

# Two Meanings of 'Is'

## *Heidegger's Horizon and the Crossing Point*

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### **Note on Relation to Previous Work**

This essay continues themes developed in earlier work on presence, temporality, and ontological grounding, but it is not a repetition of those arguments. Where the previous essay ranged broadly across phenomenology, metaphysics, and theological reflection, the present study narrows its focus to a single interlocutor: Martin Heidegger. Its purpose is to examine, in a more concentrated form, whether Heidegger's account of Being as disclosed through temporality sufficiently addresses the distinct question of ontological ground.

### **Introduction**

There is a question so fundamental that Western philosophy spent centuries walking around it rather than through it. Martin Heidegger named it the *Seinsfrage* – the question of Being – and was right that the tradition had largely forgotten to ask it. What does the 'is' in any statement of existence actually mean? Not what things *are*, which is the business of science and logic, but what the '*is*' is doing – what it points to, what grounds it, what holds it open at all.

This essay argues that Heidegger correctly recovered the question of Being, but temporal horizon does not suffice as ontological ground.

The argument proceeds in two stages: first, granting Heidegger's phenomenology of finite existence its full weight; second, asking

whether phenomenological horizon suffices as an account of ontological ground. Heidegger's project is phenomenological rather than causal – it analyzes the meaning of Being as disclosed through Dasein rather than asking what metaphysically sustains Being. The present critique does not dispute this as a phenomenological project. It asks a prior question: whether the conditions of disclosure can also serve as the conditions of persistence. Intelligibility and sustenance are not the same problem, and an account that addresses the first does not automatically resolve the second.

Heidegger's answer to his own question was time. Being becomes intelligible, he argued, only against the horizon of temporality. The human being – *Dasein*, the being for whom Being is a question – understands existence because it is radically temporal: thrown into a world it did not choose, always projecting forward, always already stretched between birth and death. The horizon that gives Being its weight and urgency is finitude. It is the awareness of *Being-toward-death* that wrenches Dasein out of its comfortable drift into the anonymous *das Man* and forces it into authentic existence – owning its ownmost possibility, which no one else can take from it and no one else can face in its place.

This is a genuine achievement. Heidegger's account of ecstatic temporality – the way Dasein exists not as a point in time but as a stretched structure of *having-been*, *present*, and *about-to-be* – illuminates the finite human condition with a power that no prior philosophy had quite matched. The existential weight he restores to ordinary life, to the moment of decision, to the irreversibility of what has been – these are real observations about what it means to exist in time, and no serious engagement with the question of Being can afford to bypass them.

But the framework proposed here departs from Heidegger at a precise structural point. It does not deny temporality as a structure of human experience. It denies only that temporality, by itself, can serve as the ultimate sustaining condition of Being. Heidegger's ecstatic analysis remains valid as a description of how finite existence is *structured*. What it leaves unaddressed is the question any account of intelligibility also faces at its foundation: what makes what is intelligible *available at all*. The question of disclosure does not eliminate the question of ontological persistence. To explain how Being shows up to Dasein is not yet to explain what keeps showing up from ceasing.

Before proceeding, a terminological note. "Horizon" and "center" are heuristic terms for two distinct explanatory models, not poetic images. *Horizon* names the model of limit-based intelligibility: Being becomes meaningful against the edge of finite existence, and

the edge is death. *Center* names the model of source-based actualization: Being is grounded not at the limit of the curve but at the invariant point through which the curve must continuously pass. The choice between them is the choice between two accounts of what the 'is' ultimately requires.

Heidegger's 'is' is horizon-based. It radiates outward from Dasein toward the limit of death, acquiring its meaning from finitude, from the edge of existence against which everything else receives its outline. The movement is always forward along the surface of time, toward a horizon that confers urgency on the whole trajectory. But a horizon on a curved surface is not a boundary. It is a visual effect produced by curvature. A ship that sails toward it does not approach a limit — the surface curves beneath the ship and the horizon simply reforms ahead. No movement along the surface ever reaches the basis of Being. Because the basis, if there is one, cannot itself be on the surface. Horizon explains why finite existence feels urgent. It does not explain what keeps finite existence actual.

If horizon accounts for intelligibility but not sustenance, another model is required.

The 'is' proposed here is center-based. It does not radiate toward a limit; it converges toward a point. That point is the Now — the invariant condition of actualization at which possibilities become determinate events. To speak of "the Now" is not to claim a measurable slice of clock-time. Every temporal description already presupposes a point of actual occurrence; the Now names that presupposition — the condition that every temporal event requires but no temporal event can explain. The Now is not a brief duration. It has no thickness. It is what makes duration possible. And it does not move. What we experience as the flow of time is the succession of events continuously actualized within it. The Now remains. What passes is what passes through it.

This changes what the 'is' means structurally.

For Heidegger, the 'is' is always already in transit — constituted by thrownness, projection, and the anticipation of an end. It is an "is" defined by what it is moving toward and what it has been thrown from. Inherently ecstatic: standing outside itself into past and future, defined by the stretch between what it has been and what it is about to be. The deepest moment of this 'is' is solitary — Dasein owning its ownmost possibility in radical isolation, because that possibility cannot be delegated or shared. Authenticity, for Heidegger, is finally a face turned toward one's own death with open eyes, and the encounter is irreducibly singular.

For this framework, the 'is' is actualized at the crossing point – and the crossing point is not a moment of solitary confrontation with finitude but the ontological center of maximum openness. It is where the will meets what grounds it, where the capacity for genuine decision resides, where return is structurally possible at every moment. The deepest moment of the 'is' is not isolation. It is intersection – when two presences meet within the one shared Now and something occurs that cannot be reduced to information exchanged or roles performed. Selfhood is not merely privately owned possibility; it is capacity for presence, and presence reaches fuller actuality in encounter than in isolation. A being constituted by relation is not less itself in that relation – it is more fully what it is.

More decisively: Heidegger's account cannot answer the question of what holds the Now open. If Being is grounded in temporal horizon, and the horizon is itself a feature of finite Dasein, then the chain of dependencies terminates in contingency – in a being that is thrown, did not choose its existence, and will end. The 'is' of a contingent being cannot serve as its own source. A chain of contingent states, however long, does not constitute a ground. It constitutes a question about what grounds the chain.

Brute contingency remains a logical possibility: one may simply accept that reality exists as a given fact, without further grounding. But brute contingency functions as a stopping point rather than an explanation. It names the place where inquiry ceases rather than the place where it finds what it is looking for. The present argument does not claim that a self-sustaining ground can be derived by logical necessity. It asks whether a more sufficient account is available – whether the structural demand the question raises can be met rather than suspended.

The structural argument here follows that chain to its terminus. Time depends on change. Change depends on matter and space undergoing transformation. The Now depends on what holds it open – and the Now, having no thickness of its own and no reserves from which to draw, requires a sustaining condition that is not itself within the sequence of dependent Nows. That condition must be what the Now cannot be: non-derivative, self-sustaining, outside the succession it makes possible.

The classical philosophical tradition has named this terminus from several directions, arriving at the same structural requirement through different approaches. Aristotle reached it through the argument from motion: a first mover, itself unmoved, pure actuality without potentiality – the source that sustains motion without itself requiring a prior source. Aquinas identified it as *esse ipsum subsistens* – Being itself subsisting, the act of being as

such, not received in any subject but identical with its own actuality. These are not theological embellishments. They are the terminus of a structural argument about what grounds contingent existence. The biblical tradition arrives at the same position from a different direction: when Moses asks for the divine name in Exodus, the answer is not a proper noun but a grammatical statement – *I AM WHO I AM* – pure, unqualified, self-sustaining present tense. Whether this formula is received as revelation, as a philosophical claim in narrative form, or as a coincidence with what the metaphysical argument independently requires, the structural point it encodes is the same: what grounds contingent presence cannot itself be contingent. What holds every 'is' open must itself simply and non-derivatively be.

The 'is' of this framework is the act of being actualized at the invariant crossing point of the Now – constitutively relational, directionally oriented by the will, and grounded not in the temporal horizon of finitude but in the self-sustaining actuality that holds every moment of existence open from outside the plane of succession entirely.

Heidegger heard the question of Being correctly. He turned toward the horizon to answer it. The horizon is real – it is what the 'is' looks like from inside the surface of time. But the horizon is not the basis. The basis is not ahead on the surface. It is what keeps the surface from ceasing – the ontological source that the surface itself cannot generate and cannot reach by moving along itself. What grounds contingent presence cannot itself be contingent. What holds the Now open cannot itself be within the Now.

The classical tradition names such self-sustaining actuality in the language of Exodus: *I AM WHO I AM*. Whether that name is received as revelation or as the most precise formulation available for what the structural argument independently requires, the demand it meets is the same: not a horizon at the edge of existence, but the ground at its center – the only 'is' that needs no ground behind it, because God –the Subsistent Being– is the ground.

## References

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