

**Overcoming Ontological Transcendence:
The Hermeneutic Significance of Heidegger's "On the Essence of Ground"**

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In the opening sentence of one of the precious few extended commentaries on this treatise offered in English, William Richardson writes that "*The Essence of Ground* is one of the hardest diamonds in all of Heidegger's ample treasury."¹ Notwithstanding its low profile and its high density, the treatise on ground (OEG) has much to offer the careful reader, especially the one patient enough to pay close attention to the fine print. Composed in 1928 in the waning twilight of fundamental ontology, the main text of the treatise boasts, by Heidegger's own lights, the most "original" and "comprehensive" of his efforts to elucidate the problem of transcendence—the very problem whose "progressive elaboration" he deems to be the central task of *Being and Time* (BT).²

To be sure, Heidegger's reappropriation of ontological transcendence in the main text of OEG is significant in its own right for reasons I shall clarify in due course. But the most intriguing facet of the essay lies at its margin. Here one discovers a mysterious series of fragmentary lettered notes that Heidegger originally scribbled into his personal copy of the 1929 edition³, but that was not made public until decades later in the 1976 revised and expanded edition of *Wegmarken*.⁴ What is offered in this subtext is nothing less than a point-for-point rebuttal of the fundamental ontological analysis of transcendence advanced in the main text above it.

The intrigue deepens as one recognizes that the reevaluation of fundamental ontology ventured in this subtext is articulated not in the corrective, supplementary idiom of *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*

¹William Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963, 161.

² Heidegger, "On the Essence of Ground" (OEG), trans. William McNeill, in Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 97-135, 125, note 66. For a more sustained discussion of this claim, see Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* (MFL), trans. Michael Heim, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, 136-154.

³ Heidegger, "Vom Wesen des Grundes" (VWG), *Festschrift Edmund Husserl zum 70. Geburtstag gewidmet (Ergänzungsband zum Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung)*, Halle, 1929.

⁴ Heidegger, VWG, in *Wegmarken*, second expanded edition with marginal notes, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, GA 9, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1976, 123-175.

(MFL: the 1928 Marburg lecture course that served as a principal source of the treatise on ground),⁵ but rather in the “destructive,” transformative idiom that animates the texts and lectures of the mid-thirties and beyond. Indeed, if one were to encounter these lettered notes extracted from their context, one could easily mistake them for outtakes from *Contributions to Philosophy* (CP),⁶ as note after emphatic note declares the urgency of “overcoming” ontological transcendence by thinking being “no longer as the being *of beings*,” but rather “as projection of the essential prevailing of the truth of beyng” [*Entwurf der Wesung der Wahrheit des Seyns*].⁷

OEG is thus an exceedingly unique text situated at a pivotal juncture along Heidegger’s path. In the space of a single treatise, we find one of his latest, most comprehensive articulations of ontological transcendence layered atop one of his earliest indications of the need to overcome it.⁸ My suggestion here is that examining these two tiers of interpretative engagement with the problem of transcendence may shed new light on both the beaten track of BT and the murky trail that cuts between BT and the increasingly well-trodden paths of CP and other influential later writings. I argue, more specifically, that reading OEG in view of Heidegger’s broader concern over the problem of transcendence has considerable hermeneutic advantages in both retrospective and prospective directions.

Retrospectively, OEG provides a synoptic overview of the progressive elaboration of ontological transcendence that unfolds throughout the two divisions of BT. Though this narrative remains largely between the lines in BT itself, its more explicit emergence in OEG enables one to discern in hindsight a hermeneutic continuity across Heidegger’s magnum opus. Among other benefits, I maintain, this narrative furnishes a more complete description of ontological transcendence than the dominant Anglo-American “pragmatist” interpretation that portrays this phenomenon chiefly in terms of its provisional characterization in division one without paying adequate heed to its ongoing elaboration in division two. The leverage that OEG offers for

⁵ Heidegger, MFL.

⁶ Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* (CP), trans. Emad and Maly, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999; Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (hereafter GA 65), ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, GA 65, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1989.

⁷ Heidegger, OEG, 105 note c, 104 note c; VWG, 132 note b.

⁸ Heidegger, OEG, 125, note 66.

redressing this influential (if truncated) description of transcendence turns out to be important for connecting the dots between the so-called “early” and “later” Heidegger, or so I shall argue.

Prospectively, on the other hand, the juxtaposition in OEG of Heidegger’s account of ontological transcendence in the main text with his destruction of it in the lettered notes offers an instructive opportunity to observe how his increasing concern over an irreducible tension at the heart of ontological transcendence—its status as both “grounding of all ground” and “abyss of ground”—gives rise to nascent inklings of a need, as he would come to express it in the mid-thirties, “to leap...over transcendence and to inquire initially into being [Seyn] and truth.”⁹ By tracing the interplay between its main text and subtext, thus, readers of OEG may travel along as Heidegger follows the transcendence problem to the limit of fundamental ontology’s explanatory power and then exploits this limit experience as a springboard for what is likely one of the first of many subsequent attempts to leap into “the mystery” toward which his account of Dasein’s transcendence could only provisionally gesture.

My efforts to chart this itinerary are organized into two parts. Part one motivates the reading I propose by situating OEG in the broader contexts of its reception in the secondary literature, its engagement by Heidegger himself in subsequent writings, and my own interpretation—in view of Heidegger’s remarks—of its utility for illuminating the catalyst’s role played by the transcendence problem in the development of his overall project. Against this backdrop, part two advances a selective reading of the most important developments in OEG’s main text and lettered notes, elucidating in the process their hermeneutic significance for returning to and “turning” from the progressive elaboration of transcendence that both initiates and eventually exhausts Heidegger’s fundamental ontological inquiries. The picture that emerges, I conclude, is that OEG is hermeneutically a significantly more important work (for Heidegger certainly, but potentially also for his interpreters) than its marginal status in the secondary literature might lead one to believe.

I

In a field as long established and meticulously surveyed as English-speaking scholarship on Heidegger’s earlier works, it may seem implausible that OEG would have remained less than thoroughly exploited were there anything particularly valuable therein to exploit. My initial burden, thus, is to offer some reasons to think

⁹ Heidegger, GA 65, 251; Heidegger, CP, 177 (translation slightly altered).

that there is more to OEG than has heretofore come to light, especially in regard to its proposed utility for clarifying the impetus of Heidegger's efforts to overcome ontological transcendence.

The first consideration to bear in mind is that the landscape of Anglophone Heidegger studies has changed significantly since OEG was introduced to the English-speaking world in the late fifties and early sixties as an intriguing if ultimately derivative work aimed at condensing the capital lessons of BT.¹⁰ Though the treatise has been available in German since its original publication in 1929,¹¹ the lettered notes didn't emerge until 1976, and the lecture course on which OEG's analysis of transcendence is largely based didn't appear until 1978.¹² As for the availability of these works in English, the first translation of the treatise itself was published in 1969,¹³ and MFL became available in 1984, but it was 1998—just over two decades ago—before the lettered notes followed suit in a new translation prepared for *Pathmarks*.¹⁴

In addition to the wider availability of these specific texts that are helpful for understanding OEG in particular, the wider availability of other key sources—especially Heidegger's lecture courses—has engendered an increased appreciation among commentators of the value of Heidegger's minor works for understanding the major works in new and more illuminating ways.¹⁵ In short, the last several decades have afforded the English-speaking guild some sharp tools (both textual and contextual) for breaking new ground in an old treatise, and the advent of the most intriguing of these resources—the lettered notes themselves—is recent indeed.

¹⁰ See, for instance, in Thomas Langan, *The Meaning of Heidegger: A Critical Study of an Existentialist Phenomenology*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1959, 86-95, esp. 88; and in Richardson, *Through Phenomenology to Thought*, 161-193, esp. 161, 174, 192-193.

¹¹ Those with archival inclinations might enjoy reading Henry Lanz's account of OEG in his 1930 review of the Husserl Festschrift in which it originally appeared. Lanz, Review of *Festschrift Edmund Husserl zum 70. Geburtstag gewidmet*, *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 39, No. 6 (Nov. 1930), 625-630.

¹² Heidegger, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*, ed. Klaus Held, GA 26, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1978.

¹³ Heidegger, *On the Essence of Reasons: A Bilingual Edition*, trans. Terence Malick, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969.

¹⁴ Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, ix, 367.

¹⁵ Works that are exemplary in this regard include, among many others, Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993; and *Heidegger's Way of Thought*, London: Continuum, 2002; John van Buren, *The Young Heidegger: Rumor of the Hidden King*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994; Daniel O. Dahlstrom, *Heidegger's Concept of Truth*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001; Kisiel and Sheehan, eds., *Becoming Heidegger: On the Trail of His Early Occasional Writings*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

Notwithstanding these developments, the status of OEG in the secondary literature suggests that first impressions of the treatise as a work of marginal significance have been hard to shake. For instance, OEG doesn't feature prominently in any of the forty-six essays collectively on offer in Blackwell's *A Companion to Heidegger* (2005)¹⁶ and *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger, Second Edition* (2006).¹⁷ And in the literature generally, when OEG does make an appearance, references to it are usually offered in passing toward the end of fine-tuning various aspects of the project of BT.¹⁸ Less often, commentators tangentially consider the possibility that OEG anticipates 'the turning' from fundamental ontology¹⁹—as early evidence, say, of Heidegger's growing doubts about the viability of his account of primordial temporality,²⁰ or as corroboration that fundamental ontology does not culminate in anthropocentrism but in the opening of a path to Dasein's reception of "the gift of being."²¹ In any case, it is rare to find OEG at center stage receiving sustained attention.²²

¹⁶ *A Companion to Heidegger*, eds. Hubert Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005. It is worth noting that in one of the few essays in which a passage from OEG is actually cited, the reference is misidentified as an outtake from "On the Essence of Truth." See Mark Wrathall, "Unconcealment," 337-357, 349.

¹⁷ *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger, Second Edition*, ed. Charles Guignon, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

¹⁸ See, among other places, in L.M. Vail, *Heidegger and Ontological Difference*, State College: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1972; Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1976, 23-24; Joseph P. Fell, "The Familiar and the Strange: On the Limits of Praxis in the Early Heidegger", in *Heidegger: A Critical Reader*, ed. Hubert Dreyfus and Harrison Hall, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992, 65-80; David Cerbone, "World, World-Entry, and Realism in Early Heidegger," *Inquiry* 38 (1995), note 18; Sonya Sikka, *Forms of Transcendence: Heidegger and Medieval Mystical Theology*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997, 152; Herman Philipse, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being: A Critical Interpretation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998, 229, 242, 245; Wrathall, 2005, 349; Dermot Moran, "Heidegger's Transcendental Phenomenology in light of Husserl's Project of First Philosophy," in *Transcendental Heidegger*, eds. Steven Crowell and Jeff Malpas, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007, 135-150, esp. 139-140; William McNeill, *The Time of Life: Heidegger and Ethos*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007, 57-59.

¹⁹ See, among other places, in Otto Pöggler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, Amherst: Humanity Books, 1991, 72-74.

²⁰ Theodore Kisiel, "The Demise of Being and Time: 1927-1930", in *Heidegger's Being and Time: Critical Essays*, ed. Richard Polt, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005, 189-214, 206.

²¹ Françoise Dastur, "The Critique of Anthropologism in Heidegger's Thought", in *Appropriating Heidegger*, eds. James Faulconer and Mark Wrathall, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 119-134, esp. 126.

²² There are, of course, a few such instances. One good example is John D. Caputo's classic essay on the self-critique of OEG that Heidegger offers in his later lecture course *On the Principle of Reason*; see in Caputo, "The Principle of Sufficient Reason: A study of Heideggerian Self-Criticism," in *Southern Journal of*

Given this lack of interest in the main text of the treatise, it is not surprising that the lettered notes—if they crop up at all—are typically mentioned as an aside within an aside.²³ The only English text I know of that offers anything resembling a thematic treatment of these lettered notes is Thomas Sheehan’s 1977 review article on the second edition of *Wegmarken*,²⁴ in which the marginalia gleaned from Heidegger’s personal copies of the collected essays are dubbed the items “[o]f greatest interest” among the distinguishing features of the new edition.²⁵

The expanse of territory that Sheehan must survey here—for starters, some 180 marginalia scattered throughout the volume—precludes a fine-toothed combing of the 28 lettered notes specific to OEG.²⁶ Nonetheless, Sheehan offers several pieces of pertinent information about them. First, OEG is among “the five most heavily noted” of the essays.²⁷ Second, it is home to several of the more “striking phrases”²⁸ in the marginalia to which Heidegger resorts for the purpose of stressing “the emergent-dynamic character” of his “topos,” a term Sheehan uses to track the main topic of Heidegger’s thought as it evolves from earlier into later

Philosophy, Winter 1975, 13, 419-426, esp. 420-422. Another more recent example is Jeff Malpas’ illuminating account of the import of OEG for Heidegger’s understanding of “world” in the late twenties and its significance for the “turning of thought” imminently to come; see in Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology: Being, Place, World*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006, Chapter 4, 147-209, 161-182; and Malpas, “Heidegger’s Topology of Being,” in *Transcendental Heidegger*, eds. Steven Crowell and Jeff Malpas, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007, 119-134, esp. 127 note 20 (260). Steven Crowell’s brief but very helpful account of OEG’s utility for clarifying “how the project of reason-giving” is grounded in Dasein’s transcendence merits mention here as well. See in Crowell, “Conscience and Reason: Heidegger and the Grounds of Intentionality,” in *Transcendental Heidegger*, 43-62, esp. 57-62.

²³ See, for instance, in Kisiel: 2005, 206; Malpas: 2006, 173.

²⁴ Thomas J. Sheehan, “Getting to the Topic: The New Edition of *Wegmarken*,” in *Radical Phenomenology: Essays in Honor of Martin Heidegger*, ed. John Sallis, Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1978, 299-316 (originally published in *Research in Phenomenology* (1977), Volume 7).

²⁵ Sheehan: 1977, 299, 301.

²⁶ Sheehan’s review includes an appendix of selected notes (untranslated) from a variety of essays, but just four notes from OEG are among the chosen (Sheehan: 177, 314-15). For those interested in perusing the OEG lettered notes in their entirety, I have assembled an appendix to this paper in which all 28 notes are standardized across the German and English editions and situated in the context of their corresponding passages from the main text (along with English translations from McNeill’s 1998 edition). This appendix is unpublished, but available for viewing at [redacted for purposes of blind review].

²⁷ Sheehan: 1977, 301.

²⁸ The phrases to which Sheehan refers here are “Entwurf der Wesung der Wahrheit des Seyns” (W 132 b)/ “projection of the essencing of the truth of beyng” (P 104 c); and “*das Seyende des Seyns*” (W 134 c)/ “beyngs of beyng” (P 105 c).

works.²⁹ Finally, and most importantly (given the concerns of this study), Sheehan reports that the lettered notes in OEG find Heidegger “searching out the ‘whence’ of transcendental projection”—in other words, looking beyond the horizon of fundamental ontological transcendence to that which opens this understanding of being in the first place.³⁰

The subtext of OEG, however, is not the only text in which Heidegger speaks prolifically and provocatively about the utility of OEG for showing up the limits of fundamental ontology. Indeed, there is significant evidence on offer in CP—yet another text only recently in wide circulation—to suggest that an ongoing engagement with OEG figures prominently in Heidegger’s earliest efforts to dismantle his account of ontological transcendence and to stage a leap beyond it. After referencing OEG numerous times throughout CP in the interest of situating his evolving concerns vis-à-vis various formally indicative if ultimately misleading or underdeveloped insights from BT,³¹ Heidegger characterizes OEG in the concluding movement of the work (VIII. *Das Seyn*) as a text that rests on the pivot of the turning from fundamental ontology, or again—swapping metaphors—on the springboard of the leap into beyng:

[A]t the deciding juncture it was necessary to overcome the crisis of the question of being that was necessarily initially laid out, and above all to avoid an objectification of beyng [*Seyn*—on the one hand by holding back the “temporal” interpretation of beyng and at the same time by attempting besides to make the truth of beyng visible (freedom for ground in *Vom Wesen des Grundes*, and yet in the first part of this treatise the ontic-ontological schema is still thoroughly maintained). By merely thinking further along the line of the question already set forth, the crisis did not let itself be mastered. Rather, a multifaceted leap [*vielfache Sprung*] into the essence of beyng itself had to be ventured, which at the same time required a more originary insertion [*Einfügung*] into history.³²

In a parallel passage from “My Pathway Hitherto,” a brief essay penned at roughly the same time as CP but published just recently as an appendix to *Mindfulness*, Heidegger gives a more detailed gloss on this progression from crisis to leap, stating explicitly that lingering questions which come to a head in OEG (and

²⁹ Sheehan: 1977, 305.

³⁰ Sheehan: 1977, 308.

³¹ Explicit references to OEG can be found at CP, 64/GA 65, 93; CP, 120/GA 65, 171; CP, 176/GA 65, 250; CP, 216*/GA 65, 307*; CP, 226/GA 65, 322; CP, 229/GA 65, 327. Given Heidegger’s pervasive usage throughout CP of the terms “ground” [*Grund*], “grounding” [*Gründung*], and “abground” or “abyss of ground” [*Abgrund*], there are arguably very many implicit references to OEG, though some are certainly more obvious than others. See, for instance, CP, 129/GA 65, 184; CP 156/GA 65, 223; CP 216/GA 65, 307; CP 246/GA 65, 351.

³² Heidegger, CP, 317 (translation slightly altered); GA 65, 451.

his ongoing revaluations of it) play a catalyst's role in provoking the "beyng-historical thinking" at stake in his lecture courses of the early-to-mid thirties:

The efforts of another decade show that the difficulties of mastering the question of the truth of beyng are not of such a kind that pertain to the so-called "birth of a problem" and its isolated tackling. Rather: because the inquiry into being is grounded most intimately in the inquiry into Da-sein and vice versa, that is, because the intimacy of the relation between being and Da-sein continues to be basically the sustaining and prompting relation that immediately holds unto the abgrund, the inquiry into Da-sein continues to be made anew and begun more originarily but at the same time in explicit relation to the truth of beyng. Therefore, right away I had to subject anew everything that had to do with 'ground' (cf. *Vom Wesen des Grundes*) to the motions of questioning and thus simultaneously clarify and sharpen my entire position on the history of Occidental philosophy hitherto. Accordingly, once again there emerged the task of a comprehensive mindfulness of this history from its first beginning (Anaximander lecture of 1932 up to the Nietzsche lectures of 1937).³³

On Heidegger's view, then, the turning from fundamental ontology is best understood not in terms of his abandonment of an old problem for the "isolated tackling" of a new one, but rather as a hermeneutic progression through which retrospective reflection on key insights from the "path hitherto" generates the momentum ("the motions of questioning") that ultimately carries him beyond the limits ("leap") of his previous strategy for tracking the phenomena.³⁴

If one takes Heidegger at his word in the foregoing passages, it is plausible to infer that his dealings with OEG play an important role in provoking this leap, and that they are persistent and ongoing from the late-twenties into (at least) the mid-thirties. The momentum begins to gather, perhaps, in what he retrospectively describes as an incomplete attempt to "make the truth of beyng visible" as "freedom for ground" in the third section of the treatise itself (1928); gains velocity behind his dismantling of the main text in the lettered notes (sometime before the summer of 1932 when the "more originary insertion into history" commences in the Anaximander lectures and elsewhere); and reaches take-off speed in CP where staging the "leap over transcendence" into "beyng" becomes the explicit task (1936-1938). That OEG remains a provocative force in Heidegger's thinking even at this latter stage is evidenced further in the "Editor's Epilogue" to CP, where von Hermann notes the existence of an entire notebook of unpublished commentary on the treatise—

³³ Heidegger, "My Pathway Hitherto" in *Mindfulness*, trans. Parvis Emad and Thomas Kalary, London: Continuum, 2006, 364-369, 367-368 (translation slightly altered); *Besinnung*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997.

³⁴ In light of this narrative, the somewhat cryptic concluding question of Heidegger's 1949 "Preface to the Third Edition" of OEG begins to make sense: "What if those who reflect on such matters were to begin at last to enter thoughtfully into this same issue that has been waiting for two decades?" Heidegger, OEG, 97.

“Anmerkungen zu ‘Vom Wesen des Grundes’” (1936)—slated to appear in the fourth division of the collected edition.³⁵

If it is clearer at this point *that* OEG figures centrally in Heidegger’s transition from crisis to leap in the years after BT, it remains to show exactly *how* it figures into this transition, and to clarify my suggestion that OEG has special import for illuminating the question of why Heidegger (at least initially) conceives of the turning from fundamental ontology explicitly in terms of “leaping over” ontological transcendence. In hopes of rendering my analysis in part two of the specific hermeneutic advantages of OEG and its subsequent revaluations a bit easier to follow, I devote the remainder of part one to a sketch of the general narrative that motivates my orientation to Heidegger’s work as a whole.

I should admit up front that, while I believe the narrative I construct here accurately reflects what is going on in the texts I cite as touchstones along the way, my sense of the overarching trajectory of the path owes a great deal to the retrospective vision afforded by OEG. So, though I offer this narrative as preparation for a more explicit discussion of the interpretative advantages of OEG, the truth is that I am already implicitly drawing on these advantages in advancing the preparatory narrative itself—a story of the stages along Heidegger’s way that first became salient for me as a unified progression in view of OEG.

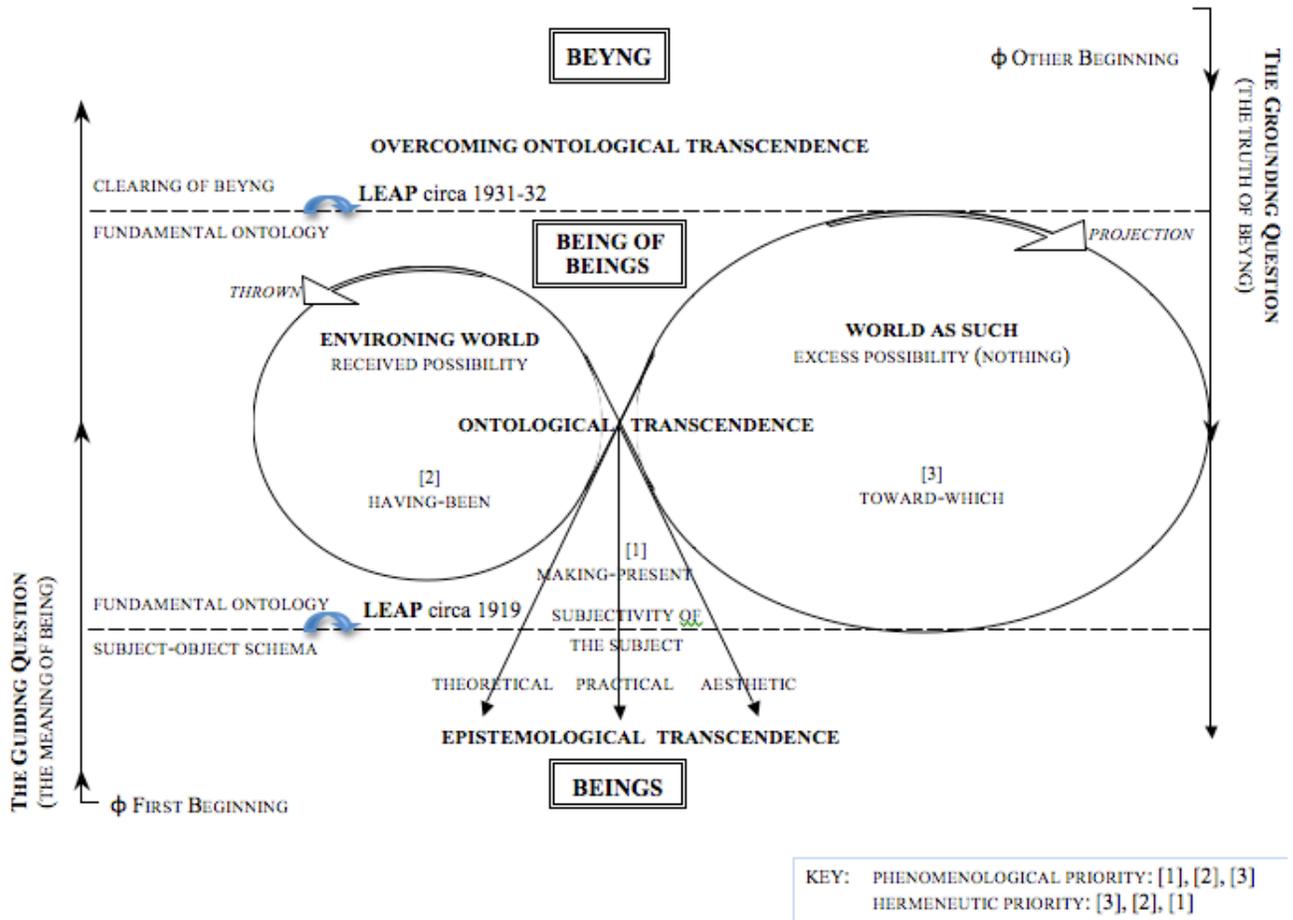
The narrative I propose is one that understands the development of Heidegger’s overall project (and the key “leaps” and “retrievals” along the way) by following the movement of his sustained engagement, at least through the mid-to-late thirties, with the problem of transcendence. In positing this approach, I am not seeking to supplant the conventional interpretation on which “the question of being” sets the trajectory of Heidegger’s path with some alternate take on this arc that posits transcendence as the guiding thread. My claim, rather, is that tracing the development of Heidegger’s concern over the transcendence problem can shed significant light on why his more foundational inquiry into the question of being evolves as it does over the course of his

³⁵ Heidegger, CP, 368/GA 65, 519. In the same passage, von Hermann makes reference to several other notebooks, including “Laufende Anmerkungen zu ‘Sein und Zeit’ (1936), and observes that the publication order of these notebooks is indicated by their “roman numerals,” which he does not seem to provide. I cannot say with certainty in which volume the OEG notebook will appear, though reference to a recent *Gesamtausgabe* prospectus suggests either GA 97 (Anmerkungen II-V) or GA 98 (Anmerkungen VI-IX).

career; in short, it is Heidegger’s confrontations with the transcendence problem at certain critical junctures along the way that propel his inquiry into the question of being forward.

The obvious question at this point is that of what exactly “the transcendence problem” is supposed to mean. The answer, I take it, depends on which stage of the inquiry one is considering. In developing my suggestion, then, I’ll offer a diagram of what I take to be the various stages along the way, explicate their central features in the abstract, and then discuss their development in several representative texts .

FIGURE 1



As I map the territory, Heidegger’s confrontations with various formulations of the transcendence problem propel him along a path that encompasses two methodological leaps across three heuristically distinguishable problem spheres that I refer to respectively as the subject-object schema, fundamental ontology, and—for lack of a better handle—the clearing of being. As the above diagram indicates, each of these problem spheres concerns the question of being; however, Heidegger’s approach to the question evolves as his confrontations

with various problem-sphere-specific versions of the transcendence problem bring him to the limit of what can be accomplished within a given sphere of inquiry, necessitating thus a methodological leap into a new understanding of the problematic within which the results of the previous stage must be reappropriated in view of the new vantage-point afforded by the leap. By following each problem sphere to its limit, in short, Heidegger achieves an inkling of what lies beyond—an epiphany that then serves as a springboard for a leap into the next sphere of inquiry.

I call these leaps “methodological” because upon making a given leap, Heidegger must shelve the tools of the previous problematic, however useful they may continue to prove for tasks carried out within that province, and engineer a new set of tools custom-fitted to the novel task at hand. So, for instance, while the “thing-oriented apprehension” of the “theoretical attitude” is useful for the performance of various tasks within the subject-object schema, it does not have the requisite resources to explain how the subject-object relation itself is grounded. To make headway on that question, the new machinery of fundamental ontology must be mobilized to dismantle the subject-object schema, tracing thereby all of its central questions and philosophemes back to their hermeneutic ground (i.e., condition of intelligibility) in various phenomena within the new field of inquiry. Thus dismantled, the subject-object relation is shown to be rooted in Dasein’s being-in-the-world, the central concepts of modern metaphysics in various modes of its being or “equiprimordial existentials” (object → “event of appropriation”, nature → “worlding”, time → “temporalizing”), and so on. But if fundamental ontology has its day vis-à-vis the subject-object schema, so too must its findings submit to destruction upon running aground on the clearing of being.

Given this general picture, how specifically do the versions of the transcendence problem I’ve noted above propel Heidegger along his way? The journey begins where for Heidegger it always must: with the question of being as it has been handed down by the tradition. As he tells the story, Western philosophy has traditionally conceived of being in terms of beings, and in the case of the early twentieth-century neo-Kantian paradigm that motivates Heidegger’s initial concern over the issue, in terms of beings understood as object-like things that somehow become “present” to subjects across an epistemological gap which fundamentally separates the two. Within the subject-object schema, then, the attempt to make headway on the question of being is immediately—and Heidegger thinks, intractably—frustrated by the problem of epistemological transcendence

in which the task of understanding beings confronts an immanent subject with the burden of theorizing its way across the gap and out of its primordial isolation into reliable contact with transcendent objects in the external world.

Heidegger's pivotal realization in the lectures of the late-teens and early-twenties is that the very possibility of understanding beings as epistemologically transcendent objects intended by an immanent subject requires the theoretical "devivification" (*Ent-lebnis*) of a more primordial, pre-theoretical relation to beings. He describes this relation in terms of the "hermeneutical intuition" of "environmental experience" (*Umwelterlebnis*) into which understanding is always already "thrown," absorbed without explicit awareness in an "environing world" of "prior involvements" with beings that provides the motivational context of possible interactions in light of which the givens of everyday experience may come meaningfully to the fore as this or that thing for this or that purpose.³⁶

Given my concerns here, it is important to observe that Heidegger comes to this realization by following the subject-object schema to the limits of its explanatory power, asking the most basic question that "thing-oriented apprehension" can entertain—"Is there something?"—and then demonstrating that this mode of inquiry cannot explain the meaning of the "there is" (*Es gibt*) contained within the question.³⁷ Heidegger concludes that a leap into a more primordial problem sphere is required in order to account for the "there" that serves as the site of the relation in which beings may be given to understanding as epistemologically transcendent objects in the first place:

We are standing at the methodological crossroad which will decide on the very life or death of philosophy. We stand at an abyss: either into nothingness, that is, absolute reification, pure thingness, or we somehow leap into another world, more precisely, we manage for the first time to make the leap [Sprung] into the world as such.³⁸

³⁶ See, for instance, in Heidegger, "The Idea of Philosophy and the Problem of Worldview," (1919) in *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, trans. Ted Sadler, London: Continuum, 2000 (GA 56/57); and in Heidegger, *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity* (1923), trans. John van Buren, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999 (GA 63). It merits mention here that Heidegger's interest in tracing the problem of epistemological transcendence back to its ground in the ontological transcendence of being-in-the-world is already clearly presaged in the account of the transcendence of "living spirit" (*lebendiger Geist*) offered in the conclusion to his 1915 dissertation, *Die Kategorien- und Bedeutungslehre des Duns Scotus*, GA 1, 1978, 399-411, esp. 407-410.

³⁷ Heidegger, "The Idea of Philosophy and the Problem of Worldview," 53-64.

³⁸ Heidegger, "The Idea of Philosophy and the Problem of Worldview," 53.

It is precisely this first leap that opens into the problem sphere that Heidegger will come to call fundamental ontology in BT. Here, the question of how beings become intelligible to understanding—a question formerly addressed to the challenge of bridging the gap between the immanent subject and the external world of epistemologically transcendent objects—must be transposed into a new context in which the problem of transcendence and its accompanying conception of “world” are transformed:

The ‘problem of transcendence’ cannot be brought round to the question of how a subject comes out to an Object, where the aggregate of Objects is identified with the idea of the world. Rather we must ask: what makes it ontologically possible for entities to be encountered within-the-world and Objectified as so encountered? This can be answered by recourse to the transcendence of the world—a transcendence with an ecstatico-horizonal foundation.³⁹

In division one of BT, Heidegger’s description of this new phenomenon of ontological transcendence proceeds along the trajectory established in his early lectures. The task, at least initially, is to explain how the pre-theoretical understanding of being funded by prior experience in the environing world (now parsed as “being-in-the-world”) grounds Dasein’s ability to interpret the beings with which it is always already engaged as “thrown” into everyday dealings (now glossed as “factual life” within a “totality of involvements”). But as the project of BT unfolds, it becomes clear that this interpretation of being-in-the-world primarily in terms of the environing world is only half the story. To capture the ontological transcendence of being-in-the-world as a whole, Heidegger must explain not only how the givens of factual life become manifest in view of Dasein’s thrownness into the totality of involvements, but also how the momentum of this thrownness itself is generated. From whence, in other words, is Dasein “returning” when it comes back to the environmental possibilities from out of which it may actualize meaningful relationships with the givens of factual life?

The task in division two, thus, is to trace environmental understanding back to its basis in the puzzling phenomenon of the “transcendence of the world as such”—the horizon of intelligibility or “future possibility” that Dasein, as existing, is said to “project” in surpassing its inherited possibilities toward the totality of possibilities for understanding beings taken as a whole.⁴⁰ I call this phenomenon “puzzling” because though it

³⁹ Heidegger, BT, 417-418.

⁴⁰ Two key texts for marking this transition are found in BT, division I, chapter 6, section 41 (where Heidegger explains how Dasein’s immersion in environmental possibilities “results in a dimming down of the possible as such” (239 ff.) that must be rectified through an authentic reappropriation of this phenomenon in division II); and in division II, chapter 4, section 69 (where he summarizes this reappropriation of “the possible as such” explicitly in terms of “the transcendence of world” (415 ff)).

is posited as the hermeneutic ground of environmental understanding—indeed, as the “prior understanding” of that “for the sake of which” Dasein’s factual involvements are undertaken⁴¹—the mode of Dasein’s being through which this prior understanding is initially disclosed to it (anxiety in the face of the “nothing” of its possible future) and the existential fallout of this disclosure (being “not-at-home” in the final analysis amidst the inherited possibilities of its past) seem to obfuscate Dasein’s understanding rather than illuminate it.⁴²

The puzzle, in a nutshell, is that of how Dasein’s “prior understanding” of itself as open to the “nothing” of future possibility could be said, on the one hand, to give purpose to Dasein’s inherited possibilities for interpreting beings, and on the other hand, to alienate Dasein from a settled interpretation of itself as existing for the sake of its environmental possibilities alone. In existing as ontologically transcendent, on this picture, being-in-a-world negotiates its present understanding of the givens of factual life through the surpassing of this understanding in two directions that would seem to be in fundamental tension with one another: Dasein can engage beings (“making present”/access) only insofar as it is thrown back into the reassuring environs of past possibilities (“having been”/recess) on the downswing of its projecting toward the alienating nothingness of future possibility (“toward-which”/excess).⁴³

Heidegger’s first pass at resolving this tension into a unified description of ontological transcendence as the “temporalizing of temporality” in division two is notoriously abstruse. First, the journey to primordial temporality cuts a tortuous path through a variety of bewildering descriptions of subordinate “equiprimordial existentials”—modes of Dasein’s being-in-the-world such as being-unto-death, anxiety, conscience, and anticipatory resoluteness—that make it difficult to see the forest for the trees. What’s more, the connections posited between and among these phenomena often seem tenuous, and in any case, the general drift of the argument is considerably less accessible than that of division one—a fact that is hardly surprising given that the central ideas of the first division had been honed for a over a decade, while division two was hastily written

⁴¹ Heidegger, BT, 415.

⁴² Heidegger, BT, 313.

⁴³ I am borrowing the memorable excess/recess/access shorthand from Thomas Sheehan, “Heidegger’s Topic: Excess, Recess, Access,” *Tijdschrift-voor-Filosofie*, D 79; 41: 615-635.

and rushed to press under professional duress.⁴⁴ Finally, while there are clues that this onslaught of strange phenomena and their attempted reconciliation in the proposed account of primordial temporality are aimed at clarifying ontological transcendence, these indications are few and far enough between that they are easily missed.

It is understandable, for instance, that with all the existential pyrotechnics in division two, one might overlook that the sense of “transcendental” Heidegger intends in describing the architectonic of BT as an “Explication of Time as the Transcendental Horizon for the Question of Being”⁴⁵ is indexed to the obscure phenomenon of “the transcendence of the world”. After all, this phenomenon doesn’t even surface explicitly until some 400 pages into the text, and even then, its explication is confined to a pivotal but scant three-page subheading of section 69—a treatment that hardly seems adequate to the phenomenon ordained therein as the key to understanding the “ecstatico-horizonal [i.e., primordial temporal] foundation” of being-in-the-world.⁴⁶ Without advance notice of the strategic importance of section 69, moreover, the small handful of other explicit references to Dasein’s transcendence that prepare the way are readily lost in the shuffle.⁴⁷

But if the guiding importance of the transcendence problem throughout both divisions remains oblique in BT itself, the works that follow immediately in its wake find Heidegger explicitly and repeatedly asserting that his *magnum opus*, properly understood, is from start to finish an elaboration of ontological transcendence—an elaboration, moreover, that has only just begun upon the conclusion of BT.⁴⁸ The following passage from MFL

⁴⁴ Hubert Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time*, Division I, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991, viii.

⁴⁵ Heidegger, BT, 7.

⁴⁶ Heidegger, BT, 415-418.

⁴⁷ For instance, there are passages strategically located at the end of each introduction (34, 62) that ground Dasein’s “priority over all other beings” in its transcendence, and describe this transcendence (in language that clearly anticipates section 69) as “lying beyond every entity and every possible character which an entity may possess”.

⁴⁸ In addition to MFL and OEG (to which I refer here), three other texts written during the same period offer parallel articulations of the importance of the transcendence problem for the fundamental ontological task set forth in BT: *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1927), trans. Albert Hofstadter, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982, esp. 294-302; “What is Metaphysics?” (1928), trans. David Farrell Krell, in *Pathmarks*, 82-96, esp. 91 ff; and *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (KPM) (1929), trans. Richard Taft, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, esp. 50-53, 81-88, and 143-173.

(one of the principal sources of OEG) captures the drift of these assertions comprehensively enough to warrant a lengthy citation:

[I]f transcendence in the sense of being-in-the-world is the basic metaphysical constitution of Dasein, then a metaphysics of Dasein, one with a fundamental ontological intent, must necessarily refer to this basic constitution. Thus the investigation in *Being and Time*...begins with: “Being-in-the-world in general as basic constitution of Dasein” and [sections] 12 and 13 present an outline and a first acquaintance with the phenomenon. Had one the least sensitivity to method, one could conclude that this basic constitution is obviously central for a metaphysics of Dasein, that it returns continually and does so even more primordially in the course of the interpretation; this means the phenomenon comes more and more to light as central. Therefore the attempt is then made, after a first description of the basic constitution, to articulate its structural moments and to elaborate them as a whole in further detail through the connections that provide the greatest access. But, insofar as the entire investigation tries to highlight temporality as the metaphysical essence of Dasein, transcendence becomes itself conceived by way of temporality; but, as basic constitution, transcendence must always come into central focus along the whole path of the investigation. The analysis of *Angst* (section 40), the problems of Dasein, worldhood, and reality, as well as the interpretation of conscience and the concept of death—all serve the progressive elaboration of transcendence, until the latter is finally taken up anew and expressly (section 69) as a problem, “The Temporality of Being-in-the-world and the Problem of Transcendence of World.”⁴⁹

In assessing the merits of this “progressive elaboration of transcendence”, Heidegger is under no illusion that he has “worked out this basic constitution in such a way that one need only look at it, as if at a blackboard, in order to ‘confirm’ it;” indeed, he insists, “[t]here are no such findings in this sense here at all!” On the contrary, he maintains, the value of the progress charted in BT should be weighed in terms of its facility for “making an interpretation possible that is still more radical than [his] previous interpretations.”⁵⁰ In short (if I may borrow an aphorism from Heidegger’s later work), “the point is not to listen to a series of propositions, but to follow the movement of showing”—to resist the temptation of reckoning BT in terms of the “results” secured between its covers in favor of staying the course into the open horizon of its guiding question.⁵¹

In this spirit, Heidegger devotes a full third of MFL—some eighty pages of material—to returning to the past with futural intent: revisiting the formal indications of the elaboration of ontological transcendence across BT, warding off their potential misinterpretation, and foregrounding their as yet underdeveloped interpretive

⁴⁹Heidegger, MFL, 168.

⁵⁰Heidegger, MFL, 168. The page citation given here for BT refers, in fact, to the German text; see *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2001, 351. In BT, this passage is found on page 401.

⁵¹ Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, New York: Harper and Row, 1972, 2.

possibilities.⁵² While these efforts certainly merit careful attention on their own terms, my concern here is with two important developments in particular that set the stage for further progress in OEG.

First, MFL offers a conceptual condensation and clarification of the trajectory of division two in which the trail from world to temporality previously cut through the arduous terrain of death, anxiety, conscience, and the like is blazed more directly through an engagement with the phenomenon of “primordial freedom” or “freedom for ground”.⁵³ The idea, in a nutshell, is that in existing as transcending the inherited possibilities of its past (facticity/environing world) toward the as yet open possibilities of its future (freedom/world as such), being-in-the-world (unlike middle-sized dry goods and “beings in nature” that do not transcend) becomes “responsible” for its own existing—i.e., for freely stewarding its inheritance in the present for the sake of its future potential. In existing “for the sake of itself” from out of its own future possibility in this way, transcending “frees” Dasein to “ground” its relations to beings by enabling beings to come to the fore as intelligible or purposeful for the sake of various aspects of its ongoing stewardship of existing.

However, if this description of primordial freedom sheds retrospective light on division two’s efforts to clarify the priority of the projective “toward which” of ontological transcendence (world as such/future) over its retentive “having been” (envirning world/past)—and here is the second development I wish to highlight from MFL—it also pushes Heidegger forward into a new confrontation with the “problem of ground.”⁵⁴ For if freedom (in this ontological sense of existing as transcending) generates the metaphysical possibility and the practical necessity for Dasein to ground itself in relation to beings and thus to understand beings (including its factual self) in view of its own transcendent potential for existing, then freedom is “the ground of ground”.⁵⁵ But as the ontological grounding of all ontic grounds, freedom itself is groundless—opening, as it were, into

⁵² Heidegger, MFL, 136-219.

⁵³ Heidegger, MFL, 185-211. While the existential phenomenon of “primordial freedom” does not receive the type of dedicated, thematic description enjoyed by those of anxiety, death, guilt, conscience, and resoluteness, it is nonetheless a unifying thread that runs just beneath the surface across all of the above, often at pivotal points in the discussion. See, for instance, in the discussions of being-toward-death as the “setting free” of possibility (307) and “freedom towards death” (311); conscience as the “nothing” that “summons Dasein toward potentiality for being” (321); being-guilty as “making oneself responsible” (327 ff.), the “nullity...that belongs to Dasein’s being-free” (331), and that which enables “becoming free” for the call (334); resoluteness as “free[ing] itself for its world” (344); anxiety as “letting one become free” for authentic possibilities (395).

⁵⁴ Heidegger, MFL, 211-219.

⁵⁵ Heidegger, MFL, 214.

the sphere of beings that it renders intelligible on the one side and into an “abyss of ground” (*Abgrund*) on the other.

My suggestion is that the ongoing development in OEG of this insight into the limit of his account of ontological transcendence is an important catalyst in the provocation of what I have described above as Heidegger’s “second leap” from the sphere of fundamental ontology into the clearing of being. Indeed, this transition from the crisis of ontological transcendence in the late twenties to the leap into being in the early thirties is precisely what I maintain is at stake between Heidegger’s “ambiguous” interpretation of Dasein’s transcendence in the main text of OEG (as both “grounding of all ground” and “abyss of ground”), and his subsequent deconstruction of this interpretation in the lettered notes.

In light of the introductory narrative advanced here, moreover, the general contours of the progression toward this leap and its methodological implications should ring familiar. Just as the problem of epistemological transcendence leads Heidegger to the limit of the subject-object schema and necessitates a leap into the fundamental ontological dismantling of this relation back to its ground in the transcendence of being-in-the-world, so too does the prosecution of this new account of ontological transcendence bring him to the limit of fundamental ontology and provoke a leap into being in light of which “the path hitherto” must be reappropriated anew.

II

In turning now to a discussion of the specific hermeneutic advantages of OEG and its revaluation in the lettered notes, I do not aspire to offer a full-scale, point-for-point exposition of the work. My modest aim, rather, is selectively to highlight the strategic importance of a handful of key themes and passages that may serve to flesh out the above sketch of Heidegger’s path as one along which his progressive engagement with the problem of transcendence drives his fundamental ontological inquiries forward even as it leads ultimately to his recognition of a need to overcome them. To this end, I provide a brief orientation to the general structure and content of the treatise before moving on to make my case in view of selected themes and passages, dealing first with the retrospective value of OEG for discerning a hermeneutic continuity across BT, and then concluding with a provisional discussion of the prospective value of the interplay between the main text and the lettered notes for clarifying the impetus of the turn from fundamental ontology.

The exemplary utility of OEG for illuminating the proposed narrative is discernable even at the level of its organizational structure. Taken together, the three parts of the main text and the lettered notes comprise a microcosm of the path described above, traversing three problem spheres connected by two methodological leaps. For bringing this structure to light, Heidegger's assessment of the treatise's central moments at the beginning of part III is instructive, especially his commentary in the lettered notes on the tension between parts I and III:

III. ON THE ESSENCE OF GROUND^a

Our discussion of the “principle of reason” referred the problem of reason or ground to the domain of transcendence (I). Transcendence has, by way of an analysis of the concept of world, been determined as the being-in-the-world of Dasein (II). The task now is to illuminate the essence of ground from out of the transcendence of Dasein [III].⁵⁶

^aFirst edition, 1929: [...] In III, an approach to the destructuring [*Destruktion*] of I, i.e., of the ontological difference; ontic-ontological truth. In III the step into a realm that compels the destruction [*Zerstörung*] of what has gone before and makes a complete overturning necessary.⁵⁷

When one unpacks these structural moments in view of their conceptual content, the territory looks familiar. Part I accomplishes the first leap from the subject-object schema into fundamental ontology. In the present context, this feat involves demonstrating that the “essence of ground”—the possibility of “the truth of assertion” or the “predicative determination” through which beings are accounted for—“is rooted in a *more originary* truth”, that is, in a “pre-predicative manifestness [*Offenbarkeit*] of beings” (environing world) that is always already “illuminated and guided in advance” by the “unveiledness” (*Enthülltheit*) of beings as a whole (transcendence of the world as such);⁵⁸ in short, “the question concerning the essence of ground becomes the *problem of transcendence*.”⁵⁹ With ontological transcendence established as the “domain” in which the essence of ground must be investigated, parts II and III map the central features of this domain, tracing the phenomena of world (II) and freedom for ground (III) to the limit of fundamental ontology's explanatory power—“the abyss of ground”.⁶⁰ So it is, as Heidegger observes in the above lettered note, “that part III marks a step into a

⁵⁶ Heidegger, OEG, 125.

⁵⁷ Heidegger, OEG, 125, note a; Heidegger, VWG, 163, note a.

⁵⁸ Heidegger, OEG, 100-107, esp. 103-104; Heidegger, VWG, 130-131.

⁵⁹ Heidegger, OEG, 106.

⁶⁰ Heidegger, OEG, 107-135, 134.

realm that compels the destruction of what has gone before and makes a complete overturning necessary.” In just forty pages, OEG and its marginalia encompass a synoptic overview of the path into and through fundamental ontology, a confrontation with its limit, and an inkling of what lies beyond.

My first task is to clarify the facility of this account for illuminating a progressive elaboration of transcendence across the two divisions of BT. For what it’s worth, Heidegger tells us point blank in OEG that this path is precisely the one he intended to clear, and to clear, moreover, not in order to furnish a stand-alone philosophical anthropology, but rather to offer an account of Dasein’s metaphysical essence—its existing as transcending toward world—that prepares the way for a deeper engagement with the question of the meaning of being:

Here we may be permitted to point out that what has been published so far of the investigations on “Being and Time” has no other task than that of a concrete projection unveiling *transcendence* (cf. sections 12-83; especially 69). This in turn occurs for the purpose of enabling the *sole* guiding intention, clearly indicated in the title of the whole of Part I, of attaining the “*transcendental* horizon of the *question* concerning being”.⁶¹

If one takes Heidegger at his word, then, BT is from beginning to end a propaedeutic exercise whose intended purpose is to show how the transcendence of Dasein lights the path from beings back to being. Regrettably, as I noted previously, however “clearly” this “*sole* guiding intention” may be *indicated* in BT, Heidegger’s concrete efforts in division two to “unveil” ontological transcendence as a whole—that is, to capture the unity of Dasein’s absorption in the environing world and its hermeneutically prior projection into the nothing of the world as such—are muddled at best. In clarifying the value of OEG for addressing this problem, thus, it will be helpful to establish that the aforementioned peculiarity of division two is viewed in the literature as an interpretive hurdle.

That division two remains a significant obstacle to reading BT as a progressive elaboration of transcendence and the utility of OEG for removing this obstacle come into sharper relief in view of the work of Hubert

⁶¹Heidegger, OEG, 125, note 66. Heidegger insists that his usage of “transcendental” here is not to be understood in its ordinary epistemological or critical sense, but rather in relation to the transcendence of Dasein’s being-in-the-world: “World co-constitutes the unitary structure of transcendence; as belonging to this structure, the concept of world may be called transcendental. This term names all that belongs essentially to transcendence and bears its intrinsic possibility thanks to such transcendence. And it is for this reason that an elucidation and interpretation of transcendence may be called a “transcendental” exposition...What transcendental means, however, is not to be taken from a philosophy to which one attributes a standpoint of the transcendental or even of being epistemological.” Heidegger, OEG, 109-110.

Dreyfus, arguably Heidegger's most influential Anglo-American interpreter. Commenting on the prospect of squaring the second division of BT with the first, Dreyfus observes that "the whole of division II seem[s]...much less carefully worked out than Division I and, indeed, to have some errors so serious as to block any consistent reading."⁶² "The most original and important" section of BT, Dreyfus maintains, is division one, where Heidegger "works out his account of being-in-the-world and uses it to ground a profound critique of traditional ontology and epistemology."⁶³ Division two, Dreyfus asserts, "divides into two somewhat independent enterprises": "the 'existentialist' side of Heidegger's thought, which focuses on anxiety, death, guilt, and resoluteness" and which "was, for good reasons, later abandoned by Heidegger"; and the account of "originary temporality" which "leads [Heidegger] so far from the phenomenon of everyday temporality that I did not feel I could give a satisfactory interpretation of the material".⁶⁴

Given this less than sanguine appraisal of the second division, it is hardly surprising that when the discussion inevitably turns to the transcendence of being-in-the-world, Dreyfus characterizes it as though division one were the end of the story:

For Heidegger...the sort of background familiarity that functions when I take in a room as a whole and deal with what is in it is neither a set of specific goal-directed actions nor merely a capacity that must be activated by a self-referential intentional state. Rather, what Heidegger calls *the background* consists in a continual intentional activity that he calls *ontological transcendence*.⁶⁵

"So pervasive and constant" is this transcendence, Dreyfus continues, that "[Heidegger] simply calls it being-in-the-world: "Being-in-the-world...amounts to a non-thematic circumspective absorption in...an equipmental whole." [*Being and Time*, p. 107]".⁶⁶

What Dreyfus omits in this latter sentence by inserting the first ellipsis, however, turns out—at least in my story—to be a potentially misleading omission. For as Heidegger wrote it, the passage in question actually reads (my emphasis) "Being-in-the-world, *according to our interpretation hitherto*, amounts to a non-thematic circumspective absorption...". And as I have argued, the "interpretation hitherto" of being-in-the-world as

⁶² Hubert Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, viii.

⁶³ Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, vii.

⁶⁴ Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, vii-viii.

⁶⁵ Dreyfus, "Heidegger's Critique of the Husserl/Searle Account of Intentionality", in *Social Research*, Vol. 60, No. 1, Spring 1993, 17-38, 36 (reprinted in *Heidegger Reexamined, Volume One: Dasein, Authenticity and Death*, Hubert Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall, eds., New York: Routledge, 2002, 135-156).

⁶⁶ Dreyfus, "Heidegger's Critique of the Husserl/Searle Account of Intentionality", 37.

“absorption” in the environing world gets a substantial overhaul in division two (as well as in the texts of the late twenties) in view of “the transcendence of the world as such”—a phenomenon whose import for understanding ontological transcendence *as a whole* remains concealed on Dreyfus’s rendering.

To be fair, Dreyfus’s occlusion of the import of division two for this task is relatively innocuous in the philosophical contexts that most concern him. In the passage cited above, for instance, he is keen to mobilize the insights of division one as a pragmatic critique of the “mentalistic” epistemologies of intentionality in Husserl and Searle, and for that purpose, Heidegger’s account of the environing world has ample utility—an insight that I readily acknowledged in discussing Heidegger’s destruction of epistemological transcendence in the early lectures and division one.

But if Dreyfus’s pragmatic interpretation offers the advantage of deploying aspects of Heidegger’s account of ontological transcendence in certain restricted contexts without having to contend with the tension that becomes thematic in division two between the “background” of the environing world and the “nothing” of the world as such, the opportunity cost of this advantage becomes apparent when Dreyfus extrapolates from these narrower applications to broader assessments of the import of Heidegger’s work as a whole:

Our general background coping, our familiarity with the world, what Heidegger calls originary transcendence, turns out to be what Heidegger means by our understanding of being. [...] It is the discovery of the primacy of this understanding of being...that Heidegger rightly holds to be his unique contribution to Western philosophy.⁶⁷

Thanks to OEG, one needn’t speculate as to how Heidegger would receive this interpretation of the overarching significance of his investigation of ontological transcendence:

If indeed one identifies the ontic contexture of items of utility or equipment, with world and interprets being-in-the-world as dealing with items of utility, then there is certainly no prospect of any understanding of transcendence as being-in-the-world in the sense of a “fundamental constitution of Dasein.”

The ontological structure of beings in our “environing world”—insofar as they are discovered as equipment—does, however, have the advantage, in terms of an *initial characterization* of the phenomenon of world, of leading over into an analysis of this phenomenon and of preparing the transcendental problem of world. And this is also the *sole* intent—an intent indicated clearly enough in the structuring and layout of sections 14-24 of *Being and Time*—of the analysis of the environing world, an analysis that as a whole, and considered with regard to the leading goal, remains of subordinate significance.⁶⁸

⁶⁷Dreyfus, “Heidegger’ Critique of the Husserl/Searle Account of Intentionality”, 38.

⁶⁸ Heidegger, OEG, 121, note 59.

A few pages later, in language that clearly forecasts his imminent confrontation with the abyss of ground at the limit of fundamental ontology, Heidegger glosses this “leading goal” in terms of “comprehend[ing] how, precisely through the elaboration of the transcendence of Dasein, ‘the human being’ comes into the ‘center’ in such a way that his nothingness amid beings as a whole can and must become a *problem* in the first place.”⁶⁹

From this perspective, thus, an interpretation like Dreyfus’s not only furnishes a truncated description of ontological transcendence, but leaves off what Heidegger deems to be the most important part of the story—the part, moreover, that pushes him toward the insights which eventually prompt the turning. The upshot is that the limited scope of Dreyfus’s pragmatic take on transcendence, notwithstanding its indisputable value for other important applications, in this particular context both obscures the possibility of reconstructing a progressive elaboration of transcendence across BT, and threatens to exaggerate, thereby, the distance between Heidegger’s so-called “early” and “later” interests.

The pressing question now is that of how exactly Heidegger’s stated aim in OEG to determine transcendence “more originarily and more comprehensively via the problem of ground” serves to clarify and advance the progressive elaboration of transcendence he claims is at stake in BT.⁷⁰ I maintain that the answer lies in Heidegger’s development of the aforementioned interpretation of transcendence as freedom for ground first ventured in MFL. As a prelude to advancing this interpretation, however, it is crucial to foreground a significant departure from MFL that has profound implications for Heidegger’s progress in OEG: “in the present investigation,” he announces, “the Temporal [*temporale*] interpretation of transcendence is intentionally set aside throughout.”⁷¹

This announcement is significant, first, in that it indicates a rapid erosion of confidence in the temporal interpretation during the brief period in 1928 between the composition of OEG and the delivery of MFL, where Heidegger is still emphatically committed to grounding ontological transcendence in primordial temporality.⁷² Second, this decision to withhold the temporal interpretation of transcendence as a self-sustaining “ecstatico-horizontal” closed-circuit in favor of highlighting the fundamental ambiguity of transcendence as both freedom

⁶⁹ Heidegger, OEG, 125, note 66.

⁷⁰ Heidegger, OEG, 99.

⁷¹ Heidegger, OEG, 128, note 67.

⁷² Heidegger, MFL, 196-219, 196.

for ground and the opening into an abyss that lies beyond the horizon of Dasein's understanding of being is evidence of Heidegger's growing awareness of the limitations of fundamental ontology. What is dawning on Heidegger in this decision, I contend, is the realization that—however useful his fundamental ontology of transcendence may be for clarifying how beings become intelligible in light of Dasein's understanding of being—this sphere of inquiry is no more suited to the task of illuminating the relation of transcendence to the abyss of ground on which it seems to depend than the subject-object schema is for clarifying transcendence as the ground of the subject-object relation.

Moreover, that temporality continues to assert itself at pivotal moments in the treatise despite Heidegger's best efforts to curtail it⁷³ implicitly corroborates the fact that a problem-spherical shift is imminent; such internal tension, after all, is just what one would expect from a discourse rapidly approaching the limit of its explanatory power—a discourse simultaneously necessary for bringing the limit to light precisely as a limit, yet insufficient, of itself, to illuminate what lies beyond. And then, of course, there is the explicit confirmation offered throughout the lettered notes that OEG's running aground on the limit of fundamental ontology is exactly what is at stake—that one is witness here, as Heidegger writes, to “the preparation of the quite other commencement”⁷⁴ in which the “temporalizing of temporality” will be revealed as but “a preliminary name for the truth of being”, even though in the present discussion “everything [is] still mixed and confused”, “contorted into phenomenological-existential and transcendental ‘research’”.⁷⁵

To make sense of this reversal of the fortunes of fundamental ontology indicated in these marginalia, it is necessary to fix the target at which they are aimed. As with the descriptions of other existential phenomena analyzed to clarify Dasein's transcendence, the guiding insight of Heidegger's interpretation of freedom for ground is that the essence of ground—the possibility of accounting for or making assertions about beings—is not ultimately a “what”, but rather a “how” of Dasein's being-in-the-world. Heidegger's interest, as usual, is to follow the movement of this mode of being, and insofar as “grounding” (*Gründen*) is “rooted in transcendence”, its movement is “strewn into manifold ways” that should look decidedly familiar: (1)

⁷³ Heidegger, OEG, 123, 128, 135.

⁷⁴ Heidegger, OEG, 123, note a.

⁷⁵ Heidegger, OEG, 123, note b.

“grounding as establishing [*Stiften*]” (which is “nothing other than *the projection of the ‘for the sake of’*”); (2) “grounding as taking up a basis [*Bodennehmen*]” (which is the “*absorption*” of “that which projects” by the beings surpassed in projection); and (3) “grounding as the grounding *of* something [*Begründen*]” (which “*mak[es] possible the why-question in general*”).⁷⁶

“As the ‘first’ of these ways we deliberately cite ‘establishing,’” Heidegger maintains, “though not because the others derive from it”, nor because it is “the manner of grounding initially familiar to us, or that we come to know first.”⁷⁷ To see what Heidegger means, one need only recall the path that leads him to the present task. In terms of phenomenological access, he encountered these three aspects of transcendence in the reverse order of that delimited above, moving from the givens of everyday experience, to the basis of their givenness in the environing world, to the projection of the world as such from which environmental possibilities are drawn, further clarifying each in view of the next. The order of grounding that Heidegger submits above, thus, unfolds in descending order of hermeneutic priority: as one moves backward from the given phenomenologically, one moves forward hermeneutically in that each element of the interpretation of transcendence becomes increasingly intelligible in light of the next.

But if this first form of grounding as the projection of beings as a whole enjoys a hermeneutic priority here, it is nothing (pardon the pun) without its essential passage into “grounding as taking up a basis”:

The “for the sake of” that is projectively cast before us points back to the entirety of those beings that can be unveiled within this horizon of world. [...] Yet in the projection of world, such beings are not yet manifest in themselves. Indeed, they would have to remain concealed, were it not for the fact that Dasein in its projecting is, *as projecting*, also already *in the midst* of such beings.⁷⁸

To follow Heidegger’s analysis here, it crucial to grasp that “being in the midst of [*Inmitten-sein von*] beings” and “being among [*Unter-sein von*] beings” are two distinct phenomena.⁷⁹ “Being among beings”, for Heidegger, means already being in an intentional relation to beings “given” as something for some specific purpose. As “in the midst of” beings, however, Dasein is not yet among particular beings, but is rather

⁷⁶Heidegger, OEG, 127, 128, 129.

⁷⁷Heidegger, OEG, 127.

⁷⁸Heidegger, OEG, 127.

⁷⁹Heidegger, VWG, 166.

absorbed in the possibilities for interpreting them inherited from prior involvements, “attuned by beings”, as it were, in “fore-having” them as an environing world:

Yet this “in the midst of...” [*Inmitten von...*] refers neither to a cropping up among other beings, nor even to a specific self-directedness *toward* this particular being in *comporting* oneself *toward* it. Rather, this being in the midst of... belongs to transcendence. That which surpasses, in passing *over and beyond* and thus elevating itself, must *find itself* [sich befinden] as such among beings. As finding itself, Dasein is already *absorbed* by beings in such a way that, in its belonging to beings, it is *thoroughly attuned* by them. *Transcendence means projection of world in such a way that those beings that are surpassed also already pervade and attune that which projects.* With this *absorption* by beings that belongs to transcendence, Dasein has taken up a basis within beings, gained “ground”.⁸⁰

This second form of grounding, Heidegger reminds us, is not derivative of the first, but “simultaneous” with it, and the key to understanding this unity is to see the way in which the “exceeding and withdrawing” of Dasein’s possibilities (that correspond respectively to these two forms of grounding) are “transcendentally attuned to one another”.⁸¹ In projecting possibilities of itself, more specifically, Dasein necessarily *exceeds* itself [*sich...überschwingt*: literally, “swings beyond” itself] insofar as this projection of possibilities “is in each case richer than the possession of them by the one projecting”.⁸² At the same time, however, this excess is intelligible *as an excess* only because Dasein, as projecting, is always already in the midst of beings such that certain possibilities for interpreting them are already *withdrawn* from it. As environmentally attuned amidst beings, in other words, Dasein’s possibilities are limited *in advance* by facticity, by its absorption in a particular hermeneutic situation. It is precisely this *withdrawal* into facticity from the *excessive* possibilities of the totality projected in freedom that “first brings those possibilities of world-projection that can “actually” be seized upon *toward* Dasein as its world”. “The ever-excessive projection of world”, in short, “attains its power and becomes our possession only in such withdrawal”.⁸³

Though “establishing” and “taking up a basis” thus address the how of Dasein’s projecting and narrowing down of the possibilities opened for it in transcendence, Heidegger maintains that neither of these forms of grounding should be understood as a *comportment* toward beings. And yet,

⁸⁰Heidegger, OEG, 128.

⁸¹Heidegger, OEG, 128, 129.

⁸²Heidegger, OEG, 128; Heidegger, VWG, 167.

⁸³Heidegger, OEG, 129.

presumably *both*—in their unity as characterized—make intentionality possible transcendently, and in such a way that, as ways of grounding, they co-temporalize a *third* manner of grounding: *grounding as the grounding of something*. In this form of grounding, the transcendence of Dasein assumes the role of making possible the manifestation of beings in themselves, the possibility of ontic truth.⁸⁴

This third form of grounding as “the grounding of something”, however, is not to be taken in the derivative sense of “proving ontic or theoretical propositions”, but in the “fundamentally originary” sense of “making possible the why-question in general” that prompts Dasein’s need to raise and vindicate ontic assertions about itself and other beings in the first place.⁸⁵

In the projection of world an excess of possibility is given with respect to which, in Dasein’s being pervaded by those (actual) beings that press around it as it finds itself, the “why” springs forth.⁸⁶

The “why” is thus Dasein’s original response to being accosted by the possibilities of its finite freedom and to finding itself responsible, thereby, to its own capacity for existing. As a response to this primordial obligation, moreover, the “why” is simultaneously Dasein’s original demand *of itself* to account *for itself* in the midst of those beings with which, because of transcendence, it is always already concerned. The “springing forth” of the “why” in Dasein, then, is a calling to account of beings (including and especially itself) on the basis of which beings may be summoned forth from the whole, differentiated from one another, and appropriated in accordance with the interpretive possibilities granted to them for Dasein’s ontic purposes (theoretical, practical, aesthetic, etc.), all of which are ultimately meaningful for Dasein on the ground of its ontological responsibility freely to steward its ongoing existing.

In the wake of all this talk about Dasein’s “projecting” this, “summoning forth” that, “finding itself” here, and “why-questioning” there, it is crucial to remember that, properly speaking, Dasein isn’t *doing* any of these feats of transcendence so much as its *being* accomplishes them insofar as Dasein exists. Notwithstanding Heidegger’s claim that, if and when it exists, Dasein’s metaphysical essence is “the origin of grounding things and thus also of accounting for them”, transcendence remains hidden from the overwhelming majority of Daseins the overwhelming majority of the time, and “it is in each case left to the freedom in Dasein how far to extend such grounding and whether indeed it understands how to attain an authentic grounding of things” at

⁸⁴Heidegger, OEG, 129.

⁸⁵Heidegger, OEG, 129.

⁸⁶Heidegger, OEG, 130.

all; in its everyday dealings, in short, Dasein remains free to “cast ‘grounds’ aside, suppress any demand for them, pervert them, and cover them over”.⁸⁷ But if it is possible in this respect “for transcendence to remain concealed *as such*”, it nonetheless unveils itself, if only indirectly, in that it “lets there be” [sic...sein läßt] the beings that have always already “irrupted with the fundamental constitution of being-in-the-world”.⁸⁸

Though transcendence unveils itself implicitly in any case, Heidegger’s concern is to make this unveiling explicit, and he summarizes the findings of his interpretation as follows:

Transcendence explicitly unveils itself as the origin of grounding when such grounding is brought to *spring forth* in its threefold character. In accordance with this, ground means: *possibility, basis, account*. Strewn in this threefold manner, the grounding that is transcendence first brings about in an originarily unifying manner that whole within which a Dasein must be able to exist in each case. Freedom in this threefold manner is freedom for ground. The occurrence of transcendence as grounding is the forming of a leeway into which there can irrupt the factual *self-maintaining* of factual Dasein in each case in the midst of beings as a whole.⁸⁹

But just when it would seem that Heidegger has transcendence by the tail, the problem of the abyss rears up on the nether-side of freedom. For as the grounding in which every offering of ontic/factual “grounds” ultimately rests, freedom itself is an “abyss of ground” in that it “places Dasein, as potentiality for being, in possibilities that gape open before its finite choice”.⁹⁰ The point here, Heidegger is careful to add, is not that Dasein’s free comportments to beings are groundless; as he has just argued, these comportments and their “results” (“ontic truth”) are indeed grounded, and precisely in freedom. The problem, rather, is the ontological ungroundedness of freedom itself: as the abyss of possibility at “the ground of ground”, freedom is that for which “there is” no prior ground insofar as the very possibility of the “there is” (and, thus, of grounding projects and priorities within the ontic spheres of *what* “there is”) is opened by freedom.

Heidegger’s conclusion is that while this “non-essence of ground” at the “heart of Dasein” can be “overcome” in factual existing—while Dasein is free, in other words, to understand itself solely in terms of its ontic relations to beings and thus to forget the ungroundedness of its own being that drives its need to cling to beings in the first place—the abyssal ground of freedom itself lies beyond Dasein’s control and can never be “eliminated”:

⁸⁷Heidegger, OEG, 131.

⁸⁸Heidegger, OEG, 131; Heidegger, VWG, 170.

⁸⁹Heidegger, OEG, 131.

⁹⁰Heidegger, OEG, 134.

The fact *that* it has the possibility of being a self, and has this factually in keeping with its freedom in each case; the fact *that* transcendence temporalizes itself as a primordial occurrence, does not stand in the power of this freedom itself. Yet such impotence [*Ohnmacht*] (thrownness) is not first the result of beings forcing themselves upon Dasein, but rather determines Dasein's being as such.⁹¹

Upon the conclusion to the main text of OEG, then, one can already glimpse a new problem on the horizon of the interpretation of transcendence within it. For though this account sheds light on the question of how beings become manifest as such within the horizon of Dasein's understanding of being, the question of the abyss from which this possibility springs is still shrouded in darkness. As Heidegger puts the question in CP, "there is in the occurrence [of transcendence] a definite opening up of beings as such...[b]ut what opens up this opening up of beings?"⁹² Even at the end of his career, after grappling with this question for some forty years under numerous rubrics ("beyng" [*Seyn*], "abyss" [*Abgrund*], "nothing" [*Nichts*], "mystery" [*Geheimnis*], "clearing" [*Lichtung*], "that-which-regions" [*Gegnet*]),⁹³ Heidegger is still asking it, and indeed, commending this inquiry to us as *the* "task of thinking" at the end of metaphysics: "But where", he queries in 1967, "does the clearing come from and how is it given? What speaks in the *Es gibt*?"⁹⁴

⁹¹Heidegger, OEG, 135; VWG, 175. A parallel passage from MFL provides a helpful gloss on Dasein's "impotence": "The powerlessness [*Ohnmacht*] is metaphysical, i.e., to be understood as essential; it cannot be removed by reference to the conquest of nature, to technology, which rages about in the "world" today like an unshackled beast; for this domination of nature is the real proof for the metaphysical powerlessness of Dasein, which can only attain freedom in its history. [...] Because, as factually existing, transcending already, in each case, encounters beings, and because, with transcendence and world-entry, the powerlessness (understood metaphysically), is manifest...Dasein...must hold itself to the condition of the possibility of its powerlessness, to the freedom to ground. And it is for this reason that we essentially place every being, as being, into question regarding ground." (215, 216)

⁹²Heidegger, GA 65, 175.

⁹³ The "abyss" and the "nothing" show up throughout MFL and OEG (1928), as well as throughout "What is Metaphysics?" (1929). "Beyng" is in play in the lettered notes of OEG, as well as throughout the texts of the mid-thirties, including CP and *Basic Questions of Philosophy* (1937-1938). The "mystery" is a central theme, among other places, in "On the Essence of Truth" (1930/1943; *Pathmarks*, 136-154) and "Gelassenheit" (1955; in Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. Anderson and Freund, New York: Harper and Row, 1966, 43-57). The best-known appearance of the "clearing" is in "The Letter on Humanism" (1947; *Pathmarks*, 239-276), but it also receives substantial attention in the CP (1936-1938), in *Basic Questions of Philosophy* (a course of lectures given over the 1937-38 academic year (trans. Rojcewicz and Schuwer, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994)), and in *On Time and Being* (1962), to name just a few. It is also worth noting an early appearance of "clearing" in *Being and Time*, which crops up (conveniently, given our purposes) on the outset of section 69, where the "Problem of the Transcendence of the World" is first explicitly discussed, 401 ff. The consideration of "That-which-regions" is in "Conversation on a Country Path" (1945) in *Discourse on Thinking*, 65 ff.

⁹⁴Heidegger, "Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens", in *Zur Sache des Denkens*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1969, 80; "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking", in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, New York: Harper Collins, 1977, 431-449.

If this path of questioning is routinely associated with Heidegger's "later" work, however, one can get an inkling of what is at issue in this turning from fundamental ontology by recourse, as advertised, to the lettered notes of OEG. What is exciting about these notes is that they grant special access to a pivotal happening in the treatise that Heidegger claims the main text insinuates yet fails to make explicit. Sometime after the spring of 1929 when the treatise was published in a *Festschrift* honoring Husserl's 70th birthday, Heidegger began to see fundamental ontology in a new light, precisely by working back through its most comprehensive articulations, this time with eyes peeled for the as yet unthought possibilities latent therein for staging a leap over ontological transcendence into the uncharted territory beyond.

As such, these notes lend credibility to the suggestion that the overturning of fundamental ontology is best understood in terms of its fruition (i.e., "going to seed," "reaching its end") rather than its repudiation—as an event spurred by the momentum of fundamental ontological inquiry itself rather than a severance provoked by Heidegger's adoption of some alternative "position" *outside* fundamental ontology. I have argued that this momentum is generated by Heidegger's prosecution of a progressive elaboration of transcendence that inaugurates, pushes forward, and ultimately shows up the limit of his fundamental ontological inquiry. My concluding task is briefly to offer a provisional sketch of how Heidegger transfers this momentum to the leap over transcendence into *beyng* ventured in the marginalia of OEG.

A good place to start is Heidegger's marginal note on the section heading of part I, where he offers a helpful summary of the problem-spherically conflicted status of OEG and its fallout for the fledgling attempt to overcome fundamental ontology advanced therein (the numbers below are interpolated to facilitate easier tracking of the questions raised by each part of the passage):

[1] The approach in terms of the truth of *beyng* is [2] undertaken here still entirely in the framework of traditional metaphysics and in a straightforward retrieval corresponding to the truth of beings, the unconcealment of beings, and the unveiledness pertaining to beings. [...] [3] Here one path toward overcoming "ontology" as such is broached (cf. Part III), but the overcoming is not accomplished or constructed in an originary manner from out of what has been attained.⁹⁵

In view of this passage, three important questions arise that will direct my discussion of how the lettered notes illuminate the ambiguity in ontological transcendence that prompts the leap beyond it: (1) What is Heidegger gesturing toward when he speaks of "*beyng*"?; (2) Why is the "retrieval" of "traditional

⁹⁵ Heidegger, OEG, 100, note a.

metaphysics” advanced in the interpretation of ontological transcendence unable to achieve full access to the problem sphere delimited by *beyng*?; (3) How does this interpretation of transcendence nonetheless achieve the indirect access to *beyng* required to prompt the initial, if conflicted, move toward “overcoming ‘ontology’” in Part III? Since the phenomena under scrutiny in questions (2) and (3) are already familiar from the foregoing study, I will work backward from (2) to (1), and then conclude with (3), supplementing the discussion with references to other relevant marginalia.

The first thing to observe regarding (2) is that, however Heidegger envisions an appropriately “originary” approach to “the truth of *beyng*” (more on that soon), he nonetheless allows that the interpretation of transcendence undertaken in OEG is *aimed* at this approach, notwithstanding his reservations concerning its methodological limitations for achieving full access.⁹⁶ This insight is important because it further corroborates my gradualist interpretation of the turning as a transition catalyzed by a progressive elaboration of transcendence that works backward from beings to being, bringing the methodological limit of fundamental ontology ever closer as the interpretation evolves. On the other hand, it is precisely the inauguration of fundamental ontology as an inquiry into being that *takes its departure from beings* that ends up causing the methodological trouble, and this is the quandary Heidegger refers to above in noting that the interpretation of ontological transcendence advanced in part I of OEG remains within the “framework of traditional metaphysics” as a “straightforward retrieval corresponding to the truth of beings, the unconcealment of beings, and the unveiledness pertaining to beings”.

Some translation is in order here to make the point salient. Elsewhere, Heidegger defines the “retrieval of a basic problem” as “the opening-up of its original, long-concealed possibilities, through the working-out of which it is transformed.”⁹⁷ In this context, let us recall, the problem that initially gives rise to the need for a fundamental ontological retrieval is that of how “the truth of assertion” or “predicative determination” of beings is possible. This initially concealed possibility, Heidegger claims in part I, is opened up by the interpretation of being-in-the-world in which the truth of assertion is shown to be grounded in Dasein’s

⁹⁶ It is worth noting that these reservations are expressed, albeit tentatively, in BT itself; 49; 488. Heidegger’s expression of these reservations becomes more emphatic in the texts that seek to clarify the provisional character of the “findings” of BT. See, for example, in MFL, 154-159, 168.

⁹⁷ Heidegger, KPM, 143.

ontological transcendence—that is, in its environmentally attuned “thrown projection” toward beings as a whole (nothing).

To be sure, this “retrieval” of the truth of assertions about beings “transforms” the problem of truth by pushing its subject-object schematic interpretation back into its fundamental ontological origin in Dasein’s transcendent understanding of being. However—and here is the rub—the fact that this transformation of the problem is undertaken in order to clarify a problem concerning *beings* (i.e., how they become “unconcealed” for predicative determination) limits from the start the interpretation of *being* advanced in the account of transcendence to an interpretation of the being *of beings*.

In the above note, Heidegger freely admits this limitation of his fundamental ontological interpretation of being, characterizing all three aspects of transcendence in terms of the role each plays in the unified movement of being-in-the-world through which beings come to light: projection opens a world of possibilities (“the unveiledness pertaining to beings”) that are narrowed down and brought within reach as an environing world (“the unconcealment of beings”) which enables, in turn, comportments toward specific beings (“truth of beings”) of which assertions, finally, may be raised and vindicated. In the main text, however, he still associates the unveiledness of the being *of beings* opened in projection with “unveiledness of being” itself and unqualifiedly names it “the truth concerning being”:

Unveiledness of being first makes possible the manifestness of beings. This unveiledness, as the truth concerning being, is termed ontological truth.⁹⁸

His marginal comment on this claim is telling:

Unclear! Ontological truth is unveiling of beingness—via the categories—but beingness as such is already one particular truth of being, one way of clearing its essencing [*Lichtung seiner Wesung*]. This distinction between “ontic and ontological truth” is only a doubling of unconcealment and initially remains ensconced within the Platonic approach. Thus what has been said hitherto only points the direction of an overcoming, but no overcoming is accomplished or grounded in terms of its own proper ground.⁹⁹

In light of this recognition that the thrown projection of transcendence is “only a doubling of unconcealment” whose illumination is directed squarely at the “guiding question” of metaphysics (the truth of beings), the answer to question (1)—that of what Heidegger is up to in speaking of “being”—appears to be

⁹⁸ Heidegger, OEG, 104.

⁹⁹ Heidegger, OEG, 104, note a.

that he is attempting to distinguish primordial concealment (the “abyss” or the “mystery” on the nether-side of transcendence) from the interpretation of “being” he has prosecuted heretofore in terms of Dasein’s understanding of the being *of beings*.¹⁰⁰ Thus, in the many passages throughout the main text of OEG where transcendence and its trappings (e.g., “being-in-the-world”, “understanding of being”, “ontological difference”) are associated straightforwardly with being, Heidegger’s marginal notes seek to keep them honest, calling attention repeatedly to “the erroneous procedure of merely extending ontological-metaphysical thinking to the question concerning the truth of beyng.”¹⁰¹

Of course, the procedure of extending a particular method of prosecuting the question of being beyond its limit is not without its advantages. After all, it was pushing the “thingly” interpretation of being past the reach of the subject-object schema that landed Heidegger in the environing world and revealed “object-being” as but one particular way (and not the most primordial one) that being may come to presence in Dasein’s transcendence. It is hardly surprising, then, that Heidegger’s inkling of a still more primordial interpretation of being—i.e., the concealment of beyng from out of which Dasein’s transcendence unfolds as but one possible manifestation of “the truth of beyng”—should be prompted by the foundering of his efforts to bring this abyss under control as transcendental projection of the being of beings.

How, then—on to question (3)—does this foundering of Heidegger’s interpretation of the being of beings as ontological transcendence achieve the indirect access to beyng that is required to set the revaluation of fundamental ontology into motion in part III of the treatise? I have argued that freedom for ground is the decisive phenomenon here, and that its unique advantage over other equiprimordial existentials analyzed in service of Heidegger’s progressive elaboration of transcendence is its facility for bringing to light the ambiguity of this transcendence as simultaneously the grounding of all ground and the abyss of ground.

I speak of the “facility” of freedom for ground “for bringing this ambiguity to light” here because the ambiguity was there all along, and even became thematic in the tension throughout division two between Dasein’s absorption in the environing world and its projection of the world as such (nothing). But as long as

¹⁰⁰Heidegger’s decision to express this matter for thinking in the word “beyng” [*Seyn*—an archaic spelling of “being” [*Sein*] intended to reinvigorate the demystified metaphysical concept as well as to suggest a certain anteriority to it—is influenced largely by the poetry of Hölderlin, wherein this word (and its relation to the mystery) are of paramount importance.

¹⁰¹ Heidegger, OEG, 104, note b. See also 100, note c; 104, note c; 105, note c; 123 b.

Heidegger's methodological approach to this "nothing" was limited by the horizon of Dasein's transcendence, and aimed at the hope of grounding transcendence in primordial temporality as a self-sustaining "ecstatical projection of Being",¹⁰² the nothing could come to light only relative to Dasein's understanding of the being of beings, and thus, only relative to its (the nothing's) importance for the task of unconcealing beings.

However, in withholding the temporal interpretation of transcendence, and following, instead, its reappropriation as freedom for ground to an "abyss of possibility" that "does not stand in the power of this freedom itself", Heidegger achieves indirect access to the nothing for the first time as a problem unto itself that is not merely an aspect of transcendence—as an indication, in short, of a still more primordial concealing that lies beyond the very possibility of horizontal disclosure. This discovery, as he puts it in the lettered notes, "places [Dasein] into the ground-less...non-ground", and compels, thus, "a complete overturning" of the account of ontological transcendence advanced in the main text.¹⁰³ What this overturning requires is nothing less than the destruction of the interpretation of being formerly guided by Dasein's unveiling of the being of beings in transcendence from the perspective of this new vantage-point on Dasein's more primordial relation to the concealing of being itself.

There is certainly much more one could say about the prospects of the lettered notes for illuminating the specific themes that come to prominence in Heidegger's efforts to bring this transition to fruition from the early thirties onward. At study's end, however, there is nonetheless significant progress to report on the stated goals of demonstrating the utility of OEG for illuminating a hermeneutic progression from the project of BT to the motivating concerns of the turn from fundamental ontology, and for demonstrating a catalyst's role for the problem of transcendence in the provocation of this ground-breaking leap.

¹⁰² Heidegger, BT, 488.

¹⁰³ Heidegger, OEG, 127, note a.