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# Heidegger's Topology from The Beginning: *Dasein*, Being, Place

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### ABSTRACT

At the Le Thor Seminar in 1969, Heidegger characterises his thinking as taking the form of what he calls a 'topology of being' (*Topologie des Seins*) and as thereby giving a key role to place (*topos*, *Ort/Ortschaft*). Much of my work over the last 25 years has been devoted to exploring how such a topology is indeed present in Heidegger's thinking, both early and late, and so to showing how place figures in that thinking – to showing, in effect, how the questioning of being is also the thinking of place. The aim here is to provide a summary introduction to the topology that this exploration has aimed at uncovering, but to do so in a way that is focussed on the early work, especially *Being and Time*. To this end, the discussion proceeds through an explication of the topological elements that are present in the form of key terms and ideas such as facticity, questionability, being-in, existential spatiality, and there-being or *Dasein*. There is also a brief exploration of the way the term *Dasein* figures in German philosophical discourse prior to Heidegger in ways that are not only reflected in Heidegger's early work, but also draw directly upon that term's topological connotations.

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## 1. The question of being and the thinking of place

It is commonplace to find Heidegger's thinking characterised as, above all else, a thinking of *being*. Certainly, the *question* of being represents the starting point for Heidegger's thought in more ways than one. But what exactly is that question and where does it lead us? Although it becomes evident only as Heidegger's thought develops, the question of being as he addresses it seems to take us, despite various detours and roundabout pathways, in one direction: towards the thinking of place – *Ort* or *Ortschaft* in Heidegger's German, or as he also refers to it in the Greek, *topos*. What Heidegger's work shows us is that to ask after being is to ask after place, and that the inquiry into being must take the form of a *topology* – a 'saying' of place.

Much of my work, especially over the last 25 years or so, has been focussed on following the course of Heidegger's thinking in this regard, and more than that: on the attempt to elaborate the nature and philosophical significance of place, and of topological thinking, in Heidegger but also beyond Heidegger. For me, then, it has never been about understanding a single thinker, but of understanding the philosophical task, and the questions around which it is configured, to which that thinking represents such an important contribution.<sup>1</sup> Keeping in mind that broader perspective, the aim of this essay is to provide a brief and summary introduction to the topological reading of Heidegger as this arises in relation to Heidegger's early thinking, and especially *Being and Time*.

This is something I have dealt with, though in slightly different ways, in various of my writings elsewhere. Those writings also provide extensive discussion of the way place and topology emerge as explicit themes in Heidegger's later thinking. There are several reasons for focusing specifically on the earlier work here. One reason is that the early work provides an important entry point of entry into Heidegger's topology more generally. Indeed, a failure properly to grasp what is at issue in *Being and Time*, especially, will create problems for the reading of the later thinking. A more pressing reason is that the prevailing interpretations of the early work, including *Being and Time*, tend to downplay, deny or simply ignore the centrality of the spatial and topological elements in that work. Rather than taking topology to be a theme only in later Heidegger, my claim is that Heidegger's thinking was topological from the start, and this is true even though Heidegger does

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<sup>1</sup> The earliest of the relevant works here is a paper published with the title 'A taste of madeleine: notes towards a philosophy of place' (Malpas, 1994). As well as articles and papers, the main book-length publications are: Malpas, 2018 (first published 1999), although Heidegger figures here only occasionally; Malpas, 2006; Malpas, 2016; Malpas, 2021; and Malpas, 2022. The discussions in these works follow a similar path to that outlined here, although there are differences in emphasis and in the way in which certain topics are approached. My own work on place is heavily indebted to other writers and thinkers including Anne Buttmer, Edward Casey, Robert Mugerauer, Edward Relph, and David Seamon, and especially, so far as Heidegger is concerned, to Joseph Fell's pioneering work (Fell, 1979). And although neither place nor topology are directly addressed anywhere in its pages in its pages, the book that is the first monograph on Heidegger in English, Vycinas, 1961, is also significant for its implicit topological sensitivity – a sensitivity largely arising from Vycinas' close attentiveness to the character of Heidegger's later thinking. A special acknowledgement is also due to Onora O'Neill who encouraged my thinking about place at a very early stage of its articulation, and as I was developing it in relation, not only to Heidegger, but to Kant.

not arrive at a clear articulation of the topological as such until much later – arguably not until the late 1940s.

In the Le Thor Seminar in 1969, Heidegger talks of the movement of thinking from the question of the meaning of being, in *Being and Time*, to the question of the truth of being, and then to the question of the place of being [*Ortschaft des Seins*], the latter being tied to the idea of the topology of being [*Topologie des Seins*] (Heidegger, 2012, 47). These formulations, although distinct, are also, says Heidegger, bound together. The movement from meaning to place is thus not a movement in which successive terms are displaced, but rather a movement in the direction of an uncovering of what is already presupposed: understanding the question of the meaning of being requires an understanding of truth of being which in turn requires an understanding of the place of being. And the way the end of that movement of thought already shapes its beginning is evident, if one only pays attention, in the centrality the early Heidegger gives to place through his emphasis on the lived, the situated, and the factual, and on the relation of being (*Sein*) and the ‘there’ (*Da*).

## 2. Facticity, questionability and being-in

A key focus for Heidegger’s early phenomenological investigations is the idea of ‘life’, not only in relation to that which is foundational or originary to it (Heidegger, 1975a, 66), but to life as given in its worldly *factual* character. In his lecture series from 1919-20, Heidegger declares that ‘a concrete experiential ground, which continually grows with factual life, is there [ist da]. ‘Is there,’ meaning that actual life does not merely establish there-being [das Dasein]; rather, it itself is and lives experiencing a world’ (Heidegger, 1975a, 66). Heidegger’s ‘path of thinking’ thus begins, not with some abstracted ‘existence’, but from life as given within the world – as *there-being* (which I will here use to translate *Dasein* rather than the more usual *being-there*).<sup>1</sup>

In the 1923 lectures to which Heidegger gave the title, *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, the emphasis is on factual life, which is to say, ‘our own there-being [Dasein] which is “there” for us’ (Heidegger, 1995, 5) as essentially given over to interpretation (*Auslegung*) – the latter being ‘itself *part and parcel* of the being *there* [das *da sein*]’ (Heidegger, 1994, 13).<sup>2</sup> Such being given over to interpretation, which here also means to self-interpretation, is a being given over the possibilities of which the being of factual life consists – there-being (or ‘the being there’) is thus also a being-possible (*Möglichsein*). In this respect, there is a fundamental *questionability* (or ‘questionableness’) that belongs to the being of factual life, that is, to the being of there-being. And this questionability is tied to the being of practical life in direct relation to its being ‘there’.

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<sup>1</sup> Part of the reason for this is to emphasise the character of *Dasein* as a mode of *being* rather than a form of ordinary *location or position*, but the use of ‘there-being’ rather than ‘being-there’, though somewhat odd in the English, also allows for the contrast being ‘there-being’ and the being *there* that is proper to it.

<sup>2</sup> I have modified the translation slight since van Buren’s version has ‘the “being *there*” of Dasein’ where the German has only ‘das *da sein*’ (the being *there*).

There-being, 'the being there', *is* its there and as such is always 'situated'. But this is not in the sense merely of being located or 'positioned' in some neutral fashion. The 'situatedness' or 'being-placed' of there-being is a matter of there-being having always to take a stand with respect to being and to its own being (and this is so, to use the language of *Being and Time*, both 'ontically' as well as 'ontologically'). This is what it is to be situated, genuinely to be *there*: it is to be called upon by the situation in which one is already engaged and to respond to that call. There can be no choice about this – for there-being to be is already for it to be given over to its 'there' in this way and so to be given over to the possibility, and the questionability, that belongs with it.

The questionability that is part of the being of there-being is the primary starting point for Heidegger's analysis in *Being and Time* – there-being is that being whose being 'is an *issue* for it' (Heidegger, 1962, H12-13). And this questionability is directly tied to there-being as *In-der-Welt-Sein*, as 'being-in-the-world' (Heidegger, 1962, H12-13). The elaboration of this idea requires explication of both 'world' (*Welt*) and 'being-in' (*In-sein*, in English, literally, 'in-being'). Heidegger emphasises that 'being-in' is not to be construed in terms merely of ordinary spatial containment – the containment that is at issue in the way the water is 'in' the glass, the clothes are 'in' the cupboard, or the cathedral is 'in' the city. Indeed, Heidegger argues (echoing a similar point made by Georg Simmel<sup>1</sup>) that the mere position of things in space – the sort of position associated with what Heidegger calls being 'present-at-hand' (*Vorhanden*) – does not allow any genuine relatedness of the sort required by being-in. And, if there is no genuine relationality, then neither can there be any genuine sense of being 'in' that applies in such a case.

Drawing on a set of etymological connections to illustrate his point, Heidegger explicates the being-in of there-being (the being-in of the being that is the there) in terms of nearness (*Nähe*), familiarity, and care (Heidegger, 1962, H54).<sup>2</sup> This sense of being-in is captured, Heidegger contends, in the German terms *wohnen* and *sich aufhalten* (terms that belong to the early Heidegger no less than to the later) that are often translated by the English 'dwell'.<sup>3</sup> Heidegger's account converges with the account of the essential situatedness of there-being and the questionability of its being that Heidegger sets out in *The Hermeneutics of Facticity*. At the same time it points towards what Heidegger will say later in *Being and Time* concerning the fundamental role of care (*Sorge*) (Heidegger, 1962, H180-H230). 'Dwelling' refers us to that mode of being that is *in* the

<sup>1</sup> Simmel speaks of the 'merciless separation of space', writing that 'no particle of matter can share its space with another, a real unity of the diverse does not exist in spatial terms' (Simmel, 1997, 170).

<sup>2</sup> The key passage here is repeated, after another twenty or more years, in one of the best-known of Heidegger's later essays, 'Bauen Wohnen Denken' ('Building Dwelling Thinking'), first given as a lecture in 1951 (see Heidegger, 1975b, 145).

<sup>3</sup> In the Macquarie and Robinson translation of *Being and Time*, *wohnen* is first rendered as 'live' and *sich aufhalten* as 'dwell'. The translation of *wohnen* as 'dwell' has become fairly standard in English translations of Heidegger, with *sich aufhalten* variously translated as 'stay', 'linger', or 'sojourn' (Though the noun form, *Aufhalten*, is often given as 'dwelling-place') Although commonly taken for granted, the translation of *wohnen* as 'dwell' is not without problems (see Malpas, 2021, 31-35).

world, that is *situated*, that is *there* – and one might add that it is this mode of being, and only this mode of being, that is characterised by ‘mineness’ and ‘ownness’ (*Jemeinigkeit* and *Eigentlichkeit*), by questionability, as well as by care.

### 3. Space and the problem of time

Much of Division One of Part One of *Being and Time* is given over to the detailed analysis of the structure of both being-in and worldhood as they figure in the overall structure of being-in-the-world. A key element in that analysis is the explication of the spatiality that is proper to there-being – what Heidegger calls ‘existential spatiality’ (*existenziale Räumlichkeit*) – and that is, consistent with the overall account of being-in, distinct from the ordinary spatiality associated with the ‘Cartesian’ ontology of extension and substance. The spatiality that belongs to there-being is the spatiality of oriented, embodied engagement in the world that is not reducible either to subjectivity or objectivity: ‘*Space is neither in the subject nor is the world in space. Rather, space is “in” the world insofar as the being-in-the-world that is constitutive for there-being has disclosed space. Space is not in the subject, nor does that subject observe the world “as if” it were in space. Rather, the subject, correctly understood, there-being, is spatial in a primordial sense. And because there-being is spatial in the way described, space shows itself as a priori*’ (Heidegger, 1962, H111).

Heidegger’s account of the spatiality of there-being, although clearly intended to exhibit space as a fundamental element in the constitution of there-being, is complicated by Heidegger’s insistence on the overall primacy of temporality. As Heidegger asserts at the very start of *Being and Time*, the aim is to show *time* as the horizon for the understanding of being (Heidegger, 1962, H111), and as becomes evident in the course of his analysis, it is in temporality that the unity of the being of there-being is founded, particularly as that unity is given in the structure of care.<sup>1</sup> This leads, in §70 of *Being and Time*, to the explicit claim that the spatiality that belongs to there-being ‘must be grounded in temporality’ (Heidegger, 1962, H367). Exactly how this should be understood, however, is by no means clear or straightforward. Even though Heidegger asserts the dependence of space on time, he also insists that this does not mean that space can be deduced from time nor reduced to time (Heidegger, 1962, H367). He talks instead of temporality being that, and only that, on the basis of which there-being is able to ‘break into’ space (‘*ist der Einbruch des Daseins in den Raum möglich*’) (Heidegger, 1962, H369).

What is at issue here is the relation between space and time – a relation that, in *Being and Time*, remains inadequately and incompletely explicated. Heidegger later expresses his own dissatisfaction with the treatment of space and time as set out in §70 (Heidegger, 1967, 16-17; 1972, 23), and he also shifts quite rapidly, in the period after *Being and Time* (most notably in the *Contributions*) to talk of the single structure of ‘time-space’, *Zeitraum* (Heidegger, 2012, 293-306). Elsewhere Heidegger also suggests that the appearance of time in the title of his *magnum opus* was

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Temporality is the meaning of the being of care’ (Heidegger, 1962, H367, see also H326).

not intended to exclude spatiality.<sup>1</sup> More significantly from the point of view specifically of the thinking of place, Heidegger asserts, in the *Parmenides* lectures from 1942-43, that

In *Being and Time*, time is experienced and named as fore-word for the word 'of' Being... Time' understood in the Greek manner, χρόνος [*chronos*], corresponds in essence to τόπος [*topos*], which we erroneously translate as 'space'. Τόπος is place [*Ort*], and specifically that place to which something appertains... (Heidegger, 1992, 141, 210).<sup>2</sup>

The real problem in *Being and Time* is not that it overlooks place, assigns a diminished importance to space, or radically misconstrues the relation between space and time (despite the issues that remain to be resolved in relation to these matters), but, more specifically, that it is not able, within the vocabulary that it deploys, adequately to articulate the *topological* character of both space and time together. This is partly a function of the lack of a clear sense in *Being and Time* of place as encompassing space and time as well as being distinct from them (something that is overcome only later in Heidegger's thinking, beginning with the Hölderlin lectures from 1934 onwards).

The way time takes priority in *Being and Time* does not, therefore, indicate some retreat either from the commitment to the fundamental spatiality of there-being or from the essential belonging-together of being with place as that is evident in being as there-being. Nor does it constitute a shift towards the assertion of time over place. What *Being and Time* shows, instead, is the way spatiality does indeed belong to the 'there, and so to place, as well as the essentially topological character of space so understood (space as tied to 'dwelling'). And it does this at the same time as it also draws attention, if indirectly, to the topological character of time, and to the difficulty in adequately articulating the complex inter-relation of time and space to place, and thence also, to being. Much of Heidegger's subsequent thinking is preoccupied, to a greater or lesser extent, with the task of working out the topology that is at issue here, and that is therefore central to *Being and Time*, and yet is not satisfactorily articulated within the pages of the latter work alone.

Yet notwithstanding the way the spatial and topological elements figure so prominently in Heidegger's early thinking, there has been a widespread tendency for readers of *Being and Time* to ignore or downplay those elements, and instead to focus on the seeming primacy of temporality alone.

In one of the earliest responses to *Being and Time*, from 1935, Watsuji Tetsuro claims that Heidegger neglects space and spatiality in favour of time and the temporal. Watsuji's own work, as elaborated in his important 1935 volume *Fudo* (in English as *Climate and Culture*), aims, in

<sup>1</sup> See eg. the condensed comment included as Entry # 8 in Heidegger's 'Hints to *Being and Time*: "'*Being and Time* – *Space*'/ In the title only 'Time,' but in this one space and time...'.', Heidegger, 2018, 209.

<sup>2</sup> See also (from 1941): 'In Greek χρόνος means what corresponds to τόπος, to the place where each respective being belongs' (Heidegger, 1993, 103).

part, to remedy this supposed neglect (Watsuji, 1988, first published 1935).<sup>1</sup> Hubert Dreyfus, in his influential commentary on Division One of *Being and Time*, resists the suggestion that there is key role for spatiality in Heidegger's analysis. Effectively reading the structure of existential spatiality as more an engagement in the 'practical' than the spatial (effectively treating spatiality as secondary to what Dreyfus often speaks about in term of 'skilful coping'), Dreyfus also claims that Heidegger's account of existential spatiality is 'fundamentally confused' (Dreyfus, 1991, 129; see also Cerbone, 2013, 131). Although arguing that there is, in *Being and Time*, analytics of space corresponding to that work's analytics of time, Petr Sloterdijk nevertheless sees Heidegger as having pulled back from the unravelling of the real issue at stake in relation to space – the issue concerning what Sloterdijk characterises as the 'existential where'. The latter topic is one that Sloterdijk takes as his own, describing his 'spherology' as 'an attempt to recover ... the project wedged sub-thematically into Heidegger's early work, namely Being and Space, from its state of entombment'. (Sloterdijk, 2011, 342).<sup>2</sup>

For many commentators, the focus on the there that seems so central to the early thinking, including *Being and Time*, and that is indicated in the centrality of the very term *Da-sein*, there-being, must be read apart from any spatial or topological connotation. This is often supported by quotations from Heidegger (sometimes in relation to the question as to how *Dasein* should be translated<sup>3</sup>) that are taken to rule out any interpretation of *Dasein* as 'being here' or 'being there' (Heidegger and Fink, 1993, 126), but which tend to ignore the fact that what Heidegger is really ruling out in such comments is any reading of *Dasein* – which one might also say means any reading of *there-being*, of *dwelling*, or of *place* – in terms of ordinary spatial locatedness.<sup>4</sup> But this is, of course, exactly what Heidegger already rules out in his discussion of being-in in *Being and Time*. Thus, when Thomas Sheehan emphatically asserts (repurposing a line from the writer Gertrude Stein) that with respect to *Dasein*, which is to say, there-being, 'there is no "there" there'

<sup>1</sup> In a discussion of space in Watsuji and Heidegger, Augustin Berque comments that 'the question of space is far from absent in Heidegger's works. However, it has only a secondary importance before the 1950s, during which it becomes central' (Berque, 1996, 374). Berque's comment echoes the position expressed by Watsuji, but it also represents a reading of the early Heidegger that is remarkably widespread.

<sup>2</sup> It is notable that although Sloterdijk refers to 'place' in the title of his discussion ('Heidegger's Lehre vom existenzialen Ort' in the original German), and 'place' (*Ort*) figures occasionally elsewhere in *Bubbles*, Sloterdijk neither distinguishes 'place' (*Ort*) from 'space' (*Raum*) nor addresses the relation between them. Indeed, Sloterdijk makes no systematic attempt to analyse the many different senses of space and place that are at work throughout his writings.

<sup>3</sup> See the comment made by Heidegger to Jean Beaufret (in connection with the 'Letter on "Humanism"': 'Da-sein' does not really mean for me "here I am!" [*me voilà!*])' (Heidegger, 1966, 130).

<sup>4</sup> And when Heidegger emphasises, instead, that what is at issue is there-being as *clearing*, then we must ask how that is to be understood, and the sense in which the clearing does not, as indicated below, itself bring a set of topological and spatial, as well as temporal, connections. The same is true of the idea of the event, *Ereignis*, which cannot be construed as somehow having a sense that is opposed to or exclusive of the topological. On these matters, see Malpas, 2006, esp. 211-278; see also the references in n.53 below (and the brief discussion of the event to which this note is attached).

(Sheehan, 136-138).<sup>1</sup> he leaves out of account the real question as to how the 'there' should itself be understood (a point that is somewhat ironic given that it is precisely the play between different senses of 'there' that is at work in the line Sheehan quotes from Stein).

Sheehan's own preferred understanding of there-being is in terms of what he calls 'openedness', and although he takes this to entail a temporal interpretation, such openedness itself carries an essentially topological inflection. In fact, much the same point can be made with respect to the many other readings of *Dasein*, including Heidegger's own characterisations, in terms of disclosedness, unconcealment, opening, or clearing that are common in the literature. Such readings direct attention to fundamental elements in Heidegger's thinking, but none of these elements stand opposed to the spatial and topological reading of *Dasein* in the sense explored here. Indeed, all of them, either directly or indirectly, draw upon the spatial and topological – something very much evident in the way Heidegger himself elaborates on these ideas especially in the later thinking. This is perhaps most obviously so in relation to the clearing (*Lichtung*), and Heidegger's use of the forest clearing to illustrate this, as well as his connection of clearing away (*Räumen*) and the open with space (*Raum*) (see eg. Heidegger, 2009, 307).

It may be said, and is often assumed, that any such spatial or topological connotations are *metaphorical* rather than literal. Yet not only does this rely on a notion of the metaphorical that is seldom explained (and that raises significant questions about the very nature of philosophical language more generally), but such a claim also goes directly against Heidegger's own explicit warnings against interpreting his thinking in such a metaphorical fashion.<sup>2</sup> The talk of place in Heidegger, as in my own work, involves no 'transfer of images', to use Heidegger's phrase in the *Letter on 'Humanism'* (Heidegger, 1998, 272), and neither can it be assimilated to some notion of simple spatial locatedness.

#### 4. Place and Dasein

The fact that the term that is so central to *Being and Time*, *Dasein*, frequently remains untranslated in English editions and discussions – as if it were a technical term of Heideggerian art removed from any other sense that might attach to it – reinforces the tendency to ignore or neglect the spatial and topological elements that the term surely carries.<sup>3</sup> Yet *Dasein* is not an unusual term in German and its spatial and topological connotations are evident in many of its occurrences.

<sup>1</sup> Sheehan is certainly not alone in reading *Dasein* in this way, and the issue is discussed further in Malpas, 2006, 47-51.

<sup>2</sup> This is most obviously so in relation to the claim that 'language is the house of being' that appears in 'Why Poets?' (from 1946) (Heidegger, 2002, 232); see also the 'Letter on "Humanism"' (Heidegger, 1998, 252, 272, 274). However, the antagonism to metaphor is present throughout Heidegger's writings and not only in respect of this one phrase – see Malpas, 2022, 99-112.

<sup>3</sup> Some might claim that the term is untranslatable, as might be confirmed by its appearance in Barbara Cassin's *Dictionary of Untranslatables* (Cassin, 2014, 195-200). But Cassin's volume is more about the irreducible complexity of translation (and of language and conceptuality more generally) rather than its impossibility – it thus includes among



In contemporary German dictionaries, *Dasein* appears as a noun as well as with a verb form (*da sein* – ‘to be here/there’); the noun form (in the sense of ‘being present or presence’) having instances as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century, but said in its current usage to refer to ‘Life [Leben]...living conditions [Lebensbedingungen]...existence, existence [das Bestehen, die Existenz] ... (rarely) presence, existence [Anwesenheit, Vorhandensein]’ (*Digital Dictionary of the German Language*). In the *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm* from 1854, the entry for the noun form reads ‘Dasein, n. ... Initially, it meant the present time, time of my Dasein ... However, this usage faded; one would no longer say "he did it in my Dasein" but rather "in my presence" or "in my company." Frequently, and likely only since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is used, particularly in a higher style, to denote life in its entire scope, essence, existence, or the state of things’ (Grimm, online).

For the most part, when the term appears in philosophical contexts outside of Heidegger, *Dasein* is translated into English as ‘existence’ (and, similarly in French, as *l’existence*).<sup>1</sup> The translation mirrors the way the term enters into German philosophical discourse in the work of Christian Wolff, in the early part of the eighteenth century, where the term appears as the German correlate to the Latin *existential* (see David, 2014, 195; Wienbruch, 1972, 15), as well as the way the term is taken up by Kant (in Kant’s case it is used specifically to refer to God’s existence, *Dasein Gottes*, as it might be the subject of attempted demonstration or proof, and this usage also appears in later writers).<sup>2</sup>

There is a widespread tendency, to which Heidegger himself contributes,<sup>3</sup> to treat *Dasein* as a term given a decisively new sense and orientation in Heidegger’s work.<sup>4</sup> There is no doubt that Heidegger does use the term differently from Wolff and Kant, and he is also quite specific in denying the terms application to the being of entities merely ‘present at hand’, and in these respects his use of the term is distinct. Yet neither the term’s philosophical centrality in Heidegger, its use

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its ‘untranslatables’ a great many terms that are not usually taken as candidates for untranslatability (‘philosophy’ being one example) but that resist any simple or straightforward explication.

<sup>1</sup> See David, 2014. *Dasein* first appeared as an untranslated term in English, not in 20<sup>th</sup> century discussions of Heidegger, but in 19<sup>th</sup> century discussions of Hegel (see Morell, 1846, 141). In the other direction, the term was also commonly used to translate Darwin’s phrase (from the *Origin of Species*, 1859), ‘struggle for life’ (*Kampf ums Dasein*).

<sup>2</sup> Kant also uses it as a contrastive term to *Nichtsein*. See David, 2014, 195.

<sup>3</sup> Commenting on the issue, Heidegger writes that: ‘In the philosophical tradition, the term ‘Dasein’ means presence-at-hand, existence. In this sense, one speaks, for instance, of proofs for God’s existence. However, Da-sein is understood differently in *Being and Time*’ (Heidegger, 2001, 120). Clearly, *Dasein*, as used in *Being and Time*, is not to be construed in terms of ‘existence’. But this claim is misleading if it is intended to imply that Heidegger’s use of *Dasein* is entirely unprecedented in the German literature – intended in the latter fashion, the claim seems to reflect Heidegger’s sometime tendency to exaggerate the sense in which his own thinking does indeed constitute a radical break with the preceding tradition.

<sup>4</sup> See eg.: ‘Dasein, in its contemporary (Heideggerian) usage, has become a paradigm of the untranslatable. It is a common word that Heidegger transformed into a neologism’ (David, 2014, 195).

to refer to human being, nor the particular emphasis on *Sein* and *Da* as its joint components (exemplified in Heidegger's sometime use of a hyphenated form – *Da-sein*) are without precedent.

Johann Gottfried Herder uses the phrase *lebendiges Daseyns*, 'living there-being', to refer to living things in general, but he also gives it a special sense in relation to the living *Dasein* that is exemplified in human being. This way of understanding *Dasein*, and its relation to space and place, is especially clear in his very late writing. 'We are and, indeed, we are with others', he writes in the *Metakritik* from 1799, and he adds 'This where means the place of our *Dasein*; we take it up, that is, some else cannot be where we are at this moment' (Herder, 2002, 50). Herder emphasises that what is at issue here is not merely some abstracted mode of being, but human being in its spatio-temporal singularity. *Dasein* is given only 'within and with experience: for as soon as living *Dasein* is posited, it experiences itself. It is self-experience; a being that comprehends and reveals itself in space and time through inner powers [innerer Kräfte]'.<sup>1</sup> According to Herder, 'Dasein (Da sein) means being in a place, asserting it' (the parenthetical insertion here is Herder's), and Herder rejects the Kantian idea of space and time as 'forms of intuition' rather than as given in and with experience – as they belong to our *Dasein*, and are inseparable from it (Herder, 2002, 53; the parenthetical insertion of 'Da sein' is Herder's own).

Herder is a particularly important example here, but he is not the only figure in whose work one can find elements that prefigure elements of Heidegger's thinking in relation to *Dasein*. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi writes that, 'In my judgment the greatest merit of the researcher is to reveal [enthüllen] and disclose [offenbaren] *Daseyn*' (Jacobi, 1998, 29; see also Sandkaulen, online). And what does *Dasein* name in Jacobi's thinking? 'It does not merely denote being in general', writes Birgit Sandhaulen, 'instead, it aims at the specific structure and complexity of human existence, whose personal center, as the "unresolvable, immediate, simple" ...evades all representation ...' (Sandkaulen, online). Paolo Livieri emphasises that, for Jacobi, *Dasein* is that which is 'the foundation or origin of thought or cognition' (Jacobi, 2024, xx). Although the details of their philosophical positions differ, and *Dasein* does retain both broader and narrower senses (including that at issue in 'existence' as used by Wolff and Kant), still many of the connotations that *Dasein* carries in Heidegger are prefigured in Herder and Jacobi. Moreover, some of those connotations are also present among other nineteenth-century thinkers. Especially notable in this regard is Ludwig Feuerbach, who uses the term *Dasein* with a specific emphasis on the fundamental connection of *Sein* with *Da* (although in Feuerbach the latter term is used with the connotation,

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<sup>1</sup> The reference here to 'powers' (*Kräfte*) reflects Herder's commitment to the being of there-being, *Dasein*, as essentially worked out through activity and the exercise of its own power: 'only through action do we become aware that we are capable of action; through the application of our powers, we demonstrate to ourselves that we are, that we possess and have ourselves. In the most joyful use of these abilities, the human being recognizes as much of his there-being [*Dasein*] as he has tested for himself' (Herder, 2002, 151).

present in ordinary German, of ‘here’ as well as ‘there’<sup>1</sup>). *Dasein*, declares Feuerbach, “is the being that comes first, the being that is the first to be determined. Here *I* am – that is the first sign of a *real and living* being’ (Feuerbach, 2014, xx; Hanfi translates *Dasein* as ‘Here-being’). What we see in Herder, in Jacobi, and in Feuerbach, to varying degrees, are indications of the topology that the term *Dasein* already carries with it, but which is seldom addressed – indications that become even more strongly evident in early Heidegger.

The problem with translation of *Dasein* as ‘existence’ in work prior to Heidegger is that the English term no longer carries any connotation that connects it to the original sense given in the Latin derivation – the Latin *existentia* coming from *ex-* ‘out’ together with *sisto* or *sistere* ‘take a stand’. *Dasein* carries no etymological link to the Latin, but nevertheless has a similar connotation of ‘standing out’, *ex-sistere* (the associated idea of *ecstasis* having an important role in Friedrich Schelling, see David, 2014, 198), as well as Heidegger, although, once again commentators tend not to take note of the topological implications that come with that idea - see Heidegger, 248). The latter being given, one might say, a new emphasis in the German precisely though the standing out as a standing there/here.

On the face of it, this may seem to provide some additional justification for the English translation of *Dasein* as ‘existence’. And that translation does connect the German term with what does seem to be its common English correlate. But where the real meaning of the original German term (and of ‘existence’ itself) is in question, and especially where this arises in relation to a question about the relation between being and the there – between being and place – then this translation must be considered problematic. It displaces the problem without resolving it at the same time as it also potentially obscures what is at issue. The sense of standing out (as well as of the standing out as a standing there or even as a ‘standing toward’<sup>2</sup>) is almost entirely lost in the English term, which no longer retains, in its common usage, any real echo of what is at work in the original Latin form. The emphasis on *Dasein* as ‘existence’, even more so than the practice of leaving the term untranslated, thus makes it easy to ignore or overlook the spatial and topological connotations that have often been associated with the term *Dasein* in German philosophical discourse.

## 5. Topology and Philosophy

In Heidegger’s writings after *Being and Time*, and especially from 1934 onwards, the topological character of his thinking comes increasingly to the fore. This is so in direct relation to his use of

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<sup>1</sup> Some will argue that, in Heidegger, the there must take precedence since *Dasein*, in Heidegger’s sense, is always ahead of itself. But this need not invalidate the significance of Feuerbach’s use of the term, nor does it mean that *Dasein* must be understood in relation only to the ‘there’ as understood in clear contrast to the ‘here’ – see also n.50 below.

<sup>2</sup> Pascal David argues that ‘in Heidegger, the *da* in *Da sein* almost means *zu* (toward). *Dasein* is never “localized,” but localizing; it must be thought of with movement’ (David, 2014, 198). *Dasein* is indeed dynamic rather than static, but that does not detract from its fundamentally topological character, and, if anything, depends upon it.

*Dasein*, with the term more often hyphenated, and even greater emphasis given to the *Da*, the there. By the late 1940s Heidegger is explicitly using the phrase 'topology of being' to characterise his own thinking, at the same time as he also talks of the 'locality of being' (*Ortschafts des Seyns*). Moreover, this language is employed in conjunction with the language of the event, *das Ereignis*, that is also a central element in his later thinking (from the 1936-38 *Contributions* onwards). The event, it turns out, is no mere temporal occurrence, but as clearing and opening, it is essentially a happening of place. As Joe Fell puts it: 'Heidegger's terms "Event" (*Ereignis*) and "Place" (*Ort*) mean "the same"' (Fell, 1979, 221; see also Malpas, 2022, 14-16 and Malpas, 2006, 213-219).

If the essential belonging together of being and place is not already clear in *Being and Time*, then this is largely due to the absence in that work of the requisite terminology – as noted already, neither *Ort/Ortschaft* nor *topos* figure in philosophically significant ways in Heidegger's earlier thinking. Yet this is not because the topological is absent from the earlier work. It is rather that topological themes and ideas are expressed differently – in ways that partly reflect the preceding tradition – and that are focussed around there-being, *Dasein*, the there, space, opening and clearing, even in the way time is itself understood. To ignore this, and to insist instead that the topological and spatial elements in early Heidegger are secondary in his thinking, is to ignore the direction of the path on which Heidegger is already set from the beginning. The neglect or even dismissal of place by many readers of Heidegger, which even persists into some readings of the later Heidegger,<sup>1</sup> although in some respects surprising, nevertheless reflects a widespread forgetting or effacing of place within the philosophical tradition (recounted in Casey, 1997). But this forgetting or effacing occurs at the very same time as philosophy constantly draws upon and employs topological and spatial ideas and imagery. Heidegger is notable – as are some of his predecessors, among them Feuerbach and Herder – not only for the way such ideas and images appear in his work, but for the way he gives specific attention to them, so that his thinking does indeed take the form of a topology explicitly recognised as such.

As a philosophical project, topology arises out of the simple recognition of the way all thinking begins with place, with our own being-placed, and with the questionability that belongs to them. Both place and being-placed thus emerge as philosophical issues from the very beginning, even though they are frequently passed over. That they are passed over may itself reflect something of the character of place. It is place that *opens* the original field in which philosophical inquiry moves. But as it does so, it also *bounds* that field. In this respect, it is perhaps not surprising that the shift in the later Heidegger to a more explicitly topological orientation is also accompanied by what has so often been seen as a shift towards the poetic and the 'mystical'. Place is not, however, somehow beyond our ability to speak of it, nor does the thinking of place, any more than the thinking of being, require that one give oneself over to 'the pretension of arcane erudition... nor the display of

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Mitchell, 2015, in which neither space nor place are mentioned even though the focus of its analysis, the Fourfold, is fundamentally topological.

rare and exceptional states ... raptures, reveries, and swoonings' (Heidegger, 1992,149). Yet as it is both the ground and limit for thinking, including philosophical thinking, so it can never be rendered wholly transparent to such thinking. And for this reason, too, it seems, it is all too easily passed over and forgotten. In this respect, Heidegger's work can be seen as an attempt to reawaken us, not only to the question of being, but to the even more neglected question of place. Such a reawakening has also been the aim of my own work – both in my reading of Heidegger and my 'reading' (or 'saying') of place.

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