

From the Facticity of Dasein  
to the Facticity of Nature:  
Naturalism, Animality, and Metontology

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In spite of the recent attempts to naturalize phenomenology, the phenomenological tradition has been largely critical of naturalism ever since Husserl's attack on psychologism.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the development of his project of a phenomenological ontology in the late twenties, Heidegger's philosophy appears to share this anti-positivistic and anti-naturalistic strategy, in particular due to his resistance to the reduction of the ontological to the ontic. In this paper I initially outline how Heidegger resists naturalism through his attempt to distinguish *Dasein* from *Vorhandensein* and the factuality of natural entities. However, I argue that there are at least two significant moments in the late twenties, moments that coincide with Heidegger's abandonment of the project of fundamental ontology, in which the threat of naturalism returns and the ontological difference is at least questioned, if not altogether undermined. The first is the overturning of fundamental ontology into the complementary project of metontology, specifically in its identification of the facticity of Dasein with the facticity of nature, while the second can be found in the famous account of animality and the attempt to distinguish Dasein's mode of being-in-the-world from the animal's world-poverty. In both of these cases what is at stake is not only the stability of Heidegger's ontological difference but the very possibility of a distinction between Dasein and nature. In this paper I contend that,

as Heidegger enters into a more serious engagement with naturalistic questions, several methodological aspects of his fundamental ontology become problematized, if only implicitly.

In order to make the case for this thesis, I begin (in the first part of the paper) by briefly developing the important distinction between Dasein's *factual* mode of being and the *factuality* of entities unlike Dasein. The stability of this difference is itself axiomatic to the project of fundamental ontology developed in *Being and Time*, even if it is briefly questioned at the end of the text. In the second part of the paper I attempt to show how the distinction between Dasein and *Vorhandensein* is important for Heidegger's resistance to naturalism, especially insofar as he repeatedly identifies the being of the *Vorhanden* with nature throughout this period. In the third part I argue that, despite the methodological significance of such distinctions, Heidegger begins to problematize and perhaps even undermine them in his treatment of animality and the project of metontology. Finally, I conclude by showing how Heidegger ultimately shrinks back from these insights and reverts to what might appear as reassertions of the distinctions he had already questioned. I suggest that Heidegger should have accepted a naturalized account of Dasein's mode of being-in-the-world, provided that he had accepted a non-reductionistic view of what naturalism can be.

## **I. FACTICITY AND THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN DASEIN AND VORHANDENSEIN**

One of the fundamental theses of Heidegger's *Being and Time* is that the manner of being of the entity he calls *Dasein* is radically distinct from the mode of being of other entities. The analytic of Dasein is developed from the beginning by contrast to the mode of existence Heidegger calls *Vorhandensein*:

Ontologically, *existentia* means objective presence [*Vorhandenheit*], a kind of being which is essentially inappropriate to characterize the being which has the character of Dasein. We can avoid the confusion

by always using the interpretive expression objective presence [*Vorhandenheit*] for the term *existentia*, and by attributing existence [*Existenz*] as a determination of being only to Dasein. (GA 2: 56/SZ2: 42)

The term “existence” (*Existenz*) designates the manner of being appropriate to Dasein, to entities for whom being is a question, while the other categorical modes of *Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenheit* are reserved for other entities. The way in which Dasein is in a world is distinct from the inner-worldliness of other entities. This distinctive characteristic of Dasein is one Heidegger will repeatedly insist on, claiming that to understand Dasein as one objectively present entity among others is to completely overlook Dasein’s essential ontological determination: “Dasein is never to be understood ontologically as a case and instance of a genus of beings as objectively present [*einer Gattung von Seiendem als Vorhandenem*]” (GA 2: 57/SZ2: 42). Of course, such a misunderstanding is always possible, and if kept within its proper boundaries, it would not necessarily be a misunderstanding. Just as biology identifies a certain class of entities (*Gattung von Seiendem*) as biological objects for investigation, anthropology or neurophysiology could single out the human for theoretical investigation. But Heidegger insists that in so doing what is distinctive about Dasein’s mode of being is either lost or ignored.

Dasein is distinguished ontically from other entities by the fact that an understanding of being is constitutive of its existence: “*Understanding of being is itself a determination of being of Dasein*. The ontic distinction of Dasein lies in the fact that it *is* ontological” (GA 2: 16/SZ2: 12). Treating Dasein as a mere object among other existent objects would obscure this ontological possibility. However, there is an important ambiguity here, since Dasein is also an entity. Dasein *is* an ontic being among others, factually thrown into the world just as other entities are contingently thrown into the natural world. Up to a point, Heidegger accepts the identification of the brute factual existence of Dasein with an objective entity such as a lump of coal: “More precisely, they can be understood within certain limits and with a certain justification as

something merely objectively present” (GA 2: 74/SZ2: 55). However, Heidegger immediately adds that “to do this, one must completely disregard or just not see the existential constitution of being-in” (GA 2: 74–75/SZ2: 55). While there is a way in which Dasein exists as objectively present among other entities, this can be appropriate only if kept within “certain limits.” I take Heidegger to mean here that if one thinks that this mode of being is exhaustive of what it means to be Dasein, it would remain inappropriate and reductive. This is because one is either reducing or eliminating the existential mode of being-in that distinguishes Dasein from a stone or a table. While Heidegger admits that in terms of the question of reality Dasein is present (and real) among other present, real entities, thinking along these lines will lead us astray from the goal of fundamental ontology, the goal of thinking through the ontological constitution of Dasein:

Like other beings, Dasein is also *objectively present as real*. Thus being in general acquires the meaning of *reality*. Accordingly, the concept of reality has a peculiar priority in the ontological problematic. This priority diverts the path [*Dieser verlegt den Weg*] to a genuine existential analytic of Dasein, it also diverts our view of the being of innerworldly things initially at hand [*Zuhandenen*]. (GA 2: 267/SZ2: 201)

That is, it not only obscures the fact that Dasein is in the world in a particular way through its circumspective concern and engagement with entities, but also that the objects encountered in a world are primarily encountered as useful entities within a context of significance, as handy (*zuhanden*). So the problem with the view of Reality as a heap of factually existing entities is that it simply ignores or “skips over the phenomenon of worldliness [*Überspringen des Phänomens der Weltlichkeit*]” (GA 2: 88/SZ2: 65).

But Dasein is also factually thrown into a world among other entities. This singular being-thus and not otherwise is what Heidegger designates by Dasein’s facticity. One may think that the facticity of Dasein,

its being thrown into the world (*Geworfenheit*) in some way, designates a mode of being that Dasein shares with other beings. However, this is not the case, and Heidegger goes to great pains to distinguish between the factuality and contingency of the objectively present and Dasein's facticity, reserving the term *Tatsächlichkeit* for the former and *Faktizität* for the latter. Just as there is a contrast between the modes of being (existence, objective presence), there is a contrast in their modes of thrownness as facts (facticity, factuality): "And yet the 'factuality' of the fact [*die 'Tatsächlichkeit' der Tatsache*] of one's own Dasein is ontologically totally different from the factual occurrence of a kind of stone. The factuality of the fact [*Die Tatsächlichkeit des Faktums*] of Dasein, as the way in which every Dasein actually is, we call its *facticity* [*Faktizität*]" (GA 2: 75/SZ2: 56). Of course, there is some form of "facticity" to the being of a stone – its "thatness" or its existing in the very way that it does exist (and not otherwise). But as Agamben and others have noted, this mode of existence has traditionally been understood through the concept of contingency (*Zufälligkeit*), which Heidegger differentiates from Dasein's mode of contingent existence, designated by *Faktizität*.<sup>2</sup> The manner in which Dasein "falls" into the world (*Geworfenheit*, *Verfallenheit*) is not the manner in which stones fall (*Zufälligkeit*) into the world. Agamben is thereby correct to stress that for Heidegger "the difference in modes of Being is decisive here."<sup>3</sup>

This difference is so decisive that almost every time Heidegger returns to the problem of Dasein's facticity in *Being and Time*, he goes out of his way to repeat this distinction just in case the reader has forgotten it: "*Facticity is not the factuality of the factum brutum of something objectively present, but is a characteristic of the being of Dasein taken on in existence*" (GA 2: 180/SZ2: 135).<sup>4</sup> This distinction is reiterated so often throughout the book that it could properly be considered a refrain or motif of *Being and Time*. Each time Heidegger further elucidates Dasein's being-in-the-world and articulates a new existential structure, he insists on the difference between factual existence and factual objective presence. For example, when developing the phenomenon of conscience, he observes: "As a phenomenon of

Dasein, conscience is not a fact [*Tatsache*] that occurs and is occasionally objectively present. It 'is' only in the kind of being of Dasein and makes itself known as a fact [*Faktum*] only in factual existence [*faktischen Existenz*]" (GA 2: 357/SZ2: 269). He returns to it when describing the temporality that is proper to Dasein and distinguishing it from the way in which objective entities are "in" time: "Evidently Dasein can never be past, not because it is imperishable, but because it can essentially *never* be *objectively present*. Rather, if it is, it *exists* [*sondern weil es wesenhaft nie vorhanden sein kann, vielmehr; wenn es ist, existiert*]" (GA 2: 503/SZ2: 380). From the standpoint of this repetitive and resolute attempt to distinguish *Dasein* from *Vorhandensein*, it becomes surprising to read the closing paragraphs of *Being and Time*, where Heidegger questions this very distinction:

The distinction between the being of existing Dasein and the being of beings unlike Dasein (for example, objective presence) may seem to be illuminating, but it is only the *point of departure* for the ontological problematic; it is nothing with which philosophy can rest and be satisfied [*ist doch nur der Ausgang der ontologischen Problematik, aber nichts, wobei die Philosophie sich beruhigen kann*]. (GA 2: 576/SZ2: 436–37)

A book that involves repetitive attempts to delineate the proper mode of being of Dasein by differentiating it from the being of other entities ends, it seems, by problematizing this very project. The distinction upon which the proper being of Dasein was articulated is something of a heuristic starting point, but not something that we must remain settled with.

## II. ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN *VORHANDENSEIN* AND NATURE

While we have seen that the distinction between *Dasein* and *Vorhandensein* is decisive for Heidegger's differentiation between facticity and factuality, it is not immediately obvious what exactly this has to do with nature and naturalism. In the following section I argue that the

ontological difference and the difference between Dasein and *Vorhandensein* are two important and mutually dependent components of Heidegger's general resistance to naturalism. But naturalism is a famously slippery term, which historically has come to mean many diverse and often contradictory philosophical positions.<sup>5</sup> The meaning of naturalism varies widely, from the very specific methodological claim that epistemology be treated as "continuous with natural science"<sup>6</sup> to strict versions of physicalist reductionism to more general forms of skepticism about spooky substances and occult qualities, or what John Dupré simply calls "anti-supernaturalism."<sup>7</sup> In claiming that Heidegger resists naturalism, it is important not to restrict this term to our post-Quinean narrow sense of naturalism: namely, the methodological view that the empirical natural sciences are continuous with philosophy, are the measure of what exists, and therefore ought to determine our ontological commitments. Instead, if one is claiming that Heidegger's philosophy is resistant to naturalism, one must have a much broader category in mind, one that includes any view of the "world" as a natural whole, with human beings as a specific part of, or a specific entity within, this whole. The latter view is what Heidegger, already in *Being and Time*, identifies with "traditional ontology" (GA 2: 88/SZ2: 65). On this more general account of naturalism, any philosophy that subsumes Dasein's mode of existence under a greater cosmological monistic totality called "nature" could be properly called naturalistic. It is therefore a category broad enough to include figures as diverse as Lucretius, Spinoza, and Nietzsche, as well as Wilfrid Sellars.

Heidegger's criticism is of any position, regardless of whether one calls it naturalism, positivism, or traditional ontology, that is reductive towards the proper mode of existence of Dasein. What is at stake is exactly how to understand "world" – and Heidegger's claim is that the positivism of traditional ontology skips over (*überspringt*) the phenomenon of world and determines nature as a totality of objectively present things. From this point of view, Dasein becomes one entity within the natural cosmos and its proper mode of existence is ignored: "Instead, one tries to interpret the world in terms of the being of the

being [*dem Sein des Seienden*] which is objectively present within the world [*innerweltlich vorhanden*] but has not, however, even been initially discovered – in terms of nature” (GA 2: 88/SZ2: 65). Whereas this understanding of nature is not the only one Heidegger mobilizes throughout his work in the twenties,<sup>8</sup> it cannot be ignored that between 1925 to 1929 Heidegger very closely identifies the *Vorhanden* with the natural, and the ontology that determines everything as *Vorhandensein* with the traditional ontology of nature. This becomes most explicit in his lecture course of the summer semester of 1927, where he attempts to differentiate the concept of world he developed in *Being and Time* from this traditional and more naturalistic one:

The world is not nature and it is certainly not the extant [*die Welt ist nicht die Natur und überhaupt nicht das Vorhandene*], any more than the whole of all the things surrounding us, the contexture of equipment, is the environing world, the *Umwelt*. Nature – even if we take it in the sense of the whole cosmos as that which we also call, in ordinary discourse, the universe, the whole world – all these entities taken together, animals, plants, and humans, too, are not the world, viewed philosophically. (GA 24: 235/165)

In this seminar Heidegger differentiates Dasein from the *Vorhanden* by directly identifying the latter with nature, with the effect of creating a contrast between the human and the “merely” natural. What is distinctive about Dasein is that as long as it is, it is *necessarily* within a world; the two are co-belonging or co-relational. However, being-in-the-world is merely a *possible* (but not necessary) determination of the natural: “Intraworldliness belongs to the being of the extant, nature, not as a determination of its being, but as a possible determination” (GA 24: 240/169). A rock can enter a world or not enter it, but this determination is not constitutive for its mode of being. This change from being “worldless” to being “in” the world is not inherent in what it means to be a rock, or in Heidegger’s words, it “does not belong to nature’s being



[*gehört nicht zum Sein der Natur*]” (GA 24: 241/269). For purely natural entities, it is, so to speak, optional whether or not they take part in the context of meaning and significance designated by being-in-the-world.

The distinction between Dasein’s mode of being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*) and that of other natural entities (*Innerweltlichkeit*) is therefore a re-articulation of the distinction between Dasein and natural entities. And the distinction is based on the fact that worldliness in the proper sense is necessary for Dasein, but only a possibility for natural entities. Heidegger is differentiating “between being-in-the-world [*In-der-Welt-sein*] as a determination of the Dasein’s ontological constitution [*Seinsverfassung*] and intraworldliness [*Innerweltlichkeit*] as a possible but not necessary determination of extant entities [*des Vorhandenen*]” (GA 24: 239–240/168). Traditional ontology thinks of the world as the entirety of the cosmos, as the universe, as nature in the Spinozistic sense, but this sense of nature is not at all what Heidegger means by *Welt*: “World is only, if, and as long as a Dasein exists. Nature can also be when no Dasein exists” (GA 24: 241/170). Whether we think of a stone or a chair, nature as *Vorhanden* is already described by Heidegger as worldless: “The chair does not have a world [*Der Stuhl hat keine Welt*]” (GA 24: 236/166). The world is something that only “is” or happens when Dasein happens, and only Dasein is properly understood as inhabiting a world: “The world is something Dasein-ish [*Die Welt ist etwas Daseinsmäßiges*]” (GA 24: 237/166). There is here a deep continuity between Heidegger’s conception of world and the Kantian conception of nature, at least insofar as the human is understood as a necessary contributor to the constitution of the space in which it meaningfully abides. Of course, Heidegger is always weary of the subjectivistic tendencies in these sorts of claims, especially insofar as they may come to mischaracterize the world as the product or fabrication of an active subject. Nonetheless, while not a product of Dasein, the world is not without Dasein’s contribution or participation: “So far as Dasein exists, a world is cast-forth [*eine Welt vor-geworfen*] with Dasein’s being. To exist means, among other things, to cast-forth a world [*sich Welt vorher-werfen*]” (GA 24: 239/168).

This casting-forth of world, if properly understood in its ecstatic character and not as a mere imposition of the activity of a transcendental subject, is what Heidegger during this period calls the “transcendence” of Dasein. Transcendence is a fundamental constitution of Dasein that allows it to be world-forming and thus to inhabit the cosmos in a manner that is radically distinct from all other entities: “Transcendence is not just one possible comportment (among others) of Dasein toward other beings, but it is the basic constitution of its being [*Grundverfassung seines Seins*], on the basis of which Dasein can at all relate to beings in the first place” (GA 26: 211/165). Transcendence is the basic comportment that explains why Dasein surpasses entities towards “world,” and thus enacts the ontological difference within which it abides. Heidegger closely aligns the relationship between Dasein’s surpassing of the ontic towards the ontological, Dasein’s transcendence, and Dasein’s essentially ecstatic mode of being-in-the-world: “insofar as a being-in-the-world is existent, beings (nature) have also already been leapt over [*ist auch schon Seiendes (Natur) übersprungen*]” (GA 26: 213/166).<sup>9</sup> The fact that Dasein exists means that entities have been transcended towards their horizon of intelligibility, giving rise to the ontological difference between being and beings. Heidegger closely associates this surpassing of the ontic that happens in Dasein’s transcendence to an understanding of the ways in which Dasein is beyond the merely natural world in which it is always already thrown:

Dasein is thrown, factual, thoroughly amidst nature through its bodiliness, and transcendence lies in the fact that these beings, among which Dasein is and to which Dasein belongs, are surpassed [*überschritten*] by Dasein. In other words, as transcending, Dasein is beyond nature, although, as factual, it remains environed by nature. As transcending, i.e. as free, Dasein is something alien to nature [*Als transzendierendes, d. h. als freies ist das Dasein der Natur etwas Fremdes*]. (GA 26: 212/166)

Even if Dasein is always embedded in its bodily existence, always one entity among others, Heidegger's point is that it is not just that, but also (and essentially) something that transcends being purely absorbed by or reduced to those determinations, and thus is an entity that is somehow outside of and alien to nature.

It is significant to note that in the very lecture course in which Heidegger introduces the ontological difference he closely relates it to the distinction between Dasein and nature. The ontological difference itself depends on the fact that there is a difference between the facticity of Dasein, Dasein's mode of being-in-the-world, and the factuality of nature. Transcendence is both the mode of being proper to Dasein and that which somehow explains the surpassing of the merely ontic into the ontological. If naturalism were correct and all that existed were entities and nothing more, then strictly speaking there would be no radical ontological difference, nor a radical distinction between the mode of being of Dasein and that of other entities. Characterizing the difference between Dasein's mode of being and that of nature as "this radical distinction of ways of being [*diesem radikalem Unterschied der Seinsweisen*]" (GA 24: 250/176), Heidegger wonders whether there is any way of unifying these senses of being:

The ontological difference between the constitution of the Dasein's being and that of nature proves to be so disparate that it seems at first as though the two ways of being are incompatible and cannot be determined by way of a uniform concept of being in general. (GA 24: 250/176)

It is unclear what this "uniform" concept of being would be, since if being were simply a higher genus under which both Dasein's existence and natural entities' objective presence were subsumed, we would readily return to the view of "traditional ontology." What is at stake in Heidegger's concern is the following: either we have two radically distinct modes of being that cannot be unified and we end up in some form of dualism (even if a modal dualism rather than a strict substance

dualism), or we have the threat of something like the monistic naturalism of traditional ontology, and Dasein is simply one type of entity among others.

This threat, namely, that of collapsing the distinction between Dasein and nature as well as the distinction between being and beings, is a threat to the very nature of philosophy as Heidegger sees it. In this sense, methodological naturalism, the idea that there is no such thing as a purely philosophical question that could not be dealt with within one of the branches of specific sciences, is also a target of Heidegger's concern. While Heidegger does not use the language of "naturalism," he has this position in mind when he criticizes the "positivism" of these endeavors, in order to stress the way in which they reduce the ontological dimension to an ontic explanation of the positive sciences: "Positive sciences deal with that which is, with beings; that is to say, they always deal with specific domains, for instance, nature" (GA 24: 17/13). While there is nothing inherently problematic with the thematization of a particular region of entities and its objectification for scientific investigation, if the positive sciences consistently interpret *all* entities in this way, it leads to a dangerous form of reductive positivism. Philosophical problems become nothing other than inarticulate versions of questions better posed and studied within anthropology, psychology, evolutionary biology, and so on. The danger of this form of positivism is that "the ontological is denied altogether and explained away ontically" (GA 24: 466/327). This procedure would make philosophy itself either impossible or unnecessary, since Heidegger directly identifies the proper space of philosophical questioning with the ontological difference: "Only by making this distinction – κρίνεν in Greek – not between one being and another being but between being and beings do we first enter the field of philosophical research" (GA 24: 23/17).<sup>10</sup> The very possibility of philosophy, on this view, is closely aligned with the possibility of distinguishing between being and beings, which in turn is dependent on understanding the proper existence of Dasein in a manner different from that of other natural entities.

### III. QUESTIONING THE DISTINCTION

Even though Heidegger insists on these distinctions in a strong way throughout 1926 and 1927, we have already noted how *Being and Time* ends by questioning the difference between Dasein and other entities, or at least in warning us that it must not become something of an unquestioned dogma. While the fault-lines are already beginning to appear, it is only in 1928 and 1929 that these fissures reach a critical point in the overturning of fundamental ontology and in the question of animality. Both of these moments in Heidegger's lecture courses involve some form of *implicit* naturalistic challenge to the difference between Dasein and nature, and Heidegger appears to be acutely aware that they have the possibility of undermining the very project of a phenomenological ontology. In a restricted sense I am claiming that the demise of Heidegger's fundamental ontology happens at the hands of naturalism.

The first important break can be seen in the appendix to his 1928 seminar on the *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*. Here Heidegger notes that the concept of world developed within fundamental ontology leads to a necessary "overturning [*Umschlag*]" (GA 26: 196/154). This overturning is not simply a change in focus or understanding, as if we should now turn to an ontic metaphysics because we have exhausted the resources of fundamental ontology. Rather, he sees fundamental ontology and a new "metontology" as complementary sciences, with the former developing into the latter: "precisely the radicalization of fundamental ontology brings about the above-mentioned overturning [*Umschlag*] of ontology out of its very self" (GA 26: 200/157).<sup>11</sup> In what does this overturning consist? It consists precisely in going beyond the radical distinction between Dasein and nature that was decisive for fundamental ontology, and in further investigating in a more primordial manner the ontic existence that Dasein shares with other extant entities.

Since being is there only insofar as beings are already there [*Da es Sein nur gibt, indem auch schon gerade Seiendes im Da ist*], fundamental ontology has in it

the latent tendency towards a primordial, metaphysical transformation which becomes possible only when being is understood in its whole problematic. The intrinsic necessity for ontology to turn back to its point of origin can be clarified by reference to the primal phenomenon of human existence: the being “man” understands being; understanding-of-being effects a distinction between being and beings; being is there only when Dasein understands being. (GA 26: 199/156)

The transformation from fundamental ontology to metontology involves noticing that even though the ontological difference happens only if and as long as Dasein is, all of this is simultaneously dependent on ontic existence. There is a strange circularity here: even though the distinction between being and beings happens only if Dasein exists in a manner different from entities, Dasein can exist in this way and have an understanding of being only “insofar as beings are already there [*indem auch schon gerade Seiendes im Da ist*].”

Why does this return us to the problem of naturalism? Because Heidegger is suggesting that we think of Dasein as one entity among others that factually happens to have an ontological tendency. The dichotomy between the facticity of Dasein and the factuality of nature is here going to break down, and this becomes clear when Heidegger uses the term facticity for the type of being of nature, a term he earlier reserved only for Dasein. This important moment is obscured by the translation, which, in line with Heidegger’s earlier claims, insists on differentiating factual and factuality, presumably hoping that this is simply a momentary terminological slip:

In other words, the possibility that being is there in the understanding presupposes the factual existence of Dasein [*die faktische Existenz des Daseins*], and this in turn presupposes the factual extantness of nature [*das faktische Vorhandensein des Natur*]. Right within the horizon of the problem of being, when posed radically,

it appears that all this is visible and can become understood as being, only if a possible totality of beings is already there. (GA 26: 199/156–157)

This statement would have been unthinkable in *Being and Time*, since here Heidegger is not only “equivocating” between the type of being of nature and that of Dasein, but also claiming that the facticity of Dasein presupposes the facticity of nature. The suggestion is that beyond the *difference* between Dasein’s *Existenz* and nature’s *Vorhandensein*, there is a factual (*faktische*) mode of being they share. Furthermore, fundamental ontology is said to depend on an understanding of “a possible totality of beings [*eine mögliche Totalität von Seiendem*],” once again precisely the type of move that he criticized under the name of “traditional” ontology. What would this totality of beings be, if not the “cosmos” he criticized as somehow a misinterpretation of what it means to be in a world? Nevertheless, at this moment Heidegger claims that if posed radically enough, even the problematic of *Being and Time* necessarily leads in that direction.

One year later and now in Freiburg, Heidegger returns to a different question that threatens to undermine the distinction between Dasein and nature, but this time through the issue of animality.<sup>12</sup> Already in *Being and Time*, Heidegger had noted how life is somehow in between Dasein and objective presence, and that it does not fit comfortably within that dichotomy: “Life is neither pure objective presence, nor is it Dasein” (GA 2: 67/SZ2: 50). Within the categories offered in *Being and Time*, this exception should have become central to Heidegger’s analytic; however, it remains a marginal comment with no further elaboration. Heidegger famously attempts to deliver on this promissory note in the lecture course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. Here, Heidegger returns to the distinction between the “worldless” constitution of the stone (which now replaces the chair as the exemplar of the *Vorhanden*) and the “world-forming” constitution of Dasein (GA 29/30: 263/177). However, Heidegger places the animal in an in-between category, famously claiming that “the animal is *poor in world*” (GA 29/30: 263/177). This poverty is phenomenologically

developed through a comparative and privative analysis in relation to Dasein, an analysis that has led many interpreters to accuse Heidegger of anthropocentric tendencies.<sup>13</sup> As Derrida has shown, Heidegger believes that when compared to Dasein there is something deficient in the “as-structure” (*als-Struktur*) of the animal, even if this deficiency is not to be understood as an absolute privation.<sup>14</sup> While the animal is not world-forming, it does have a mode of access to entities – and entities are actually phenomenologically “given” to the animal: “whatever the lizard is lying on is certainly given *in some way* for the lizard, and yet is not known to the lizard *as* a rock” (GA 29/30: 291/198).<sup>15</sup> Animals have distinct relationships to their environments, treating entities in a manner that is fairly close to *Zuhandenheit*. Just as I may see a hammer *as* a hammer, my dog may see it *as* object-to-be-chewed. However, as Derrida, Calarco, and others have argued, Heidegger is unable to successfully articulate these distinctions. He notices that animality transcends *Vorhandenheit*, but cannot find a way to determine its relationship to Dasein other than through privation and comparison. In the end, the seminar concludes aporetically, once again showing that animality is an impasse to the distinctions essential to fundamental ontology: “Thus the thesis that ‘the animal is poor in world’ must remain as a problem” (GA 29/30: 396/273). In fact, problems and *aporiai* proliferate in this text, which is the lecture course in which Heidegger questions whether the ontological difference is adequately treated through fundamental ontology, going so far as to suggest the abandonment of ontology altogether (GA 29/30: 522/359).

It is arguable that the problem of animality once again brings with it the implicit threat of naturalism. This is because the distinction between the facticity of Dasein and the factuality of nature is blurred by the addition of a previously excluded middle. Animals are clearly a part of nature, and yet they do not necessarily fit the categories of *Vorhandenheit* or *Zuhandenheit*, challenging the notion that nature is even appropriately determined by these categories. Furthermore, if animals are to some extent within a world, then Dasein is not as distinctive and unique as it would appear from the analytic of Dasein in *Being and*



*Time.* More importantly, what the question of animality brings with it is the threat of something like gradualism – the idea that one can be more or less Dasein-ish, that one can be “in” a world to different degrees. If that is the case, then Dasein’s ontological possibilities can be ontically reinterpreted as capacities or dispositional properties of a particular kind of entity within a natural cosmos. Not only are “animals” poor in world, but many human animals can be poor in world, such as children or the mentally disabled, or perhaps even the severely drunk or sleeping. The problem of world-poverty and the privative interpretation that goes along with it could be equally applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to infants or to humans with specific types of neurological deficiencies. This is a problem Heidegger briefly acknowledged in his treatment of young Dasein in the 1928/1929 winter semester lecture course in Freiburg (GA 27: 123–126). Heidegger wonders about the challenges inherent in understanding early and young forms of Dasein in the fundamental-ontological manner, and how to appropriately treat a mode of being that is not-quite Dasein but already includes several aspects of comportment and understanding of being. As Andrew Mitchell notes, “the similarities with the treatment of the animal are striking.”<sup>16</sup> The relationships between Dasein and humans, between Dasein and other animals, between Dasein and nature become much more difficult to clearly delineate, once one acknowledges that there is a serious methodological problem in the constitution of different levels and modes of Dasein itself. If the capacity to have an understanding of being and of effectuating the ontological difference can happen to different degrees, it could potentially be explainable as an ontic capacity embedded in our material nature. What Heidegger called the “enactment of the difference between being and beings [*der Vollzug des Unterschiedes von Sein und Seiendem*]” (GA 26: 199/156) – which was allegedly only possible within Dasein – is itself conditioned by specific natural capacities of human beings. Whether or not Heidegger acknowledges this explicitly, the questions of animality and of metontology bring his project of fundamental ontology to the brink of naturalism and to a radical blurring of the contours of the ontological difference.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

However, if Kant shrinks back from the abyss of metaphysics, Heidegger does so from the abyss of naturalism. I have argued that in the late twenties, *both* the distinction between Dasein's mode of being and that of other natural entities *and* the ontological difference come very close to collapsing under the threat of a naturalized conception of existence. Heidegger himself saw these problems, especially insofar as they present significant impassés to his project of fundamental ontology. But even though Heidegger gives up on fundamental ontology as an inadequate path towards the proper articulation of the question of being and the truth of being, he reverts back to the distinctions he came close to abandoning along the way. By the mid-thirties, Heidegger can once again claim that the question of being and the ontological difference cannot be understood as a mere factual occurrence: "The asking of this question is not, in relation to beings as such and as a whole, some arbitrary occurrence amid beings, such as the falling of raindrops" (GA 40: 6/5). In the same text Heidegger neutralizes the threat of animality, now going so far as to claim that animals have *neither* a world nor an environment, and are not simply poor in world: "World is always *spiritual* world. The animal has no world [*Welt*], nor any environment [*Umwelt*]" (GA 40: 48/47). This judgment is especially troubling given the fact that Heidegger's phenomenological exercise into the question of animality ends, by his own account, aporetically with the claim that it remains an open problem. And even after Heidegger came to question, through the project of metontology, whether the distinction between the mode of existence of Dasein and other natural entities is as stable as it was presented within the contours of fundamental ontology, he reverts back to such strong formulations as the following: "The human being alone exists. Rocks are, but they do not exist. Trees are, but they do not exist. Horses are, but they do not exist" (GA 9: 374/284). Much of what was problematized in the late twenties simply gets restated a decade later, without a proper justification of how these difficulties were somehow overcome.

What, then, are we to do with the inconsistency between Heidegger's brief contact with naturalistic themes and his repeated renunciation of thinking in any naturalistic terms? Is his reversion to strong versions of distinctions he had already contested and problematized a sign of a repressed danger that Heidegger's phenomenology does not want to face? By way of conclusion, I want to suggest a different way of reading the situation. While Heidegger did come into contact with questions that should have pushed his inquiry towards naturalistic themes, this remained an impossibility for Heidegger because he always understood naturalism as essentially *reductionistic*. We saw above how Heidegger understands positivism as a danger that "the ontological is denied altogether and explained away ontically" (GA 24: 466/327). The fear here is that if we are to think of our mode of existing as if it were factually the same as that of other entities, we would lose what is distinctive about it. We would therefore have to think our mode of being, our intentional acts, as well as our movements in space and time in terms of the efficient causality that governs physical interactions in naturalistic accounts. Because of this fear Heidegger resists any philosophy that reduces the ontological dimension to merely a different form of ontic interaction. This is the minimal sense in which Heidegger maintains that his philosophy must be consistent with transcendental idealism: "If the term idealism amounts to an understanding of the fact that being is never explicable by beings, but is always already the 'transcendental' for every being, then the sole correct possibility of a philosophical problematic lies in idealism" (GA 2: 275/SZ2: 208). However, what is missing here is a sustained argument to show that naturalism *must* reduce the ontological dimension to the ontic. Of course, one can give examples of eliminativist forms of materialism that would be guilty of such a reduction, such as those proposed by La Mettrie in the eighteenth century or Büchner in the nineteenth, and defended by Paul Churchland today.<sup>17</sup> But does it follow that all forms of naturalism must be reductionistic by necessity, and that idealism is the only way not to eliminate the ontological dimension?

Today, it is clear that the objectification and reductionism that Heidegger and Husserl saw as essential to scientific naturalism are characteristics of only one of the many options within a vast array of different types of naturalism. John Dupré, for example, has criticized the fundamental presuppositions of the mechanical and physicalistic views of natural science (essentialism, reductionism, and determinism) in order to offer an ontologically pluralist way of understanding nature while remaining a naturalist.<sup>18</sup> Nancy Cartwright has offered similar critiques, calling the scientific view “fundamentalism” and suggesting instead a pluralist account of causality and laws of nature.<sup>19</sup> The options that emerge from such historically and practically sensitive accounts of science undermine the either/or of transcendental idealism or naturalism. We too often believe that we must defend the sphere of meaning, intentional comportment, and intelligibility from naturalistic attacks because naturalism must be some form of physicalist reductionism, explaining away any understanding of being as if it were the collision of billiard balls. So we desperately attempt to delineate a sphere that is essentially different from the vicissitudes of natural change and contamination, as Heidegger does in claims such as these:

Because *this*, that we understand Being, does not just occur in our Dasein like the fact, say, that we possess earlobes of such and such a sort. Instead of earlobes, some other structure could form part of our hearing organ. That we understand Being is not just actual; it is also necessary [*Daß wir das Sein verstehen, ist nicht nur wirklich, sondern es ist notwendig*]. (GA 40: 90/88)

Against all the phenomenological clues that make the distinction between Dasein and nature and between facticity and factuality untenable in the final analysis, Heidegger maintains that the event of an understanding of being happens in a manner completely different from the contingent happening of a naturally evolved capacity. But to say that Dasein’s mode of being is not reducible to the way our earlobes evolve, or to the mode of being of a lizard, or that the mode of being of a lizard

is not reducible to the mode of being of stones, is just to say that entities exist in different ways, and to say it in a manner completely consistent with many forms of liberal naturalism.<sup>20</sup> As Cartwright insists, “we live in a dappled world, a world rich in different things, with different natures, behaving in different ways.”<sup>21</sup> Once we accept a pluralistic account of modes of being and the reality of non-reducible, higher-level domains, we do not need to maintain the absolute exceptionalism of Dasein’s mode of existence. In light of the problems of metontology and animality, Heidegger should accept, at least as question-worthy, the possibility that the facticity of Dasein is intricately related to the facticity of other natural entities. Our understanding of Being *could* then be understood to have a mode of contingent and factual existence, just as the size of our earlobes, or the capacities of our prefrontal cortex.

**ENDNOTES**

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- 1 Cf. J. Petitot, F. Varela, B. Pachoud, and J.-M. Roy (eds.), *Naturalizing Phenomenology: Issues in Contemporary Phenomenology and Cognitive Science* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). Some more traditional interpreters of Husserl see this project as doomed from the very start, since, as Lawlor claims, “without any question, the idea of naturalizing contradicts Husserl’s entire conception of phenomenology.” Leonard Lawlor, “Becoming and Auto-Affection: Part 2: Who Are We?” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, Vol. 30: 2 (2009), 220. A good summary of the methodological issues surrounding the transcendental aspects of phenomenology and their compatibility with naturalism can be found in Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: an Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 19–41.
- 2 Giorgio Agamben, “The Passion of Facticity,” in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, edited and translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 188–189.
- 3 Agamben, “The Passion of Facticity,” 189.
- 4 This distinction is reiterated several times throughout the text; see, for example, GA 2: 366–67/SZ2: 276: “Dasein, after all, always exists factically. [...] But the facticity of Dasein is essentially distinguished from the factuality of something objectively present. Existing Dasein does not encounter itself as something objectively present within the world.”

- 5 An excellent history and taxonomy of the term can be found in Geert Keil's "Naturalism," in *The Routledge Companion to Twentieth Century Philosophy*, edited by Dermot Moran (New York: Routledge, 2008), 254–307.
- 6 W. V. Quine, "Naturalism; or, Living within One's Means," in *Quintessence: Basic Readings from the Philosophy of W. V. Quine*, edited by Roger F. Gibson, Jr. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 281.
- 7 John Dupré, "How to be Naturalistic Without Being Simplistic in the Study of Human Nature," in *Naturalism and Normativity*, edited by Mario de Caro and David Macarthur (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 290.
- 8 It must be stressed that Heidegger, even in *Being and Time*, does not exclusively determine nature in terms of the *Vorhanden*. For other senses of nature operating in the early Heidegger, see my forthcoming "The Problem of Nature in Heidegger's Marburg Period," in *Heideggers Marburger Zeit: Themen, Argumente, Konstellationen* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2013). These other senses of nature, however, remain undeveloped in the early work and must be read against the grain of Heidegger's predominant identification of *Vorhandenheit* with nature as understood by the natural sciences.
- 9 There is, admittedly, a systematic instability in claiming that nature is identified with the *Vorhanden* (as we saw above) and this identification of nature with the ontic (entities), since the *Vorhanden* should only be one of many possible modes of being of entities. Heidegger is not entirely consistent in differentiating presence-at-hand from the bare undifferentiated entity-character of beings.
- 10 Joseph Rouse claims that Heidegger "joined naturalists in arguing, against his neo-Kantian, phenomenological, and logical positivist contemporaries, that philosophy must begin from and remain within the horizon of our 'natural' involvement with our surroundings in all its material and historical concreteness"; see

Joseph Rouse, in “Heidegger on Science and Naturalism,” *Continental Philosophy of Science*, edited by Gary Gutting (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 130. But Rouse is here collapsing the concreteness of Dasein’s being-in-the-world with the material and historical concreteness of other entities, and only in that sense could Heidegger be called a true naturalist. The distinction between facticity and factuality is precisely an attempt to differentiate those two forms of supposed “concreteness.” Additionally, Rose claims that “opponents of naturalism typically assign a distinctive subject-matter to philosophy, such as epistemology, logic, semantics, or transcendental consciousness, whereas naturalists tend to emphasize the continuity between philosophy and the sciences.” According to Rouse, Heidegger’s conception of fundamental ontology inclined more in the latter direction (*ibid.*, 130). But we have seen that Heidegger believes that the ontological difference is essential for maintaining the proper space of philosophy independent from the positive sciences, which is why I believe that Rouse is painting a picture of fundamental ontology that is too close to naturalism for Heidegger ever to accept.

11 Heidegger’s characterization here is of a general enterprise called “metaphysics” that has within it two complementary parts: “In their unity, fundamental ontology and metontology constitute the concept of metaphysics” (GA 26: 202/158). For an excellent, lucid account of the uncomfortable relationship between ontology, phenomenology, and metontology, see Steven Galt Crowell, *Husserl, Heidegger, and the Space of Meaning* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 222–43.

12 For an excellent summary of Heidegger’s account of animality, see William McNeill, “Life Beyond the Organism: Animal Being in Heidegger’s Freiburg Lectures, 1929–1930,” in *Animal Others: On Ethics, Ontology and Animal Life*, edited by Peter Steeves (Albany, SUNY Press, 1999), 197–248. For an almost exhaustive account of Heidegger’s engagement with the contemporary biological theory of his day and its effects on his understanding of



- organic life, see Thomas Kessel, *Phänomenologie des Lebendigen: Heideggers Kritik an den Leitbegriffen der neuzeitlichen Biologie* (Verlag Karl Alber, 2011).
- 13 See, for example, Matthew Calarco, who concludes that despite all the caveats, Heidegger's "discourse on animals constantly falls back into an anthropocentric framework, measuring animals against what he considers to be uniquely human capacities." Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 36.
- 14 Jacques Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, translated by David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 143–160.
- 15 However, even if animals do have some mode of comportment towards their world, or in the very least their environmental surroundings, Heidegger denies them the holistic understanding of being which is necessary for world-formation: "World is the manifestness of beings as such as a whole" (GA 29/30: 512/353). This letting-be of the whole is precisely what Heidegger, in his conclusions, denies to animality, determining its world-relation as "poor" in relation to Dasein: "Nothing of this kind is to be found in animality or in life in general" (GA 29/30: 398/274).
- 16 Andrew J. Mitchell, "Heidegger's Late Thinking of Animality: The End of World-Poverty," *Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle Annual*, Volume 1 (2011): 84.
- 17 Julien Offray de la Mettrie, *Man a Machine*, French-English Edition (Illinois: Open Court, 1912); Ludwig Büchner, *Force and Matter, or the Principles of the Natural Order of the Universe* (London: Asher and Co., 1884); Paul Churchland, "Eliminative Materialism and the Propositional Attitudes," *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. LXXVIII, no. 2 (1981): 67–90.
- 18 John Dupré, *The Disorder of Things: Metaphysical Foundations of the Disunity of Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

- 19 Nancy Cartwright, *The Dappled World: A Study of the Boundaries of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). In addition, see also the many practice-oriented and historically sensitive accounts of science found in Ian Hacking's *Representing and Intervening: Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) and Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison's *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007). The picture that emerges from such texts is a view of natural science that does not immediately elicit the fear of reductionism so prevalent in the transcendental aspects of phenomenology.
- 20 See the essays collected in Mario de Caro and David Macarthur's *Naturalism and Normativity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
- 21 Cartwright, *The Dappled World*, 1.