The Light That Illuminates: Heidegger, Being and the World

A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for an Honours degree in Philosophy, Murdoch University, 2015.

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I draw on the work of Martin Heidegger to provide a critical account of the way our understanding of the world is shaped by modern conceptions of reason. I claim that our current ways of thinking about ourselves and the world of our everyday lives are already framed by a particular form of reason that Heidegger identifies as sufficient ‘scientific’ reasoning. This type of reasoning limits our understanding of the world by framing it \textit{a priori} within the confines of the scientific conception of ‘nature’.

What this entails, more specifically, is an account of the world and human existence that is reduced to the level of \textit{things}. I argue that this scientific conception is a historically situated interpretation, which following Heidegger, I suggest is based on our tendency to \textit{forget} the way we primarily understand and interpret the things around us. I begin by addressing the question of Being, which I frame in terms of the meaningful presence of things. Following this, I present Heidegger’s account of the meaningful surrounding world, which we encounter through our projects. Finally, I close by discussing some of the specific ways that scientific reasoning has covered over this meaningful surrounding world. My aim is to show how the world around us is primarily meaningful, and that Heidegger’s analyses of sufficient reason and modern science are an extension of his earlier critique of the metaphysical divide between subject and object, whereby human beings are reduced to the thinking thing—\textit{res cogitans}. Overall, I argue that the scientific account of the ‘natural world’ is one interpretation among others, and by no means the final or ultimate interpretation of that which \textit{is}. Rather, we must challenge ourselves to new ways of thinking in order to see that the world ‘\textit{is}’ primarily the place where we carry out the meaningful projects of our everyday lives.
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Abbreviations of Heidegger’s Texts

AWV   “The Age of The World View.”
BT    Being and Time
OHF   Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity
PR    The Principle of Reason
WT    What is a Thing?
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Introduction

My aim in the following dissertation will be to show the historical basis and limitations of modern scientific and sufficient reasoning, which I argue occlude other ways of understanding the world we live in. Following Heidegger, I claim that these forms of reasoning rest on a common metaphysical ground, which I explain through René Descartes’ distinction between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*. I contend that the dominance of this type of reasoning covers over the conception of world presented in *Being and Time* (2010), wherein Heidegger conceives of the world as the broader meaningful horizon that shapes our human understanding. Specifically, the modern scientific notion of the ‘natural world’ reduces the world of our living to a collection of singular objects. This is problematic because the objects we account for on the basis of scientific reason are ultimately devoid of human meaning. By contrast, Heidegger offers a way to rethink the world as the meaningful place of human concern.

As I explain further in §6, Heidegger follows the method of hermeneutic phenomenology, the emphasis of which is on the way phenomena are understood and interpreted by *historical* human beings. Therefore, since I am drawing mainly from Heidegger’s work and Heideggerian scholarship, this method will be reflected in the discussion I present here. I consider this hermeneutic approach to phenomena necessary against the backdrop of modern scientific reasoning, which leads us to overlook the history of human thought. My intention will be to present a different way of thinking about the world around us, one that is able to recognise how things are disclosed to us meaningfully, in regard to our own historical situation.

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1 I use the terms ‘the world’, ‘surrounding world’ and ‘the world around us’ interchangeably to refer to this meaningful human world, or ‘Umwelt’ for Heidegger (cf. §12). Any references to the scientific conception of the world will be qualified by phrases like ‘the natural world’ or ‘the scientific conception of’.

In order to substantiate my thesis that scientific reasoning is a historically constituted interpretation of our surrounding world, and to introduce the reader to some of the major concerns of Heidegger’s thought, in chapter one, I begin with a brief overview of Heidegger’s ontological project as developed in *Being and Time*. My aim is to outline the conception of meaning that modern scientific rationality cannot account for. Specifically, I discuss the question of Being [Sein], which, following work by Thomas Sheehan, I argue is a question about the *meaningful* presence of things.¹ I claim that any response to questions about our meaningful surroundings will change depending on the historical conditions of our own finite lives, so that such questions are best approached in terms of hermeneutic phenomenology. To repeat, this method involves a focus on the way meaningful phenomena are revealed and concealed to human beings in terms of the historical and factual circumstances of human life. Moreover, it is this hermeneutic method of inquiry that I oppose to modern scientific inquiry in the third chapter.

In the second chapter, I expand on Heidegger’s conception of ‘the world’ as he explains it through the method of hermeneutic phenomenology. Following Heidegger, my intention in this chapter will be to put forward the conception of the meaningful world that I contend is primary, and presupposed by our modern scientific notions of reason. In doing so, I compare Heidegger’s conception of the structure of human existence (*Dasein*) and ‘being-in-the-world’ [‘*In-der-Welt-sein*’] with the Cartesian divide between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, a divide that serves as the metaphysical ground of modern science. In contrast to the Cartesian account, I argue that the world is *not* an object or collection of objects, but the historically constituted, meaningful horizon that

is always already open to Dasein. In other words, the world ‘is’ the broader, meaningful context of everyday human life.

In the final chapter, I draw on some of Heidegger’s later critiques of modern scientific reasoning, which I argue extend the critique of Cartesianism that he presents in *Being and Time*. I point out how modern science leads us to overlook our meaningful engagement with the things we use in the context of our surrounding world by limiting our understanding of the world *in advance*. On the modern scientific account, our surroundings are reduced to an ordered arrangement of fixed objects, objects that are represented to our consciousness, but which are divorced from our own meaningful engagement with things. Such an understanding, I claim, is an appropriation of Cartesian metaphysics. As I show, both Cartesian metaphysics and scientific inquiry take as their point of departure mathematical principles that are considered to be ‘known’ *a priori*.

Yet, far from being *a priori*, such metaphysical descriptions are ultimately human interpretations of the surrounding world, interpretations that are always historical. While we formulate certain metaphysical concepts in our attempts to provide reasons or grounds for the Being of things, (i.e., the meaningful presence of things), Being cannot be reduced to reason or grounds, but is ‘groundless’ to the extent that there is nothing ‘to’ Being other than human meaning. Only human beings interpret their surroundings meaningfully, in the context of the concerns that make up everyday life. The initial task of any inquiry into the world around us is to address the question of Being, since worldly things ‘are’ and must *be* before we can render them as objects for rational–scientific investigation. Therefore, following Heidegger, I argue that if we overlook the question of how beings come to *be* the beings they ‘are’, we will always overlook our most primary relation to the world, which is always already meaningful. Taken together,
I will show that sufficient ‘scientific’ reasoning is a historical interpretation that is always derived from this meaningful world-horizon.
§1 Introduction

To support my claim that scientific rationality is a historically grounded interpretation that limits our thinking about the world around us, in this first chapter, I outline Heidegger’s posing of the question of Being. My intention here is to present the notion of meaning that is covered over by modern conceptions of reason. The study of Being is ontology, and through fundamental ontology, Heidegger aims to uncover the conditions for the possibility of the study of Being. In the following, I suggest that Heidegger’s concern with ontological questions is a consistent theme throughout his thinking.

Moreover, I approach the question of Being as a question about the significance or meaningfulness of our surrounding world. Sheehan lends support for this approach in his call for a paradigm shift in Heideggerian research. At the crux of Sheehan’s argument is the claim that ‘Being’ should always be taken to refer to the “meaningful presence of things”, intelligible only to human beings in a particular epoch. The only ‘escape’ from meaning, according to Sheehan, is death. Likewise, Taylor Carman claims that Being refers to the intelligibility of entities that we deal with, or more specifically, the condition for the intelligibility of such entities. As I explain further, entities are intelligible to us insofar as we immediately understand them in relation to our own lives. Briefly, we can say that to ask after the Being of beings is to ask after...
that which allows human beings to encounter things as the things they are at a specific period of time.¹⁰

As I will discuss throughout, the issue for Heidegger is that the tradition of Western metaphysics—inaugurated by the Ancient Greeks, transformed by the scholastics and then overturned by Descartes in the seventeenth century—has limited our understanding of the world around us to an arrangement of objects that are supposedly ‘timeless’ and unchanging (cf. §3). This is problematic insofar as we forget that our meaningful engagement with worldly things does not take the form of our merely looking at them as fixed objects. Rather, for the most part, we use things in order to undertake certain projects [Entwurf], projects which are future-orientated. To limit the world around us to a collection of fixed objects is particularly pernicious when we consider that human life—and the meaningful engagement with things entailed by it—is always structured by time. As I discuss below, human existence is not like some timeless or static object, but is always finite and factical.

Therefore, in contrast to the static objects of modern metaphysics, Heidegger argues that fundamental ontology must take finite human existence as its point of departure, leading him to reformulate phenomenology as hermeneutic¹¹ phenomenology. He develops this method in order to account for the way our meaningful comportment toward things is shaped by the historical circumstances of our lives. Overall, in this chapter, I will lay down the groundwork necessary to illustrate the limitations of scientific rationality in regard to the meaningfulness of our surrounding world, which I address in chapter three.

Here, I will show that the Being of things is always related to human meaning.

¹⁰ N.B. This view is disputed by the ‘Object Orientated Ontology’ of Graham Harman, who asserts that it is entirely possible to maintain a Heideggerian ontology that takes nonhuman beings as its point of departure. See, Graham Harman, “An Outline of Object-Oriented Philosophy,” *Science Progress* 96, no. 2 (2013).

§2 The Question of Being

Heidegger lays down the project of fundamental ontology in Being and Time,12 which is widely considered his magnum opus.13 Fundamental ontology is influenced by (yet radically different to) the ‘transcendental’ or ‘reflective’ phenomenology of Edmund Husserl,14 Neo-Kantianism,15 the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard,16 and work done by figures like Wilhelm Dilthey, Count Paul Yorck von Wartenburg,17 and Georg Simmel.18 Heidegger’s work is distinguished from these other ways of thinking insofar as the question of Being is at the front and centre of his philosophy, a question Heidegger claims has been ‘forgotten’ over the course of history, and which he insists we must return to.19 Vincent Vycinas, Otto Pöggeler and Hans-Georg Gadamer (among others) suggest that the problem of Being characterises Heidegger’s entire oeuvre, and that all the problems Heidegger identifies are problems to do with the question of Being.20 To be sure, any critical engagement with Heidegger’s work will ultimately come up against the ‘Being question’, which, to repeat, I argue is a question about the meaningful context of our surrounding world.

In the opening pages of BT, Heidegger tentatively suggests that we can take ‘Being’ to refer to “that which determines beings as beings, that in terms of which beings have

12 From now on referred to as BT
13 See, for example, Sheehan, 2015, p. 123; Harman, 2007, p. 127.
14 N.B. While I acknowledge the profound influence of Husserl on Heidegger’s thought, due to the scope of this dissertation I am only able to mention this influence in passing. For more, see Martin Heidegger, “My Way to Phenomenology.” In On Time and Being (1972). See also, Gadamer: “[Heidegger] built on research in intentionality carried out by the phenomenology of Husserl” (2004, p. 235). Von Herrmann, 2013, Biemel, 1977, pp. 5–7.
19 Heidegger, BT, §1, p. 1 [2]; §6, p. 21 [21]. See also, Heidegger, OHF, §1, pp. 1–3.
always been understood no matter how they are discussed”. Following this claim, he immediately clarifies that “[t]he [B]eing of being ‘is’ itself not a being”. As William Richardson explains, ‘Being’ names that which renders possible all that ‘is’. One could say that Being ‘illuminates’ particular beings as something we recognise as meaningfully related to the projects of our everyday lives. Yet, “just as light cannot be perceived without the things it illuminates,” we have no ‘access’ to Being, only to particular beings. Being ‘is not’ a particular being, “Being is the transcendens pure and simple”. That is, Being ‘transcends’ every possible and actual conception of a being.

Being ‘transcends’ particular beings insofar as human beings understand what Being illuminates in terms of a broader meaningful context, which goes beyond particular beings and makes sense to us in terms of our own past and present circumstances, as well as the future we expect for ourselves. In the next chapter, I identify this meaningful context as our surrounding world. Here, I wish only to indicate that our own relation to beings is always marked by temporality [Zeitlichkeit], and, by extension, historicity (i.e. our being historical). Specifically, our interpretation of the way Being discloses particular beings will always change depending on our own finite situation. Hence, we cannot label ‘Being’ with any kind of ‘comprehensive’ or timeless definition. As I

21 Martin Heidegger, Being and Time (2010), §2, p. 5 [6].
22 Ibid.
24 Vycinas, Earth and Gods: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger, p. 5.
25 Heidegger, BT, §7, p. 36 [38].
26 In The Concept of Time, Heidegger claims “Historicity signifies the historical being [Geschichtlichsein] of that which exists as history.” (2011, p. 1, [3]). Further, in BT: “...temporality is at the same time the condition of the possibility of historicity as a temporal mode of being of Dasein itself...” (BT, §6, p. 19 [20]). See also, The Concept of Time, pp. 80–91 [94–95]; BT, §45, pp. 224–225 [234–235].
27 N.B. In the chapters that follow, we will see how this ‘finite situation’ is not strictly limited to the temporal, and also encompasses the meaningful place (not space) of human life. See Jeff Malpas: “[T]he hermeneutic focus on human finitude, and so on knowledge and understanding as belonging essentially to finite existence, and only to finite existence, may seem to involve no appeal to notions of situation or place in the first instance, and yet these notions are surely implicit, being brought directly into view as soon as any close attention is brought to bear on the idea of finitude as such.” “Place and Situation.” In The Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics, ed. Jeff Malpas and Hans-Helmuth Gander (2015), p. 355.
28 “Because being is in each instance comprehensible only in regard to time, the answer to the question of being cannot lie in an isolated and blind proposition.” (BT, §5, p.18 [19]).
explain below, time is the *total horizon* of Being,\(^{29}\) and the way we relate to the Being of things is always already framed by the historical situation in which we find ourselves. Therefore, we must avoid metaphysical (rational, empirical) conceptions which equate ‘Being’ with the objectively present *ahistorical* characteristics of particular beings.

§3 Temporality, Historicity and Facticity

According to Heidegger, traditional metaphysical accounts of Being overlook the temporal structure of our meaningful engagement with things in favour of what is static and unchanging. In *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity* (1991),\(^ {30}\) he broadly defines modern metaphysics as “a theory of objects”.\(^ {31}\) As he repeatedly stresses, modern metaphysics always conceives of the thing as standing over and against the human subject, as an *object* that is unchanging and ‘frozen’ outside of time. Metaphysics, then, is always the metaphysics of objective *presence*.\(^ {32}\) In *BT* Heidegger explicitly attempts to overcome this prejudice via his ‘destruction’ [*Destruktion*] of the philosophical tradition.\(^ {33}\) Walter Biemel notes that this ‘destruction’ is intended to make the “petrified history of ontology” transparent to us, so that we may come to know the manner in which such a history has framed our understanding.\(^ {34}\) For Heidegger, we must resist the impulse to render Being in terms of any traditional metaphysical distinctions or logical propositions, which conflate ‘Being’ with the timeless presence of particular beings, since that which Being illuminates is never static or timeless. Contra metaphysics, we never encounter beings as fixed objects that we observe as standing


\(^{30}\) From now on referred to as *OHF*.

\(^{31}\) Heidegger, *OHF*, §1, p.1.

\(^{32}\) See Heidegger in *Introduction to Metaphysics*: “To be sure, within the purview of metaphysics…one can regard the question about Being as such merely as a mechanical repetition of the question about beings as such.” (2014, p. 20 [14]). See also, Richardson: “Metaphysics talks about Being…only in the sense of the total ensemble of Beings.” (1974, p. 7); Gadamer, 1994, p. 48; Hart, 2011, p. 45.


\(^{34}\) Biemel, *Martin Heidegger: An Illustrated Study*, p. 32.
over and against us. Rather, beings only make sense to us in terms of the broader meaningful context of our projects.

One of Heidegger’s key claims is that we never find ourselves opposed to singular, unchanging objects that we first ‘perceive’ and then attribute meaning to. Instead, things are immediately meaningfully related to the whole of our lives. In BT he points out that “‘[i]nitially’ we never hear noises and complexes of sound, but the creaking wagon, the motorcycle. We hear the column on the march, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the crackling fire”.35 In other words, we never hear ‘sound’ as such; ‘sound’ is a theoretical concept that subsumes all particular instances of our hearing something as something we already understand. We could never conceive of ‘sound’ and go on to establish fields like acoustics or audiology if we did not initially find ourselves in a context that is immediately meaningful to us.

As Sheehan observes, our comportment toward things does not take the form of a response to isolated sense-data; we always encounter meaningful things before we are even able to consider them.36 The fact that things already are constitutes the great ‘wonder’ that marks the beginning of philosophy, as Plato and Aristotle claimed.37 Yet, when we ask about things—or even when we start to think about them—we tend to take this wonder for granted, we neglect our primary involvement with meaningful things and consider them as singular objects, thereby removing them from the context of ‘total meaningfulness’.38 To overlook this meaningful context is to overlook the fundamental way that we understand our surroundings, an understanding that is always shaped by the continual passing of our own lives, as well as the historical situation that we find

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35 Heidegger, BT, §34, p. 158 [164].
36 Sheehan, Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift, p. 117.
37 In the Theaetetus, Plato claims: “This wondering: this is where philosophy begins and nowhere else.” (155d3). See also, Aristotle’s Metaphysics, 982b13-23; 983a10-20, Hart, 2011, p. 46, Sheehan, 2015, p. 112.
38 To use William Richardson’s term. See Richardson, Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought, p. 56.
ourselves in. For Heidegger, the way human beings meaningfully relate to the things around them is not reducible to the static presence or appearance of singular things to sensory perception; this is already a historically constituted way of thinking.

While I will return to this particular way of thinking, for now it is suffice to say that, for Heidegger, human beings cannot be reduced to the level of static objects. Rather, human life is *always* structured by time: one is born, one lives awhile and then, finally, one dies. For this reason, human life is characterised by finitude, as well as facticity [*faktizität*].\(^{39}\) As I will discuss in the next chapter (cf. §9), facticity plays a crucial role in our meaningful comportment toward worldly things. Briefly, we can take ‘facticity’ to refer to the being of our own existence.\(^{40}\) According to Heidegger we are always ‘awake to’\(^{41}\) or aware of our own Being, though not in the sense of our ‘having’ or ‘knowing’ this Being, which is not a being among other beings that can be ‘had’ or ‘known’. Rather, facticity refers to how we are always ‘there’ for ourselves to the extent that our own Being is an issue for us.\(^{42}\)

This awareness of our own Being is illustrated by the way we are always interpreting *ourselves* in terms of who we are.\(^{43}\) For example, it is due to my facticity that I already understand myself as an Australian male, living in the 21st century. Facticity underpins all our actions in the world, which always make sense to us because we already understand the things we encounter and use in terms of their *being something*. Things can only *be* the things they are within the context of the projects we undertake, and these projects shape our understanding of who we are, an understanding that is itself

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\(^{39}\) *N.B.* I use the terms ‘facticity’ and ‘factic’ interchangeably.

\(^{40}\) Heidegger, *OHF*, p. 5.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., p. 5; §3, pp. 12–15.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., p. 5.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., §3, p. 14.
always already shaped by the particular historical and cultural circumstances we are born into.

Thus, to overlook temporality is especially problematic when it comes to human existence, which is always structured by time. For Theodore Kisiel, Heidegger takes up the concept of facticity to account for the “particular while” or awhileness [“Jeweiligkeit”] that characterises each of our own lives.\(^{44}\) In \textit{OHF}, Heidegger explicitly identifies temporality as “fundamental” to facticity.\(^{45}\) Facticity, however, is not something present that is to be found ‘out there’ in the external world, but is rather the very basis of our ability to engage with things at all. Through facticity, our relation to things always takes on a sense of ‘mineness’ to the extent that we are only able to interpret the Being of things in terms of our own lived historical situation.\(^{46}\) Due to our facticity, we already stand in some ‘relation’ to Being, which, for Heidegger, means that there is always a ‘fore-structure’ [‘Vor-Struktur’] that shapes our understanding of Being in advance.\(^{47}\) As Vycinas observes, all our actions are, so to speak, a response to Being.\(^{48}\) As I discuss in §6, we only approach the meaning of Being hermeneutically, i.e., in terms of interpretation.

\textbf{§4 Being and Meaningfulness}

As I have stressed, any response to the question of Being will always be limited by our own finite understanding of the things we encounter and use meaningfully each day. Thus, one way to frame the problem of Being is in terms of the problem of meaning.

\(^{45}\) Ibid.
\(^{46}\) Heidegger, \textit{OHF}, §2, p. 5. See also, Gadamer: “Everything that is experienced by oneself, and part of its meaning is that it belongs to the unity of the self and thus contains an unmistakable and irreplaceable relation to the whole of this one life” (2004, p.48).
\(^{48}\) Vycinas, \textit{Earth and Gods: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger}, p. 8. See also, Heidegger in \textit{Identity and Difference}: “Man is essentially this relationship of responding to Being, and he is only this. This ‘only’ does not mean a limitation, but rather an excess.” (1969, p. 31).
That is, how it is that things come to be understood and interpreted as the things they ‘are’. Heidegger explicitly puts forward this formulation of the problem of Being in a 1935 lecture course,\(^{49}\) wherein he aligns the question of Being with the question ‘what is a thing?’ Once again, he points out that the emphasis of this question is not on this or that species of thing, but on what it means to be a thing—i.e., the ‘thingness’ of the thing. The issue is that we cannot say the thingness of the thing is itself a thing, since this does not tell us anything about ‘thingness’ at all.\(^{50}\) While asking after the ‘thingness’ of the thing might appear like an odd question to our modern way of thinking, this formulation is helpful for bringing the question of Being in closer proximity to the question of meaning, and by extension, to our everyday lives.

We can take ‘meaning’ in this context to refer to the way that human beings—and only human beings—relate to the things we encounter and use.\(^{51}\) The things we encounter are always already intelligible or significant to us. I always encounter things as ‘mine’ to the extent that I understand the things around me in terms of the whole meaningful context of my life. After all, it is not as if I can ever be totally indifferent toward worldly things. Things are only ever disclosed to me as something, whether as something that will facilitate my everyday dealings [Umgang] with the world or as something that will frustrate these dealings.\(^{52}\) Even when I do not care about something, this ‘something’ is still intelligible to me as something that I do not care about. Strictly speaking, then, there is no ‘singular thing’ that stands over and against us, since things only make sense to us in relation to the total meaningful context of the projects with which we are engaged.


\(^{50}\) Ibid., p. 8. See also: Seidel, 1970, pp. 35–39.

\(^{51}\) “When innerworldly beings are discovered along with the being of Dasein, that is, when they become intelligible, we say that they have meaning [Sinn]. But strictly speaking, what is understood is not meaning, but beings [Seiende], or being [Sein].” (*BT*, §32, p. 146 [151]). See also: *OHF*, §21, p. 71.

\(^{52}\) *BT*, §32, p. 144 [149].
Hence, to pose the question of Being is, in a sense, tantamount to asking about the ‘thingness’ of the thing. Sheehan observes that Heidegger overtly equates Being with the meaningfulness of things when he identifies ontology as “the explicit theoretical inquiry into the intelligibility of things.” Indeed, the Being question is uncanny, in the sense that the Being of beings is both obvious and obscure; both close and distant. We have an “inconspicuous familiarity” with Being, according to Heidegger, and this familiarity marks the fore-structure of our understanding. To even ask the question of Being, one must already have an awareness of what it is to be something, even if only in a confused manner. One cannot ask ‘where is the hammer?’ without already knowing what a ‘hammer’ is. The fact that we can ask the question ‘what is a thing?’ suggests that we must already be familiar with what ‘the thing’ is. In the very act of saying the ‘is’, one makes a claim about the meaningful presence of something, about the Being of something. Such claims, in turn, can be understood and interpreted due to the fore-structure of our understanding, which means we are already ‘familiar’ with what Being discloses.

Overall, the ‘Being’ of things, what things ‘are’, names what they mean in the context of the particular ‘awhile’ of human life. Whenever we say a thing ‘is’, we make a claim about the Being of something. The problem, however, is that this same ‘is’ seems to limit Being to a particular entity, leading to the obliteration of the difference between Being and individual beings.

54 Heidegger, The Concept of Time: The First Draft of Being and Time, p. 15 [21].
55 Seidel observes that Heidegger traces the neglect of the ontological difference to an ambiguity in the Ancient Greek ‘τό ὄν’, which can be taken either in an existential or predicative sense (1970, p. 35). For more, see Heidegger’s “Moira (Parmenides, Fragment VIII, 34–41).” In Early Greek Thinking: The Dawn of Western Philosophy (1984), p. 88.
§5 Ontological Questions vs. Ontic Questions

So far, I have discussed the question of Being as a question about the meaningful context of factic human life, about those historical surroundings that already make sense to us and which cannot be reduced to any individual being. For Heidegger, the difference between Being and beings is the ontological difference, and one way that he distinguishes his method of inquiry from the metaphysical tradition that precedes him is by distinguishing between ontological and ontic questions. As J. L. Mehta notes, ontological inquiry is a way of investigating the entities that are disclosed to us in terms of their being something. In other words, ontological questions are those questions directed at the essential structures that underpin and give rise to our understanding of beings: i.e., the way things are always meaningful things.

Ontological questions are to be opposed to ontic questions, which do not ask after the Being of things, but simply ask after particular beings. It is through ontic questions that we come to know ‘facts’ about the characteristics of, and relations between, particular worldly beings. For example, if I describe this particular table in front of me as rickety and wooden, then I am offering an ontic description of the table. When I start to describe what makes the table what it is, however, then I am offering an ontological description.

In this fashion, we can pose a range of both ontological and ontic questions about the same entity. To repeat an earlier point, Being is always the Being of something. This

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57 N.B. ‘Essential’ here is taken from the German ‘Wesen’, and is not intended to suggest anything like a timeless ‘essential property’, but simply to those essential structures that make a being the being it is. For Heidegger, such essential structures are to be demonstrated in everyday life and “remain determinative in every mode of being of factical Dasein.” (BT, §5, 16-17 [17]).
59 See Kisiel in The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time (1995). Kisiel stresses that the ontological can never be divorced from the ontic (p. 79), and that Heidegger acknowledged early on that ontological inquiry always has ontic ‘roots’ ['Boden']; i.e., that ontology must always emerge from the ontic (p. 6).
is not to suggest that there is some kind of one-to-one relation between Being and beings, but simply that there is no Being in isolation from particular beings. After all, things can be the things they are in many and various ways, depending on the circumstances we encounter them. When the scientist suggests this same table is a table because it is an aggregate of atomic particles, by virtue of the ‘is’ they are making an ontological claim about the Being of something; albeit by offering a particular ontic description.61

To carry out an ontic inquiry is to skip over the broader context of our encounters with things and to focus only on particular beings. In our ontic inquires, domains of Being (e.g., nature, history, human life) are marked off and become thematized as objects of our investigation. Once thematized, these domains provide us with ‘fundamental concepts’ which are then simply taken for granted and become ossified.62 To cordon off a particular region of Being for theoretical investigation in this way is to reduce the field of that investigation to a select group of abstract entities, entities which can then be ascertained and ‘known’, rather than meaningfully interpreted. While all ontic inquires make implicit claims about Being, ontic inquires do not overtly raise the question of Being. Ontic inquires arise from a preconceived, narrow interpretation of Being on the basis of some particular being (or group of beings), and are therefore unable to recognise the ontological difference.63

In the chapters that follow we will see that our traditional methods of inquiry lead us to overlook the ontological difference. In regard to the meaningfulness of our surrounding

62 Heidegger, BT, §3, p. 8 [9].
63 “We can conclude only that ‘being’ [‘Sein’] is not something like a being [Seienden]. Thus the manner of definition of beings which has its justification within limits—the ‘definition’ of traditional logic which is itself rooted in ancient ontology—cannot be applied to being.” (ibid., §1, p. 3 [4]).
world, our modern scientific inquiries inevitably presuppose some notion of what the world is. In scientific investigation, we thematize the world around us as an object of our inquiry and formulate the basic concept of ‘nature’. The problem addressed by fundamental ontology is that such an inquiry already takes beings as given, without inquiring how they might be given and why. Namely, our traditional ontological inquiries are limited to what they can tell us about what it means to be a thing, leading us to forget how our understanding of things is always structured historically.

§6 Ontology and Hermeneutic Phenomenology

It is out of this concern for the neglect of basic ontological questions, as well as his mentor Husserl’s injunction to “go back to the things themselves,” 64 that Heidegger demands a return to the ancient question of Being. Yet, at the same time, he insists that this return must acknowledge any kind of historical or theoretical prejudice. Accordingly, the method that leads Heidegger to align the question of Being with the question of meaning is the phenomenological method. Gadamer defines phenomenology as the attempt to describe phenomena without recourse to physiological–psychological explanations or preconceived principles.65 For Vycinas, the phenomenological attitude can be broadly understood as a ‘respectful stance’ toward our lived experience of the surrounding world.66

Both Sheehan67 and Frederic-Wilhelm von Herrmann68 note that the basic focus of phenomenology is on how things are meaningful to human being. Things will become meaningful to us in accordance with the finite, historical situation of our own lives.

65 Gadamer, Heidegger’s Ways, p. 51.
68 Von Herrmann, Hermeneutics and Reflection: Heidegger and Husserl on the Concept of Phenomenology, p. 5.
Different historical periods are characterised by different understandings of what ‘the thing’ is. The phenomenon that we today call the ‘the sun’ and currently take to be a luminous sphere of plasma at the centre of our solar system showed itself to the people of 15th century Europe as a heavenly body that revolves around the earth. Prior to this, the people of Ancient Greece considered the sun as the chariot of the deity Helios. As we will see in chapter three, history is replete with similar examples. Given that meaning is always constituted historically, in our accounts of the things that make up our world, we must recognise the historical basis of the metaphysical and scientific claims that ground our modern understanding, since these claims are loaded with ontological assumptions. Instead, in our ontological inquiries, we must shift our attention back to the meaningful world. In particular, we need to recognise there cannot be some eternal unchanging ground on which our knowledge rests; knowledge can only ever be partial human knowledge.

Accordingly, Heidegger’s method of accounting for phenomena—his phenomenology—is hermeneutic. Pöggeler describes hermeneutic phenomenology as “essentially temporal interpretation”. For Von Herrmann, hermeneutics is a-theoretical, by which he means that hermeneutics does not assume the static presence of things in advance. Gadamer notes that Heidegger’s phenomenology is hermeneutic in the sense that the meaning of phenomena is “explicated” rather than merely “explained”. One makes no attempt to provide a ‘neutral description’ of phenomena, since phenomena are always disclosed differently in relation to the historical context of one’s factic life. Heidegger himself contrasts hermeneutics with logical analysis: hermeneutics is the way of

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69 See also, Heidegger in WT, pp. 12–14.
70 Pöggeler, The Paths of Heidegger’s Life and Thought, p. 76.
71 Von Herrmann, Hermeneutics and Reflection: Heidegger and Husserl on the Concept of Phenomenology, pp. 5–6.
72 Gadamer, Heidegger’s Ways, p. 51.
explicating our facticity, which our traditional inquiries cannot account for. In short, Heidegger’s method of inquiry is distinguished from those methodological approaches that privilege the timeless presence of objects. Rather, he attempts to account for the way meaningful things are revealed to human beings over time.

As I have outlined above, the question of Being should be taken as a question about the meaningful presence of things. The disclosure of Being is required for us to understand and interpret the things around us as meaningful things. Moreover, any response to this question will have to acknowledge the temporal structure of human life, since only human beings are able to understand what is disclosed by Being, and only ever in a partial way. The Being of the things we encounter cannot be observed by merely looking at singular things, nor can we analyse Being in terms of fixed metaphysical principles. We are only able to approach the question of Being hermeneutically—in relation to the broader historical context of factic human life. Therefore, ontology—the study of Being—is only possible as hermeneutic phenomenology. For Heidegger, the effectiveness of a method for ontology is determined by the extent that such a method is able to ‘confront’ the things themselves. Such a method should not simply ‘confront’ the presence of singular things, but ask after the way these things are brought to light for historical human beings. To do so is to ask after the meaning and ground of things, i.e. the Being of things.

For Heidegger, this is precisely where our traditional metaphysical inquiries are wrongheaded. Human life is always factical: I always understand things in terms of my own situation before I understand them as singular objects. Only through hermeneutics are we able to make this ‘mineness’ explicit. In other words, the only way to investigate

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73 Heidegger, OHF, §3, pp. 6–7.
74 BT, §7, p. 33 [35].
75 Ibid., §7, p. 26 [27].
what things are is to consider the way things are understood and interpreted by historical human beings. Without 'Being', there is no meaningful disclosure of things. Therefore, if we overlook the question of Being, we will always overlook our most basic relation to worldly things, which are always already meaningful.

§7 Conclusion
In this chapter, I have outlined some of the methodological considerations that lead Heidegger to pose the question of Being, which I have approached here in terms of meaningful things. Needless to say, this is a complex issue. Heidegger's approach to the Being question undergoes a number of changes throughout his writing, and it is not the intention of this dissertation to explore these changes. For our current purposes, I have focused our attention on Heidegger's early commitment to ontological questions, which go beyond particular things, and ask after the way things are illuminated as things that are meaningfully related to factic human life. For Heidegger, modern metaphysics neglects the facticity of human life in favour of the static 'objective' characteristics of particular things. To limit ourselves to objects that stand over and against us is to forget the way we are primary involved with worldly things—an involvement that is never static, but always structured by temporality.

It is due to this temporal structure that our surroundings are only ever disclosed to us partially, within the context of our own finite lives. The condition that makes possible all worldly phenomena—the Being of things—is not a thing, and so cannot be rendered in terms of rational or empirical theories, since these theories do not account for the way the Being of things is disclosed in accordance with the historical conditions of factic human life. Subsequently, if we do not question the metaphysical ontology of presence handed down to us, then we will be condemned to overlook our own facticity. And it is our facticity that underpins our immediate understanding of things as meaningful things.
Therefore, ontology must always begin with hermeneutic phenomenology: to ask after the Being or meaning of things we must return to our interpretations of the things themselves.

In the next chapter, to further substantiate my thesis that modern scientific reason is unable to account for the meaningful world of historical human beings, I expand on Heidegger’s conception of the relation between human being and the world, which he terms ‘being-in-the-world’. This is the conception of the world and human being that I argue is presupposed and thus covered over by the scientific conception of reason. Heidegger uses the word Dasein to describe the structure of human existence. As Dasein, human beings are always meaningfully engaged with things, and cannot, for the most part, be understood in isolation from the meaningful things surrounding them. For Heidegger, we predominately engage with things as tools [zeuge] that are handy [zuhanden] to our projects, rather than as objects that are objectively present [vorhanden]. Therefore, our accounts of the world ought to start from the way we understand and interpret the meaningful things that surround us, since this is the most basic way that we come into contact with the world.
Chapter 2: World

§8 Introduction

In chapter one, I argued that the problem of Being is tantamount to the problem of meaning. I outlined how, according to Heidegger, the study of Being must avoid the presuppositions of metaphysical ontology and instead focus on the way things are meaningful for factual human beings. As we saw, we only encounter things in terms of our own finite perspective in a given historical period. Therefore, rather than focus on the static objects of modern metaphysics, fundamental ontological inquiry must be hermeneutic and consider how beings are meaningfully understood by human beings, who will always interpret what is disclosed in terms of the awhileness of their own lives.

In this chapter, in order to highlight the limitations of scientific reason, and to offer another way of thinking about the relation between humans, world and nature, I present the notion of the meaningful world in which we live, for which, I claim, modern science cannot account. In doing so, I concentrate on Heidegger’s conceptions of ‘Dasein’ and ‘the world’, as well as the relation between them, which he terms ‘being-in-the-world’.\(^\text{76}\) Dasein is the structure of human existence, and as Dasein, we are the only beings who care for our own Being. This care for our own Being (viz. our facticity) means we have an ‘inconspicuous familiarity’ with the Being of beings. After all, only Dasein can pose and respond to the question of Being. Accordingly, in \textit{BT} the focus of Heidegger’s ontological inquiry is Dasein.\(^\text{77}\)

As I have pointed out already, things must \textit{be} in order for human beings to understand and interpret them \textit{as} meaningful things. In this chapter, I extend my claim to contend

\(^{76}\) Ibid., §4, p.12 [13]; p. 39 [41]; §11–12, pp. 50–62 [52–62]

\(^{77}\) Ibid., §5, p. 16 [16].
that ‘being-in-the-world’ refers to the way human beings relate to and engage with
things in terms of a broader, meaningful context, which I identify as our ‘surrounding
world’ [‘Umwelt’]. In the next chapter, I concentrate specifically on the manner in
which our modern scientific understanding is founded on the same metaphysical
principles that have led us to neglect this meaningful surrounding world.

At this stage, however, it is sufficient that we take heed of Werner Marx’s assertion that
for Heidegger, ‘the world’ “does not stand ‘opposite’” to human being, but should be
taken as an ‘opening up’ or bestowing of meaning.\footnote{Marx, \textit{Heidegger and the Tradition}, p. 184.} One can find support for this
reading in the work of Richardson, who explains Heidegger’s conception of the world in
terms of a “matrix of relations” \cite{Richardson2011},\footnote{Richardson, \textit{Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought}, p. 56.} which together, make up the
‘total meaningfulness’ that constitutes the structure of the world.\footnote{Ibid., p. 57.} Similarly, Sheehan
identifies the very structure of the world as meaningfulness.\footnote{Sheehan, \textit{Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift}, p. 123.} In a similar vein, against
the modern ‘scientific’ conception of nature, I argue that ‘the world’ does not refer to a
thing, or even a collection of things, but to the \textit{total meaningful horizon} of human
concern. Overall, following Heidegger, I argue that our naturalistic conceptions of the
world are always derived from this broader horizon.

\section*{§9 Dasein and Facticity vs. the Cartesian Subject}

As per his ‘destruction’ of Western metaphysics (cf. §3), Heidegger is at pains to avoid
traditional conceptions of the ‘external’ world. One such conception is the theoretical
divide between object and subject, which he traces to Descartes’ distinction between \textit{res
extensa} and \textit{res cogitans} in the seventeenth century.\footnote{Heidegger, \textit{BT}, §6, pp. 21–24 [22–24]; §10, p. 45 [46]; §14, p. 66 [66]; §18, pp.87–99 [89–101].} According to this understanding,
the human being is something \textit{substantially and essentially different} from every other
thing that surrounds them. Yet, despite this distinction, the human being is still taken on the same level as a thing—albeit the thinking thing. As Cartesian subject, there is a metaphysical gulf between ourselves and our surrounding world: human beings are conceived of in terms of pure ego, with no ‘direct access’ to worldly things. All we can ‘know’ is things as objects that are given to us in consciousness (cf. §20). While we are able to express what we are conscious of to others in the form of propositions, these propositions are not in themselves ‘guaranteed’ to say anything about the world—only about our own thinking. In order to verify that these propositions do say something about the world, they must correspond to the most abstract, ‘objective’ features of the things we encounter. As I discuss in chapter three, on this account, the world becomes reducible to a collection of objects that are represented in consciousness to the human subject. Briefly, we can say that by conceiving of the thing as an ‘object’, we limit our understanding of worldly things to representations that are supposedly given to our conscious ego, rather than as things that we encounter and use meaningfully.

In this regard, Heidegger marks a departure from his mentor Husserl. Heidegger rejects any notions of the self, the subject, ‘man’, or the transcendental ego. Rather, the priority of the question of Being leads Heidegger to rethink all traditional conceptions of human being. In BT he begins his inquiry with the hermeneutic analysis of Dasein, which he identifies as the structure of everyday human existence. Hence, as Von Herrmann argues, while Husserl sought to practice phenomenology in terms of how things appear

\[83\] “…[O]n the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it.” René Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies (2012), p. 54 [78].

\[84\] Heidegger, OHF, §21, p. 73. See also Heidegger in “The Thing”: “An independent, self-supporting thing may become an object if we place it before us, whether in immediate perception or by bringing it to mind in a recollective re-presentation. However, the thingly character of the thing does not consist in terms of the objectness, the over-againstness, of the object.” (1971, p. 167).

\[85\] OHF, p. 5. See also, BT, §4, pp. 10–13 [11–15].
to the “reflective gaze” of the pure and timeless ego, Heidegger identified the starting point of ontology to be the factic life of Dasein.\textsuperscript{86}

As noted above, ‘facticity’ refers to the character of our own Being.\textsuperscript{87} That is, how we are always aware of our own Being by virtue of the way we meaningfully engage with things in terms of the particular awhileness of our own lives (cf. §3).\textsuperscript{88} According to Kisiel, Heidegger’s conception of ‘Dasein’ is a result of his earlier interest in factic life, so Dasein can (in a sense) be taken as an “alternate term” for facticity.\textsuperscript{89} Kisiel goes on to note that facticity is integral to the structure of human existence (viz., Dasein) insofar as the finitude of factic life continually shapes one’s own Dasein.\textsuperscript{90}

This finitude distinguishes Dasein from all other beings. Whereas other beings are factual, only Dasein is factical. In BT Heidegger remarks: “The factuality of the fact of Dasein, as the way in which every Dasein actually is, we call its facticity.”\textsuperscript{91} As Biemel reminds us, for Heidegger such terminological distinctions are intended to imply a broader change in our seeing and thinking about what is.\textsuperscript{92} Heidegger’s reasoning for employing the term ‘facticity’ is that the ‘factuality’ of Dasein is “ontologically fundamentally different” from anything that can be rendered as objectively present, like some “kind of stone.”\textsuperscript{93} The stone, after all, does not relate to itself or the things surrounding it meaningfully, in regard to any particular ‘awhile’, and therefore lacks facticity.

\textsuperscript{86} Von Herrmann, \textit{Hermeneutics and Reflection: Heidegger and Husserl on the Concept of Phenomenology}, pp. 5–6.
\textsuperscript{87} “Let us call this presence, possessed by each individual Dasein—one is it, or I am it—facticity” Heidegger, \textit{The Concept of Time: The First Draft of Being and Time}, p. 35 [44].
\textsuperscript{88} OHF, p. 5; §3, pp. 12–15; §6, pp. 24–27.
\textsuperscript{89} Kisiel, \textit{The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time}, p. 274.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{91} Heidegger, \textit{BT}, §12, p. 56 [56].
\textsuperscript{92} Biemel, \textit{Martin Heidegger: An Illustrated Study}, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{93} Heidegger, \textit{BT}, §12, p. 56 [56].
It is though facticity that Dasein is able to understand and interpret the factuality of things like the stone in such a way that these things make a difference to Dasein’s own Being. As factual Dasein, we are already aware of the Being of our own existence—only Dasein exists, all other things are. We are aware of our own Being to the extent that we always find ourselves living within the context of a world that already is. For Biemel, the key difference between the Being of Dasein and the Being of the stone is that while the stone just ‘is’, Dasein is always ‘to-be’. Namely, the Being of Dasein cannot be determined in advance, Dasein can only be realised in terms of the future-orientated projects that shape our sense of who we are. In short, only human beings can develop an attitude toward the future possibilities of their own Being, the stone cannot. It is this capacity to have an attitude toward ourselves and our own possibilities that means our own Being is already an issue for us.

As the only being whose own Being is an issue, Dasein already stands in some ‘relation’ to Being qua Being. We do not, however, relate to Being as if ‘it’ were a being that we could encounter. Rather, to relate to Being is existential, it is part of the structure of our very existence. In the Letter on Humanism (1993), Heidegger emphasises the term ‘openness’ when discussing the Being of beings. ‘Openness’ here simply refers to our immediate understanding of things as meaningful things: we must already be ‘open’ to the things around us for these things to be ‘open’ to us. Being ‘creates’ an opening and human beings are thrown into the world, which is already ‘opened up’ or framed by a historically constituted understanding of what is. Hence, what Being discloses to Dasein cannot be reduced to metaphysical conceptions like sensory perception or

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94 N.B. To be sure, there is a basic intentionality to all questioning, so our awareness of Being is illustrated by our very asking after it. As Metha points out: “Whenever we ask a question, we are seeking for something and this quest takes its direction from a preliminary awareness of what we are looking for—this is what the question is about” (1976, p. 89).

95 Biemel, Martin Heidegger: An Illustrated Study, p. 34.

cognitive representation; these are already historically situated notions. Rather, beings are only open to Dasein to the extent that Dasein is already open to beings. As Sheehan notes: “we are able to do such ‘traversing of an open space’…only because we already are such an open space.”

In *On the Essence of Truth* (1993), Heidegger describes Dasein as both ‘ek-sistent’ and ‘in-sistent’. On Richardson’s interpretation, ‘ek-sistent’ refers to the way Dasein is structured to ‘stand outside’ its own being, *ex-posed* [*aussetzend*] toward the openness of Being *qua* Being. At the same time, as Dasein we are in-sistent: we tend to neglect the question of Being by focusing only on the particular beings we encounter, leaving us prone to unquestioningly accept the tradition of thinking we are born into. As I noted earlier in regard to *BT*, Being always transcends particular beings, inasmuch as beings are only intelligible to human beings in terms of a broader context of meaning. Likewise, as ek-sistent, Dasein moves beyond beings that are opened up (disclosed) by Being and toward the Opening itself. For Richardson, this ‘Opening’ is what Heidegger identifies as ‘the world’ in *BT*. This leads Richardson to suggest that for Heidegger, the problem with accounting for Being and the problem with accounting for the world are, at root, identical. Taken together, it is as both ek-sistent and in-sistent that Dasein is ‘being-in-the-world’. Briefly, we can say that the world here refers to that Opening that we ourselves are always already open to, or as Sheehan puts it: “the meaning-giving context opened up by and as ex-sistence.”

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100 Ibid., p. 231.
101 Ibid.
103 *Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift*, p. 11.
In the *Concept of Time* (2011), Heidegger remarks that “Dasein, as the opened-up [erschlossen] state of ‘being-in’, is the condition for encountering the world”.104 This encounter with the world (our being-in) initially takes on the character of thrownness [Geworfenheit], to the extent that we always find ourselves thrown amidst a range of possibilities that we are able to take up or dismiss.105 For Heidegger, we are these possibilities; there is no pre-given, timeless essence that constitutes our existence.106 Put simply, human being is not a thing with an unchanging essence. This is one of the further insights that distinguishes Heidegger from the metaphysical tradition that precedes him: Dasein cannot be reduced to any essential property or pre-given category such as animal rationale, cogitans, Homo sapiens, etc.107

§10 Being-There and Concern

Given that Dasein is ontologically, fundamentally distinct from other beings, one cannot describe Dasein in the same terms one would describe other entities, since these terms are steeped in metaphysical assumptions. Dasein is not some-thing that is on par with other things or even alongside them. In a sense, Dasein has more in common with an ‘event’ than anything like an object or subject. Specifically, as Heidegger says, ‘Dasein’ marks the event of disclosure.108 For Heidegger, truth is the disclosure of Being.109 As noted, Being is the light that illuminates particular beings, but ‘is not’ a being that is ever disclosed or brought to light. The significance of Dasein is that only Dasein is open to what is disclosed, only Dasein is able to understand beings as meaningful things—a relation to things that is not reducible to sensory perception. To return to an earlier

105 “The expression thrownness is meant to suggest the facticity of its being delivered over [Überantwortung].” *BT*, §29, pp. 131-132 [135]. For more on thrownness, see: Braver, 2014, pp. 54–56; Mehta, 1976, p. 153; Vycinas, 1961, pp. 43–47.
106 *BT*, §9, pp. 41–43 [42–44].
108 “Dasein is its disclosedness” Heidegger, *BT*, §28, p. 129 [133].
point, our comportment toward meaningful things does not primarily take the form of perceiving singular things that we understand as ‘outside’ of us. Instead, things are immediately disclosed to us as something meaningfully related to the projects of our everyday lives.

In this way, the Being of beings can only be an issue for Dasein, inasmuch as only Dasein encounters things within the world as things that make sense or have meaning at all. As I have mentioned already, and will discuss further below (cf. §13), our everyday engagement with things rarely resembles anything like simply ‘looking’ at things in their singularity. On the contrary, we mostly find ourselves doing things, and the ‘there’ [‘Da’] in the ‘being-there’ of ‘Dasein’ refers to this concernful engagement with things—to our meaningful engagement with things. An engagement that always makes sense to us in terms of the broader context of our surrounding world. As Dasein, we are always ‘there’ for ourselves to the extent that we find ourselves taking care of things for the sake of some project, which means we are already somewhat familiar with the Being of things that we encounter and use.\(^{110}\)

As both ek-sistent and in-sistent, human being is always ‘being-there’, and as ‘being-there’ our primary engagement with the surrounding world is structured by ‘care’ [‘Sorge’]. In and through ‘care’, Dasein is inextricably immersed by the surrounding world—or, as Heidegger puts it: “The being which is essentially constituted by being-in-the-world is itself always its ‘there’”.\(^{111}\) Care takes us ‘there’ to the extent that in our day to day lives, we are rarely aware of the singular things we use, because our concern is ‘there’ with some broader project that we find ourselves undertaking.\(^{112}\) For Lee Braver, what is initially counter-intuitive about this idea is that “we’re not in the there,

\(^{111}\) Ibid., §28, p. 129 [132].
\(^{112}\) “What everyday dealings are initially busy with is not tools themselves, but the work” (ibid., §15, p. 69 [69]).
we are the there”.

Sheehan observes that “…our engagement with meaning is structured as care…” Moreover, he notes that this structure “cuts across” the aforementioned divide between mind (res cogitans) and body (res extensa). That is, we are this structure: care is not something we do, but makes us who we are. Heidegger himself claims that “Dasein is in terms of what it takes care of”. Furthermore, care is the “the primordial being of Dasein itself”.

As Raymond Tallis explains, it is through the structure of care that past, present and future—which are separated in our ‘vulgar’ understanding—form a unified whole. In chapter one, we discussed how our meaningful engagement with things is always structured by temporality (cf. §3), which is enacted by our taking care of the things we use. Through care, our past makes sense to us in terms of the projects we are involved with in the present, and through these projects we direct ourselves toward the future. Care is the very structure of Dasein’s meaningful engagement with worldly things, and for this reason, without care, there is no Dasein. Human life cannot be thought of in terms of res cogitans, which is supposedly independent of this concerned involvement. As Dasein, human existence is always characterised by ‘being-there’ through care—an involvement with our surroundings which, far from being static or timeless, is fundamentally temporal in the sense of the ‘awhileness’ of factic Dasein. Therefore, as mentioned above the meaningful engagement with things constitutive of Dasein cannot be rendered in terms of static metaphysical principles, but only interpreted hermeneutically, in the context of our finite relation to the beings around us.

113 Braver, Heidegger: Thinking of Being, pp. 50–51.
115 Ibid., p. 115.
116 Heidegger, BT, §30, p. 137 [141].
117 Ibid., §28, p. 127 [131].
§11 Being-in

Heidegger’s hermeneutic analysis of Dasein leads him to the notion of world. One of the key claims in *BT* is that human being is *always* ‘being-in-the-world’.\(^{119}\) As noted, Heidegger observes that in our most basic engagements with everyday life, singular things do not stand over and against us, but are always caught up with activities and projects that we are already undertaking. Mehta observes that activities like producing, cultivating, using as well as *not* using, neglecting and so forth, are all modes of ‘being-in’ that Heidegger describes as ‘taking care’ [*Besorgen*],\(^{120}\) which is itself a part of the broader care structure discussed above.

These projects are by no means limited to any grand aspirations for the future we might have, but extend to those small-scale, thoughtless acts that we are constantly engaging in. *Everything* we do, we do in the service of some project. After breakfast I brush my teeth and have a shower—all with the ‘project’ of starting my day with fresh breath. To consider things as totally divorced from these projects is to overlook the way we actually deal with them, and thus to overlook our most basic way of relating to the things around us. In other words, our understanding of things does not come from mere observation, but from using things in the context of the projects we are engaged with, as per our being-in-the-world.

As I already noted, Dasein cannot be reduced to any fixed essence or predetermined category. This being so, Dasein is not ‘in’ the world like other things are. Rather, the ‘in’ of being-in-the-world refers to this concernful involvement with things, and not our spatial location within some other kind of entity—as if we were merely ‘in’ the world like the toothpaste is ‘in’ the bathroom drawer. Rather, we find ourselves already being-

\(^{119}\) *BT*, §4, p. 12 [13]; p. 39 [41]; §12–13, pp. 53–62 [53–62].

there, ‘in’ the world, dealing with meaningful things, and carrying out projects in a context we already understand.

§12 Four Senses of ‘The World’

‘The world’, then, does not refer to our position on the planet Earth. So to further distinguish the terms of his investigation from those of traditional metaphysics, Heidegger outlines four different senses of the term ‘world’.121 The first sense that he outlines refers to commonplace notion of the world I have already alluded to, that is, as a giant ‘container’ where all particular entities are located.

The second sense of ‘world’ is ontological, and pertains to the Being of entities within the world, i.e., the way things are. This second sense can denote any region of entities, and so can refer to any kind of ‘regional’ ontology, like those of mathematics or physics. We express this sense of ‘the world’ in everyday phrases like ‘the world of the microbiologist’ or ‘the world of the engineer’.122

Heidegger identifies the third sense of world as the ‘pre-ontological’ public world. He notes that while this is an ontic conception of the world, we should not take this description as in the first description of the world, that is, as the total collection of entities that are objectively present to Dasein. This third sense, rather, refers to Dasein’s surrounding world, that meaningful context where Dasein is thrown and finds itself already immersed. This notion of the world refers to the matrix of ‘total meaningfulness’ described by Richardson.123 According to Von Herrmann, this sense of the world refers to the “worldly whole of significance”, which is not mediated by our

121 Heidegger, BT, §14, pp. 64–65 [64–65].
122 Ibid.
123 Richardson, Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought, pp. 56–57.
sensory perception. This is not a world that consists of fixed objects that are represented to our consciousness, but the publically interpreted, meaningful context of human concern. In terms of my previous example, we could take this as the bathroom where the things that I use to brush my teeth already make sense to me. Not the physical dimensions of the bathroom itself, but the meaningful context of my using things in order to brush my teeth each day. This third sense refers to our surrounding world, which is the conception of the world that I contend is presupposed by the modern scientific conception of ‘nature’. This is the predominant way that Heidegger (and myself) use the term ‘world’.

The fourth and final sense of world that Heidegger identifies refers to the notion of ‘worldliness’ or ‘worldhood’ [Weltlichkeit]. Worldliness refers to the a priori conditions which structure Dasein’s surrounding world; that is, the conditions that underpin and give rise to the third sense of the world. In our everyday lives, the projects we find ourselves undertaking already make sense to us in terms of a broader horizon, and this is due to our being worldly. Our worldliness is not just limited to our surrounding world, but extends to the historical conditions we find ourselves thrown into. In order to understand ourselves as ‘conscious’ subjects in a ‘natural world’ of non-conscious objects we must be able to adhere to particular assumptions that we have inherited from the Cartesian metaphysical tradition, and we are only able to understand ourselves in terms of these assumptions due to our worldliness as Dasein.

124 Von Herrmann, Hermeneutics and Reflection: Heidegger and Husserl on the Concept of Phenomenology, p. 40.
125 Heidegger, BT, §14, pp.64–65 [64–65].
126 See Jan Patočka: “Understanding means primarily understanding our possibilities; I understand myself as he who does this or that, acts thus or so; this activity takes place within a referential context; within it I encounter pragmata, things in the mode of how I interact with them. The framework within which understanding takes place, that is the world, that is the original phenomenon of the world; that is what characterizes the worldhood of the world. That is the existential which characterizes our being in the world. That is how Heidegger thematizes the phenomenon world” In Body, Community, Language, World (1998), pp. 117–118.
While one of Heidegger’s ultimate aims is to provide an account of our worldliness in the most fundamental sense, in order to do this he must first account for the pre-ontological world described by the third sense of the world: that is, Dasein’s surrounding world.

§13 Handiness and Objective Presence

After putting forward these four definitions of ‘world’, Heidegger turns his investigation toward the Being of things that we come across in our surrounding world. He identifies two fundamental categories: ‘objective presence’ [Vorhandenheit] and ‘handiness’ [Zuhandenheit]. For Heidegger, philosophers in the tradition have gone astray in their ontological claims by considering things solely in terms of objective presence, rather than taking things as tools that are handy.

A thing is objectively present when we consider it in theoretical abstraction, when we bring the objectified character of a thing into the open. To take a thing as objectively present means to take the thing out of the context of our projects. The thing becomes an object that is ‘frozen’ outside of the time and place it occupies, as it is in the modern scientific conception, thus removing the thing from our dealings with it. By contrast, ‘handiness’ refers specifically to this everyday dealing with things, which is prior to any theoretical understanding. We encounter handy things through what Heidegger identifies as pragmata [πραγματα], that is, ‘equipment’ or ‘tools’, which we only encounter within a broader meaningful context. Tools refer to those ordinary and mundane things that we use each day: toothbrushes, toothpaste, dental floss, etc. Such tools are ‘handy’ insofar as we encounter them as something that will either help or hinder us in our projects.

127 BT, §9, pp. 41–42 [42–43]; §12, pp. 54–56 [54–57]; §15, pp. 69–75 [70–75].
128 Ibid., §15, pp. 68–71 [69–72]; §16, pp. 72–75 [73–76].
129 Ibid., §15, p. 68 [68].
Initially, we encounter things as tools that are handy to our projects. Any theoretical understanding is only possible once we have already separated things from our involvement with them, when we consider things as singular things that are objectively present. According to Heidegger, the character of the tools we use is always dependent on a broader meaningful context. There is no singular tool or tool-in-itself, because tools are only intelligible in the context of our being-in-the-world.\textsuperscript{130} Tools are only able to be tools within a framework of referential relations; handy things only make sense to us in terms of some action or project we are already undertaking. The tools I use to brush my teeth always refer to the broader project of avoiding bad breath, which itself refers to an even broader project, like my desire to talk to others without fear of embarrassment—which, even further, refers to the Dasein of others, who I encounter and recognise as ‘being there’ with me.\textsuperscript{131}

For Heidegger, this involvement with the world means that we have an understanding of our surroundings that comes prior to any theoretical understanding, which is demonstrated by the way we deal with tools in everyday life. When I brush my teeth in the morning, I already find myself within a meaningful context: I understand what the toothbrush is, since I am already using it to brush my teeth. The toothbrush, in turn, refers to the toothpaste, which I similarly understand as toothpaste since I am already applying it to the brush. Taken together, all these relations between tools refer to some broader context, like my wish to have fresh breath so that I don’t offend other people. It is important to note, however, that when I present this description, I am already isolating things out of their context, away from my actual involvement with them.

One of the reasons that we disregard the tools we use is because they do not arrest our attention while we use them. Their Being ‘withdraws’, so to speak. We are never

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., §26, pp. 117–118 [121].
concerned with handy things in their singularity, because when we use tools, we direct our concern toward some task we are already undertaking. After all, I rarely think of the toothbrush while I am using it, I am simply too distracted by my desire to avoid halitosis. The things Dasein interacts with always refer to projects that Dasein is already concerned with, as well as other Dasein, who we can recognise as undertaking projects that are comparable to our own. Heidegger identifies the totality of these references—which are always pointing toward Dasein’s projects and concerns—as the surrounding world. This totality or ‘matrix’ of referential relations is intelligible to us because of our worldliness, and it is due to our worldliness that we are, for the most part, completely immersed in our projects.

§14 Nature

The world, then, in the main sense that Heidegger intends in BT, refers to the broader, meaningful context of Dasein’s concern. The world is not our immediate physical location, but the meaningful place where we dwell. To be human is to be-in-the-world. The world ‘is’ not some particular being or phenomenon that we can come across in experience, but the total historical horizon that informs our encounters with phenomena. We do not primarily relate to the world around us as if ‘it’ were some external object or container which holds us and everything else that we encounter. To outline all those particular entities that we can observe in isolation from our involvement with them—like we do in scientific investigation—is to tell us nothing about our everyday engagement with the world. The world is not a thing, nor a collection of things, so we must avoid designating it as such with an ‘is’. As Heidegger claims in The Origin of the Work of Art (1993): “The world worlds, and is more fully in

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132 “What is peculiar to what is initially at hand is that it withdraws, so to speak, in its character of handiness in order to be really handy. What everyday dealings are initially busy with is not tools themselves, but the work” ibid., §15 p. 69 [70].
133 Ibid., §12, pp. 54–55 [54–55].
being than the tangible and perceptible realm in which we believe ourselves to be at home”.134

As I discuss further in the next chapter, on Heidegger’s account, our modern naturalistic conceptions of the world do not account for this integral aspect of human existence, leaving us prone to overlook the world as the broader meaningful context of human concern.135 In BT, he argues that our commitment to describing the world purely in terms of modern natural science tacitly presupposes the very existence of the world we are trying to describe. He notes that, “Nature is itself a being which is encountered within the world and is discoverable on various paths and stages.”136 That is to say, ‘the world’ of human being is not reducible to any naturalistic conception, since it is only from already being-in a meaningful world that we can begin to formulate such a conception. The natural world is always derivative of our surrounding world, which is always already meaningful to us.

For Heidegger, our traditional ontological accounts overlook the worldliness of Dasein in favour of examining those things that are objectively present in the world, the total arrangement of which we call ‘nature’. Worldliness, though, is ontological, and cannot be reduced to anything objectively present in the world. Thus we can never reach worldliness on the basis of our modern conception of nature. The world does not primarily refer to the external space ‘outside’ of us that ‘consists’ of various objects, but to the historically constituted place where things matter to us, as per our being-in-the-world. This is important to keep in mind, since it is this notion of the world as the meaningful place of human concern that I claim is overlooked by modern scientific rationality.

135 BT, §14, p.65 [65].
136 Ibid., §14, p. 63 [63].
§15 Conclusion

For the most part, at this stage of his thought, Heidegger is concerned with the project of fundamental ontology, and so he wants to uncover the ground for all other ontological inquiries. To accomplish this, he puts forward the method of hermeneutic phenomenology, which I discussed in chapter one as a way of explicating the facticity that plays a crucial role in our comportment toward meaningful things. In this chapter, I have discussed Heidegger’s conception of the structure of factic human existence, which he terms Dasein. As Dasein, we always find ourselves already living in terms of our surrounding world. Yet, we do not relate to the world around us like we do to an object or to a being that we encounter, but as the broader meaningful horizon that is disclosed to us in accordance with the projects with which we are involved. This meaningful involvement constitutes the worldliness of Dasein, and it is by virtue of our worldliness that we always find ourselves being-in-the-world. Taken together, we always already understand ourselves in terms of the broader meaningful horizon of our historical surrounding world. More often than not, we are absorbed with these surroundings when using tools in order to undertake the projects that make up our everyday lives. Therefore, contra metaphysics, we do not primarily relate to the world around us in terms of the objectively present character of singular things. Nor do we encounter the world as an object. Prior to any theoretical insight, there is our involvement with things in terms of the totality of references or ‘total meaningfulness’ that structures the world around us.

As I have stressed, to render all beings in terms of static metaphysical descriptions is to pass over the structure of human existence, which—unlike things—is always factic. Therefore, if we seek a fundamental, ontological account of our relation to the world, we must not presuppose the world as some fixed object that is opposed to the human subject. While the modern sciences can offer us remarkable descriptions of objectively
present things, such descriptions are only meaningful on the basis of Dasein’s openness to Being, which is always primary. As mentioned, Dasein must already be open to Being in order to understand and interpret things as things at all, a relation to things that is always conditioned by the historical circumstances of one’s life.

To extend our discussion further, in the next chapter, I argue that the modern scientific interpretation maintains the Cartesian split inherent in modern metaphysical ontology. In contrast to the hermeneutic method described above, modern science is mathematical. Modern science is ‘mathematical’ in the sense that scientific research presupposes a mathematical conception of what the world is (i.e., nature). This conception of the world can never reach beyond what is objectively present and reveal to us how things comes to be something in terms of our being-in-the-world. While it may be true that every now and again we do happen to merely observe singular things in the world—taking up the role of a disinterested observer—primarily, we are caught up in our own projects, which are always already taking place in a world that is not reducible to a purely naturalistic conception. In some respects, the primacy of this meaningful world may seem trite or obvious, but as I argue in the next chapter, for Heidegger, it is precisely this obviousness that has led our traditional metaphysical and scientific understandings astray, condemning us to overlook what is closest to us: the meaningful presence of things.
Chapter 3: Reason

§16 Introduction

In the first chapter, I discussed the question of Being as a question about the meaningful presence of things for factic human beings. In the second chapter, I claimed that things always initially make sense to us in terms of a broader historical horizon, which I identified as our surrounding world. Overall, against traditional metaphysical ontology, I noted how any response to the problem of Being—or as I have framed it, *the problem of meaning*—will change over time, so there can be no fixed or eternal approach to ontological inquiry. Rather, if we wish to take these historical changes into account, our inquiry must be *hermeneutic*; we must not consider things as separate from their historical context.

In this chapter, to further consider Heidegger’s critique of the reduction of our surrounding world to ‘nature’, I focus specifically on two of Heidegger’s works after *BT*: namely, *The Age of The World View* (1976)\(^\text{137}\) and *The Principle of Reason* (1991).\(^\text{138}\) I argue that in these works Heidegger extends his critique of Cartesian metaphysics, which he initially puts forward in *BT*, in order to make a specific critique in regards to modern scientific knowledge. I suggest that the major insight underpinning both of these works is that our modern scientific approach to ontological questions is already shaped by the metaphysical divide between the thing as ‘object’ and the human being as ‘subject’. As I have already mentioned, on this account our surrounding world becomes reducible to a collection of fixed objects that we call ‘nature’. Yet, as Heidegger already noted in *BT*, we never encounter things as objects, nor do we relate to the world as if ‘it’ were an object. Such a way of thinking only makes sense within our own historically situated interpretation of what *is*. In light of this, I discuss the

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137 From now on referred to as *AWV*.
138 From now on referred to as *PR*. 
historical ways of thinking that have come to shape our contemporary scientific understanding of the ‘natural’ world.

In AWV, (and to a lesser extent, What is a Thing?) Heidegger outlines the metaphysical grounds that lead us to think of the world as something opposed to us, which we have a ‘view’ of. He traces this way of thinking to the philosophy of Descartes, whose rationalist project he compares to the Ancient Greek conception of tà mathémata [tà μαθήματα] or what has become ‘mathematics’. In PR, he discusses the relation between reason and subjectivity further, in terms of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz’s principle of sufficient reason, which, he argues, presupposes the same Cartesian split mentioned above. For Heidegger, the principle of reason places a demand on the human being to provide reason or grounds for worldly things. Yet, as I will discuss, any such grounds—far from describing some totally universal and objective ‘reality’—are an interpretation. An interpretation that is based on the unchanging character of things and which skips over the way human beings always encounter things meaningfully, in terms of a broader, historical world-horizon.

Overall, I contend that modern scientific reason takes the metaphysical conception of the ‘natural world’ (described above) for granted by reducing all that is existent to what is objectively present. On this account, things become objects that can be researched and ‘known’ on the basis of pre-set formal laws. In AWV, Heidegger refers to this way of seeing the world as the ‘objectification of Being’. Against this scientific view,

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139 From now on referred to as WT.
140 N.B. The German ‘G rund’ has a sense that is similar to both the English ‘reason’ and ‘ground’. PR translator Reginald Lilly and commentator John D. Caputo have both argued that one can translate the principle of reason as ‘the principle of ground’, which gives us the form: “nothing is without ground”. For Caputo, while ‘the principle of ground’ might have a “harsh sound for English ears”, this sense of Grund is more consistent with Heidegger’s thinking, namely for showing how Being and ground belong together. See, John D Caputo, The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought (1978), p. 49.
142 Ibid., p. 348.
I claim Heidegger’s work draws our attention to the fact that this interpretation is based on a range of historical assumptions, which, in turn, raises the question of why we take this ‘objectification’ of Being to be the primary or only way to understand things we encounter. Following Heidegger, I claim that this scientific understanding is only one way of understanding and interpreting that which Being discloses.

§17 The Objectification of Being

I have stressed already how our understanding of the surrounding world is always shaped by the tradition of thinking we are born into. As we saw in regard to the ‘destruction’ of the tradition in BT, Heidegger wants to uncover the ways that the history of thinking has influenced our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. In BT he singles out the metaphysics of Descartes, which in AWV, he terms the ‘objectification of Being’. He claims that Cartesian metaphysics gives form to our interpretations of the world by putting forward a particular theory of truth, and that our modern scientific understanding of the ‘natural world’ is grounded in the Cartesian account of truth ‘as certainty’.143 Below, I explain this notion of truth in terms of the aforementioned distinction between res extensa and res cogitans. Beforehand, however, it is worth pointing out that Heidegger’s critique of Cartesianism in AWV takes a different approach to the one we find in BT.144 Rather than formulating his inquiry on the basis of Dasein, Heidegger turns to the way Being is disclosed historically. He asks: “what conception of truth gives form to our contemporary understanding of the things around us and that we meaningfully deal with each day?”145

143 Ibid., p. 349.
144 N.B. It is worth pointing out that the second division of BT that was supposed to discuss the history of Being was never published. However, Heidegger returns to the historical disclosure of Being in a later lecture course entitled “Time and Being” in On Time and Being (1972), pp. 1–24.
Heidegger poses this question because different conceptions of reason give rise to different conceptions of truth, which together, give form to different interpretations of our surrounding world. For Heidegger, Being and truth always “go together”. Namely, the way we understand truth will shape the way we understand the Being of things that we encounter. To return to an earlier point (cf. §6), the way things are disclosed to human beings is always dependent on the historical context of one’s life. As human beings we are always limited to our own historical situation, we cannot immediately understand the things around us in every possible and conceivable way, since our understanding is always confined to our own finite perspective. As Heidegger notes in *The Origin of The Work of Art*: “Each being we encounter and which encounters us keeps to this curious opposition of presencing in that it always withholds itself at the same time in concealedness.” Put simply, things never show themselves in their entirely or fullness, but are always revealed and concealed to us differently, in terms of our own historical situation.

Following this line of argument, in *AWV* Heidegger suggests that it would be nonsensical to judge modern science as somehow more exact than Ancient Greek conceptions of *episteme*, or medieval notions of *doctrina* and *scientia*. These former historical periods were characterised by different interpretations of the Being of beings, which demand a different way of seeing and asking after what ‘is’. After all, one struggles to even imagine the difficulty of trying to explain to a citizen of Ancient Greece that the sun is an ‘object’ made of ‘plasma’ at the centre of ‘the solar system’. This kind of description would simply not make sense to the Ancient Greek.

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146 BT, §7, p. 36 [38]; §39, p. 178 [184]; §44, p. 211 [230].
For Heidegger, modern science is to be carefully distinguished from Ancient Greek and Medieval science. The essence of modern science is *research*, which he compares to the Ancient Greek notion of *tà mathémata* [τὰ μαθήματα].\(^{149}\)

§18 *Tà Mathémata*

While *tà mathémata* is a historical precursor to our modern conception of mathematics, *tà mathémata* has a much broader meaning in the Ancient Greek, and is not strictly limited to the calculable or numerical.\(^ {150}\) Rather, in *WT* Heidegger explains *tà mathemata* as what is *learnable*, and by extension, what is teachable.\(^ {151}\) Kisiel describes *tà mathemata* as a “learning process” through which “we come to know what we already know.”\(^ {152}\) Specifically, *tà mathemata* refers to that which we ‘bring’ to things in order to understand and use them. As I discussed in chapter two, for Heidegger our primary engagement with things is using handy things in the context of our concern for the projects we undertake. In *WT* he observes that when we learn something, we do not ‘learn the thing’ per se, but learn to *use* things for some *purpose*—often through practice.\(^ {153}\) Before we can learn or practice to use things, we must already be familiar with them in some sense. Learning to drive a car, for example, demands a prior familiarity with what a car *is* and what things like gear sticks and steering wheels *do*, and such a familiarity comes before one is even in the driver’s seat.

If we were not already familiar with things in this way, then we would not even recognise them as things we can learn to use in the first place. For Heidegger, this familiarity with things prior to our actual dealing with them falls under the scope of *tà*

\(^{149}\) Ibid., p. 343.

\(^{150}\) Ibid. See also, *WT*, pp. 69–74.

\(^{151}\) *WT*, pp. 69–71.


mathémata. As he notes: “The μαθήματα, the mathematical, is that ‘about’ things which we really already know. Therefore we do not first get it out of things, but, in a certain way, we bring it already with us.” Hence, while for the Ancient Greeks the mathematical cannot be reduced to the numerical, the numerical falls under the scope of the mathematical in this sense. Namely, our understanding of number comes prior to our actual dealing with the things we count: numbers are not ‘in’ the things themselves, but are a conception that we ‘bring’ to things when we interpret them as something countable. Before I can say the car I’m driving has four wheels, I must already know what the ‘four’ stands for. I cannot find the ‘four’ in any of the wheels themselves; ‘four’ only makes sense within a broader context.

§19 Science as Research

In AWV, Heidegger traces the origins of modern science to this historical notion of tà mathémata, which he claims has become limited to the calculable and numerical. He argues that modern science is mathematical to the extent that scientific research involves following a pre-set, formal procedure, which itself entails a predetermined conception of what the world is. Kisiel opposes the modern conception of tà mathémata to the hermeneutic thinking that I outlined in §6. Hermeneutic phenomenology aims to interpret the Being of things in terms of the historical situation they are encountered. By contrast, mathematical science turns on a conception of the thing that is based on a series of “self-evident axioms” or ‘laws’ that determine what can be known in advance. On this scientific account, the world of our living is reduced to the lawful arrangement of objectively present entities and events that we call ‘nature’. This

154 Ibid., p. 74.
155 “AWV,” p. 343. See also, WT, pp. 74–75.
157 Ibid.
naturalistic conception is mathematical to the extent that things are *prefigured* as mathematical.

In this sense, Heidegger is not simply referring to the methods of modern science, but to the *conditions for the possibility* of such methods. He argues that the possibility of modern scientific experiment can only arise after the projection of a particular naturalistic blueprint or “ground-plan” [*Grundrisse*].\(^\text{158}\) As Don Ihde explains, for Heidegger, science “makes a *projection* upon nature and only works within the limits of this projection.”\(^\text{159}\) The possibility of modern scientific research does *not* arise from our surrounding world being somehow inherently mathematical. Rather, the practice of modern science is only possible once there has been a shift in our understanding, once we have already taken the world around us to be reducible to the mathematical–scientific conception of nature.\(^\text{160}\)

Heidegger offers us an example of such a shift in understanding in *WT* when he outlines some of the key differences between the Aristotelian and Newtonian conceptions of motion.\(^\text{161}\) Again, he suggests that the historical changes in the way human beings understand certain phenomena—in this case, motion—reveal a much broader, total reconfiguration in the way we interpret and understand the Being of worldly things.\(^\text{162}\)

On Heidegger’s account, for Aristotle, the capacity for motion lies ‘within’ the nature of the particular body. Particular bodies move according to their own distinct nature, and since heavenly bodies have a different nature to earthly bodies, they move differently to


\(^{160}\) “...natural science does not become research through experiment; on the contrary, experiment becomes possible where, and only where, natural knowledge has already been transformed into research.” Heidegger, “AWV,” p. 345. See also, Kisiel: “Theoretical ideas, their degrees of certitude, intuition and evidence are all to be situated within the domain of the Open.” (1970, p. 175).

\(^{161}\) *WT*, pp. 80–88.

one another. By contrast, Heidegger cites the ‘corpus omne’ or ‘every body’ in Newton’s law of inertia to illustrate that Newton makes no such distinction between heavenly and earthly bodies. Rather, for Newton, all bodies move with uniform linearity, until some ‘force’ disrupts them. Further, as Heidegger points out, ‘force’ is at the same time defined as “that whose impact results in a declination from rectilinear, uniform motion.” i.e., as that which disturbs linear movement.

Subsequently, the human understanding of what motion ‘is’ changes in order to accord with this formal law. Such laws entail a particular definition of what things ‘are’ that we take to be universal and self-evident, and which, in turn, form the basis of the way we understand all that ‘is’. It is this claim to ‘self-evidence’ that Heidegger takes issue with. He writes that prior to its discovery, Newton’s law of inertia was not simply ‘unknown’ but “[n]ature and Being in general were experienced in such a way that it would have been senseless.” Namely, there is a shift in the understanding of ‘nature’ which changes from being the “inner principle” of things, to the lawful relation between points of mass connected in space and time. Motion is taken ‘outside’ of the particular body and reconfigured in terms of a universal law that all bodies are ruled by.

In regard to tà mathémata, this historical example is useful for revealing the mathematical foundation of modern physics, as well as the modern sciences at large. Despite the purported ‘empirical basis’ of the sciences, the practice of modern physics turns on a conception of what the thing is that is not derived from empirical observation,

163 Heidegger, WT, pp. 83–85.
164 “Corpus omne preservare in statu suoquiescendi vel movendi uniformiter in directum, nisiquatenus a viribus impressis cogitur statum illummutare” (“Every body continues in its state of rest, or uniform motion in a straight line, unless it is compelled to change that state by force impressed upon it”) Isaac Newton, as cited by translators W.B Barton, Jr. and Vera Deutsch (ibid., p. 78).
165 Ibid., p. 87.
167 Heidegger, WT, p. 79.
168 Ibid., p. 88.
but from formal laws that cannot be encountered or observed. We can *never* encounter a ‘singular body’ that is “left to itself” and which moves with total uniformity.\(^{169}\) As Heidegger notes, after figures like Galileo and Newton, our understanding of worldly things is reduced to objectively present “spatiotemporal kinetic magnitudes” rather than tools that are handy to our projects.\(^{170}\) Accordingly, the mathematical project of modern science leads the scientist to make claims that *run contrary* to our everyday engagement with things themselves: how exactly does one encounter and use a “spatiotemporal kinetic magnitude”? I have stressed already how our *meaningful* encounters with things do not take the form of our sensing objects that are represented to us in consciousness. Rather, things are immediately meaningful to us in terms of our surrounding world. By contrast, modern science is mathematical to the extent that practitioners of modern science work with an *a priori* conception of the world, i.e., lawful ‘nature’. The research worker takes this naturalistic account for granted on the basis of pre-established “fundamental conceptions”\(^{171}\) and “self-evident axioms”\(^{172}\) like the law of inertia described above. Scientific knowledge, then, is the result of a process that is divorced from our actual encounters with meaningful things.

Heidegger argues that these natural laws—which are purely formal and never encountered—are confirmed, disconfirmed and modified by means of the modern research experiment. The defining characteristic of the modern experiment for Heidegger is the way the research worker takes these natural laws—which are ‘already known’—as their point of departure, thereby discarding as ‘knowable’ anything that is

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169 Ibid., p. 89.
171 *WT*, p. 89. See also, *BT*, §3, p. 8 [9].
inconsistent with this preconception.\textsuperscript{173} The research experiment sets up a field of investigation that formulates the objects of its inquiry on the basis of pre-established natural laws.\textsuperscript{174} Such laws are deemed universally self-evident, and so more reliable than our everyday ‘subjective’ encounters with handy things.

To repeat, the problem is that the scientific conception of the world is not self-evident, but a historically grounded interpretation, one that is only intelligible to us after we find ourselves living ‘in’ a world that is publically interpreted as reducible to natural laws and processes. In short, the possibility of modern experiment only arises once we already understand the world in mathematical terms. In regard to modern metaphysics—or as Heidegger terms it in \textit{AWV} ‘the objectification of Being’—the researcher conceives of beings \textit{a priori} as objectively present mathematical entities, which can be ascertained, measured and certified rather than encountered and used meaningfully. On this account, we totally separate things from our broader dealings with them, leading us to \textit{forget} that we are always initially being-in-the-world.

Hence, modern science—like the metaphysical tradition that gave rise to it—is founded on a predetermined conception of what \textit{is}. Kisiel notes that the scope of any scientific inquiry is limited by \textit{preconceptions} that are not determined scientifically. He draws on the example of modern biology, which operates within a pre-set field of investigation that is based on a range of assumptions that are taken to be characteristic of ‘life’.\textsuperscript{175} For example, notions like ‘motion’ or ‘growth’ are not drawn from scientific method but

\textsuperscript{173} Heidegger, “\textit{AWV},” p. 346. See Also, “[The research experiment] founds an unknown by means of a known, and at the same time preserves this known through that unknown.” Ibid., p. 345.

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., pp. 343–345. See also, \textit{WT}, pp. 89–92.

\textsuperscript{175} Kisiel, “Science, Phenomenology, and the Thinking of Being,” p. 169. See also, Hannah Arendt: “…notions such as life, or man, or science, or knowledge are prescientific by definition, and the question is whether or not the actual development of science which has led to the conquest of terrestrial space and to the invasion of the space of the universe has changed these notions to such an extent that they no longer make sense.” “The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man.” In \textit{Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought}. (2006), p. 262.
from metaphysical concepts that are taken for granted.\textsuperscript{176} In other words, modern science is grounded in a metaphysics that it does not recognise. For Kisiel, the scientist cannot tell us what ‘life’ \textit{is} without taking up the role of metaphysician, which means that modern scientific research is always “united” with traditional metaphysics.\textsuperscript{177} Namely, both forms of inquiry maintain conceptions of reason and truth that are already limited by the field of investigation.

\textbf{§20 Representation and Objectification}

So far, I have discussed the mathematical basis of modern scientific research. In this section, I will discuss the relation between modern mathematical science and Cartesian metaphysics. As mentioned previously, Heidegger considers the metaphysical underpinning of modern science to be Descartes’ conception of truth as certainty, a notion he argues itself presupposes a metaphysical divide between object and subject.\textsuperscript{178}

According to Kisiel, Descartes’ \textit{Ego cogito} is the ultimate expression of \textit{tà mathémata}, since Descartes attempts to ground all knowledge in the ‘clear and distinct ideas’ of human thought.\textsuperscript{179} As Heidegger claims in \textit{AWV}, it is in the metaphysics of Descartes that Being is first defined in terms of the ‘objectivity of representation’ and truth in terms of ‘certainty of representation’.\textsuperscript{180}

On this account, a thing can only truly ‘be’ a thing if it can be adequately certified as an \textit{object (res extensa)} that is re-presented\textsuperscript{181} to the thinking subject \textit{(res cogitans)}. For Heidegger, to ‘re-present’ means to “bring what is present before one as something

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\textsuperscript{176} “Science, Phenomenology, and the Thinking of Being,” p. 169.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{178} Heidegger, \textit{“AWV,”} p. 349.
\textsuperscript{180} Heidegger, \textit{“AWV,”} p. 349.
\textsuperscript{181} Translator of \textit{PR} Reginald Lilly notes that ‘\textit{Vorstellung}’ is one of the most important terms in German philosophy, with a broad range of technical understandings. While variously translated as ‘representation’, ‘presentation’ or ‘cognition’, Lilly notes: “As a verbal noun, \textit{Vorstellung} stands for the intellectual process in consciousness”. See Lilly’s introduction in \textit{The Principle of Reason} (1991), p. xvi.
\end{flushright}
confronting oneself.”

That is, to consider something as an *object* opposed to and ‘outside’ of oneself. This is the conception of truth and Being that is presupposed by the modern research experiment, which we saw sets the standard for how a thing can be ‘certified’ on the basis of pre-set formal laws. In scientific research, one’s understanding of the thing is rendered in terms of how and to what extent the thing can be *represented* to the human subject. Subsequently, a thing only becomes ‘knowable’ as a thing when the calculating person can securely claim the object represented corresponds to the object itself.

Let us return to the example of sound, as I noted in §3, we never experience a sound. Instead, we immediately hear something as something meaningfully related to us. In the modern research experiment, however, we pass over this meaningful relation in favour of those objectively present characteristics that can be certified according to the mathematical blueprint we have projected. Pierre Duhem has pointed out that in scientific practice our own concrete instances of hearing are developed into abstract concepts like pitch, octave, timbre, et cetera. In the field of acoustics, we explain the relations between these abstractions by formulating experiments that are grounded in formal laws like those about motion discussed above. These laws limit our investigation to the most general characteristics of things, which are stripped of all particularity and thereby removed from the total meaningful context of our own factual situation.

Accordingly, worldly things become recognisable only as *objects* that conform to the pre-established ground-plan. These objects, which are ‘represented’ to human

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182 “AWV,” p. 351.
183 “Science as research is produced when and only when truth has been transformed into such certainty of representation.” Ibid., p. 349.
184 Ibid.
consciousness, are then submitted to research experiments that attempt to certify what
the object ‘is’. The object is only certified as an object when it accords with pre-set,
abstract concepts, like those I have just mentioned in regard to sound. Therefore,
implicit in the practice of scientific research is a conception of the thing that places a
demand on the thing to conform to some fixed representation, which is expressed in an
abstract, formal law and reinforced by the research experiment. We thus overlook the
world of human concern in favour of ‘nature’, an arrangement of objects to be
ascertained and investigated. We skip over our being-in-the-world, which is always
primary.

In the same process, human being becomes a subjectum, insofar as our comportment
toward worldly things changes, placing us at “the center to which the existent as such is
related.” Namely, on this account, things can only be things when they stand over and
against us in consciousness. The world becomes a thing separate from human being,
that human beings have a ‘view of’. Hence, the notion of a ‘worldview’ is only
possible after we have projected a scientific understanding upon our surrounding world.
Once we have already reduced the Being of worldly things to those objectively present
characteristics that conform to the laws we have constructed. The danger is that we do
not recognise the historical basis and limitations of this understanding, leaving us prone
to ignore the meaningful world that informs our everyday lives.

§21 The Principle of Sufficient Reason

In PR, Heidegger explains modern science from a different angle, in terms of Leibniz’s
principle of sufficient reason. Jan Patočka—a student of Heidegger’s—identifies the
principle of sufficient reason as the “central philosophical formulation” of traditional

187 “…the world becomes a view and man a subjectum…” ibid., 352.
metaphysics, which he argues Heidegger takes to be a principle of “universal calculability and predictability.” Heidegger himself describes the principle as “the fundamental principle of all fundamental principles”, which has come to rule human thought in the modern ‘atomic’ age.

In the ‘short’ or ‘vulgar’ form, Leibniz’s principle reads: ‘nihil est sine ratione’, or ‘nothing is without reason’. Heidegger writes that in our modern understanding, “what is encountered is presented to a cognising I, presented back to and over against it, made present”. Once again, he is suggesting that modern rationality presupposes an understanding of the human being as Cartesian subject. To repeat, on the Cartesian account, the human being is conceived of as a thing among things—specifically as a thinking thing. Yet, the human being is not a thing, since, unlike things, we always find ourselves being-in-the-world. Only human beings understand and interpret themselves and the things they encounter in terms of the historical surrounding world, which we can only ‘escape’ when we die.

Returning to PR, Heidegger offers a number of different formulations of the principle of reason, which work to draw our attention to the various ways in which our thinking is already shaped by sufficient reason. In one such formulation—which Heidegger, following Leibniz himself, calls the “strict” form—the principle states: “nothing is without rendering its reasons”. Or, in John D. Caputo’s translation of the strict form: “for every truth, a reason can be given”. Of particular interest is that at a glance, there seems to be nothing especially controversial or provocative about this statement; to

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189 Heidegger, PR, p. 8.
191 Heidegger, PR, p. 22.(emphasis mine)
192 BT, §19–21, pp. 88–99 [90–101].
193 PR, p. 35.
194 Caputo, The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought, p. 55.
some extent, this formulation seems self-evident, even \textit{a priori}. We immediately understand the principle of reason \textit{without} reflection, because reason has come to shape the very way things in the world are given to us. As Braver quips, under this principle “beings provoke investigation the way pies demand to be eaten, or chairs beckon us to take a load off”.\footnote{Lee Braver, \textit{Groundless Grounds: A Study of Wittgenstein and Heidegger} (2012), p. 201.} In short, providing reasons has become incorporated into our very thinking and acting. As Heidegger puts it, the principle of reason is the “element within which [our] cognition moves, as does the fish in water and the bird in air”.\footnote{Heidegger, \textit{PR}, p. 30.}

It is the apparent \textit{obviousness} of the principle of reason that sparks Heidegger’s interest. According to Caputo, Heidegger’s intention in the opening pages of \textit{PR} is to throw us into confusion about a principle that we otherwise take for granted.\footnote{Caputo, \textit{The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought}, p. 51.} For Heidegger, sufficient reason is obvious to us because it “resounds” with human thinking as “the motive of its conduct”.\footnote{Heidegger, \textit{PR}, p. 4.} The way the principle ‘resounds’ or \textit{shapes} our actions within the world becomes increasingly clear if we listen more closely to the so-called ‘strict’ formulation. Heidegger observes that the strict formulation introduces the Latin \textit{reddere}, which highlights the ‘demand-character’ of sufficient reason. He notes that \textit{reddere} has its etymological roots in expressions like ‘to render’, or ‘to reckon.’\footnote{Ibid., p. 22–23.} Expressions that have a similar sense to expressions like ‘to arrange’ or ‘to order one thing after another.’ As Caputo points out, \textit{reddere} can be translated literally as ‘to give back.’\footnote{Caputo, \textit{The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought}, p. 55.} This raises the question: \textit{who} is giving \textit{what} back to \textit{whom}?

Heidegger’s answer is that it is the human ‘subject’ who must ‘give back’ to reason. It follows, then, that when Heidegger speaks of the ‘demand-character’ of reason, he is drawing our attention to a way of thinking which presupposes the Cartesian divide
between the thinking subject and the ‘natural’ world. With this thinking, there is a ‘demand’ put on the human being to provide reasons for the things they see and do in the world. This demand shapes our everyday engagement with things to the extent that we attempt to explain this very engagement rationally. For the most part, we are quite able to provide some kind of reasons for our actions (faulty or ill-informed reasons are still reasons, after all). Often, we even attempt to provide sufficient reasons for the things we say and do. Right now, I am myself providing reasons to you—the reader—in order to outline some of the limitations of reason itself!

Overall, one would be hard pressed to overstate the influence of reason on human thinking in the modern era. Yet, historically speaking, this is not the only way that human beings have experienced themselves in relation to the rest of the world. One of the key observations Heidegger makes in *PR* is that we are only able to ‘render’ or give back reasons for the things surrounding us once we have already assumed the role of ‘subject’. Once we already consider things as objects that are opposed to us and separate from our everyday involvement with them. Only after adopting this theoretical attitude can we ‘give back’ to reason by putting forward propositions about the way such objects are ‘represented’ to us.

These propositions are given as reasons, and are deemed ‘sufficient’ when they correspond to the objectively present character of things. In the age of modern science, the objectively present is generally expressed in terms of the mathematical, formalised properties of a thing. Those properties that are ‘already known’ according to the methods of natural science, and which are able to be tested and verified according to formal laws like those described above. Thus, in our modern understanding, when presented with the question ‘what is the thingness of the thing?’, our response will typically refer to those mathematical, formal properties that are objectively present,
since this is the ‘demand’ imposed on us by the principle of reason. In short, science does not deal with the things we deal with in everyday life, but only with things reduced to the most abstract, general properties. All characteristics that are considered changeable are replaced with formal characteristics that are considered unchangeable.

Our contemporary society is replete with examples of this type of formalisation. In regard to the arts, Tallis has pointed out some of the shortcomings in recent attempts by neuroscientists to reduce our appreciation of music to the objectively present brain-states of the individual, which are able to be scanned and analysed. In politics, Jacques Rancière has observed a shift in our contemporary understanding of democracy: rather than the polis of Ancient Greece, we now have opinion polls that are able to be rendered mathematically. Furthermore, one could consider the utilitarian ethics of Peter Singer, whose moral philosophy is founded on ahistorical ethical principles that are taken to be self-evident and universal. Such examples, among countless others, are illustrative of a total shift in our historical understanding of what is, which becomes reduced to objective presence. A shift that Heidegger traces to the so-called ‘demand’ of sufficient reasoning.

§22 The Rose is Without ‘Why?’

The problem with this way of thinking is that we tend to forget that the demand of sufficient reason can only make sense to us because of our own historical situation.

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201 “Many neuro-aestheticians think that… we have found the secret of music; it is rewarding because it stimulates the ‘reward’ centres, where dopamine pathways are found in abundance. In fact, this banal finding is worse than banal; it is embarrassing because it betrays how little is revealed by looking at the brains of people enjoying music. A science that cannot tell the difference between the response to music, drugs and sex, getting a hit of Bach and getting a hit of cocaine, or between hearing the organ and having your organs played with, says little about either.” Raymond Tallis, “Was Schubert a Musican Brain?” In Reflections of a Metaphysical Flâneur: And Other Essays (2014), p. 53.

202 “What in actual fact is this identification of democratic opinion with the system of polls and simulations? It is the absolute removal of the sphere of appearance of the people.” Jacques Rancière, Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy (1999), p. 103.

203 “Ethics requires us to go beyond ‘I’ and ‘you’ to the universal law, the universalisable judgment, the standpoint of the impartial spectator or ideal observer, or whatever we choose to call it” Peter Singer, Practical Ethics (1993), p. 12.
Hence, this type of reasoning will always fall short when it comes to the question of Being. As I noted at the very outset, the question of Being can be expressed as the question ‘what is a thing?’, which again, is not a question about this or that thing, but a question about what it means to be a thing. However, when we respond to the demand placed on us by the principle of reason, we pass over the meaningful presence of things and limit ourselves to that which is objectively present. The consequence of this is that we limit our inquiry to the most abstract, unchanging characteristics of singular things, which does not tell us anything about the thingness of the thing itself, which is constituted historically. In short, how exactly are we able to ‘verify’ our understanding of the thing on the basis of such timeless, unchanging characteristics, when this understanding will change depending on the way beings are disclosed historically?

It is in consideration of these tacit, ontological assumptions and the problems arising from them that Heidegger offers yet another formulation of the principle, this time to bring the principle into closer proximity with a verse from the mystic poet Angelus Silesius—and, as we will see, in closer alignment with the question of Being more generally. Under this formulation, the principle runs: “nothing is without a why”.204 Almost immediately, Heidegger refers us to following verse from Silesius’ Cherubinic Wanderer: Sensual Description of the Four Final Things (1657):

The rose is without why: it blooms because it blooms,
It pays no attention to itself, asks whether it is seen.205

From the position of our modern rational–scientific understanding, this may seem like quite a perplexing turn. However, as Caputo observes—and as we would do well to remember—Heidegger does not introduce the words of the mystic poet out of some disregard for the basic laws of logic, but because he finds the poet’s words

204 Heidegger, PR, p. 35.
205 Ibid.
“astoundingly clear” and “neatly constructed”.\(^{206}\) After all, today, if someone were to ask us “why does the rose bloom?” we might direct them to the botanist, who would no doubt have quite a bit to tell us about the ‘APETALA1’ gene, and the way this particular gene triggers the “floral initiation” of the rose by “integrating growth, patterning, and hormonal pathways”.\(^{207}\) While such discoveries are undeniably impressive, these are far from the kind of answers that Heidegger is looking for—what can the ‘APETALA1’ gene tell us about the meaningful presence of the rose?

Heidegger turns to Silesius’ verse because the verse offers us an insight into the thingness of the thing that is otherwise occluded by our modern notion of reason. In order to draw out such an insight, Heidegger distinguishes between the ‘why’ and the ‘because’. To start with the latter, he notes that the ‘because’ does not seek grounds, but conveys grounds.\(^{208}\) The ‘because’ immediately suggests to us what kind of answer is required, which we can see when we pose the question ‘why does the rose bloom?’ to the botanist, who can readily provide us with a ‘because’ that accords with the demands of reason. The ‘why’, on the other hand, refers to the style of ontological questioning mentioned above, in that the ‘why’ seeks out precisely those grounds which are presupposed by the ‘because’.

**§23 Being as Abyss**

The key difference, then, is in this relationship to the question of ground \([grund]\), and how we conceive of the ground that ‘grounds’ our understanding of what \(is\).\(^{209}\) By making this distinction between ‘why’ and ‘because’, Heidegger aims to show us that reason and ground are not equivalent, and it is in fact Being and ground that “belong

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\(^{208}\) Heidegger, *PR*, p. 36.

\(^{209}\) Ibid.
together”.\textsuperscript{210} In Caputo’s words, Heidegger is not suggesting that Being ‘has’ a ground but that Being ‘is’ ground.\textsuperscript{211} If we take ‘grounds’ to refer to the structures that underlie the meaningfulness of things, then to ask after the ground of the thing is to ask after the ‘thingness’ of the thing, i.e., the Being of the thing.

In light of this, we can see that when posed the question, ‘why does the rose bloom?’ the botanist does not ask after the ground of the rose, but considers the rose only in terms of it being an object that appears, and which is in need of an explanation. In doing so, the botanist unwittingly presupposes reason as the ground of the thing. In other words, the botanist’s answer conflates the Being or meaningfulness of the rose with what is measurable and objectively present (e.g., genes, “hormonal pathways” etc.)—with what is ‘already known’ and certifiable through research. While the botanist’s answer might be an adequate response in terms of the ‘because’, this response does not hold in terms of the ‘why’. The botanist has not told us anything about the grounds of the rose because this ground is simply assumed.

If we glance back to Silesius’ verse, we can see that he does not at all deny that the rose can be understood in terms of the ‘because’ (and how could he, when our friend the botanist can so readily produce an answer?). Rather, the poet asserts that the rose is without why, which is different from the claim that the rose is without ground. As human beings, we can convey grounds for the rose, but unlike us, the rose itself is not driven by the need to seek out grounds. Only human beings can formulate reasons and attribute some kind of ‘because’ to the rose, the rose itself has no need for these reasons; it is, so to speak, without why, but never without meaning or ground for us.

\textsuperscript{210} Ibid., p. 51.  
\textsuperscript{211} Caputo, \textit{The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought}, p. 69.
Heidegger refers us to the poet’s verse to remind us that reason is not itself a being to be encountered in the world, but a historically grounded understanding of what Being discloses, which has come to frame our modern interpretation of that which is.\textsuperscript{212} We can see this insofar as the demand of sufficient reason is placed on us—the human being—and not the rose. The rose cannot ask after those genetic or hormonal factors which trigger its so-called ‘floral initiation’. It is simply not a part of being the rose to ask ‘why?’ or to consider itself at all.\textsuperscript{213} For Heidegger, asking ‘why?’ is a profoundly human activity. The search for meaningful grounds is always shaped by a broader historical horizon, and only human beings are able to understand and interpret the things surrounding them in terms of this horizon. The rose, on the other hand, has no ‘access’ to this horizon, no use for grounds. The search for grounds, expressed by the ‘why’, only has meaning for historical human beings.

We see this in Silesius’ verse, insofar as the Being of the rose is ‘without why’ and thus outside the demand of reason. The rose simply blooms because it blooms. While we can give the rose a ground by providing reasons for it, the rose itself is not grounded in anything to do with reason. As a principle, the principle of reason is groundless to the extent that we cannot give reasons or grounds for the principle itself. There is no reason to assume that what is can be rendered in terms of sufficient reasoning. Especially given that things must ‘be’ before we can give reasons for them. Accordingly, the principle falls short in regard to the question of Being, since sufficient reasoning can only apply to beings, and not Being qua Being.\textsuperscript{214} To repeat, the Being of things ‘is not’ a thing, certainly not anything objectively present that is represented to a thinking subject. Only

\textsuperscript{213} \textit{PR}, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., p. 51.
beings can be grounded in this way, the ground itself—Being—will be disclosed differently according to one’s human understanding, which is always historical.

As that which is not present but which gives presence to the things we encounter, Being has no ground, no first cause. Heidegger notes: “to the extent that Being as such grounds, it remains groundless”.\textsuperscript{215} Being is ‘abyssal’; both ground and abyss [Abgrund].\textsuperscript{216} Hence, as ground, Being is ‘groundless’: Being discloses beings, yet cannot be reduced to or rendered in terms of what is disclosed. In this way, when we provide rational scientific accounts of the earthly beings we encounter, we offer an interpretation of what is that is already grounded in the tradition of thinking. According to Heidegger, if we do not make this historical framing of beings clear to ourselves, then we risk merely carrying on the tradition, thereby limiting ourselves to one particular understanding of what is. As he warns us in a lecture toward the end of his career:

\begin{quote}
The attempt to think Being without beings becomes necessary because otherwise, it seems to me, there is no longer any possibility of explicitly bringing into view the Being of what is today all over the earth, let alone of adequately determining the relation of man to what has been called “Being” up to now.\textsuperscript{217}
\end{quote}

To address one possible objection, we should note that Heidegger is not merely suggesting that human beings think, whereas roses do not. To take him as pointing out such a truism would be to tacitly assume the very notion of reason he wants to keep at bay. Rather, through the words of Silesius, Heidegger argues for the necessity of a leap; that is, a leap out of the ‘mighty orbit’ of reason, and, by extension, the metaphysical gulf assumed by Cartesianism.\textsuperscript{218} If the principle of reason has come to serve as the very basis of metaphysics, the ground from which we understand the ‘thingness’ of the thing, then the poet’s verse can serve as an alternative to this metaphysical understanding.

\textsuperscript{215} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{216} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{217} On Time and Being, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{218} PR, pp. 52–53.
The mystic poet opens up a space for us to consider the thing in a new light, one unclouded by our modern notion of reason. Caputo remarks, quite aptly, that “[Silesius] speaks of the rose not as it stands for the representing subject but as it stands in itself”.\(^{219}\) That is to say, the poet offers an account of the rose which is not dependent on our taking up the role of Cartesian subject. The value of Silesius’ verse, then, is that Silesius does not presuppose reason as the ground of the rose. This, in turn, highlights the problem with presupposing reason as the ground of beings. For Silesius, the rose simply stands on its own, and not on the grounds that we provide for it. Silesius does not say anything of how worldly things are given, just that they are given, thereby affirming the groundless abyss of Being—which, like the rose is, ‘without why’.

\section*{§24 Conclusion}

Returning to our broader discussion, in chapter one, I outlined Heidegger’s concern for the question of Being, which he attempts to revive via the hermeneutic analysis of human existence. Following this, in chapter two, I discussed Heidegger’s conception of the structure of human existence or ‘Dasein’. I noted how, as Dasein, we always understand ourselves and the things around us in terms of the projects we undertake, and how by virtue of these projects, we are always ‘there’ as being-in-the-world. In this chapter, I have focused specifically on two of Heidegger’s texts after BT, in order to show how he extends his earlier critique of the metaphysical tradition to concentrate specifically on the way that modern science is defined by sufficient reasoning. In doing so, I have limited our discussion to the scientific conception of the natural world, as defined by sufficient reasoning, to outline some of the specific ways in which this conception leads us to overlook our everyday living in favour of universal laws that are ‘already known’.

\(^{219}\) Caputo, The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought, p. 64.
As I have argued, this way of thinking is illustrative of a ‘demand’ placed on human beings to offer grounds for the things around them. Yet, these ‘grounds’ are an interpretation that we have inherited from the tradition of thinking, an interpretation which betrays ontological prejudices that stem from a particular historical situation. Without the transformation of tà mathemata into modern mathematics, taken as applicable to all beings—including human beings—modern science would not be possible. Hence, far from ‘already known’, mathematical–scientific laws are always historically constituted, and only have importance or relevance to human beings. For Heidegger, we are prone to overlook the historical basis of this understanding, which has been ushered in by modern science. He warns us against limiting ourselves to the mathematical–scientific account, and the example of Silesius brings this warning to the fore. We must be careful not to forget that the demand of reason and the seeking of grounds is only an issue for historical human beings, the only being who asks: ‘why?’
Conclusion

In the above, I have discussed the historical basis and limitations of sufficient ‘scientific’ reasoning, which I claim is an interpretation that is derived from the meaningful world of human beings, which is always primary. To give a brief overview, in the first chapter I concentrated on Heidegger’s conception of meaning. Specifically, I introduced Heidegger’s concern for fundamental ontological questions, which I framed in terms of our meaningful engagement with worldly things. This is supported by recent work by Sheehan, who has argued for a ‘paradigm shift’ in Heideggerian research. As noted, for Sheehan, ‘Being’ should be taken to refer to the meaningful presence of things to human beings. Following this line of argument, against traditional metaphysics and modern science, I have argued that the particular way things are meaningfully present for human beings will change historically. The way the world makes sense to us will always depend on the particular circumstances of our own lives, and so cannot be rendered in terms of fixed objects that are represented to the human subject in their timeless presence.

In chapter two, I focused specifically on the meaningful world of human beings. I considered Heidegger’s notion of Dasein and the Cartesian distinction between res extensa and res cogitans. Following Heidegger, I observed that Dasein’s most basic relation to the surrounding world is ‘being-in-the-world’, which is illustrated by the way that we always find ourselves using tools that are handy to the projects we undertake. The projects we undertake are structured by care, and through our taking care for the things we do, our surroundings are always meaningful or ‘open’ to us. We do not primarily find ourselves as subjects who are opposed to singular objects that stand over and against us. Rather, as ek-sistent, Dasein is structured to ‘stand outside’ itself and toward the openness of Being. At the same time, as in-sistent, Dasein is finite, and can
only encounter particular beings. Put together, we always find ourselves inextricably immersed by our surroundings, but not reducible to them.

Finally, in chapter three, I discussed AWV and PR, in order to detail some of the specific ways that scientific reasoning has covered over this meaningful surrounding world. Moreover, to further consider the historical basis of scientific reason, I showed that in these two works, Heidegger extends the critique of Cartesianism he initially put forward in BT. For Heidegger, modern scientific reasoning is grounded in Cartesian metaphysics, which is itself an appropriation of the Ancient Greek conception of tà mathémata. While Heidegger approaches the problem differently in each of these works, he maintains that our modern understanding of the surrounding world is already shaped by Cartesian metaphysics, which limits our understanding of all that ‘is’ to what is unchanging and objectively present. In doing so, we limit our focus to the objectively present, static character of things, leaving us unable to account for the meaningful presence of things, which is always disclosed historically. For this reason, we cannot render Being qua Being in terms of some unchanging, universalisable ground. The ground that grounds our understanding of what is will be different depending on the historical horizon that structures everyday human existence.

In closing, we can say that ultimately, the world around us is like the rose, without why. As noted, the world ‘is not’ any kind of being that we can encounter: the world worlds insofar as the world ‘is’ the historically constituted, meaningful context of human concern, which therefore cannot be rendered in terms of any kind of timeless a priori concepts or principles. As we have seen throughout, what Being discloses will change depending on the historical epoch that we find ourselves; contrary to our modern rational understanding, there is no ‘timeless’ or eternal grounds from which we can explain the thingness of the thing. Therefore, as a method, the value of hermeneutic
phenomenology is that it offers us the possibility to question the historical conditions that give rise to our interpretations of what is. From this, we can attempt to *re-think* our own interpretation of what Being discloses. To ‘leap beyond’ the confines of our own understanding and, instead, approach beings *as* the beings they ‘are’. This is not to reject, or even to undermine the rational–scientific worldview, but rather to focus our attention back on the world around us, which is always meaningful and that we only ‘escape’ when we die. The light that illuminates will be always be reflected in the things around us, albeit differently depending on when and who we are. If we wish to account for the meaningfulness of things, then we must be careful not to lose sight of the things themselves.
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