifications of the anticipation of death above; e.g., it is not, as Hegel thinks, a series of now points in which the past and the future are defined as *not now*. Insofar as Da-sein is being-toward-death, moreover, temporality is *finite*; its finitude—as a “function” of death—while *indefinite*, is without question *certain*.

Just as *knowing* is mode of temporalizing for Da-sein, there is a mode of temporalizing in which Da-sein comes authentically toward death. This mode Heidegger

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37 Cf. *Being and Time*, §65.
terms ‘anticipatory resoluteness.’\textsuperscript{39} Anticipatory resoluteness does not serve as an “ideal form” of authentic existence that we can and should all strive toward for the purpose of becoming “real, authentic individuals.” As Taylor Carman writes in “Authenticity,” “A common, but I think erroneous, reading of Being and Time supposes that understanding ourselves in terms of the one [i.e., the they] is nothing more than a deplorable error, craven conformism, a mere distortion of social life.”\textsuperscript{40} In other words, coming toward death authentically is not something that we can consciously do for the purpose of becoming true individuals—the they is not an “obstacle to overcome,” as it were. Likewise, anticipatory resoluteness does not provide a means by which to bypass death; death still maintains its original qualifier of not to be bypassed. Anticipatory resoluteness, furthermore, exposes the three-fold character of temporality:\textsuperscript{41}

(1) In being-toward-death, Da-sein is primarily oriented as coming toward itself as this possibility. This coming-toward exposes the primordial phenomenon of future. Anticipation, as such, is only possible in terms of the futuralness of Da-sein:

“Anticipation makes Da-sein authentically futural in such a way that anticipation itself is possible only in that Da-sein, as existing, always already comes toward itself, that is, is futural in its being in general.”\textsuperscript{42} Anticipating, the future, and coming-toward are all essentially the same phenomenon. “The future” is not that time and those things that are out there but not yet present now and here; it is, rather, the movement of coming as the condition for the possibility of any orientation toward … in the first place.

\textsuperscript{40} Carman, p. 293.
\textsuperscript{41} Compare what follows to Being and Time, §65. Also cf. Blattner’s “Temporality” (pp. 311-324).
\textsuperscript{42} Heidegger, p. 299 (325).
(2) The toward-itself, on the other hand, exposes the primordial phenomenon of *having-been*. Da-sein, in being futural, is at the same time “returning” to itself: “Anticipatory resoluteness understands Da-sein in its essential being-guilty. This understanding means to take over being-guilty while existing, to *be* the thrown ground of nullity. But to take over thrownness means to authentically *be* Da-sein in the way that it *always already was.*”\(^{43}\) Returning to an “always already was” needs a having-been towards which to return. In other words, returning is predicated upon Da-sein as having-been. Da-sein, in anticipatory resoluteness, projects itself futurally towards its having been, but at the same time, the future is the condition for the possibility of the having-been in the first place; without the coming-toward, Da-sein is nothing.

(3) Lastly, encountering beings in the world is only possible in terms of presencing or *making-present*. More primordially, the coming-toward that primarily exposes the future must also orient itself in terms of a making-present (that permits the experience of coming-toward). Temporality, as such, is constituted by the three phenomena of future, having-been, and present; Heidegger terms these phenomena the *ecstasies* of temporality. According to the fashion in which they are all bound up together in Da-sein (as described above), these ecstasies are irrevocably unified. As a primordial, ecstatic unity, temporality is a coming-toward-itself as having-been encountered in the present.

To avoid discussing temporality as though it occurs in time, we must clarify that temporality *is* not nor does it simply “happen;” rather, it *temporalizes* itself in the various modes. *Time* is not, as Kant thought, the most original condition; temporality, as a primordial phenomenon attested to and exposed by anticipatory resoluteness in being-

toward-death, is the condition for the possibility of time in the first place. Heidegger terms the traditional (e.g., Kantian or Hegelian) conception of time vulgar time.\textsuperscript{44} Temporality, as Heidegger understands it, is strictly distinguished from the common, ‘vulgar’ conception of time. Vulgar time is usually characterized as a linear sequence of now points that extends infinitely from the present to the past and the future. Vulgar time, for the most part, gives priority to the now and interprets time generally in terms of what is now present.\textsuperscript{45} Temporality, on the other hand, was interpreted as an ecstatic unity in which the future and having-been are synthesized as a making present. Future is the initial ecstasy in relation to which the others ultimately “arise” and, as such, has priority. Temporality, moreover, is necessarily finite. So, how does Heidegger distinguish finite temporality from infinite time and how can infinite time arise from finite temporality?

As temporality, Da-sein is, in anticipatory resoluteness, authentically being-toward-death. Temporality, as primarily futural, is being toward its end. Temporality has no explicit “discoverable” end in the future; as with death, its end is imminent and certain but indefinite with respect to its actual determination. Its end, moreover, must not be understood as “occurring in time,” for doing so would reduce temporality to a mere concept that we think about in everyday existence and reverse its ontological priority. Properly understood, the end of temporality is the cessation of its temporalizing. The future is such that it has the eminent, immanent capacity to abolish all possibility for Da-sein; and the finitude of temporality must be understood strictly and precisely in this sense. In his article “Temporality,” Blattner writes, “Heidegger answers that originary temporality explains [vulgar] time, and for that reason it deserves the title originary

\textsuperscript{44} Cf. Being and Time, §82.
\textsuperscript{45} For Heidegger’s discussion of the origins of the vulgar conception of time, see Being and Time, §81.
Vulgar time is a particular (inauthentic) mode of temporalizing that understands time as infinite. But, only because Da-sein has in its being an understanding of primordial temporality as finite, is infinite, vulgar time possible in the first place. Heidegger writes:

> Time is thus endless “in both directions.” This thesis about time is possible only on the basis of an orientation toward an unattached in-itself of a course of nows objectively present . . . If “one thinks” the succession of nows “to the end” with the perspective of objective presence or the lack of it, an end can never be found. In this way of thinking time through to the end, one must always think more time; from this one concludes that time is endless.

Thereby, Heidegger describes how vulgar time is founded in authentic temporality:

Relating to time through the mode of knowing (what is objectively present) inevitably understands time as infinite. Da-sein initially and for the most part understands time in this way due to the fact that it is largely “lost in the they” and its authentic mode of being—anticipatory resoluteness—is covered over.

As such, we have interpreted temporality and its associated phenomena according to the being of Da-sein. Temporality—as an ecstatic unity that temporalizes in various modes—is the meaning of the being of Da-sein. We interpreted anticipatory resoluteness as the authentic mode of temporalizing in which Da-sein comes to terms with itself as being-toward-death. Death, as Da-sein’s eminent imminence, certain but indefinite, ownmost possibility not to be bypassed constitutes the “end” of temporality (and thereby Da-sein) and is, equally, the condition for the impossibility of temporality. Temporality has its priority in the future, while vulgar time is oriented primarily in terms of the present. Since making-present is the basis for falling prey—which is Heidegger’s term for what Da-sein does in its inauthentic modes of being—and Da-sein is initially and for

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47 Cf. *Being and Time*, §65 and §81.
48 Heidegger, p. 388 (424).
the most part lost in objectively present things taken care of (and consequently interprets itself in terms of those things)—the misinterpretation of being that Heidegger accuses the tradition of making is an “understandable mistake.” By aligning making-present with falling prey, Heidegger effectively exposes the “reason” behind the error in philosophy’s prioritization of present.

I hope I have made clear the ways in which Heidegger’s analysis depends on a certain pure delineation between vulgar and authentic temporality and, likewise, inauthentic and authentic modes of being (they are really the same thing). Heidegger habitually describes authenticity in terms of what it is not—and this is often our average everyday, inauthentic conception of being or time. For Heidegger, this distinction is absolutely necessary; our common conception of time—the very manner in which we exist on a day-to-day basis—is ultimately founded in primordial temporality. The relationship between time and temporality—if we maintain a strict reading of Heidegger—is not bidirectional. More specifically, while vulgar time is based entirely on primordial temporality, primordial temporality is not based in the least on vulgar time. If it were, I think, Heidegger’s most central project would be shaken at its roots. In sum, this comprises what I identify as the necessary, pure delineation in Heidegger’s project.

III. DISMANTLING HEIDEGGER’S ANALYSIS

The most elementary problem within Heidegger’s discourse on being is that any distinction between supposed opposites in a way always already contaminates its own purity. As we learned from Hegel, each element in a binary opposition is inseparable from its other; it is defined by its other and, as Derrida might put it, inevitably presupposes something that consists in its other. In short, because each element is defined
in relation to its other, we cannot have a pure conception of either one individually. For example, when Heidegger delineates the bounds of authentic temporality, his logic is contaminated by so-called “vulgar” time. As we saw above, Heidegger’s description of authentic temporality depends heavily on its distinction from vulgar time; Heidegger systematically describes these two modes of time “against” each other. Insofar as the concept of temporality is determined by what it is not, it depends upon or presupposes something that consists in its other, namely, vulgar time.

Now, Heidegger might object by saying that his interpretation of Da-sein—especially its most authentic mode of being—is not merely an epistemological construction that is subject to Hegelian laws of logic. In other words, what Da-sein is in itself is not, as the interpretation makes clear, on equal par with the vulgar or ‘average everyday’ way of being. Da-sein’s most authentic mode of being is prior to—it is the necessary precondition for—any ‘average everyday’ relationship to the world in the first place. As such, authentic temporality and death are in no way contaminated or determined by vulgar temporality and death.

Several essays and lectures by Derrida are devoted largely to different aspects of Being and Time that entail border drawing, especially—for my purposes here at least—“Ousia and Gramme,” “The Ends of Man,” and Aporias. In these works Derrida pays close attention to Heidegger’s formulation of the line between authentic and vulgar conceptions of temporality and death, his dependence on the ‘logic of presupposition,’ his consequent attempt to ground ontology according to his interpretation of Da-sein, and—perhaps most important—the culmination of these readings in the recognition of an irresolvable aporia at the heart of Heidegger’s discourse on being. By far the most crucial
and interesting facet of his analysis, Derrida’s disclosure of this aporia will be the goal of the present discussion. First, however, we must make some introductory remarks to lay the groundwork for the main production.

“Ousia and Gramme” performs a variety of analyses on Being and Time, the bulk of which we will not have time to recount here. Most, however, center on Heidegger’s project to overturn metaphysics or ‘destroy classical ontology’—as Derrida puts it—by reformulating temporality. In the same way that Heidegger demonstrates how the priority of the present in classical ontology is a fundamental but understandable mistake, Derrida is interested in undermining or at least shaking the foundations of Heidegger’s project for authentic temporality. Derrida’s argument, at the core, is quite simple. Heidegger’s project, he points out, is metaphysical from the start: it operates with entirely the same language and is directly interested in time, which is irrevocably a metaphysical concept to begin with. Furthermore, Derrida asks, “why qualify temporality as authentic—or proper (eigentlich)—and as inauthentic—or improper—when every ethical preoccupation has been suspended?” A good question; and I do not think that Heidegger would admit a priority of ethics over fundamental ontology. Indeed, but—perhaps contrary to Derrida—I do not think that Heidegger is making ethical claims by distinguishing the authentic from the inauthentic. At the very least, however, Derrida’s critique brings into question the formulation of Heidegger’s interpretation of being and its relationship to authentic temporality.

51 Ibid., p. 63.
A common and central theme attended by *Aporias* is Heidegger’s usage of the “logic of presupposition.”\(^{53}\) Heidegger, like a number of other philosophers before him in the metaphysical tradition (disregarding whether or not Heidegger falls within that tradition), leverages the pervasive and deeply authoritative method of discovering and disclosing the conditions that make something—in this case Da-sein’s average everyday way of being—possible in the first place. Another way to say this is that Heidegger shows us how (infinite) time is only possible on the basis of (finite) primordial temporality. As Derrida notes, this involves invoking the “classical idea of order” that delineates “priority, precedence, and presupposition” all for the purpose of proving a *foundation*, of showing what is the most original—or, to use Heidegger’s terminology, *primordial*—and of formulating the distinction or *delineating the boundary* between what is founded and is foundational.\(^{54}\) Heidegger’s discourse on being intends give a more foundation basis to ontology proper and to determine the legitimacy (or lack thereof) of other secondary disciplines:

All the disciplines thus named, and thereby identified within their regional borders, notably ‘metaphysics’ and ‘biology,’ not to mention ‘demography,’ necessarily presuppose a meaning of death [and thereby of being *as such*], a preunderstanding of what death is or of what the word ‘death’ means. The theme of the [that is, of Heidegger’s] existential analysis is to explain and make explicit this ontological preunderstanding. If one wants to translate this situation in terms of disciplinary or regional borders, of the domains of knowledge, then one will say that the delimitation of the fields of anthropological, historical, biological, demographic, and even theological knowledge presupposes a nonregional onto-phenomenology that not only does not let itself be enclosed within the borders of these domains, but furthermore does not let itself be enclosed within cultural, linguistic, national, or religious borders either, and not even within sexual borders, which crisscross all the others.\(^{55}\)


Heidegger believes that the entire tradition prior to him had a prejudice about being that allows it to be displaced—or at least grounded again—by his fundamental ontology. The same is true, by extension, for the other disciplines in the academy. What is more, Heidegger complicates the issue up front by stating that the concept of temporality is not presupposed by classical ontology; he merely says, instead, that fundamental ontology is markedly absent from the tradition. Derrida acknowledges the incredible and overwhelming authority of this project: “This order of orders belongs to the great ontologico-juridico-transcendental tradition, and I believe it to be undeniable, impossible to dismantle, and invulnerable.”56 The authority of this argument is demonstrated well by Kant’s classic argument concerning the forms of intuition: he posits, simply, that space and time are conditions for the possibility of experience; this is virtually impossible for us to deny, because we cannot have any experience that does not arrive in one or both of these forms.

The case of death, however, provides a unique and crucial entry point into shaking the foundations of Heidegger’s existential analysis and its usage of the logic of presupposition: “except perhaps in this particular case called death,” Derrida continues, “which is more than a case and whose uniqueness excludes it from the system of possibilities, and specifically from the order that it, in turn, may condition.”57 Death is unique for us here, Derrida thinks, because Da-sein’s very capacity to raise questions about death must be made possible by something other than being-toward-death: “if there are legitimate and powerful questions about the foundation and the ‘already’ of the condition of possibility, then they themselves are made possible and necessary by a

56 Ibid., p. 45.
57 Ibid., p. 45.
relation to death, by a ‘life-death’ that no longer falls under the case of what it makes possible. That is what I call the *aporia*.”\(^{58}\) Death, such as it is, is the most extreme and at the same time individual, authentic, and original possibility for Da-sein. But—and this is Derrida’s point above—there must be some other means by which we can have access to death in the first place, some other relationship to it (what Derrida calls ‘life-death’) that makes it possible for us to interrogate it as a phenomenon. This precisely is the *aporia* that we are concerned with here and it demonstrates the unique and crucial character of death for our deconstruction of Heidegger’s logic of presupposition.

How can death be what Heidegger thinks it is if Da-sein necessarily has some other “back door”\(^{59}\) relationship to it? And how, furthermore, is it possible to relate to an *impossibility* in the first place? This is precisely the nature of the aporia we are dealing with here: it is the site of a necessary but impossible relationship—a *non-passage*—that leaves us with no sense of resolution whatsoever. How, then, does it facilitate the deconstruction of Heidegger’s central argument? Derrida most directly returns to this subject near the close of *Aporias*:

> If death, the most proper possibility of Dasein, is the possibility of its impossibility, death becomes the most improper possibility and the most expropriating, the most inauthenticating one. From the most originary [sic] inside of its possibility, the proper of *Dasein* becomes from then on contaminated, parasited, and divided by the most improper.\(^{60}\)

Without any argument whatsoever, Derrida in the blink of an eye disposes of Heidegger’s argument that says precisely the opposite (the point of Heidegger’s argument being that death—the possibility of an impossibility—is in the fact the *most proper* possibility for Da-sein). Still, Derrida’s point is a strong one and well taken. That is, the possibility of


\(^{59}\) (this is my language, not Derrida’s)

\(^{60}\) Derrida, *Aporias*, p. 77.
non-being—the possibility of Da-sein no longer being able to be there, as Heidegger puts it—is far from most proper to Da-sein. It would seem that this possibility, despite Heidegger’s belief otherwise, does not individuate Da-sein in any way, let alone in the most authentic way possible.

The problems that the aporia generate for Heidegger are exemplified well in his attempt to delineate, through an interpretation of Da-sein, the conditions requisite for authentic temporality and the original, primordial, or foundational understanding of being thus interpreted. Heidegger was right to argue that we have no place of departure in the interpretation of being except here. Specifically, it is only through Da-sein’s self-concern that we can have any access to an interpretation of being as such in the first place. Heidegger realizes that our starting point of here—of Da-sein—is not pure. Initially and for the most part, Da-sein is caught up in average everydayness and objectively present things taken care of. Still, however, Heidegger sees authentic temporality and anticipatory resoluteness as a definite possibility for Da-sein. This possibility, moreover, must be purely distinguished or delineated from lostness in the they. Derrida’s claim, however, is that anticipatory resoluteness always already operates within cultural borders that incorporate—subtly and against Heidegger’s intention—“vulgar” conceptions of death and time. As Derrida writes in *Aporias*,

Despite all the distance taken from anthropo-theology, indeed, from Christian onto-theology, the analysis of death in *Being and Time* nonetheless repeats all the essential motifs of such ontotheology, a repetition that bores into its originarity [sic] right down to its ontological foundation, whether it concerns the fall, the Verfallen, into the inauthenticity of relaxation or distraction, or the sollicitudo, the cura, and the care (Sorge), or sin and originary guilt (Schuldigsein), or anxiety … [in short,] neither the language nor the process of this analysis of death is possible without the Christian experience, indeed, the Judeo-Christiano-Islamic experience of death to which the analysis testifies.61

In short, Heidegger’s interpretation of Da-sein is always already contaminated by the socio-onto-theological situation from which he is operating. Heidegger’s fundamental project—which I read as one that tries to purely delineate being—is shaken at its roots by Derrida’s deconstruction. Heidegger’s project depends irrevocably on the values—namely, vulgar and authentic—that he has placed on different modes of being. By invoking Derrida here, I hope I have begun to make it clear how Heidegger’s discourse on being is in some respects a failed quest to purely delineate being as such.

IV. CONCLUSION

We have seen how Heidegger’s fundamental ontology largely resituated the metaphysical conceptions of time, death, and being and, moreover, how this authorized Heidegger to argue that all other disciplines presuppose fundamental ontology. We have seen, moreover, how Derrida proceeded to identify, at the core of Heidegger’s ontology, a crucially problematic aporia that brings into question the authority of Heidegger’s project. Heidegger’s project depends upon—it makes necessary—a pure delineation between being and a being, between temporality and time, and so forth. Derrida’s analysis, on the other hand, shows how this delineation—as a consequence of certain aspects inherent to Heidegger’s project—is fundamentally impossible. In a way, we have approached Derrida’s aim—the site of a necessary but impossible border.

Thomson offers some remarks that bring into question—or at least complicate—Derrida’s analysis of Heidegger. Derrida’s analysis can generally be divided into two different arguments: the first of these states that Da-sein must have some “back door” relationship to death (other than being-toward-death); the second is that Heidegger’s formulations of anticipatory resoluteness and authentic temporality are apparently
contaminated by the socio-onto-theological position that Heidegger is operating from. Thomson points out that, at one crucial point, Derrida conflates the idea of being-possible (Möglichein) with that of ability (Seinkönnen).62 By seeing death as an ability and not being-possible, Derrida can make the first argument: only as an “ability” is death something that we might necessarily need access to (via “life-death,” for example). As being-possible, the unknown, untheoretical relationship to death is precisely what Heidegger is after—and I do not think, following Thomson, that Derrida’s critique does justice to this distinction. Derrida, like several of the other readers of Heidegger outlined above, is not entirely consistent in his understanding of possibility in Being and Time.

Regardless, I think, Derrida’s second argument—that Heidegger’s formulation of anticipatory resoluteness clearly incorporates certain aspects of the socio-onto-theological tradition that it is operating from—maintains its ground. Throughout the Western tradition there is a negative connotation given to worldliness, just as Heidegger has argued that Da-sein falls prey to “the they” and to objectively present things that it takes care of; in a word, it falls prey to the world. This mimics almost precisely the Christian tradition’s formulation of original sin and “the fall” into the world. Just as Christianity thinks humans as sinful by nature, so Heidegger thinks that Da-sein initially and for most part falls prey to the they. While I do not think that Heidegger is making ethical claims by establishing authenticity and inauthenticity,63 he inevitably risks being interpreted as such. What is the point of distinguishing the authentic from the inauthentic, if not to subtly suggest that one is better than the other?

62 Cf. Thomson, the section titled “Different Possibilities” (p. 31).
63 Cf. Carman.
The point here has not been that “Heidegger was wrong”—if it were, we would be participating in the same pattern of undermining and grounding philosophy anew that has haunted the tradition for millennia. Still, avoiding this variety of criticism is more easily said than done. As Derrida himself would likely agree, simply saying that we are not trying to prove Heidegger wrong does not mean that we avoid participating in precisely that. Heidegger’s pure delineation is somewhat of an ambiguous paradox: Heidegger is not wrong, but nor does he succeed in drawing a pure border between what is “vulgar” and what is “authentic” as such.

My aim here has largely been to interrogate the foundation of Heidegger’s discourse on being and disclose, if possible, something that would allow us to compromise the system by which it operates. I hope the invocation of Derrida has indicated that this possibility may, at least, exist. The key here is that we took Heidegger’s project apart from within—and did not impose some external system of knowledge on it. So, I do not intend to reproduce philosophical authority in yet another new and stronger way. I merely want to show how one instance, at least, of this authoritative business of delineation may be problematic at the center. I have tried to show how constructing pure borders—at least in this case and perhaps with similar, political borders around nations, classes, and races—is a problem that we can begin to dismantle. The establishment of pure borders entails a certain presumption of authority that, in the end, is not always legitimate. The analysis of this claim—that is, the alignment of philosophical and political border drawing and the problematic of authority—is a worthy project for future study.
Bibliography

Blattner, William D. “The Concept of Death in Being and Time.” *Man and World: An International Philosophical Review* 27, no. 1 (January, 1994): 49-70. In this essay Blattner wrestles with the antinomy “Death is a possible way to be Dasein, one in which Dasein is not able to be.” He presents a number of options for overcoming this seeming contradiction and reminds us of the Heideggerian distinction between death and demise. At times, he seems to forget that death is purely a possibility for Da-sein and not a “way to be.” But, overall, the essay offers a good review of the concept of death in *Being and Time* (and death is indeed one of the most crucial parts of Heidegger’s project therein).

---. “Temporality.” *A companion to Heidegger.* Ed. Hubert L Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005. In this essay, Blattner largely makes up for what is missing from “The Concept of Death in *Being and Time*” (above)—namely, a thorough discussion of Heidegger’s conception of temporality. For the most part, Blattner does an excellent job of distinguishing “authentic” temporality from “vulgar” time, in the same way that Heidegger does in *Being and Time*. He also discusses the way in which Heidegger founds vulgar time in authentic temporality, which is crucial to any understanding of temporality.

Carman, Taylor. “Authenticity.” *A companion to Heidegger.* Ed. Hubert L Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005. In this essay Carman offers an insightful and well organized analysis of Heidegger’s conception of authenticity. Heidegger’s usage is sometimes confusing, so Carman attempts to sort out what it really means. As he says in the first line, “‘Authentic’ (*eigentlich*) is one of Heidegger’s favorite words” (p. 285). Carman also engages several other authors—such as Sartre and Wittgenstein—for the purpose of elucidating Heidegger’s remarks on authenticity.

analysis of Heidegger’s formulation of temporality and attempt to ‘destroy classical ontology,’ as Derrida puts it, in *Being and Time*. Derrida focuses largely on the distinction that Heidegger makes between authentic temporality and vulgar time and the domination of *presence* in metaphysics—as Heidegger reads it—throughout history. Ultimately, he concludes by leaning towards the inadequacy and even failure of Heidegger’s distinction.

---. “Ends of Man.” *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp. 109-136. In this essay, Derrida discusses the arrival of humanism in French philosophy from Heidegger’s Da-sein. The original French translation of Da-sein was “human-reality,” which much of Sartre’s philosophy is then based upon. This is largely a mistranslation (“monstrous in many respects,” Derrida says) that in a way reverses the original intent of Heidegger’s project. Derrida explores the relationship between the “proper” and the “improper” translations and the extent to which the improper translation existed as a definite possibility in Heidegger’s thought from the start. He finishes by questioning whether Heidegger has moved beyond metaphysics or remains within the tradition.

---. *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993. This is a later, more detailed and more precise reading of *Being and Time* that focuses specifically on the question of death. Derrida is interested, again, in the distinction between the authentic and the vulgar (especially with respect to Heidegger’s conceptions of death and temporality). In the key moment of the text Derrida identifies a certain *aporia* at the heart of Heidegger’s discourse on being. This aporia is somewhat of a necessary but impossible relationship or passage that deeply complicates and problematizes Heidegger’s project. He finishes by noting how Heidegger’s conception of Da-sein is not nearly as universal as Heidegger would have it be, but is actually contaminated by all the vulgar conceptions of death and temporality that Heidegger was trying to avoid.

---. “The Crisis in the Teaching of Philosophy.” *Right to Philosophy I: Who’s Afraid of*
In this essay Derrida brings into question the authority of philosophy in several respects. It includes the probably often cited quote that aligns philosophy’s ‘imperialist self-confidence’ and pervasive demarcation of the disciplines in the academy. This is what Derrida terms the ‘self-critical movement’ of philosophy. This movement, he thinks, serves largely for the purpose of reproducing philosophy’s already self-designated authority.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Trans. Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996. This is Heidegger’s seminal work to re-think the nature of being as such. Heidegger’s project here is founded around the belief that all philosophy prior to him merely understood being in terms of other people and objectively present things in the world. This formulation does not allow for differences in the way in which things are, which is, Heidegger thinks, a deep and decisive prejudice in the history of philosophy. As such, Heidegger proceeds from the start to reformulate a fundamental ontology. This leads him to re-think temporality, among other things, and posit it as the most fundamental meaning of being as such.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996. In this key contribution to the history of philosophy Kant quite successfully reconciles many of the disputes between rationalist and empiricist discourses. Kant’s project here is in part to determine the conditions that make experience possible for us. I reference it only as an example of border drawing in the history of philosophy.

Mulhall, Stephen. “Human Mortality: Heidegger on How to Portray the Impossible Possibility of Dasein.” *A companion to Heidegger*. Ed. Hubert L Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005. In this article, Mulhall offers a brief overview of several aspects of *Being and Time*, especially those pertaining to Da-sein and death. At several points Mulhall offers marginally interesting insight into Heidegger’s discourse, but, unfortunately, I do not think
that he really understands several crucial concepts therein (especially possibility and temporality). He tends, furthermore, to conflate the ideas of Da-sein with human being, which leads to some somewhat confusing and convoluted conclusions.

Plato. *Republic*, Trans. G. M. A. Grube and C. D. C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992. In this crucial work, Plato outlines the structure of the *polis* and corresponding structure of the human soul. His interest is largely in arguing for the importance of *education* and determining the conditions for *authority* in the *polis*. I cite it only briefly as an example of border drawing in philosophy.