

## **Toward a Resolute Reading of *Being and Time*:**

### **Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and the Dilemma between Inconsistency and Ineffability**

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#### **Abstract**

Both Heidegger and Wittgenstein consider the possibility of a philosophical inquiry of an absolutely universal scope—an inquiry into the being of all beings, in Heidegger’s case, and into the logical form of everything that can be meaningfully said, in Wittgenstein’s. Moreover, they both raise the worry that the theoretical language by means of which we speak of particular beings and assert particular facts is not suitable for this task. And yet their own philosophical work seems to include many assertions of ordinary, theoretical language. Are they being inconsistent? Or are they hoping to use theoretical language in a way that conveys what cannot be said in that language? Much of the scholarship on each of these thinkers takes the form of one of the two horns of this dilemma. In the context of Wittgenstein scholarship, however, a third alternative has been proposed: the “resolute” reading of the *Tractatus*. My aim is to establish the availability of a similar solution to Heidegger’s predicament. It will emerge that Heidegger rejects the possibility of a theoretical account of being and pursues a project of a radically different sort, whose goal is to bring about a transformation of our fundamental relation to being.

#### **1. Introduction**

Heidegger’s stated goal in *Being and Time* is to reawaken the question of being and thereby to effect a thoroughgoing revolution in philosophy. The task is all the more formidable given how radically Heidegger differentiates the approach of philosophers hitherto and the true nature of philosophy as he understands it. While philosophers have often taken themselves to be concerned with being, their theories failed to secure the proper access to the subject matter of their inquiry, and they ultimately ended up speaking of being in terms that are only appropriate for beings. Indeed, as Heidegger understands it, the ontological difference between beings and being runs so

deep, that it places in question the very possibility of the language of philosophy. Since in his view the very language used by philosophers distorts the true object of their inquiry, it becomes urgent for Heidegger to inquire into the possibility of a mode of discourse that is capable of avoiding such distortion.

In responding to this challenge, Heidegger differentiates between being and beings and the kinds of discourse that make each of these topics accessible. But that is not all; he also proposes to distinguish two kinds of truth: the truth of assertions about beings and a more fundamental, *ontological* notion of truth (SZ, 223).<sup>1</sup> The theoretical use of language, Heidegger holds, is only capable of producing truths about *beings*, but it is not suited to address being. However, Heidegger himself seems to use theoretical language in his analyses of the ontology of Dasein. Several of Heidegger's readers have speculated that by coming to recognize this inconsistency Heidegger was led to abandon his plans to complete the project begun in *Being and Time*.<sup>2</sup> Alternatively, Heidegger has been taken to hold that despite their ultimate ineffability, genuine ontological insights can nevertheless guide the philosopher's theoretical activity.<sup>3</sup> But by endowing ineffable insights with this guiding and grounding role for expressible theories, the radical distinction that Heidegger draws between ontic and ontological truth would be effaced. Neither horn of the dilemma furnishes us with a compelling picture of the radical vision and singular achievement of Heidegger's early *magnum opus*.

My aim in this paper is to spell out the shape of a third alternative to this apparent dilemma. To that end, it will prove useful to consider the striking structural similarity between Heidegger's alleged predicament and the predicament that is often attributed to the early Wittgenstein. Just as Heidegger realizes that the being of beings is not itself a being, and that the language that is apt for discussing beings inevitably distorts our understanding of being, Wittgenstein came to recognize that the logical form of language cannot be treated as the object of descriptive propositions: insofar as all language is informed by logic, any attempt to theorize about logic by means of language is bound to miss its mark.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Wittgenstein frames the aims of the

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<sup>1</sup> References to *Sein und Zeit* (Heidegger 2001) are abbreviated 'SZ'; references to volumes of Heidegger's collected writings are abbreviated 'GA' followed by the volume number. All translations from Heidegger's work are my own.

<sup>2</sup> See Dahlstrom 2001, 208–9, Blattner 2007 and McManus 2013a.

<sup>3</sup> See Dahlstrom 1994, Streeter 1997 and Witherspoon 2002.

<sup>4</sup> This is what Ricketts 1985 terms "the logocentric predicament". See Wittgenstein 1960, 4.12; all references to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* are henceforth abbreviated as 'TLP' followed by paragraph number, except when citing the Preface, pp. 26-27.

*Tractatus* in terms of an inquiry into the very idea of drawing the limits of thought and of language (TLP 5.61 and p. 27). Standard readings of the book take it to tackle this task by constructing a theory of meaning which specifies the logical structure of all propositions that have sense, thereby delimiting the realm of everything that can be said meaningfully, i.e. that can be either true or false. But according to this putative theory of meaning, the claims that spell out the theory do not themselves belong in the language which they govern, and hence, properly speaking, which is what leads Wittgenstein, on this reading, to declare his own propositions to be nonsensical (TLP 6.54). And this seems to amount to an admission of an irresolvable inconsistency. For if Wittgenstein's propositions are nonsensical, how can they express anything, let alone spell out a theory of meaning? And without such a theory, what ground could there be for declaring Wittgenstein's theoretical propositions to be nonsensical? Wittgenstein appears, on this reading, to deal himself a "self-mate", or to cut the branch on which he himself is sitting.<sup>5</sup> In seeking to save Wittgenstein from the inconsistency, some of his standard readers point to the distinction he draws between what can be said by means of propositions, and what shows itself, but cannot be said (TLP 4.121–4.1212, 6.124). The distinction is taken to allow Wittgenstein to justify the book's explicit claims by appeal to an ineffable, non-discursive, or even mystical vision of the underlying metaphysical structure of language and reality.<sup>6</sup>

An alternative to this apparent dilemma has been proposed by authors such as Cora Diamond and James Conant, whose interpretation of Wittgenstein has come to be called the *resolute reading* of the *Tractatus*. According to the resolute reading, both sides of the dilemma (i.e. both the interpretation of Wittgenstein as inconsistent and the interpretation that ascribes to him a mysterious appeal to the ineffable) share an underlying, common assumption, namely that Wittgenstein's goal is ultimately theoretical in nature. But as the resolute reading points out, Wittgenstein himself asserts that philosophy is not a theory, but an *activity* consisting in the elucidation of language and thought (cf. TLP 4.112, 6.54). The goal of elucidations, on the resolute reading, is to lead philosophers to overcome their own confusions by means of a transformation of their use of language, rather than to provide them with new knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The inconsistency is termed a "self-mate" in Geach 1976, 54; it is described in terms of cutting the branch on which one is sitting in Hacker 2000, 356.

<sup>6</sup> See Anscombe 1959, 162, as well as Hacker 2001, who writes that "In the course of the book, Wittgenstein asserts many different kinds of truths that *stricto sensu* cannot be said, but that are held to show themselves in features of the symbolism" (146).

<sup>7</sup> Diamond 1991a and 2000; Conant 1989.

Might there be a similar, third alternative to Heidegger's apparent dilemma? While certain similarities between the predicaments faced by Wittgenstein and Heidegger have been noted in the literature, this third option has not been given appropriate consideration.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Heidegger might seem more deeply committed to the theoretical conception of philosophy than Wittgenstein is, insofar as he frames his central concern in *Being and Time*, fundamental ontology, in terms of providing an analysis of the temporal structures that underlie Dasein's understanding of being (SZ, 17). Moreover, the very idea of ontological truth, a truth which outstrips our capacity to frame truth-evaluable assertions, might seem to be the epitome of ineffability. What other sense might there be in speaking about a kind of truth that does not attach to assertions? If Heidegger does aim to replace philosophical theory with philosophical therapy, where precisely does he do that, and how?

I believe these concerns and questions can be adequately answered, and that a reading of *Being and Time* can be offered according to which Heidegger resolutely avoids taking his philosophy to consist in providing his readers with an ontological theory. Heidegger's purpose is to help us, his readers, overcome the metaphysical distortions to which we are all prone and which lead us to treat being in terms that only fit beings. He hopes to achieve this not by communicating a theory of being (which would either be inconsistent, or involve the indirect communication of ineffable insights) but by promoting a completely different kind of philosophical activity, which is not theoretical but (in a sense to be clarified below) ethical. The result of such philosophical activity is a transformative experience, not an epistemic achievement.

The plan for the paper is as follows. In the next section (2) I look at Heidegger's critique of traditional metaphysics, and in particular at his rejection of the philosophical employment of the discourse of theoretical assertions. Heidegger's distinction between the truth of assertions and ontological truth, which he accuses the metaphysical tradition for neglecting, is the topic of Section 3. I there argue that ontological truth must not be assimilated to an object of theoretical knowledge, and cannot even be taken to serve as an ineffable source of justification for expressible theoretical claims. In Section 4 I spell out the shape of the dilemma Heidegger seems to face and consider the way recent readers of Heidegger have reacted to it. In Section 5 I revisit the parallels between Heidegger and Wittgenstein and show how the resolute reading of the

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<sup>8</sup> The parallels between the dilemmas allegedly faced by Heidegger and Wittgenstein are noted, for example, by Dahlstrom 1994, 788. Comparisons of the two thinkers that consider the possibility of a third alternative to the dilemma include Witherspoon 2002, McManus 2012 (Chapter 9), McManus 2013a and 2013b and Egan 2019 (Chapter 7). All of them conclude that such an alternative was not pursued by Heidegger.

*Tractatus* succeeds in escaping the Wittgensteinian dilemma. Section 6 is concerned with Heidegger's methodological discussions; I argue that they are best understood in light of his having pursued a resolute alternative to the traditional, theoretical approach to philosophy. I highlight three elements of Heidegger's method. In 6.1 I consider Heidegger's insistence that the essence of philosophizing is to be found in the activity of questioning. In 6.2 I consider Heidegger's suggestion that his philosophical expressions are "formal indications" (*formale Anzeigen*), rather than theoretical assertions. I argue that the method of formal indication, like Wittgenstein's method of elucidation, is not a means for the communication of knowledge, but a vehicle of transformation. In 6.3 I turn to Heidegger's proposal that the positive results of his inquiry must be subjected to the method of interpretative "destruction" (*Destruktion*). I argue that the point of *Destruktion* is to bring us to see our own philosophizing as a historically situated happening, to take a critical distance from its apparent results, and thereby to transform our relation to what these results purport to be about, namely being.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. Being and Language

We can begin to see what kind of philosophical activity Heidegger took himself to pursue by considering the kind of philosophical activity that he rejected. The main target of Heidegger's critique of traditional metaphysics, as it is presented in his seminars as well as in *Being and Time*, is the recurrent failure to respect the ontological difference between being and beings.<sup>10</sup> Heidegger traces the roots of this failure to the language of metaphysics; he argues that the particular kind of use of language employed by traditional philosophers prevents them from properly engaging with being. 'Logos' (λόγος) is Heidegger's term for the discourse of true and false assertions about beings, and it is this use of language that he takes to be privileged in

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<sup>9</sup> Since my focus in this paper is on *Being and Time* (1927), I mainly rely on texts stemming from the period in which Heidegger developed the ideas presented in the book as well as the period immediately following its publication, in which Heidegger continues to reflect on its aims and methods (roughly 1916–1931). I believe that the claim that Heidegger seeks an alternative, non-theoretical conception of philosophy would be much easier to establish with reference to Heidegger's later work; but I leave this task for a different occasion.

<sup>10</sup> The first explicit mention of the term 'ontological difference' occurs in the 1927 seminar, GA24; but its presence in *Being and Time* and earlier seminars is palpable. See e.g. SZ, 35 and 201.

metaphysics over all others.<sup>11</sup> It is important to see, however, that in criticizing logos Heidegger is not advocating the rejection of logic — i.e. of the principles of thought as such — whatever such a rejection might mean. Indeed very often Heidegger puts the terms “logic” and “logical” in scare quotes, to signal that his target is a particular interpretation or theory of logic, not logic as such (SZ, 10 and 160, GA32, 142). His aim is to reject the privileging of a restricted fragment of language, the “logic of a specific mode of address” (GA62, 397).<sup>12</sup>

Heidegger accuses metaphysicians of treating logos as the exclusive medium of all ontological inquiry, and proceeding as though the activity which produces logos (*‘legein’*, λέγειν) exhausts all meaningful engagement with being. Here is how Heidegger spells out the target of his critique:

λέγειν... is the guiding thread (*Leitfaden*) for eliciting the structures of the being of a being that is encountered in addressing and speaking. (SZ, 25).

...in the decisive beginnings of antique ontology logos functioned as the only guiding thread for the access to that which is genuinely an entity, and for the determination of the being of such entity (SZ, 154).<sup>13</sup>

One outcome of the metaphysical privileging of the logos of assertion, according to Heidegger, is the failure to attend to other manners in which beings are revealed, e.g. through other modes of discourse, such as requesting, praying, commanding, and, importantly, questioning (SZ, 32). By giving priority to logos, the metaphysician’s gaze becomes fixed on the narrow range of

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<sup>11</sup> SZ 25 and 154, GA17 20, GA19 224, GA22 155, GA29/30 424, GA32 142. Notoriously, this critique of logos leads Heidegger to deploy an ostensibly “anti-logical” rhetoric; the polemic reaches an extreme in the his 1929 inaugural lecture, “What is Metaphysics?” (GA9, 103-122), but it is anticipated in *Being and Time* and in earlier seminars.

<sup>12</sup> Witherspoon (2002) helpfully clarifies this point in the following way: Heidegger distinguishes between logic, understood as the set of principles that guide all thinking, and logic understood as an established formal discipline which is primarily concerned with assertions and which is accompanied by an ideology according to which what this studies exhausts all there is to say about logic. Heidegger’s critique primarily applies to this ideology.

<sup>13</sup> It seems to be no coincidence that in these paragraphs Heidegger speaks of a “guiding thread” — it is probably Kant’s “metaphysical deduction” that he has in mind, in which Kant takes his guiding thread from the traditional *logical* table of judgments in order to spell out the highest determinations of all beings, namely the categories.

phenomena which logos is best suited to articulate — substances and their categorial properties, i.e. beings that are present at hand (*Vorhandensein*):

... λέγειν itself, as well as νοεῖν – the simple apprehension of something given in its pure presence at hand, that Parmenides already took as the guide to the interpretation of being — has the temporal structure of the pure “being present”. The being, which shows itself for it and which is understood as the genuine entity, thereby receives its interpretation with a view to its being present, that is, it is understood as presence (οὐσία) (SZ 25–6).

Logos brings to the fore the specific temporality of the constant presence of substance. So by privileging logos, the metaphysical tradition has come to treat the constantly present substance as the primary kind of being in relation to which *all* other beings (as well as being) are to be understood.

It is because it is particularly fit for representing the present at hand (*Vorhandensein*) that logos fails to appropriately represent beings which belong to other modes of being, for instance the ready to hand (*Zuhandensein*) (SZ, 157). But not only does logos fit only certain kinds of beings and not others; more importantly, logos is unfit to address *being*:

Because for the Greeks, for Plato as well as for Aristotle... all assertions are understood as mundane assertions, it transpired that being itself, insofar as it came into view, was conceived of as a being (GA21, 410n; cf. SZ 32 and 154).

The upshot of Heidegger’s critique is therefore the following. By taking the logos of assertion as their guiding thread, philosophers have prevented themselves from achieving their own stated goal, namely to inquire into being, for the prioritization of logos effaces the ontological difference between beings and being.

### 3. Two Kinds of Truth

Heidegger takes himself to offer a radical alternative to this metaphysical approach. To this end, he draws a distinction between two kinds of truth — the truth of assertions and ontological truth. The metaphysical prioritization of logos, he proposes, makes the truth of assertions seem as though it were the single, defining goal of all philosophical activity: “assertion came to count as the primary and genuine “locus” of *truth*” (SZ, 154). Now Heidegger does not deny that assertions are *a* locus of truth. Through assertions we disclose entities as being thus and so, and thereby say true or false things about them. But the manner in which assertions do that, Heidegger holds, is grounded in a more fundamental form of disclosedness (*Erschlossenheit*), which is not a property of assertions at all, but a mode of being of Dasein. In this primordial sense, truth is the way in which entities are revealed to Dasein, that is, the manner in which Dasein’s understanding of being—and ultimately Dasein itself—is constituted (SZ, 224–5). This original dimension of truth precedes the truth of assertions and grounds it:

Assertion is not the primary “locus” of truth, but rather the other way round, assertion as a manner of appropriating of what is uncovered and as a manner of being-in-the-world is grounded in the uncovering, in other words in the disclosedness of Dasein. The most original “truth” is the “locus” of the assertion and the ontological condition of possibility for assertion’s being true or false (uncovering or covering over). (SZ 226).<sup>14</sup>

The distinguishing mark of ontological truth, as opposed to the truth of assertions, is that it is not subject to the duality of truth and falsity. This puzzling feature of Heidegger’s conception of ontological truth can be traced back to a similar distinction drawn by Aristotle, which Heidegger repeatedly invokes. Aristotle proposes that whereas assertions may be either or false, this is not so for all truth. There is another, ontologically more proper notion of truth, that concerns the mind’s attainment or failure to attain contact with the simplest elements of reality. Failure to possess this kind of truth does not constitute falsity, but ignorance:

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<sup>14</sup> Heidegger’s use of the terms ‘ground’ and ‘condition of possibility’ in this passage seems to me to be problematic; see below.



Assertion, like affirmation, states an attribute of a subject, and is always either true or false; but this is not always so with the mind (*noûs*): for the what it is, the essence, is not a predication, and is always true. (Aristotle 1984b, 430b)

Truth means to apprehend (*noein*) these [essences and incomposites], and there is no falsity or deception, but only ignorance (*agnoia*)... (Aristotle 1984a, 1052a)

Heidegger clearly has these Aristotelian texts in mind when he makes the following comments in the Introduction to *Being and Time*:

“True” in the purest and most original sense — that is, that which is solely disclosing, and can never be concealing — is the pure *noein*, the purely observational apprehension of the simplest determinations of beings as beings. This *noein* can never conceal, can never be false, though it surely can remain a non apprehension, *agnoein*, a failure to attain the simple, appropriate access (SZ 33).

Inspired by Aristotle, Heidegger here proposes that grasping or failing to clearly grasp the “simplest determinations of beings” shapes our theoretical point of view and thereby predetermines the range of the assertions we are able to rightly or falsely make.<sup>15</sup> Unlike a failed assertion, which results in falsity, a deficient grasp of being does not result in an intelligible, but false grasp of some determinate content, but rather in sheer ignorance (*agnoia*). In adopting the Aristotelian contrast between the duality of assertions (their being true *or* false) and the non-duality of ontological truth (its having no intelligible contrast), Heidegger acquires a powerful critical tool. It allows him to criticize the assertions of metaphysics not for their being determinately false, but for failing to “attain access” to their purported subject matter and hence for failing to have any determinate content.

To put it in Wittgensteinian terms, metaphysical statements are criticized not for being false but for being *nonsensical* (TLP 4.003). Precisely because metaphysics is an attempt to reveal

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<sup>15</sup> Although Heidegger does not mention Aristotle by name in this part of the Introduction to *Being and Time*, it is clear that he has the Aristotelian text in mind, for in other places where he does refer to Aristotle’s texts explicitly, he uses the same words to elucidate the view. See e.g. SZ, 226 and GA21, 170–197.

ontological truth by means of a use of language that is only fit for ontic truths, what metaphysics achieves, in Heidegger's eyes, is not a false theory of being, but the concealment of that which it set out to reveal. Metaphysics thus does not provide us a theory of being, not even a false one. Instead, it is a mode of philosophizing in which being is ignored and covered up, a "perversion" (*Verkehrung*) of the very problems it was supposed to address.<sup>16</sup> What is needed, therefore, is not to refute the claims of metaphysics, but to transform the way metaphysicians understand what they are up to. This, I believe, is what lies behind the distinctive way Heidegger frames the project of *Being and Time* as an endeavor to overcome the "forgetfulness" of being (SZ 2, 21, 35).

Heidegger takes the capacity for ontological truth (and correspondingly, for ontological ignorance and confusion) to be a constitutive feature of Dasein's historical way of being. Dasein as such is defined by its concern with being, that is, by its capacity to disclose ontological truth (SZ, 13), and such disclosure is historical in nature (SZ 222, 226); but this capacity can be exercised either authentically or inauthentically. Thus the metaphysical failure to draw the ontological difference can be traced back to the inclination of average, everyday Dasein to understand itself and its being in terms of other beings (*Verfallenheit*). In its average everydayness, Dasein fails to face up to its being; instead of securing proper access to being, it applies the logos of assertion to it. The metaphysical theories that arise from such failure are not to be criticized for producing theoretically *false* propositions; rather, they are criticized for being a symptom of a corruption of the personality (GA29/30, 423, 426), that is, for being an *ethical* failure.

In the mode of authentic *resoluteness* (*Entschlossenheit*), by contrast, Dasein overcomes this tendency. For in being resolute, rather than attempting to explain the ultimate ground of its being in terms of this or that being, Dasein comes face to face with its own *groundlessness*: it finds *nothing* — no entity — that it can appeal to as the ultimate ground of its being (SZ, 306).<sup>17</sup> In its resolve Dasein thus confronts being without treating any being as its ground, and hence without confusing being for a being: resolute Dasein confronts being as such. To avoid the metaphysical distortion of ontological truth which it thereby reveals, resolute Dasein must avoid employing the theoretical mode of discourse; indeed, it must withhold all speech (SZ, 165 and

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<sup>16</sup> Heidegger speaks of the effacement of ontological differences in terms of perversion in SZ, 11, 115 and 158.

<sup>17</sup> This is the sense in which (as I noted above) it seems to me to be problematic for Heidegger to speak (as he does in SZ, 226) of ontological truth as a "ground" and a "condition of possibility" of ontic assertions.

296). Heidegger, like Wittgenstein, thus proposes that concerning that which cannot be talked of without distortion, one must remain silent (TLP 7).

Heidegger himself should be read as someone who, in his own philosophizing—that is, in writing *Being and Time*—aims to escape the fallenness of the metaphysical inclination and the perversions it invites. But he does not deflect from the reality of the corrupt human tendency to employ theoretical logos in the account of being, and thereby to distort ontological truth. To resolutely face up to this tendency for corruption is to seek a radically alternative understanding of the nature of philosophy.

#### **4. The Apparent Dilemma Between Inconsistency and Ineffability**

As we have seen, Heidegger holds that the language used in metaphysical theorizing is limited, and that these limits preclude the possibility of providing a theory or a concept of being. Indeed, given the radicality of the ontological difference between being and beings, there could be no single language that can address both, and so it is unclear whether there could even be a single language in which one could properly draw the ontological difference itself. This predicament has been aptly termed “the paradox of thematization” by Daniel Dahlstrom.<sup>18</sup> One type of reaction among scholars of Heidegger has been to accuse him of an inconsistency: Heidegger seems to aim at providing an account of being, the implication of which is that there could not be such an account. Denis McManus, for instance, takes this inconsistency to be insurmountable, and holds that it is precisely this issue which led Heidegger to abandon the project of *Being and Time*.<sup>19</sup>

A second type of reaction consists in retaining the negative claim about the theoretical inexpressibility of being, while resisting the conclusion that Heidegger’s own project is just as problematic as the metaphysics that he criticizes. Thus Heidegger is taken to overcome the strictures of theoretical logos by relying on ineffable insights and seeking to communicate them indirectly. Dahlstrom 1994 and Streeter 1997, for example, suggest that Heidegger overcomes the difficulty of communicating ontological insights by employing an indirect use of language, which they associate with the method Heidegger calls formal indication.<sup>20</sup> According to

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<sup>18</sup> Dahlstrom 1994.

<sup>19</sup> McManus 2013a; cf. Blattner 2007.

<sup>20</sup> I offer a different construal of formal indication in section 6.2 below.

Witherspoon 2002, it is the recognition of the failure of theoretical assertions to capture ontological subject matter that leads one to an appreciation of ineffable ontological insight. How we should make sense of the ineffable insights that are presupposed by these accounts is a question I will leave aside; I will focus instead on the systematic role these ineffable insights are taken to play within the context of Heidegger's inquiry. Just as on the first approach, Heidegger is here taken to aim at providing a theoretical account of some sort, only in this case the ultimate justifications of his theoretical account are taken to consist in insights that do not properly belong within it. Kris McDaniel makes this idea explicit in arguing that the radical distinctions Heidegger recognizes between different kinds of entities dictate the shape of Heidegger's ontological theory, even though they cannot be coherently expressed within it; he proposes that these distinctions can nevertheless be introduced by means of a "minimal use" of ontological terms.<sup>21</sup> The ineffable insights are thus taken to deliver some kind of determinate content that can ground and guide the framing of explicit theoretical claims. Without themselves being theoretical statements, for all intents and purposes they do play the logical role that theoretical statements have, namely that of serving as grounds from which other, storable truths follow. In other words they are all taken to belong in one logical space. But for this to work, the ontological difference and the distinction between the theoretical language of beings and the language of being must be severely weakened or even effaced.

One way in which some readers of Heidegger have attempted to avoid the dilemma between these two ways of construing his aims is by denying that he ever meant to pose insurmountable strictures on theoretical logos of the kind I have outlined above. Schear 2007 and Golob 2015 thus argue that theoretical logos is not limited to the representation of present at hand beings (*Vorhandensein*), at least in the sense that it can also be used to represent other kinds of beings, such as the ready to hand (*Zuhandensein*). But their arguments leave untouched what I consider to be the fundamental point, namely that logos is inapt for addressing *being*. This claim, that logos cannot express being, has been attacked by Stephan Käufer, who argues that it is wrong to attribute it to Heidegger. Käufer cites as evidence Heidegger's claim that assertions about beings give voice to being (GA29/30 466 and 521).<sup>22</sup> Indeed, there is no denying that for Heidegger assertions about beings have the capacity to manifest the being of those beings in some way—this is precisely what the critique of logos brings out, namely that the logical form of theoretical assertions forces their users to depict all beings as having the being of presence at hand. But this does not mean that there can be theoretical assertions that are properly about

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<sup>21</sup> McDaniel 2009, 311. For further discussion, see McManus 2013a, 669.

<sup>22</sup> Käufer 2005, 491.

*being*, and it is this that Heidegger excludes when he argues that logos is exclusively concerned with the present at hand.<sup>23</sup> Notably, Käufer, Schear and Golob all share the assumption that underlies the dilemma that they seek to reject, namely that Heidegger's philosophical aim is to provide a theory of some form.

In what follows I will not attempt to offer further arguments for the claims that metaphysics is restricted to theoretical logos, and that logos is restricted to the representation of the present at hand, such that any attempt to construct a theory of being would violate the ontological difference. Instead, my aim will be to show that even if these claims are admitted, this does not saddle Heidegger with the dilemma between inconsistency and ineffability, so long as Heidegger's aims are not construed in terms of providing a theory of being.<sup>24</sup>

What is needed in order to bypass the dilemma between inconsistency and ineffability is to construe Heidegger's goals in terms that radically distinguish his concern with being from the concerns of traditional metaphysics. What must be shown, in other words, is that Heidegger does not think of ontological truth as an object of theoretical knowledge. Moreover, it needs to be shown that he differentiates genuine philosophical discourse from theoretical logos not merely in terms of their subject matter, but also in terms of their functions and aims. I have hinted at the shape of this alternative construal of Heidegger's aims in the previous sections, where I argued that by contrast to the attainment of theoretical truth and falsity, the attainment of ontological truth (or its perversion) consists in a total transformation of Dasein and its relation to its world. I proceed to elaborate the methodologies through which Heidegger aims to achieve this goal in Section 6. But before I go on to do that, I wish to spell out more clearly the shape of this

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<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Wittgenstein suggests that any assertion presupposes that we grasp its logical form, even though that form is not what the assertion is about, and he then goes on to argue that no assertion can be *about* logical form (TLP 4.12). I say more about this in the next section.

<sup>24</sup> Priest 2015 and Casati 2019 construe Heidegger's later work as providing a different alternative to the dilemma. According to them, in his later work Heidegger abandons classical logic, and embraces dialetheism; this allows him to hold on to the inconsistency inherent in the attempt to theorize about being. Since my interest in this paper is with *Being and Time*, and since in any case the dialetheist reading does not seem to apply there, I leave the consideration of this alternative for a different occasion.

alternative to the apparent dilemma between inconsistency and ineffability, by developing the parallels between Heidegger and Wittgenstein.<sup>25</sup>

## 5. How the Resolute Reading Escapes the Apparent Dilemma

My construal of Heidegger's project in terms which make it immune to the dilemma between inconsistency and ineffability is inspired by the way in which the resolute reading of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* responds to a similar impasse.<sup>26</sup> Wittgenstein, too, accuses metaphysically minded philosophers for seeking to theoretically ground that which does not admit of grounding. Like Heidegger, who thinks that the being of beings is falsified when one attempts to address it by means of the logos of assertion, Wittgenstein holds that logic is falsified wherever one conceives of it in ways that make it appear as the topic of substantive theoretical propositions (TLP 6.111). By contrast, Wittgenstein proposes, "logic must take care of itself" (5.473); the intelligibility of our discursive practices does not depend on any substantive theorizing, for language is in perfect logical order just as it is (5.5563). And yet it has seemed to many readers — I will refer to this as the "standard" reading of the *Tractatus* — that Wittgenstein does attempt to offer a theory that "takes care" of logic, namely by constructing the logical syntax of a language which excludes nonsense. But what this syntax would exclude, such readers acknowledge, includes the sentences with which the theory itself is introduced.<sup>27</sup> The standard reading of the *Tractatus* thus gives rise to the by now familiar dilemma: either Wittgenstein is being inconsistent, or he takes himself to ground his theoretical claims on what, according to his own view, is ineffable.

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<sup>25</sup> Although Witherspoon 2002 and Egan 2019 acknowledge that a resolute Wittgensteinian approach might succeed in resolving the predicament Heidegger faces, they deny that Heidegger takes this route. McManus 2013b briefly considers the same possibility, but rejects it; he seems to also reject the resolute reading of the *Tractatus* as such. All these interpreters fail to take into account crucial pieces of evidence that I propose to consider below; for instance they do not take into account the role played by the method of *Destruktion* within the project of *Being and Time*.

<sup>26</sup> For examples of the resolute readings see Diamond 1991a and 2000, and Conant 1989. For an overview of the debate and a survey of the various positions, see Goldfarb 2011 and Bronzo 2012. For a defense of the traditional reading see Hacker (2000 and 2001). For the resolute readers' replies to their critics see Conant and Diamond 2004 and Diamond 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Proponents of this reading include Geach 1976 and Hacker 2000.

The resolute reading of the *Tractatus*, by contrast to the standard reading, takes Wittgenstein at his word when he says that the kind of philosophy he pursues in the *Tractatus* is not theoretical in nature:

4.112 The object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts.  
Philosophy is not a theory but an activity.

A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations (*Erläuterungen*).

The result of philosophy is not a number of “philosophical propositions”, but to make propositions clear.

Philosophy should make clear and delimit sharply the thoughts which otherwise are, as it were, opaque and blurred.

Since Wittgenstein’s purpose is not to advocate theories, the *Tractatus* is neither to be read as inconsistently attempting to do what it takes to be impossible, nor as an attempt to justify a logical theory by appeal to some ineffable ground. Philosophy, as Wittgenstein conceives it, is not a theory at all, but an activity of elucidation. On the resolute approach, the sole aim of the elucidatory sentences of the *Tractatus* is to remove philosophical confusion, by leading philosophers to reach clarity in their use of language and thereby recognize the confusedness of their own metaphysical claims. This is to be achieved not by means of theoretical argument but by means of elucidations, that is, through a form of philosophical therapy, or spiritual exercise.<sup>28</sup>

According to Wittgenstein, metaphysical propositions are nonsensical, though their outward appearance may not allow us to easily recognize this. Underlying the metaphysical use of words is a failure to assign signs with a determinate meaning, of which the metaphysician, who is subject to an illusion of making sense, might not be aware (TLP 5.4733). This is not a failure that a theory of logical syntax could prevent from taking place. What is needed in order to remedy it is not to reform language, but to help the metaphysician overcome the fundamental tendencies (cf. Heidegger’s talk of corruptions of personality) that lead her to imagine that there is sense where in fact there is none. The very importance that she imputes to metaphysical assertions is an illusory one; and in dispelling this illusion, nothing would be added to the her stock of knowledge. Philosophy, rather than providing theories, is an activity whose aim is not to

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<sup>28</sup> The therapeutic conception of philosophy becomes even more explicit in Wittgenstein’s later work, e.g. see Wittgenstein 2009, #133. On the relevance of this notion of therapy to the *Tractatus*, see Diamond 2000. On Wittgenstein’s place in the long tradition of conceiving of philosophical activity as a spiritual exercise, see Hadot 2004.

*inform* but to *transform* its practitioners, helping them attain a more authentic self-understanding, and with it, to attain a state of clarity (6.54).

The resolute reading of the *Tractatus* refuses to “chicken out” in face of Wittgenstein’s insistence that not only the propositions of metaphysics, but also the expressions of his own critique of metaphysics must ultimately be recognized as involving nonsense, and hence must be thrown away (6.54).<sup>29</sup> To chicken out, in this context, would be to think that although the sentences of the *Tractatus* do not make sense, one could still take them to serve the function of conveying genuine insights, namely by pointing to the ineffable underpinnings of the logical syntax of language. However, according to Wittgenstein not only the answers that metaphysicians propose, but the very problems that they take themselves to address are mere illusions of problems (cf. TLP 27, 3.323-4, 6.5, 6.52 and 6.53), and Wittgenstein’s response to these merely apparent problems is not to attempt to solve them, but to dissolve them; the clarified use of language he aims to impart is one in which such problems would not even seem to make sense. To read the *Tractatus* resolutely, to truly be ready to throw away the ladder, means to see that Wittgenstein has no need to ground his elucidatory activity in ineffable insights. The elucidation of language can be achieved by means of nonsense even if nonsense fails to convey any content, for the dissolution of problems does not consist in a proof that certain words cannot be used in certain ways (a proof which would putatively depend on ineffable insights that can only be conveyed by nonsense), but rather in bringing the confused thinker herself to recognize that she has failed to assign them a determinate meaning, and hence that she herself was only under the illusion of sense.<sup>30</sup>

There are various methods for achieving this aim that Wittgenstein proposes in the *Tractatus*. One central method involves the introduction of new formal notations, which clearly reflect logical distinctions and thus prevents indeterminacies of meaning and illusions of sense. The introduction of such notations involves elucidatory nonsense, but it need not be taken to involve an appeal to ineffable content. This will become clearer by considering the contrast between Wittgenstein’s understanding of elucidation by means of nonsense and that of his mentor, Gottlob Frege. The way Frege sees it, logical distinctions such as the difference between concepts and objects are so fundamental to the logical structure of thought and language that they cannot be properly expressed by means of language (Frege 1984). For example, attempting

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<sup>29</sup> See Diamond 1991a on “Chickening out” and the sympathetic discussion in Goldfarb 2011.

<sup>30</sup> For a more elaborate discussion of Wittgenstein’s idea that the problems of philosophy can be dissolved by means of elucidations that are themselves nonsensical, see Nir 2020a.



to assert that no concept is an object, we end up grammatically treating concepts as potential bearers of objectual properties—even in denying the claim that any concept is an object, we treat it as at least intelligible to check whether what is true of all objects is also true of the concept, or not. But if the distinction truly captures the fundamental shape of thought, violating it does not consist in an intelligible, but false claim, but rather in sheer nonsense. So to take the distinction to consist in a true theoretical claim, one whose truth excludes an intelligible, but false alternative, would lead to effacing the distinction.

Frege himself concedes that in his attempt to draw the distinction, “[b]y a kind of necessity of language, my expressions, taken literally, sometimes miss my thought”.<sup>31</sup> But he proposes that despite their defectiveness, his philosophical statements succeed in providing “hints” at to the shape of the distinction. The crucial difference between Wittgenstein and Frege on this issue, which the resolute reading makes us attentive to, is the following.<sup>32</sup> Frege’s talk of “hints” makes it appear as if there is some substantive content which is ineffable, and yet successfully conveyed by means of his philosophical elucidations—content which we would count as true, if only we could express it properly. It is on the basis of what we grasp by means of such hints, Frege holds, that we would recognize the correctness of his new logical notation, which is governed by this distinction but cannot express it.<sup>33</sup> Wittgenstein thinks that introducing new logical notations is indeed a powerful means through which we can avoid the ambiguities that are inherent in our ordinary use of language, and thereby avoid the slip to metaphysical nonsense. But there is a crucial difference between getting someone to adopt an adequate system of signs, and making meaningful claims about what such a notation can or cannot express (TLP 3.33-3.331)—by contrast to Frege, Wittgenstein thinks one can do the former without the latter (4.126). The transformation we would undergo in adopting a use of language which excludes nonsense (including the philosophical nonsense that the attempt to spell out the distinction between

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<sup>31</sup> Frege 1984, 193.

<sup>32</sup> Standard readers of the *Tractatus* such as Geach 1976, Anscombe 1959 and Hacker 2000 assimilate Wittgenstein’s understanding of elucidations to Frege’s; by contrast, resolute readings such as Conant 1989 and Kremer 2013 bring out the differences.

<sup>33</sup> Frege’s approach is analogous to the one McDaniel attributes to Heidegger: the distinctions underlying ontological pluralism are substantive truths, even though, if these distinctions are as radical as Heidegger takes them to be, there is no single language in which they can be properly asserted.

concepts and objects leads to) does not depend on any theoretical insights, expressible or not (including the putative insights into the distinctions that underlie language).

Wittgenstein's elucidations aim to bring about such transformation by means of a merely *transitional* use of language.<sup>34</sup> For instance, the elucidation may involve pointing out that in the adequate notation there would be no way to frame claims that efface the distinction between concepts and objects (e.g. 4.1272). This claim might initially *appear* to be contentful—it might seem to exclude a genuine possibility, and thereby to convey a genuinely necessary fact. But a person who has been helped by elucidations and has adopted a language in which no such possibilities appear to make sense would ultimately come to see that the elucidations are themselves defective, and involve the same indeterminacies that they were meant to help her overcome. In realizing that the elucidations themselves are nonsensical, she would come to reject them, to throw them away, without thereby undermining her right to continue to use the new notation they introduced (6.54).

Tractarian elucidations thus manifest a distinctive temporality, which is similar to the one manifested by the considerations appealed to by a scientist in the midst of a revolution in the foundations of her science.<sup>35</sup> To demonstrate the failure of her old way of thinking, the scientist must initially continue to deploy the vocabulary that she will ultimately transcend, continuing to refer, for example, to what aether may or may not be. But the revolution in the scientist's way of thinking alters the status not only of the theoretical answers that she was previously prone to treat as intelligible (e.g., that aether is the medium through which electromagnetic waves move) but also the questions that led her to frame such answers (e.g. what is the medium through which electromagnetic waves move?). The adoption of a new paradigm involves a transformation of the concepts that the scientist took for granted (e.g. waves are no longer understood to require a medium), as a result of which both the past answers and the questions they attempted to answer lose the appearance that they have a determinate sense. Indeed, not only the expressions that spell out the shape of the old paradigm, but also those that lead the scientist to abandon it would thereby be deprived of their meaning and use, since they too draw on the vocabulary of the old paradigm. Since the elucidations that led to the scientist's new theory no longer have any role to play in it, they would simply be thrown away.

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<sup>34</sup> On the “transitional” status of elucidations see Diamond 2000, 157.

<sup>35</sup> I have in mind the account of scientific revolutions provided in Kuhn 1962.

As Wittgenstein sees it, philosophical elucidations bring about a similarly far-reaching transformative effect. They may result, for instance, in the thinker's no longer taking her existential problems to require a theoretical solution (TLP 6.521, 6.371-2), and in her no longer feeling dissatisfaction by her failure to find metaphysical answers to her philosophical questions (6.53). Her entire vision of reality may thereby be altered; she would come, in Wittgenstein's words, "to see the world rightly" (6.54). To use Heidegger's terminology, Wittgenstein here comes close to proposing that what elucidations transform is not ontic, but ontological truth. And it is in this sense that the results of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, on the resolute reading, are not merely negative. Its positive results do not consist in communicating theoretical content (either directly or indirectly), but rather in helping the reader achieve a new way of seeing the world, a transformed understanding of being.<sup>36</sup> And yet the resolute reading, so construed, neither requires us to see the project of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* as inconsistent, nor to take it to rely on ineffable theoretical insights.

## **6. Heidegger on the Transformative Goal of Philosophical Activity**

In the following sections I will delineate the shape of a resolute reading of Heidegger's work that similarly shows him to avoid both horns of the dilemma he seems to face. But Heidegger himself does not explicitly tell us that his own propositions are nonsensical, and this might seem to preclude drawing any meaningful parallels between Wittgenstein's elucidatory method and Heidegger's. Nonetheless, as I will show, Heidegger, like Wittgenstein, does not take his philosophical claims to serve a theoretical goal; rather, he takes them to serve the role of evoking an activity, the result of which is the transformation of the reader's understanding. Like Wittgenstein, Heidegger acknowledges that the kind of goals he pursues compel him to speak in

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<sup>36</sup> There are significant differences between the early and the later Wittgenstein when it comes to the question whether philosophical problems could be overcome once and for all, providing an unencumbered vision of reality, or only addressed piecemeal (Wittgenstein 2009). Moreover, the ultimate clarity that the early Wittgenstein seeks to achieve through philosophical elucidation is something which, for the later Wittgenstein, may manifest itself differently at different historical moments and for different cultures (Wittgenstein 1969). In these respects, the later Wittgenstein is even closer to Heidegger's philosophy of being than the author of the *Tractatus*. However, as Diamond 2019 shows, there is room, in the *Tractatus* itself, for a notion of truth that differs both from the truth of contingent propositions, and from the truth of empty, logical tautologies. It is this notion of truth that I consider to be analogous Heidegger's ontological truth.

ways that might mislead his reader to misconstrue what he is up to. And like Wittgenstein's, Heidegger's reader is asked to subject the author's propositions to the same form of criticism that the author directs against the propositions of metaphysics. For such a reader, Heidegger's assertions will ultimately cease to seem to fulfill a theoretical purpose. Indeed, the reader would come to recognize that treating them as theoretical assertions is nonsensical—that it bespeaks, in Heidegger's terms, a perversion of sense, a corruption of the personality, and a forgetfulness of being. At least in this sense, the reader would then throw them away.

It is worth emphasizing that the adjective “resolute” is wonderfully suited to characterize the manner of philosophizing that Heidegger pursues. For as we have seen, the notion of resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) is central to Heidegger's account of the way Dasein establishes an ontologically authentic relation to being. The resoluteness of Dasein consists in her not flinching from the realization that her own being *cannot* be grounded, and more generally, that being as such cannot be explained in terms of beings. Such flinching would occur were Dasein to seek to make theoretical assertions where theory cannot but distort that which it aims to clarify. To be resolute, for Heidegger just as much as for Wittgenstein, is to overcome the temptation to think of philosophical achievement in metaphysical terms, i.e. as the attainment of substantive, theoretical insights (be they expressible or not). Rather, the achievement of resoluteness consists in a radical transformation of one's understanding of being.

Three elements of Heidegger's conception of philosophical method speak in favor of my proposal that the goals he pursues are not theoretical, but ultimately ethical in nature, and that therefore his project does not fall prey to the dilemma between inconsistency and ineffability. These are (1) his construal of the essence of philosophy as an activity of questioning; (2) his discussions of the method of formal indication; and (3) his tripartite methodology of reduction, construction and Destruktion. In the context of the present inquiry, I can only briefly introduce each of these and point out in what way they bear on the question whether Heidegger is caught in the dilemma that the literature tends to ascribe to him. But this should suffice for establishing the plausibility of my alternative proposal, and for pointing out directions for future inquiry.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> By highlighting the parallels between Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's conceptions of philosophy I do not wish to deny that there are important differences between their respective methods and concerns. To spell out these differences, however, would lie beyond the scope of the present paper.

## 6.1. Philosophy as an Activity of Questioning

*Being and Time* opens by stating its overarching goal, namely to reawaken the now forgotten question of being. It is crucial that we do not flatten out and efface the uniqueness, even weirdness, of describing the ambition of a philosophical project in this way. It is the question — not the answer — which is here said to be what is sought:

To repeat the question of being therefore means: first of all to sufficiently elaborate the positing of the question. (SZ, 4)

Indeed, Heidegger takes pains to avoid the implication that the book ultimately provides an answer to this question. For even if every question as such is to be seen as a search that is oriented towards *finding* an answer, what is urgent in the ontological context, according to Heidegger, is the activity of questioning itself— an activity which would be brought to a stop by the very appearance of having reached an answer. Accordingly, the highest words of praise Heidegger reserves for the achievements of past philosophers single out the manner in which they have exposed and maintained such an attitude of questioning:

It is necessary to keep everything open and questionable — only so are we able to truly liberate and keep awake the unresolved inner questioning of Aristotle, and with it of ancient philosophizing, and with it our philosophizing. (GA33, 47).<sup>38</sup>

The ontological priority of questioning is one of Heidegger's earliest and enduring commitments. In his very first seminar, held in summer of 1919, Heidegger approaches the phenomenology of the experience of questioning by looking at a specific ontological example: the question "Is there anything?" (*Gibt es etwas?*). Heidegger harks back to the Aristotelian idea that philosophy starts with wonder (Aristotle 1984a, 982b11): so long as we are concerned with such a question, we turn away from our immersive concern with this or that entity, and instead wonder at the very existence of the world. But Heidegger moves beyond Aristotle in adding that as soon as we start framing answers to such a question, we are bound to reify the object of genuine ontological inquiry (GA56/57, 59–69). In light of the critique of theoretical *logos* he

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<sup>38</sup> And see the similar assessment of Kant's greatness in GA3, 8

develops in later seminars, we can reframe the upshot of this discussion as follows: in giving theoretical answers we impose the logos of assertion on the ontological domain that the experience of questioning opens up, and thereby distort it. Questioning itself, by contrast, is the proper mode of engaging with being, insofar as it allows us to avoid reducing being to beings.

In *Being and Time* itself, the priority of questioning over answering might seem to gradually recede in favor of the positive project of constructing a fundamental ontology, in which self-standing answers seem to be provided. This appearance is at least partly illusory, for note that just when Heidegger suggests that an *answer* to the question of the meaning of being of Dasein would be found in the “exposition of the problematics (*Problematik*) of temporality”, he immediately goes on to clarify that such an “answer” will only serve to reframe the problem, and thereby indicate a direction for further ontological questioning:

... the answer to the question of being can never be located in an isolated, blind proposition. The answer is not grasped in the repetition of that which it propositionally says ... The answer, according to its *proper* sense, gives instructions for concrete ontological research, to begin the investigative questioning within the cleared-up horizon — and that is all it gives. (SZ 19)

Moreover, in the concluding section of the book, Heidegger says that the value of the entire inquiry of *Being and Time* does not lie in the correctness of its apparent results, but in the extent to which it might spark the attitude of fundamental questioning. He then indicates that the work would still be of value even if the entire fundamental ontology proposed in it turns out to have been the *incorrect* way to engage with the question of being:

It is not possible to investigate the origin and possibility of the “idea” of being as such by means of a formal-logical “abstraction”, that is, without a secure horizon of questioning and answering. [Rather,] one must search for a *way* of clarifying the ontological fundamental question [the question concerning the fundamental role of the ontology of Dasein for all ontology] and then *walk* it. Whether this is the *only*, or even the *correct* way, can only be decided *after one has walked it*. ...to this end, the present inquiry is *underway*. (SZ 437).

It thus seems that the author of *Being and Time* seriously considers the need to ultimately throw away the ladder of fundamental ontology — not just after the “turn” in his later philosophy, but already in the way he initially meant the book to be read. The rationale for this is clearly stated in a seminar from 1928:

The philosophical knowledge of the essence of the world [i.e. of the being of beings] is not, not ever, a cognition of something present at hand, but rather the conceptual unlocking (*das begreifende Aufschließen*) of something within a determinately directed questioning, which as questioning never lets that which is inquired into to become a present at hand. (GA29/30 423).

Philosophy, on Heidegger’s view, is not a theory, but an experience — a way to be walked, a sustained activity of questioning. So long as it remains a questioning, philosophy is genuinely engaged with being; and the result of such questioning is not a theoretical cognition, but rather the clearing up of new horizons of inquiry and new ways of conceptualizing beings. Questioning is, in other words, the driver of revolutionary transformations.

The activity of questioning with which *Being and Time* opens is not to be brought to a rest by the apparent answers that fundamental ontology purports to provide. Indeed, as I will argue below, Heidegger deploys the methods of formal indication and of *Destruktion* in order to combat the temptation to construe the achievements of his inquiry in terms of the acquisition of incontestable content. He takes this temptation to be ubiquitous in philosophy, and he therefore holds that even the claims made within his own analyses in *Being and Time* should be subjected to further critique, which would prevent such misinterpretations of their status. Indeed, Heidegger does not always resolutely avoid implying that he achieves self-standing positive theoretical results. But I believe that when these passages are placed in the context of the methodological considerations discussed here and in the next sections, they can be understood as dialectical in nature: while they initially present an image of philosophy as positive science, this image is one of the obstacles which are ultimately to be overcome, if one is to secure a proper access to being. One example is GA24 (459), where Heidegger speaks of positive results being gained by means of his analyses; but in the introduction to this very seminar Heidegger declares that the appearance of having reached positive results would have to be subjected to the kind of critique he calls *Destruktion* (whose role I will discuss below).

This vision of philosophy as an activity of questioning that transforms our relation to being is a radical departure from the kind of theoretical project that is standardly attributed to Heidegger. Had he pursued such theoretical goals, no alternative to the dilemma between inconsistency and ineffability would have been open to him. But since he himself insists that his aims are radically different, and much more ambitious, than to propose a theory of being, there is room for this “resolute” reading of Heidegger’s early work.

## 6.2. Formal Indications as “Ethical” Tasks

The predicament that being cannot be addressed by means of theoretical language is not something that takes Heidegger by surprise, nor is it something which he realizes only after he has settled on his aims and methods or even only after he has completed *Being and Time*. Heidegger’s entire philosophical career, from its earliest days, is informed by an appreciation of this difficulty and is designed to overcome it. My two aims in this section are first, to show that the method Heidegger calls *formal indication* is meant to promote the philosophical attitude of questioning and thereby serves the transformative goal of disclosing ontological truth. Second, I aim to clarify the nature of Heidegger’s goals by bringing out the striking parallels between his method of formal indication and Wittgenstein’s method of philosophical elucidation.

The origins of the method of formal indication can be traced back to Heidegger’s Habilitation (1916), where Heidegger is concerned with what he takes to be an incommensurable difference between the realm of human existence and the realm of nature; he seeks to establish the possibility of a language, a mode of speaking, that will not impose the features of the latter on the former (GA1, 255). In his earliest seminars Heidegger continues to engage with this theme, by responding to the critique Paul Natorp raised against Husserl’s phenomenology. Natorp grants that there are pure phenomenological insights of the sort that Husserl attempts to describe, but he objects that one could not communicate such insights by means of theoretical language without distorting them.<sup>39</sup> Heidegger responds by suggesting that phenomenology avoids framing its results in terms of theoretical assertions and instead captures these results in mere formal indications.<sup>40</sup> But this, as I will argue below, need not be taken to mean that what is conveyed by formal indications are theoretical (but ineffable) insights, of the kind Natorp seems to have in mind.

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<sup>39</sup> Natorp 1912, 103; and see the discussions of Natorp’s objection and Heidegger’s response in Van Buren 1994, 325 and O’Rourke 2018.

<sup>40</sup> GA56/57,. Formal indication is extensively discussed in GA61, 32–35 and 140–155.



The contrast between theoretical assertions and formal indications is stressed in *Being and Time* as well, where Heidegger reminds the reader that the positive claims he is making should not be treated as theoretical assertions. For example he asserts that to treat his claims about the existential structures of Dasein as theoretical assertions would be to succumb to Dasein's inauthentic tendency to misinterpret itself in terms of the other kinds of entities that surround it (*Verfallenheit*) (SZ, 314–5).<sup>41</sup> A proper inquiry into being should not involve any free-floating theoretical assertions, but must rather take the form of a hermeneutic circle that involves the interpreter in that which she interprets; each apparent claim would serve, for the ideal reader of Heidegger's book, as a formal indication, that is, as the basis for further acts of questioning.

In the seminar of Winter 1929/1930 Heidegger goes on to claim that *all* the claims he made in *Being and Time* about Dasein, about death, and about nothingness would be misunderstood if one took them as descriptive statements, for in fact they are meant as formal indications (GA29/30, 428–31). More sweepingly, Heidegger argues that all *genuine* philosophical concepts are merely formally indicative:

All philosophical concepts are formal-indicative, and only when they are so taken, do they result in a true possibility of comprehension. (GA29/30, 425).

To see how formal indications are supposed to achieve this goal let us consider one specific example, namely Heidegger's discussion of the "as-structure" which underlies all understanding, and in particular, the understanding of beings *as* beings (GA 29/30, 416ff.). Heidegger starts the discussion with the indication that the as-structure can in a sense be conceived of as a relation. However, he immediately notes (417) that relations are traditionally construed in terms of the entities they relate (e.g. in terms of a set of ordered pairs of entities), whereas the "as" of "being as being" does not relate two entities at all. It serves to point out an ontological structure, not an ontic fact. In this discussion, what starts as an act of comparing the as-structure to a relation turns out to require the retraction of this comparison. This is not accidental; the double gesture of indication and retraction is designed to invite the reader to see that to take the ontological "as" to consist in stating an ontic relation would result in confusion, insofar as it would conflate the

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<sup>41</sup> See also SZ, 114, 115, 117 and 313; relatedly, see the discussion of "formalization" of the phenomenon of guilt (*Schuld*), in SZ, 283. And see the discussions in Kisiel 1993, Dahlstrom 1994; Burch 2011; and O'Rourke 2018.

formal and material, the ontological and the ontic (like Frege's attempt to draw the distinction between concepts and objects in terms that only fit objects, the result would be nonsensical). Heidegger dubs this double gesture of formal indication its "referring-prohibitive" characteristic.<sup>42</sup>

A second feature of formal indications that comes out in Heidegger's discussion is that rather than communicating *content*, a formal indication merely aims to set up a *task* (*Aufgabe*):

Nonetheless we can continue to call the "as" a relation, and speak of the "as"-relation. We must however keep in mind that the *formal characteristic does not give the essence*, but (on the contrary) only indicates the decisive *task*, to grasp the relation out of its own dimension, rather than to flatten this dimension through the formal characteristic. Treating the "as" as a relation does not say anything about the "as" as such, but rather only contains the order to take up a peculiar task. I therefore speak in relation to such a characteristic in terms of a "formal indication" (GA29/30 425).

As long as we do not confuse it for an assertion, a formal indication will help direct our genuine philosophical activity; its role is not to communicate content, but to provoke in us the attitude of questioning in which the ontological "task" consists.

A third crucial feature of formal indications is that their target is essentially personal — they address a particular reader, and require her to carry out a task for herself. And a final, fourth feature is that by setting tasks for the particular reader, formal indications aim to *transform* her. Both features are highlighted in the way Heidegger describes the intended goals of the analyses of Dasein in *Being and Time*:

In each of these concepts — death, resoluteness, history, existence — there lies the demand of transformation (*Verwandlung*), not merely as a subsequent so-called ethical application of that which has been conceived, but as a preliminary unlocking of the dimension of that which is conceivable. These concepts are

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. GA 61, 142 and the discussion in Dahlstrom 1994, 783

merely indicative since when they are truly attained, they merely let this demand for transformation speak forth, but they are never able to bring about this transformation by themselves. They indicate to Dasein. But Da-sein is always — as I understand it — *my own*. And because this indication is essentially a pointing to the concretion of an individual Dasein of a human being, without carrying any content in them, they are *formally indicative*. (GA29/30, 428–9)

Much in this passage is obscure, but one point that comes out clearly is that we can only speak of a formal indication in connection with the activity of a specific reader who takes up the task indicated, and by doing so, engages in a philosophical activity of *transforming* her concepts, thereby altering her relation to being, i.e. her own way of being.<sup>43</sup> This connects to the point I made earlier, that ontological truth is inextricably the truth *of* Dasein, that is, that it is embodied in Dasein's existence, as a historical being which is concerned with its own being. Heidegger often speaks of the philosophical transformation he aims to enact in terms of a “counter-movement” to Dasein's tendency to immerse itself in beings (GA61, 153). He proposes, by contrast, that in order to be able to address being, rather than beings, we must undergo a “turn (*Umstellung*) of the understanding” (GA21, 410n.). And he also speaks of his own form of inquiry, Fundamental Ontology, as something which must undergo such a “turnaround” (*Umschlag*, GA26 198).<sup>44</sup> As I will argue below, it is the main task of the method of interpretative destruction (*Destruktion*) to instigate such a transformation of the philosophical inquiry.

There are deep and fascinating affinities between these four features of Heidegger's method of formal indication—the double gesture of indication and retraction, the setting up of tasks, the personal character of their appeal, and their transformative goal—and the central features of

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<sup>43</sup> For further discussion of the relation between formal indications and transformation, see Dahlstrom 2001, 248–252; van Buren 1995; McManus 2013b, and Egan 2019, 178ff.

<sup>44</sup> In *Being and Time* Heidegger also speaks of a turnaround (*Umschlag*) in a different, though not unrelated sense, namely the transformation of Dasein from the attitude of engaging with the ready to hand to the theoretical attitude of assertions about present at hand entities (SZ, 157 and 357).

Wittgenstein's conception of the philosophical activity of elucidation.<sup>45</sup> Though Wittgenstein's elucidations might initially appear to convey substantive content, one is meant to ultimately recognize their nonsensicality, to retract them and overcome the appearance that that is what they achieve. Understood as a transitional use of language, the elucidations—the ladder on which the reader of the *Tractatus* is asked to climb—can be seen as setting up tasks for the reader, who is called upon to work through her own confusions, and thereby alter her understanding of the terms involved both in her own use of language and in the elucidations themselves. The clarity which is thereby achieved does not consist in the obtainment of any truths, however, but in the transformation of the philosopher's own use of language. This does not alter her knowledge of the facts, but rather brings her to abandon the expectation that theorizing could ever provide answers to her existential concerns. As a result, her problems would dissolve, and her vision of reality would be transformed.

To read Heidegger's formal indications resolutely, in turn, is not to take him to deploy them in order to bypass the predicament spelled out by Natorp, that ontologically contentful insights cannot be directly communicated. A formal indication is not an attempt to use language to convey ineffable truths that show themselves but cannot be said.<sup>46</sup> Rather, they are to be seen as a means through which Heidegger hopes to bring himself, and each of us, into the elucidatory activity of authentic questioning. The goal of this exercise is not to impart insights, but to transform our tendencies to be philosophically complacent, to abuse logos, and to imagine ourselves to be in pursuit of theoretical answers to ontological questions, for such answers cannot but distort the difference between being and beings. Formal indications, insofar as they prevent us from falling into such confusion, transform our ontological truth.

The achievement of formal indications is in this sense not a theoretical, but an *ethical* one, in the sense I will now attempt to clarify. Admittedly, Heidegger's *Being and Time* does not engage in what is commonly called "ethics". The vocabulary by means of which Heidegger construes Dasein's engagement with being—both in the deficient, improper mode of avoiding and forgetting it, as well as in the exemplary, authentic mode of facing up to it—is a conspicuously ethical vocabulary. The central characterization of Dasein, i.e. of the being who is

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<sup>45</sup> The similarities between Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's respective methods might be due to the fact that they share a common source — namely, Kierkegaard's discussions of indirect communication. On the relation of Heidegger's method to Kierkegaard's see van Buren 1995; and on the relation of Wittgenstein's method to Kierkegaard's see Conant 1993.

<sup>46</sup> Pace Dahlstrom 1994, Streeter 1997 and Egan 2019, 192.

concerned with its being, is care (*Sorge*); and Dasein is said to be called upon, by its own conscience (*Gewissen*), to overcome the dissimulation of being that characterizes its fallenness (*Verfallenheit*) and to take responsibility for its ontological guilt (*Schuld*) (SZ, 284). The care that expresses itself in Dasein's various engagements with beings, Heidegger emphasizes, is neither a theoretical nor a practical phenomenon—it belongs at a level that precedes even this fundamental division (SZ, 193). It is by reference to this originary level that I here speak of the *ethical* dimension of Heidegger's work: the transformations he aims to bring about are modifications of the ontological care that underlies all our engagements with beings. Indeed, when Heidegger much later reflects on the relation of his early work to ethics he proposes that the fundamental-ontological inquiry into Dasein as the locus of ontological truth, in *Being and Time*, is to be seen as an attempt at an “originary ethics” (GA9, 356).<sup>47</sup> It is worth mentioning that there is a significant parallel to this in Wittgenstein, who once said that the ultimate point of *Tractatus* is an ethical one. What is ethical about it, in Wittgenstein's case as in Heidegger's, is the transformative effect it is meant to have on its reader.<sup>48</sup>

### **6.3. Heidegger's Tripartite Methodology: Reduction, Construction and Destruction**

The third and final element of Heidegger's conception of philosophy that I propose to consider here is the role he gives to the task of interpretative destruction (*Destruktion*) in the context of the methodology of *Being and Time*. This is an issue which has been downplayed and ignored by many of his readers,<sup>49</sup> even though in the Introduction to the book Heidegger explicitly announces that the preparation of the question of being requires not one, but two tasks, that is, that fundamental ontology must be deployed alongside *Destruktion* (SZ, 15). It is thus often assumed that in *Being and Time* *Destruktion* is a merely ancillary task, consisting in a critique of

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<sup>47</sup> On the claim that fundamental ontology is an originary ethics see Nancy 2002; an insightful discussion of the existential and ethical goals of Heidegger's formal indications is found in Burch 2011.

<sup>48</sup> Wittgenstein's letter to Ludwig von Ficker from 1919, cited in Luckhard 1979: 94; and see Diamond 2000 and Kremer 2013 for discussion.

<sup>49</sup> Some notable exceptions are Guignon 1984, Bernasconi 1994, and Pöggeler 1994; I discuss this issue in more detail in Nir 2020b.

the philosophical concepts handed down to us by tradition.<sup>50</sup> But on my reading, Destruktion's contribution to the inquiry is indispensable. It is also often assumed that the manner in which Destruktion is concerned with history and tradition is such that it can be neatly separated from fundamental ontology. As I see it, this, too, is incorrect. Heidegger proposes that Destruktion's role is to oppose the "absolutizing" (*Verabsolutieren*) tendency of fundamental ontology, and to thereby effect a transformative turnaround (*Umschlag*) of the mode of investigation (GA26, 197 & 201). It would do that by allowing us to see our own philosophical activity as a historical happening, and to see that we ourselves are complicit in the failures of the metaphysical tradition that we seek to criticize. In this sense Destruktion aims to effect a transformation of our philosophical personality.<sup>51</sup>

This conception of the role of Destruktion is most clearly expressed in Heidegger's reflections on the method of phenomenology in the 1927 seminar, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Heidegger there proposes that phenomenology has a tripartite methodological structure, consisting of reduction, construction and Destruktion (GA24, 31). Reduction is the task that allows us to turn our gaze from beings to being, that is, the task of drawing the ontological difference (GA24, 29). Though in *Being and Time* the Husserlian term "reduction" does not appear at all, Heidegger's methodological discussions make it clear that drawing an ontological difference between beings and being is a precondition of all ontological inquiry (SZ, 35). The second element of the method, construction, consists in the analysis of the structures of the being of a specific region of beings (GA24, 30), which is precisely the kind of task that fundamental ontology is assigned in *Being and Time* (SZ, 37). Finally, the 1927 Seminar construes Destruktion as a self-critique which is *internal* to the phenomenological method. It is meant to apply to the results of the constructive step of the investigation, and thereby allow the phenomenologist to come to terms with the historical situatedness of her own investigative activity (GA24, 31).<sup>52</sup> Heidegger thus admits that phenomenology is prone to the same

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<sup>50</sup> McNeill 2012 offers an illuminating account of growing importance of Destruktion in Heidegger's later work, where it is explicitly assigned the essential ontological task of uncovering the "history of being." However, I disagree with McNeill that in the period of *Being and Time*, Heidegger did not already assign to Destruktion a similarly essential role.

<sup>51</sup> Crowe 2006, 235 similarly argues that Destruktion is meant to effect a personal transformation, and that this understanding of Destruktion goes back to Heidegger's early work.

<sup>52</sup> The need for this critical step is not absent from the methodological discussion in the Introduction to *Being and Time*, although there it is quite implicit. Cf. SZ 22 and 36.

distortions that he takes traditional metaphysics to fall victim to. For indeed, phenomenology does appear to offer substantive results and to frame these in terms of assertions. To this extent, Heidegger comes very close to Wittgenstein's admission that his own elucidations, which sometime seem like theoretical assertions, are ultimately to be recognized as nonsensical. Subjecting fundamental ontology to *Destruktion* is similarly meant to remedy the appearance that Heidegger's analyses of *Dasein* are meant to contribute to a theoretical account of being.

In articulating the task of *Destruktion* Heidegger often speaks of it as tracing ontological concepts to the historical, concrete situations from which they arise.<sup>53</sup> And even though part of what this means is that acts of *Destruktion* consist in a critique of concepts that were handed to us by tradition, to suggest that *Destruktion* is internal to the phenomenological method and that it also needs to be applied to fundamental ontology brings out the important fact that *Destruktion* is not concerned with *past* traditions alone. *Destruktion* is also (and essentially) meant to make us face the concrete historical situation (the "facticity") of Heidegger's own, and hence also of our own inquiry. By realizing that our own philosophical activity is itself a historical happening we should come to realize that the seemingly substantive theoretical results of our inquiry are not proper theoretical assertions after all.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, such a historical reflection on ourselves would help us see these assertions as formal indications, and thereby allow them to spark in us the attitude of authentic ontological questioning.

The essential role of *Destruktion* in Heidegger's methodology is thus not to criticize the historical past, but to bring ourselves and the historical event from which our own work arises into view, and thereby to transform the historical beings that we ourselves are.<sup>55</sup> The effect it is supposed to have on us is a change of our very personality, and of the way it manifests itself in our philosophical pursuits. *Destruktion* has an indispensable role to play in the context of Heidegger's project, for it helps us reawaken the question of being, keep it an open question for us, and thereby alter us and our very relation to being — our ontological truth.

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. SZ, 23, GA62, 367, GA18, 327, GA22, 172; GA24, 152 and 164.

<sup>54</sup> This is implicit in SZ, 36; it is very explicit in GA24, 26 and 31; GA26, 197–198; GA3, 214–5 and GA29/30, 495.

<sup>55</sup> I argue for this point in more detail in Nir 2020b.

## 7. Conclusion

By means of the comparison between Heidegger and Wittgenstein I have argued that rather than attempting to provide a theory of being, Heidegger's ultimate goal in *Being and Time* is to transform us and our tendency to form metaphysical, theoretical, and hence distorted relations to being. Since the manner in which he seeks to achieve this goal does not depend on the success of any theoretical assertions, it is not inherently inconsistent of him to reject the applicability of logos to ontological inquiry. And since his aims are ethical and transformative, rather than theoretical, he does not need to appeal to any ineffable insights as the putative source of justification of his putative theory. Many questions are left open, but I hope to have at least shown that the resolute reading of Heidegger is a plausible alternative to the apparent dilemma between inconsistency and ineffability. To see these affinities between Heidegger and Wittgenstein is not to deny that there are also significant differences between their approaches, their methods and their concerns. Rather, it provides us a better vantage point from which these differences can be more clearly evaluated. This, too, is a task for a different occasion.<sup>56</sup>

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