Truth and Finitude: Heidegger's Transcendental Existentialism

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In their lengthy and powerful appendix to Dreyfus's Being-in-the-World, Dreyfus and Rubin argue that the "existentialist" portions of Being and Time—those having to do with authenticity, falling, anxiety, death, conscience, guilt, and resoluteness—are an attempt to secularize Kierkegaard's notion of Religiousness A, while also incorporating certain features of his Religiousness B (though without the latter's essential risk or vulnerability). They conclude, however, that, for all its ingenuity, this attempt results in an inconsistent position and is therefore a failure.

It is undeniable that Heidegger drew most of these terms and much of what he says in their regard from Kierkegaard. I believe, nevertheless, that his uses of them, and the larger endeavor within which they fit, are farther removed from Kierkegaard's than Dreyfus and Rubin allow. In particular, they are deeply integrated with the explicit and overarching aim of Being and Time, which is to reawaken the question of being. For instance, Heidegger says about Being and Time in 1930:

It was never my idea to preach an "existentialist philosophy." Rather, I have been concerned with renewing the question of ontology—the most central question of western philosophy—the question of being.¹

Accordingly, I take it as a sign of the incompleteness (at best) of Dreyfus and Rubin's reading that they do not so much as mention the understanding of being until their last few pages, and then only...
in the context of discussing how Heidegger's position evolved in subsequent decades.

In the present setting, I will undertake neither to summarize the Dreyfus/Rubin interpretation nor to criticize it in any detail. Rather, in the space available, I will sketch an alternative approach that may better unify the various themes in *Being and Time* and perhaps thereby illuminate them severally. In so doing, I will give pride of place to Heidegger's extensive and central treatment of death, surely one of the most striking and puzzling "existentialist" notes in the book. (Indeed, it is so puzzling that the foremost exegetical question is what it's doing there at all—that is, in a technical treatise on the question of being.) Yet I will maintain that death, as Heidegger means it, is not merely relevant but in fact the fulcrum of his entire ontology.

Toward this end, it will be necessary to expound in outline that larger metaphysical project; and here it seems to me that Kant is at least as important and illuminating a predecessor as Kierkegaard. Specifically, Heidegger's inquiry into the disclosing of being as the condition of the possibility of comportment toward entities as entities is a direct descendant of Kant's inquiry into the forms of sensibility and understanding as conditions of the possibility of knowledge of objects as objects. In Kantian terms, this could be called the transcendental question of the possibility of objectivity. In Heideggerian terms, that would become the existential question of the possibility of truth.

I Traditional and Heideggerian Concepts

Heidegger is inevitably and self-consciously a follower in the western philosophical tradition. But he is also attempting to advance and hence transform that tradition. This effort entails generalizing and/or transforming various traditional concepts, as well as introducing new ones. The most basic of Heidegger's innovations—in the sense that it's what all the others turn on—is his "reawakening" of the question of being. So that will be my main topic in this introductory section. Before undertaking to explain what "being" means, however, I need to review briefly four of Heidegger's
other characteristic words—"entity", "comportment", "Dasein", and "disclosedness"—and how they relate to their traditional predecessors.

Entities are all and only what there is: everything that there is—no more, no less. Thus, if Quine were right that to be is to be the value of a bound variable, then entities would be all and only the values of bound variables. Now, the term "object" can be used in broader and narrower ways. Heidegger usually reserves it a recognizably Kantian sense: objects (Gegenstände) are the entities that can be known in explicit, theoretical judgments—paradigmatically, the knowledge attained in natural science. He also often calls such objects occurring (vorhandene) entities. But, according to Heidegger, not all entities are occurring objects. Two other sorts of entity are discussed at length in Being and Time: (i) available (zuhandene) entities, which include tools and other equipment and paraphernalia; and (ii) existing entities (in Heidegger's proprietary sense of "existence"), which include Dasein and such "Dasein-like" entities as sciences and languages. Thus, all objects are entities, but not all entities are objects. So Heidegger's term is a generalization of Kant's.

Corresponding to that generalization is another. Heidegger is concerned with the possibility of comportment toward entities (as entities). Husserl (following Brentano) had already generalized theoretical knowledge to intentionality, which includes other cognitive attitudes besides knowing, such as those characteristic of action and perception. But Heidegger maintains that everyday uses of equipment and interactions with other people aren't usually cognitive at all, even in Husserl's broad sense. Yet they are still ways of having to do with entities as entities—that is, not just interacting with things physically (as do sticks and stones), or even just actively and sentiently (as do animals), but in some way that involves understanding them as what they are. Thus, he speaks instead of comportment-toward, which is even more general than Husserlian intentionality (though still not so general as to include whatever it is that animals do).²

The generalization from intentionality to comportment-toward is important not merely because the latter encompasses a wider range of relevant phenomena, but also and mainly because, according to Heidegger, the further phenomena that it embraces are more basic.
Comportment—toward is not exclusively or even primarily a mental phenomenon, but rather, in the first place and usually, an active and competent “taking care of business.” Cognitive comportments (that is, intentional “attitudes” — including but not limited to knowing) are a special case that is not only different from but also founded upon noncognitive comportments—such as skillful engagements. Thus, the generalization is not made simply in the interest of thoroughness, but rather in the interest of addressing what is most fundamental.

Dasein is Heidegger’s word for what essentially distinguishes the human from the nonhuman (whether animate or inanimate). This is not definitive of Dasein, but only an indication of its evident scope; in other words, it is not ruled out that there may be nonhuman Dasein (perhaps on other planets), but we don’t know of any. It is definitive of Dasein that it is the entity that understands being, hence can comport itself toward entities as entities. (This is not the most basic definition of Dasein, but it follows from it.) Thus, Dasein is a distant successor of the logos and the immortal soul, and a not-so-distant successor of the transcendental subject or spirit. (As it happens, I disagree with most readers of Heidegger about the individuation of Dasein; in particular, I don’t think there is a separate and unique Dasein for each person. But that won’t matter for most of what follows; so I won’t discuss it except in passing.)

Dasein’s essential characteristic, as the entity that understands being, is what Heidegger calls disclosedness. I am going to argue that disclosedness is a successor, albeit fundamentally transformed, of Kant’s transcendental apperception. Apperception, for Kant, is consciousness of an object that is, or at least could be, conscious of itself as conscious of that object. Apperceptive consciousness is the consciousness that is distinctive, and prerequisite to the possibility, of synthetic judgment—hence of empirical knowledge. In particular, the fact that it could be conscious of itself in being conscious of an object is prerequisite to the possibility of its being conscious of the object as an object at all. This is why apperception is transcendental.

There are many conspicuous and important differences between disclosedness and apperception. (I will mention several in a footnote to a later passage.) The reason that I nevertheless want to emphasize
their kinship is that disclosedness has the same sort of interdependent duality in what it is “of” that apperception has. Any disclosing is at once a disclosing of Dasein itself and a disclosing of the being of entities. It could not be either without being also the other. But, as we shall see, disclosing the being of entities is the condition of the possibility of any comportment toward them as entities; and, moreover, this depends on the fact that it is always also a self-disclosing. Therefore, disclosedness too is transcendental, and for a structurally similar reason.

One disanalogy, however, is quite fundamental. Whereas apperception, as self-conscious, is conscious also of objects, disclosedness, as self-disclosing, does not disclose also entities, but rather the being of entities. This is not a minor difference. If there is any single thesis that can be picked out as Heidegger’s most emphatic, basic, and original, it is this: “The being of entities “is” not itself an entity” (SZ, 6). This expresses what he calls “the ontological difference”—the difference between being and entities. It is the central thought of Heideggerian philosophy.

Kant could not have seen this profound difference between apperception and disclosedness because he did not thematize the difference between being and entities. For the same reason, he could not have raised the question of being. Heidegger claims that, apart from a few dark glimpses, all of his predecessors since the earliest Greeks have forgotten the question of being (and he has an account of how and why that happened). But he also claims that the disclosedness of being (as self-disclosing too) is the condition of the possibility of any comportment toward entities as entities. That is why the question of being now needs to be reawakened—the principal aim of Being and Time. Thus, disclosedness lies at the heart of the whole project.

It is all too easy to get baffled or intimidated—not to say exasperated—by the way Heidegger talks about being. But that’s not necessary; the basic idea is in fact fairly straightforward. The being of entities is that in terms of which they are intelligible as entities. The qualifier “as entities” (as I am using it) is short for this: with regard to the fact that they are (at all) and with regard to what they are. Understanding an entity as an entity—and there is no other way of
understanding it—means understanding it in its that-it-is and its what-ites. Disclosing the being of entities amounts to letting them become accessible in this two-fold intelligibility—that is, as phenomena that are understood. When taken with sufficient generality, a pretty good colloquial paraphrase for "disclosing the being of" is making sense of.

I can illustrate and clarify this by reciting a familiar special case. Consider the entities that are investigated by fundamental mathematical physics—electrons, quarks, photons, the properties or states they can have, the basic forces by which they interact, and so on. These are all physical entities (in a specific sense of "physical"); that is, they are things that there are, according to fundamental physics. Now, in terms of what are these entities intelligible as entities that are and as what they are? Obviously, they are intelligible via physical theory, especially the basic laws that specify how they can and must relate to one another. For instance, what the electromagnetic force is—its essence—makes sense in terms of, and only in terms of, the laws of electromagnetism; and so do electric charge, magnetic moment, and what have you. More subtly, perhaps, but just as clearly: that there is such an entity—its actuality—is intelligible as its current, particular standing in just such relationships, at determinate locations in space and time. In sum, the being of the physical—the essence and actuality of physical entities—is spelled out by the laws of physics.

This being, in terms of which those entities are intelligible as entities, is disclosed by Dasein—more particularly, by what might be called physicist-Dasein. (On my controversial reading, physicist-Dasein is not individual physicists, or something that they all "have," but rather the scientific theory and practice of physics that they develop and carry out; but never mind that.) We, physicists and their disciples, comport ourselves toward physical entities (as physical entities) in terms of what is thus disclosed—that is, in terms of their being. No one could observe or measure an electron or an electric field (or even talk about them) as such, except in terms of that being, as spelled out by the relevant laws. It is only in such terms that they so much as make sense to us as entities at all. In other words, disclosure of the being of the physical is the condition of the possibility of comportment toward physical entities as physical entities.
This example of physics and physical being is mentioned by Heidegger (SZ, 9ff., 362ff.), but not elaborated. On the other hand, he discusses the being of equipment in considerable detail. Everyday equipment is primarily understood in the skillful mastery of its proper use—what we might call a "hands on" intelligibility. What an item of equipment is (its "essence") is what it is properly to be used for—what Heidegger calls its employment (Bewandtnis), which is tantamount to its equipmental role. Its "actuality" is what he calls its availability (Zuhandenheit)—that is, its current, particular capacity to be so used. These two, role and availability, make up the being of equipment, in terms of which it is intelligible as equipment at all. Our primary mode of comportment toward equipment as equipment is, of course, using it as the equipment that it is; but there are other modes, such as making it, repairing it, looking for it, talking about it, and so on. The condition of the possibility of any of these modes of comportment is that the equipment make sense to us as equipment—which just is the disclosedness of its being (by lay or professional Dasein).

Now, physical being—physicalness, we might call it—is clearly not itself a physical entity. It's not a physical particle, a physical property, a physical force, a physical interaction, or anything of the sort. Likewise, equipmental being—equipmentality, we might call it—is not an item of equipment. Are physicalness and equipmentality entities of any sort? Heidegger insists that they are not—they're not anything that there is whatsoever. This is precisely the point of the ontological difference.

The idea that being "is" not anything at all can be hard to get used to. It's even hard to express: given the point, one strictly shouldn't even use the copula "is" to talk about being—yet, the copula is built into the very structure of ordinary language (much as the quantifier is built into the structure of predicate logic). Accordingly, philosophers have tried to say that, although physicalness isn't a physical entity (or equipmentality an equipmental entity), they—and with them various other sorts of being—must be entities of some further and somehow "special" sort. Perhaps the being of ordinary entities is an "abstract," "ideal," or even "divine" entity. But, then, what of the being of these entities (in terms of which alone they could
be intelligible and accessible); Nor is a possible regress the only problem with such traditional suggestions. Another that Heidegger is concerned to avoid is the implication that they make being somehow eternal. (It's no accident that the title of his book is *Being and Time.*) But the real payoff for recognizing the ontological difference and reawakening the question of being will lie in the insights it affords us into ourselves and our comportments toward entities as entities.

So far, I have mainly been introducing some Heideggerian terminology, including some of the relationships within it and between it and traditional terms. Now it is time to get down to business and see how these things really work.

II Disclosing Being and the Grounding of Ontical Truth

We comport ourselves toward entities as entities. From one point of view, the whole question is what that means and how it is possible. Heidegger calls such comportments ontical comportments, because they have to do with entities. This is to distinguish them from ontological comportments, which have to do rather with being. Disclosing being is an ontological comportment. Discovering entities is the corresponding term for ontical comportments. What we want to see is how disclosure makes discovery possible.

Discovery presupposes a species of truth—what we can call ontical truth (truth regarding entities—which is the only sort of truth most of us ever consider). This is implied in the pivotal qualifier "as entities": it means that ontical comportments must undertake to get the entities in some sense "right." The feasibility and requirement of ontical truth is what distinguishes human (ontical) comportments from the behavior of animals and inanimate things. Thus, in wanting to see how disclosure makes discovery possible, we want to see how it makes ontical truth possible. I will call this issue the grounding of ontical truth; and I will structure my exposition of Heidegger's transcendental philosophy as a three-stage response to it—that is, a three-stage grounding of ontical truth.

The first stage (the remainder of this section) spells out in more detail why discovery of entities presupposes disclosure of their being.
In so doing, it shows also, though only in a preliminary way, how discoveries are beholden to the entities they discover (the “feasibility” of ontical truth.) Stage two (section 3) shows how disclosure of being is inseparable from self-disclosure, and thereby shows also, though again only in a preliminary way, how ontical truth is binding on Dasein (the “requirement” of it). Finally, the third and deepest stage in the grounding (sections 4 and 5) will reveal why and how all of this depends on the so-called existentialist elements in Being and Time—especially the doctrine of death. In particular, it will fill in what is missing from the first two stages, in virtue of which they are each only “preliminary”. (It must be conceded that Heidegger himself does not lay out the stages in quite this way, or develop any of them quite fully. But he does say more as the stages get deeper and more difficult, and is particularly fulsome at stage three).

In Heidegger’s analysis, discovery and disclosure each have three moments—understanding, telling, and sofoundingness. The fact that they each have this same structure evinces the fact that they are closely related phenomena; indeed, we could as well say (though Heidegger does not) that discovery just is ontical disclosure.

Heidegger’s basic conception of understanding is competence or know-how. Thus, everyday ontical understanding is knowing how to use, manage, or otherwise cope with everyday entities and situations. For instance, understanding hammers is knowing how to hammer with them, understanding a language is knowing how to converse in it, understanding people is knowing how to interact and get along with them, and so on. Even everyday self-understanding is characterized as one’s “ability-to-be” who one is—that is, to carry out one’s various personal, social, and professional roles. This is not to deny that there can also be theoretical or intellectual understanding; but these are seen as dependent upon “practical” understanding in at least two ways. First, as many have pointed out, theoretical understanding is almost always derivative (perhaps via several intermediaries) from prior pretheoretical understandings, themselves rooted in practical mastery and difficulties. And second, even grasping a theory itself involves technical mastery of various formalisms, methods, vocabulary, models, and such.
“Telling” is my translation of “Rede”, a word which usually just means “talk”. But Heidegger introduces Rede as the foundation of language, and then explicitly defines it as the articulation of intelligibility (where “articulate” carries its original connotations of joints and separations between things). Now, “tell” comes from the same root as “talk” and often means much the same—as in telling others about something, telling them what to do, telling a story, and the like. But it also has other uses that have to do more with distinguishing, identifying, and even counting—such as telling apart, telling whether, telling what’s what, telling one when you see one, telling how many, and so on. These latter senses clearly echo the image of articulation, and are plausibly prerequisite to the possibility of putting things into words. So, for example, in skillfully hammering, I can tell whether I am swinging hard enough, whether the nail is going in straight, or whether the board is splitting; and these distinctions articulate what, in knowing how to hammer, I understand. And they also underlie my ability to talk sensibly about hammering—at least insofar as I know what I’m talking about.

“Sofindingness” is my contrived rendition of Heidegger’s contrived word “Befindlichkeit”. This bizarre term names the feature of human life that it is always responsive to what matters in its current, concrete situation—it finds the situation as thus mattering to it. For instance, if I am absorbed in hammering, I will be responsive to the heft and recoil of the hammer, the fit and integrity of the boards, the position and angle of the nail; these all matter to the hammering. But I’m likely to be oblivious of the sawdust on the floor or the flicker of the lamp (unless, of course, they interfere with the work). Moods are Heidegger’s favorite example of a response to what matters in a situation, at least in part because they are so pervasive, intrusive, and uninvited. A mood makes manifest not only (i) how things are going (here and now), but also (ii) the way in which this matters, and (iii) the extent to which it just has to be accepted (put up with). But I think that sofindingness must also include more than Heidegger explicitly mentions, such as the fluid involved rapport of a craftsman or athlete with the current work or play situation, and even the attentive responsiveness that is prerequisite to “disinterested” observation.
These general characterizations of understanding, telling, and so-findingness have been neutral between discovery (ontical) and disclosure (ontological); but the examples have all been ontical. What would be examples of ontological understanding, telling and so-findingness—that is, of disclosure properly so called? Heidegger is perfectly clear about the essential point: understanding, he says, always projects entities onto their possibilities. Ontical know-how masters entities as they are or are not in fact. Ontological know-how masters entities as they could or could-not be. In other words, disclosing the being of entities involves grasping them in terms of a distinction between what is possible and impossible for them.

This should not come as a complete surprise. After all, specifying what is possible and impossible for physical entities is precisely what the laws of physics do. (Indeed, they specify the possible relationships among the values of physical variables so precisely—that is, strictly—that it is often easier to think of them as specifying what is necessary; but that's just another way of saying the same thing). So, understanding physical entities in terms of these laws is projecting them onto their possibilities. Projecting entities onto their possibilities is the same as projecting them onto their being. (Heidegger uses both expressions). So, the ability to project entities onto their possibilities is the ontological know-how that is the understanding moment of disclosedness.

Notice that, for sciences like physics, the essential connection between understanding and possibility is a commonplace in the philosophy of science, even though it is expressed in a different vocabulary. The usual focus is explanation; but explaining something (perhaps something already known) is nothing other than a way of rendering it intelligible. And standard models of explanation always involve subsumption under lawlike generalizations—where "lawlikeness" amounts to some sort of modal force (necessity or possibility).

The possibilities and impossibilities for equipmental entities are not so strictly definable as for physical entities; but they are just as fundamental to understanding. What is possible for an item of equipment is how it can properly be used and how it ought properly to function in such use. Thus, stirring paint with a hammer is ruled out, and
so is a hammer that shatters when it hits a nail. Of course, neither of these is "physically" impossible; but they are ruled out for this equipment as the equipment that it is. Clearly, equipmental possibilities and impossibilities are in some way normative. Yet, just as with the physical, the equipmental is intelligible as such in terms of—as projected onto—what is possible and impossible for it in the relevant sense. We can see, therefore, that standard accounts of scientific explanation are effectively special cases of Heidegger's more general formulation.¹

Ontological understanding, like any understanding, is essentially integrated with a telling (articulation of intelligibility) and a sofindingness (responsiveness to what matters in the current situation). Manifestly, the articulation of ontological intelligibility is at least making the many determinate distinctions between the possible and the impossible for the entities of the relevant sort.² Without these distinctions, the ability to project would be vacuous. In effect, the ability to project is nothing other than the ability to "apply" these distinctions in particular and specified kinds of cases. Just as clearly, those distinctions would come to nothing—would not in fact be drawn—if there were in general no ability to "apply" them. So, the understanding and telling that belong to disclosedness belong essentially together.

Sofindingness is responsiveness to what matters in the current situation. What is it that matters for ontological sofindingness—the sofindingness that belongs properly to disclosedness? What matters is that the entities, as ontically discovered, be in fact possible—that is, not impossible—according to the understanding of their being. I will explain this point in a way that is not explicit in Heidegger's texts, but lies, I believe, just behind the scenes. It is quite fundamental to the first stage in the grounding of ontical truth.³

If ontical truth, "getting the entities right," is to be a distinctive possibility and aim of ontical comportments, then there must be a difference between those comportments that are true in this sense and those that are not, a difference that depends on the entities themselves, and that the comportments undertake to be on one side of. The effect is that comportments must be, in a distinctive way, beholden to the entities toward which they are comportments. Thus,
apart from all other questions of success or failure in a comportment, there is this distinctive question of success or failure: has the comportment "got the entity right"?

This will all seem less cryptic if we revert for a moment to more familiar territory. Suppose the comportment in question is a description of the state of some physical particle. Such a comportment (description) might succeed or fail in any number of ways: in impressing the graduate students, in securing a grant, in adhering to the grammar of English, or whatever. But there is a distinctive kind of success that descriptions as such must aim at—one that depends on the described entity itself. In our example, it depends on whether there is such a particle and whether it is in that state. This amounts to saying, of course, that a description as such undertakes to be correct or true (truth in the sense of correctness). Thus, truth, in the sense of descriptive correctness, is a special case of "getting the entities themselves right."

Heidegger uses the word "truth" for a more general phenomenon of which descriptive correctness is a special case. For example, using a hammer properly as a hammer is also true in this more general sense—it discovers the hammer as an entity and "gets it right." He also says of such true comportments (including but not limited to correct descriptions) that they "let entities be," "let them show themselves," or "set them free." The idea is that entities first lie hidden, either because they have not yet been noticed, or because they have since been somehow disguised or even forgotten. True comportments bring them out of this hiddenness—out into the open. It is no coincidence that the terms "discover" and "disclose" both have connotations of unhiding and bringing into the open.

Now, if there is to be a significant distinction between "getting an entity right" and failing to do so, there must be some way—some feasible and nonarbitrary way—of telling it in particular cases. For instance, for a descriptive comportment (judgment or assertion), there must be some way of telling whether that description is true (correct) of the entity described—not in every instance, of course, but as a rule. Comportments in themselves, however, do not wear their ontical truth on their sleeves. Therefore, something else, some further comportment or comportments, must be involved in telling
whether they are true or not. So the question at this point resolves into these: how can some comportments impugn the ontical truth of others? And, supposing they can, how can the choice among them be nonarbitrary?

Comportments can impugn the ontical truth of others if their respective discoverings of entities as entities are mutually incompatible. Hence, such incompatibility must itself make sense and be tellable (identifiable) in practice. In general, discoverings of entities are incompatible just in case the entities themselves, as (ostensibly) discovered, would be impossible. And this, at long last, is why the difference between the possible and the impossible matters—matters, in particular, to the aim of ontical truth. Ontological sofindingness is responsiveness to ostensible impossibilities in the current situation as something that matters.

More specifically, the response must be a refusal to accept any current apparent impossibility. Impossibilities matter by way of being unacceptable. This is familiar enough: if you discover both that your son is now at school and now at home, then something must be wrong, for he cannot be two places at once. Likewise, if you discover that something is a hammer but shatters against a nail, or that something is an electric current but generates no magnetic field. Since that would be impossible, something is wrong. So, you have to ask: what is wrong? You double-check, reexamine your means of discovery, find alternative ways to discover the same entities, seek confirmation from other people, and so on. Soon enough, other things being equal, it becomes clear which of your earlier apparent discoveries was wrong—was merely an appearance—and perhaps also why. By such perfectly ordinary procedures, the choice among the incompatible comportments becomes nonarbitrary. To put the emphasis another way, these procedures make feasible a nonarbitrary distinction between (mere) appearance and reality—that is, the ability to get the entities themselves right.

But that means we have shown how comportments can be beholden to entities—that is, can be comportments toward entities as entities. This, however is just to show how they can undertake to be ontically true. Thus, ontological sofindingness, as the refusal to accept ostensible impossibilities, belongs together with ontological
understanding (projecting entities onto their possibilities) and ontological telling (articulating the distinction between the possible and the impossible) in making true ontical comportments possible. And that is exactly what we wanted to show: disclosing the being of entities is a condition of the possibility of discovering them as entities.

In this first stage of the grounding of ontical truth it has been shown why any discovering of entities presupposes a disclosing of their being. In particular, it has been shown (though only in a preliminary way) how ontical comportments can be—feasibly and nonarbitrarily—beholden to the entities toward which they are comportments. This beholdenness belongs to the essential aim of any comportment toward an entity as an entity—namely, that it get the entity itself "right." In other words, beholdenness to entities belongs to ontical truth as such; and it is this that has been grounded in the disclosing of being.

III Disclosing Dasein and Ontological Responsibility

Whenever any entities are discovered, they are discovered by Dasein. It is Dasein that, in comporting itself toward entities, undertakes to get them right. Thus, really, it is Dasein that is "beholden" in any beholdenness to entities. This beholdenness of Dasein must also belong to any adequate account of ontical truth. To avoid confusion, I will refer to this second essential side of beholdenness as the bindingness of ontical truth—namely, its bindingness on Dasein. Explaining the essential bindingness of ontical truth is the second stage in its grounding.

As I mentioned at the outset, disclosedness is analogous to apperception in two ways: first, it is the condition of the possibility of comportment toward entities as entities; and second, it is at once a disclosing of the being of those entities and a self-disclosing. It is to the latter of these two parallels that we now turn. We have just seen what disclosing being means, and how it is prerequisite to ontical comportments toward entities as entities. But what does that have to do with self-disclosing? In this section I will give an initial account of self-disclosing and then explain why it is and must be integral with disclosing the being of entities. And that will enable us to see (though
again in only a preliminary way) how ontical truth is binding on Dasein.

In the first place and usually, Dasein does not “discover” itself by, say, using, observing, or measuring itself. Rather, in each case, it simply lives its life—mostly by taking care of its daily business. (“Dasein in each case” means each individual person, whether or not one accepts my controversial suggestion that Dasein as such is not individual or personal.) As Heidegger says, we are what we do (SZ, 126, 239). That is, in each case, we comport ourselves toward ourselves as ourselves (that is, as the entities that we are) by living our lives as our lives. As with any comportment toward entities as entities, we do so in terms of a disclosing of being—our being. This disclosing too has the form of an articulated sofinding understanding in terms of possibilities—our possibilities. In seeing what this means, we will see why Dasein’s self-disclosing is inseparable from a disclosing of the being of other entities.7

Dasein’s possibilities are ways in which it can live—what Heidegger calls its ability-to-be. In the first place and usually, these are individual capacities that are governed and defined by social norms and practices, as further specified in each case by individual social roles. Thus, “we” (end-of-millennium westerners, say) can use money to buy food and clothing of our choosing, cannot run around in public without clothing, must pay taxes, and need licenses if we are to operate automobiles. If we are academics, we can (and are “expected to”) teach classes, assign work to students, and evaluate that work; on the other hand, we cannot issue traffic citations (unless we are also police officers). And I, in particular, can and am expected to teach particular classes (with a certain leeway in how I teach them), at particular times, and with particular students. It is in such terms that we understand ourselves as entities and as the entities that we are—that is, as who we are.

These are all worldly possibilities. They are possibilities for an entity whose basic make-up is being-in-the-world, which means (among other things) being in the midst of entities, and comporting ourselves toward them. I could not be a teacher, for instance, without comporting myself toward students, lessons, assignments, and the like. Thus, in knowing how to be me, I must know how to
deal with the entities amidst which I work and live—indeed, these are often just two ways of looking at the same know-how. But that’s not all: since what I can and am expected to do (in the roles onto which I project myself) depends on which entities there are and what they are, my comportments toward those entities must be ontically true (at least mostly). My self-understanding, therefore, presupposes that I understand the being of the entities amidst which I live.

In fact, the connection is closer yet. My self-understanding is my ability-to-be who I am—the skillful know-how that enables me to project myself onto my own possibilities (as a teacher, for instance) and, in those terms, to live my life. But, if my self-understanding depends on my understanding of the being of other entities, then I must also be able to project those entities onto their possibilities. This ability, therefore, belongs essentially to my ability-to-be me. My ability to project those entities onto their possibilities is not merely another possibility onto which I project myself, but is rather part of my ability to project myself onto my own possibilities at all. In other words, my self-understanding literally incorporates an understanding of the being of other entities. And since, conversely, there could also be no projection of any entities onto their possibilities if that were not something that someone is able to do, neither self-understanding nor understanding of being is possible except insofar as they are integrated with one another.

Obviously the same goes for articulative telling. Projection onto possibilities, whether possibilities for one’s own living or possibilities for the entities around one, is for nought if the respective possibilities are not distinguished from impossibilities—that is, from something that is ruled out. Making such distinctions is the relevant telling; and there would be nothing to tell if there were no projections. Therefore, since the corresponding understandings are possible only as integrated, so are the tellings.

Sofindingness is more interesting. In understanding myself as a teacher, I project myself onto the possibilities that go with that role—possibilities that I distinguish from impossibilities. Moreover, I am responsive to that distinction as something that matters in each current situation, specifically in that impossibilities are not acceptable to me. That’s the sofindingness that belongs to self-disclosing.
But, since I am the entity that I'm comporting myself toward, what matters is whether I am “possible” or not—which is to say, whether what I am doing is ruled out or not. For instance, in comporting myself toward myself as a teacher, it matters to me that, so far as I can manage, I do everything that's prescribed to me as a teacher and nothing that's proscribed. Stretching the terms a bit, we could even call such propriety the “ontical truth” of being a teacher.

Now, we saw earlier that comportments toward entities as entities undertake to be ontically true, because impossibilities are unacceptable. In the context of self-disclosing, however, what I undertake is to do what I am supposed to—that is, never to act in a way that is ruled out; that's what matters in this sofindingness. But a responsiveness that finds what is ruled out in the responding entity's own actions to be unacceptable to that entity itself is responsibility. So, for instance, one can say of a hammer or other worldly entity that is found to be impossible (ruled out) that it is unacceptable; but one cannot say that it is irresponsible. By contrast, one can and does say exactly that of a teacher—or any other person—who is out of line in terms of his or her role. Therefore, the sofindingness that belongs to self-disclosing amounts to responsibility.

But, as we have also seen, performing as one is supposed to in a worldly role always involves comportments toward entities as entities, comportments that need, that is, mostly to be ontically true. I cannot carry out my responsibilities as a teacher, for instance, if I cannot reliably tell whether I have my notes with me, whether I am in the right classroom, and a host of other such things. Telling reliably means mostly truly. It follows that the responsibilities implied by self-disclosing include the responsibility to, in a broad sense, tell the truth.

This responsibility does not extend merely to everyday comportments toward, say, equipment or other people, but rather to all ontical comportments. Suppose, for example, a physicist discovered an entity that, according to certain experimental results, appeared to violate some law of physics (that is, was impossible according to that law). How should this physicist, qua physicist, respond to such a discovery? Well, in real life, there may be many reasonable alternatives; but nonchalant indifference is not among them. No one who
simply didn’t give a damn whether experimental results accord with theory could be a proper scientist—it would be scientifically irresponsible. But this is just to say that every scientist as such must acknowledge the scientific responsibility (perhaps in concert with the larger scientific community) to see that such matters are cleared up, that is, to figure out what’s true.

Since getting the entities right depends on the disclosure of their being, the ontological sofindingness that belongs to the disclosure of being is likewise not merely responsiveness but responsibility. That is, finding impossible entities unacceptable is not just a response but a responsibility—a further part of the responsibility that Dasein in each case has as self-disclosing. And, moreover, there clearly could be no such responsibility except as part of Dasein’s self-responsibility. In other words, the sofindingness of self-disclosure and that of the disclosure of being are inseparable. Inasmuch as this responsibility is responsibility for ontical truth, it can also be called ontological responsibility. (Ontical responsibilities are just one’s ordinary duties and the like).

With this conclusion, we have shown for each of understanding, telling, and sofindingness that, as belonging respectively to self-disclosing and disclosing the being of other entities, they are inseparable. But, since these three moments are jointly constitutive of disclosing, to have shown that for each of them is to have shown it for disclosing itself. In other words, we have shown that disclosing as such is at once a self-disclosing and a disclosing of the being of entities. This was the first goal of the present section. (Among other things, it completes the justification of the analogy with transcendental apperception.)

And the second goal now follows easily. Responsibility is intrinsically a kind of bindingness: one is “bound” by one’s responsibilities. Therefore, in showing that Dasein is responsible for ontical truth—for “telling the truth”—we have shown (at least in a preliminary way) how ontical truth is binding on Dasein. And that completes the second stage in its grounding. What remains is to see why these first two stages have only been “preliminary”; and second to supply what is still needed for a full grounding of ontical truth. That will take us into the thick of Heidegger’s “existentialism.”