

The Methodological Significance of Feelings in Martin Heidegger's Philosophy: Heidegger's Reconceptualization of Philosophical Knowledge and Truth

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the methodological significance of feelings and moods in Heidegger's philosophy, challenging the modern philosophical view that prioritizes cognition over feelings in acquiring knowledge. Heidegger argues that by exploring the disclosive and disruptive qualities of feelings, philosophy can provide "philosophical knowledge," which he considers superior to scientific knowledge as it entails knowledge about the world from which science originates. Heidegger's assertion of the primacy of feelings is based on the notion that only feelings can reveal essential and yet concealed aspects of the correlation between humans and beings, and that these aspects are crucial for our understanding of the world. This paper will explore these claims by engaging with the strongest critics of Heidegger's position, namely philosophers of the Neo-Kantian tradition, who claim that he has abandoned philosophy to the arbitrariness and irrationality of mere feelings.

KEY WORDS: Epistemology, Martin Heidegger, neo-Kantianism, philosophy of emotions, René Descartes, self-consciousness.

1. Introduction

Heidegger's first major work, *Being and Time*, stands out in multiple regards but particularly for its exploration of themes such as anxiety, death, and conscience within the context of a rigorous, systematic in-

quiry into the abstract question of Being (Heidegger 1967: 52; 153).¹ Heidegger apparently sought to merge the vitality of life philosophy with the enigmatic topics of existentialism, combining these with the rigor and seriousness of Kantian transcendental philosophy. However, the precise nature of how these diverse aspects were meant to come together was unclear to many, and it remained a mystery how the anxious call of conscience in the anticipation of death is related to the temporalization of time or to knowledge of “Being as such” (Heidegger 1967: 19). After nearly a century since the publication of *Being and Time*, it remains an open question why feelings such as anxiety or boredom are relevant to abstract philosophical topics like Being or time (see Haugeland 2000).

Heidegger’s contemporaries, including Neo-Kantians and Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, were not only puzzled by these topics but also found fault with Heidegger’s reliance on feelings and moods.² They insisted that the epistemological investigation of knowledge and validity, aimed at securing its certainty, was essential to philosophy. They contended that Heidegger’s appeal to feelings and his critique of theoretical knowledge undermined the truth claim (*Wahrheitsanspruch*) of his own philosophy (Brelage 1965: 31ff; 119ff). The underlying assumption is that no philosophy that fails to assert a claim to knowledge could be considered philosophy.³ It is said that Heidegger abandons this principle, and that, by overemphasizing the significance of feelings and moods, he inadvertently stumbles into irrationality and romanticism.

This critique has been put forth by prominent representatives of Neo-Kantian transcendental philosophy, such as Rudolf Zocher, who indirectly invokes Heidegger’s critics Nicolai Hartmann and Heinrich Rickert (Zocher 1939; Rickert 1920: 51-53; Rickert 1926: 30). Additionally, we will consider the work of Hans Wagner and Werner Flach, as it is presented by Manfred Brelage, who were among the first and most influential critics of Heidegger’s philosophy (Wagner 1967: 61ff;

¹ Martin Heidegger’s published texts and lecture transcripts will be cited according to the *Martin Heidegger Gesamtausgabe*. They are published by Vittorio Klostermann in Frankfurt a.M. Translations by the author. Heidegger (1967) refers to the Niemeyer Edition of *Being and Time*.

² Husserl (1997: 284): “Heidegger transposes or changes the constitutive-phenomenological clarification of all regions of entities and universals, of the total region of the world, into the anthropological; the whole problematic is shifted over: corresponding to the ego there is Dasein, etc. In that way everything becomes ponderously unclear, and philosophically loses its value.”

³ In the following, we will use “knowledge” and “cognition” as a translation for the German *Erkenntnis* to capture both aspects, the process of recognizing something (*cognition*) and what is meant to result from it, knowledge in the sense of verifiable insights.

336–338; Flach 1994; Brelage 1965; see Strube 2009). The implications of these critiques will be examined, and the following questions will be posed: What are the limitations of theoretical knowledge (*theoretische Erkenntnis*)? Is knowledge limited to that which is theoretically known, and is the certainty of this knowledge bound to the Cartesian model of self-consciousness? To address these questions, I will demonstrate how Heidegger, as early as the 1920s, developed a notion of “philosophical knowledge” that is neither objectively true nor certain in the manner of modern science but true and certain nonetheless. Exploring these questions will provide us with an understanding of the methodological significance of feelings and moods, which is an essential component of Heidegger’s philosophical methodology.

2. The Alleged Superiority of Cognition over Feelings

In modern philosophy, particularly within Neo-Kantian thought, it has become common to assert that the indispensability of “knowledge” and “cognition” for both philosophy and science lies in their intrinsic potential for attaining certainty, specifically apodictic certainty (Brelage 1965: 37). This certainty is not grounded in faith or religion but rather can fully support and substantiate itself, which implies that the modern subject has acquired the full capacity to secure knowledge about things in the world solely through the exercise of its cognitive faculties. This marked the beginning of the ascent of the modern subject with modern science as its most powerful tool, striving to establish itself as the master of the Earth and subjugate all things under its dominion.⁴

In philosophy and science, cognition (*Erkenntnis*) remains deeply connected with this idea of certainty. This link can be traced back to the Cartesian model of self-consciousness. What distinguishes this cognition from earlier, pre-Cartesian forms, is its ability to secure itself through a feature of consciousness. This feature allows every representation of objects to become a self-aware representation, as the representing I is present within the representations and can “observe itself” at every stage.⁵

⁴ According to Heidegger, it was Descartes’ transformation of the Christian “certainty of salvation” (*Heilsgewissheit*) into the epistemological “certainty of knowledge,” that became the foundation for modernity, including modern science and philosophy (Heidegger 1977: 75ff).

⁵ Contemporary philosophy and science have shifted away from the ideal of apodictic certainty, gradually replacing it with the heuristic principles of probability. However, this transition has not been accompanied by a recognition of the methodological significance of feelings. The same limitations thus persist in the new paradigm. Consequently, this shift is not towards a more rigorous science, but rather towards utility (e.g. probability in data science).

The aforementioned Neo-Kantian critics claim that Heidegger neglects the significance of “cognition” and “knowledge” and instead prioritizes the vagueness and ambiguity of sub-logical affective states (Brelage 1965: 35; Wagner 1967: 328ff). These critics argue that without “cognition” in the Cartesian sense, Heidegger’s philosophy devolves into poetry, prose, or perhaps even religion. There have been numerous similar critiques of Heidegger’s philosophy, which will be addressed indirectly by outlining Heidegger’s alternative concept of (non-theoretical) philosophical knowledge (Habermas 1985: 165ff; Tugendhat 1979: 209ff).⁶ But here, I will primarily engage with the Neo-Kantian Manfred Brelage and his critique of the alleged irrationality of Heidegger’s philosophy as it is representative of the majority of the aforementioned critics. In this regard, Brelage emerges as the strongest opponent of Heidegger’s philosophical project and poses the greatest challenge, offering this line of critique in its most sophisticated form.

Brelage is leveling a critique against Heidegger and simultaneously invoking the indispensability of certainty provided by theoretical knowledge. He dismissively remarks that “it takes a considerable infatuation with the primordial and sub-logical to ignore and deny these problems” (Brelage 1965: 36). Brelage argues that Heidegger’s rejection of the Cartesian model of cognition and his emphasis on non-theoretical forms of knowledge undermine the foundations of philosophy and ignore the importance of theoretical certainty for philosophical inquiry. Brelage refers to Heidegger’s critique of theoretical knowledge and cognition in the context of *Being and Time* where Heidegger asserts that they and their corresponding truth are grounded in more primordial modes of being-in-the-world and therefore derivative (see Heidegger 1967: 214ff). Brelage’s critique is that reducing knowledge and cognition to more primordial modes of disclosure (such as moods) renders whatever is “known” in that sphere “pre-predicative” and “pre-cognitive.” Brelage says that what is only felt is not yet recognized and therefore can be anything but not knowledge. It is still “sublogical.”

Because it is not knowledge, it is unable to interpret and justify itself. Anxiety, mood, and care would remain mute if philosophical thinking did not redeem them and put into their mouths the words they have always wanted to say. Only

⁶ Jürgen Habermas and Ernst Tugendhat were among the most prominent critics of Heidegger’s reliance on feelings. They argued that the anxious call of conscience individuates the individual, thereby isolating it from any form of rational discourse. However, by examining the methodological significance of feelings such as anxiety, it is possible to indirectly address their critique and clarify their misunderstandings.

philosophical cognition [*Erkenntnis*] can bring to light what is contained in these pre-predicative and pre-cognitive acts in terms of genuine *existential* content [*Seinsgehalt*]. (Brelage 1965: 36)

Concerning Heidegger's "infatuation" with feelings and moods, Brelage argues that it is important to maintain that cognition, due to the possibility of becoming self-aware and thereby certain, represents a "truly outstanding mode of being of human existence" (Brelage 1965: 37). Brelage concludes: "Even if pre-predicative and pre-cognitive human existence is already disclosive in its very being, – only cognition can put into words that it is so and to what extent and in what manner" (Brelage 1965: 36). Therefore, when Heidegger claims that human beings always "understand" their world to a certain extent based on moods and affective states, Brelage argues that this "understanding," would not constitute knowledge in any shape or form unless humans reflect this "understanding" through a specific cognitive and representational act that enables them to make falsifiable judgments about it. Heidegger's "understanding" remains blind and mute if it does not become the object of theoretical cognition. Accordingly, a feeling-based "understanding" is not truly "understanding" at all, for nothing is understood unless it is "recognized" through our cognitive faculties.

Brelage's broader argument is that only this kind of self-conscious cognition can bring "light" into the "darkness" and "muteness" of affective states, and that cognition, at least regarding the pursuit of knowledge and truth, must be considered as prior to feelings.⁷ He concludes that a philosophy based on moods and feelings lacks scientific rigor and undermines its own claims to truth. For Brelage, epistemology, as the explicit reflection of the possibility of knowledge, is prior and more fundamental than Heidegger's feeling-based philosophy. Furthermore, he asserts that Neo-Kantian epistemology is the proper foundation of philosophy, while Heidegger's philosophy allegedly disqualifies itself. Brelage's fervent defense of epistemology can be seen as in line with numerous other critics of Heidegger who share the aim of safeguarding

⁷ In these debates, distinctions are drawn between different types of contingencies that have varying effects on truth claims. The central idea is that the factual instantiation of cognition in a human being does not impact its unique cognitive potentials. The primacy of cognition is argued to hold within the dimension of epistemological justification of validity and truth claims, and the fact that cognition is a process within a living body is considered an arbitrary anthropological fact that is unrelated to its primacy concerning certainty and knowledge. Heidegger, on the other hand, would contend that this facticity is substantial for all cognitive faculties. The reasons for this will be made clearer in the subsequent discussion on the disclosive qualities of feelings.

and protecting the scientific and rational character of philosophy against what they see as Heidegger's destructive and irrational tendencies (see Brelage 1965: 25ff; see also the overview in Thomä 2013).

3. Heidegger's Notion of Philosophical Certainty

Heidegger would respond to this line of critique by stating that affective states such as anxiety, boredom or joy are never blind in the traditional sense of being "mere feelings," but instead possess disclosive qualities that are essential for any understanding.⁸ In his lectures, Heidegger demonstrates how modern philosophy has, without explicitly acknowledging it, inherited and perpetuated an ancient metaphysical hierarchy that privileges cognitive faculties over affective states (see Coriando 2002). This hierarchy, he contends, has its roots in Greek philosophy but was solidified in Christianity, which elevated the immateriality of reason and faith over the sensuality of feelings and bodily desires (Heidegger 2002: 191ff). This superiority of reason, its purity and alleged impartiality, were meant to resemble the divine intellect of God himself.⁹ Furthermore, Heidegger argues that core concepts of contemporary methodology, such as "cognition," "truth," and "certainty," as well as the modern interpretation of rationality and reason (*Vernunft*), are all manifestations of Christian metaphysics, molded into the Cartesian framework of certainty.¹⁰ Heidegger describes this as an "unjustified hegemony of the theoretical" (Heidegger 1987: 89). He challenges the Christian tradition and its metaphysical underpinnings by drawing attention to the widely disregarded methodological significance of feelings.¹¹

For instance, in his lectures on Descartes and Husserl, Heidegger demonstrates that at the core of the Cartesian philosophy lies a particular

⁸ Heidegger claims that all feelings are disclosive, however, due to reason that we will discuss in the subsequent sections, certain feelings have "disclosive capacities" that reach further and therefore are more relevant to philosophy. As such, Heidegger most frequently discusses anxiety, boredom, and wonder, and highlights the fact that these feelings "individuate." See Heidegger (1967: 182; 190–1): "It is true that it is part of the essence of every findingness to disclose the full being-in-the-world according to all its constitutive moments (world, being-in, self). But only in anxiety lies the possibility of an outstanding disclosing, because it individuates."

⁹ This metaphysical hierarchy is based on what Heidegger calls the dominance of the metaphysics of presence and goes back further than Christianity, namely to the beginning of Western philosophy in ancient Greece (Heidegger 1997a: 363ff). The more modern term "logocentrism" and its critique are related to and influenced by Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics.

¹⁰ For Heidegger's "destruction" (*destruere*) of the modern history of "rationality," see his lecture on the principle of reason (Heidegger 1997b).

¹¹ Heidegger's emphasis on the methodological significance of feelings is comparable to that of William James in his theory of emotion (Ratcliffe 2008).

interpretation of consciousness that takes its self-referentiality as it is displayed in representations of objects as the primary characteristic of cognition and knowledge (Heidegger 1994: 136ff). This interpretation serves as the foundation for the Cartesian methodology, and it is meant to justify the alleged superiority of cognition over feelings. Heidegger, however, contends that there are multiple issues with this interpretation (Heidegger 1994: 247ff).

First, Heidegger criticizes Descartes and the Cartesians for reducing the complex phenomenon of consciousness and its underlying self-referentiality to the representational structure of *cogitationes*. This reduction wrongly assumes that self-referentiality is unique to those representational acts in which the I, in its representations of objects, is co-presenting itself (*cogito me cogitare*) (Heidegger 1994: 141). Heidegger, however, demonstrates that the structure of self-referentiality also applies to non-representational and non-theoretical acts, such as feelings and moods (Heidegger 1993a: 56; 247ff).¹²

In addition, Heidegger finds fault with the Cartesian interpretation of this self-referentiality. He criticizes that the presence of the I in its representations is formalized and taken as an empty relation, devoid of all: “Rather, precisely by taking the fact [of self-referentiality within consciousness] as an opportunity for a formal principle, Descartes *distorts* the *specific Being* of what he has seen before: the phenomenon of *having-oneself*” (Heidegger 1994: 250). This reduction of the “phenomenon of consciousness” seemingly serves the purpose of establishing a principle (*Grundsatz*) for the foundation of science. Heidegger argues that this indicates another problem, namely that it leaves open the question of how the I can know of itself in its representations insofar as knowing is said to be representational (Heidegger 1993b: 131).¹³ This problem will be addressed further below.

¹² Heidegger (1993a) examines the limitations of objectifying consciousness in the theoretical attitude and explores the possibilities of other forms of “knowing of oneself,” for instance, within autobiographies, religious and philosophical self-contemplation, memory, and experience: “Having-myself is not staring at the ego as an object, but it is the process of gaining and losing a certain familiarity of life with itself” (247) (see also Heidegger 1993b: 163ff). See also the instructive work on the “double structure” in feelings by Jan Slaby (2007: 93–112).

¹³ Regarding the same problem in Natorp’s philosophy, Heidegger remarks: “One has already stopped thinking the I as I, if one ‘thinks’ of it as an object. If the I itself were captured as the I, then it would be at the same time the one recognizing and the one recognized. This is impossible because [within this theory] it underlies thinking and cognition, it is presupposed in them” (Heidegger 1993b: 132).

Despite these inherent problems, however, this purely formal and empty relation between the *cogito* and the *cogitatum* is still intended to serve as the indestructible foundation for all sciences, and Cartesians proclaim that the apodicticity of this certainty must henceforth be regarded as the highest ideal for all pursuit of knowledge.¹⁴

To challenge this reductionism, including the reduction of all forms of consciousness to this particular interpretation of consciousness and the reduction of all certainty to this specific notion of certainty, as well as the overall inclination to understand all truth and knowledge theoretically, Heidegger demonstrates that feelings possess a greater degree of self-referentiality than the empty formal relation within *cogitationes*.¹⁵ This suggests that there can be an alternative form of certainty that takes the self-referentiality of feelings as a starting point, aiming to explicate it in order to secure a mode of certainty that is distinct from and superior to the Cartesian certainty. This mode of certainty could be characterized as “more fundamental” than the Cartesian apodictic certainty because it does not reiterate the same reductionisms that are inherent in the Cartesian model: “Self-consciousness must be interpreted from factual being [...]. The evidence of the cogito is there, but it must be grounded in the factual. For every science, too, ultimately depends on factual existence” (Heidegger 1995b: 298–9).

To further explain the primacy of this certainty over the Cartesian certainty, let us first look at *Being and Time* where Heidegger compares the certainty of philosophical knowledge to the certainty of modern science and to what he calls “empirical certainty” (257), which resembles the certainty that is ascribed to commonly shared knowledge and everyday experiences. He does so when introducing the peculiar certainty of our own death (see 265; 136; 256) or when he describes the certainty within the call of conscience (see 292ff), both of which are made possible by

¹⁴ The Cartesian philosophy is considered by Heidegger to have laid the foundations for the Kantian philosophy, in which then cognition and knowledge are secured by the transcendental deduction of categories. Regarding the Cartesianism in Kant’s philosophy, see Dahlstrom (1991: 329–61).

¹⁵ This is not to deny that for Descartes, too, feelings and desires are self-referential. See, for instance, Descartes (2011: 15). However, for Heidegger the problem lies in the fact that they are said to be self-referential by virtue of the underlying structure of the *cogitationes*. Thereby, the representational structure of the *cogitationes* becomes the paradigmatic model for all intentional acts, molding diverse phenomena that possess their own form of self-referentiality into this one mold of the *cogito me cogitare* (Heidegger 1994: 241–2). Heidegger will later claim that this particular interpretation of thinking as representational became the paradigm for modernity (Heidegger 1977: 75ff).

the mood of anxiety (302). Heidegger describes this certainty as the “certainty of Dasein” (256) and characterizes it as the mode of existence in which existence is “transparent” (*durchsichtig*) and “unconcealed” (146–7), claiming that human beings have therein gained a fundamental understanding of their individual situation including their relation to beings (182). In Heidegger’s view, this certainty of Dasein and its corresponding truth are “more fundamental” insofar as Dasein only here possesses an “authentic understanding of its Being” (265ff). The attribute “authentic” is used to signify a unique form of self-awareness in which one’s situation has become transparent to oneself:

Resoluteness, as *authentically being-a-self*, does not detach existence from its world, does not isolate it to a free-floating ego. How could it do so – when it is nothing other than *being-in-the-world in the mode of authenticity*. Resoluteness brings the self precisely into the respective engagement with the ready-to-hand and pushes it into the caring being-with the others (*in das fürsorgende Mit-sein mit den Anderen*). (298)

This form of self-awareness, moreover, is completely distinct from the formal and empty self-referentiality that characterizes the Cartesian model of self-consciousness (137). It is not only an awareness of oneself as the one consciously performing the act of representation but an awareness of the normative implications of what it means to be alive. Because this certainty pertains to its decisions and choices, Heidegger indicates here the potential for an “originary ethics” (286).¹⁶ It is a mode of certainty that transcends the limitations of traditional epistemology, allowing for a reconceptualization and radicalization of epistemological issues that takes this peculiar mode of certainty as the starting point. Heidegger sees therein the potential of a “new and fundamental possibility of inquiry,” which, according to Heidegger, is a distinct form of “understanding and conceptualizing Being” (Heidegger 1996: 223; Kraatz 2024).

In addition to these differences in the “depth” of awareness between the Cartesian *cogito me cogitare* and the Heideggerian authentic understanding of being-in-the-world, Heidegger also justifies the superiority of the philosophical certainty of Dasein by highlighting regional ontological differences between the realm of objects and the lifeworld. He contends that knowledge about the latter, about existence (being-in-the-world),

¹⁶ In this framework, Heidegger introduces the notion of an “originary ethics,” which is grounded in a mode of existing wherein one accepts complete responsibility for one’s life. This responsibility arises from the fact that one is inescapably “thrown” into a network of (normative) relations, including but not limited to those with other human beings (see Heidegger 1976: 313ff).

is potentially superior to other forms of knowledge because it underlies and precedes all human endeavors (Heidegger 1967: 8–15). Insights about the “existentials,” for instance, can be secured by a non-theoretical mode of certainty – one that is made possible by the disclosive qualities of feelings. These existentials – individuated ways of being according to which beings are constituted – underpin all human endeavors (Heidegger 1967: 148). Moreover, as Haugeland (2017) suggested, the transparency of the normativity of one’s relations to the world – that is gained through the mode of certainty in resoluteness – also grounds our “beholdenness” to truth, thus playing a pivotal role in any pursuit of truth, such as the quest for objectivity in modern science. The implication of this is that the philosophical reflection on what precedes and persists as a determining force in all human activities takes priority and can thus be referred to as “fundamental” or “primary.” This is the motivation behind Heidegger’s development of a non-theoretical philosophical science of these foundations, including a distinct philosophical methodology, in which due recognition is given to this “sphere of origin” (*Ursprungssphäre*) (Heidegger 1985: 159–160) or what he also calls the “primacy of the factual” (Heidegger 1987: 72–73).¹⁷

To summarize, the certainty of philosophical knowledge concerning existing entities surpasses that of theoretical knowledge because the latter is restricted to the representation of objects and constrained by a narrow notion of self-referentiality. Consequently, theoretical knowledge is applicable only to objects. Moreover, its mode of certainty is inferior to that of feelings: It is not only devoid of knowledge regarding the normative dimension – a form of knowledge that Heidegger ascribes to the transparency of existence that is gained through the certainty of resoluteness – but it is also derivative of and dependent on knowledge of the sphere of origin. This sphere is the lifeworld from which modern science emerges and which predetermines its relation to objects. Only philosophical knowledge, grounded in the disclosive qualities of feelings and their peculiar mode of certainty, can provide us with knowledge within the realm of existence. This also implies that the “truth” of philosophical knowledge can only be secured in a peculiar mode of certainty, one that is bound to a specific self-awareness. It is not only truth “about

¹⁷ This “originary science” (*Ursprungswissenschaft*) later became Heidegger’s “Hermeneutics of Facticity” (1923), which then ultimately merged with his ontology (see Heidegger 1988: 3ff) and was only partially referred to as something that is distinct from ontology (or phenomenology). See also Crowell (2013: 184).

existence,” but always also “truth for existence” (Heidegger 1978: 239; Kraatz 2020, 451ff).

The reasons for why this certainty is dependent on feelings, how it is secured, and the claim that it is “more fundamental” rather than simply another form of certainty, will become more apparent as we further follow the path of Heidegger’s critique.

4. The Methodological Significance of Feelings

A key aspect of Heidegger’s critique is the notion that a certain kind of self-awareness is a prerequisite for any kind of self-identification. The underlying premise is that we can only consciously identify ourselves (with ourselves) because we “already know” that we are the object of identification. Heidegger (and many others since then) have argued that this kind of prior knowledge or self-awareness cannot be constituted by theoretical knowledge or any kind of representative faculty.¹⁸ Instead, it is bound to more fundamental underlying affective states, particularly to the disclosive qualities of feelings and its peculiar mode of (non-representational) self-referentiality. The reasoning behind this idea is that there is a problem with identifying cognition with representation, as it limits cognition to a resultative model, whereas self-consciousness cannot result from cognition, but must be prior to it (Heidegger 1993b: 131ff). Heidegger contends that what Brelage praises as a unique feature of theoretical knowledge and by which he justifies the superiority of cognition over feelings is in fact only possible because of a more fundamental mode of self-awareness that is manifested in feelings (Brelage 1965: 37).

This line of Heidegger’s critique gives rise to another one, which concerns the limitations of the Cartesian model of cognition. Heidegger contends that the explicative theoretical acts that Brelage and his fellow Neo-Kantians associate with cognition are only possible based on an ontological foundation that they can only presuppose but not develop (Heidegger 1995a: 305). For instance, if a subject-object relation is the basis for the epistemologist’s model of cognition, then this relation presumes an openness within which subject and object can “meet” and which, for Heidegger, is something that makes possible their relation. Cognition is not only factually dependent on something given to it in its sensuality but also dependent in a deeper sense on the operability

¹⁸ See the works of Manfred Frank and Dieter Henrich, e.g. the overview in Frank and Kuneš (2022). See also Thomä (1990: 52ff).

of the relation between itself and what is given to it. Heidegger claims that this operative dimension cannot be constituted by cognition, as cognition presupposes the openness of this dimension in order to be what it is (Heidegger 1967: 366). To illustrate the problem, consider the following analogy: conceiving of cognition as the faculty that creates its own preconditions is akin to proposing that a child needs to be its parents first in order to be that child.

According to Heidegger, the solution to this “transcendental overburdening of cognition” (Gethmann 1974: 50) is to consider the openness of the operative dimension not as something that is created by cognition (“resultative” as something that results from cognition), but rather as something that is already presupposed by it. Heidegger argues that this openness is constituted by more fundamental ways of self-awareness within feelings, which are features of our facticity, not of our transcendentality.¹⁹ Feelings overwhelm us and take control of us; we find ourselves “thrown” into moods and emotions but are never their masters nor their ground (Heidegger 1967: 135). Heidegger does not simply shift the problem to a deeper level, but rather fundamentally transforms the principle of constitution by no longer assuming the subject as its ground (Heidegger 1967: 285).

Heidegger’s alternative understanding of feelings posits that they are not strictly subjective states located within the “inside” of human beings. Instead, they are always feelings of something, directed at things “outside in the world,” but also how we are opened to the world.²⁰ Feelings, Heidegger contends, are the very ways in which we find ourselves in this world where everything always and already matters to us. He concludes that feelings are not dark or blind but rather constitute the openness that serves as the ontological precondition for any possible relation to beings. The alleged “darkness” of feelings is therefore also the precondition of the specific “light” attributed to theoretical knowledge, serving as the basis for the certainty achieved in self-consciousness and even underlying the objectivity of scientific knowledge. Certainty, knowledge, and truth would not be possible without these constitutive features of feelings.

¹⁹ According to Heidegger, this “factual transcendentality” is not identified with the Cartesian *percipere*, nor with reason in the Kantian sense. Rather, for Heidegger, Dasein’s transcendence is that of understanding (*Verstehen*), findingness (*Befindlichkeit*), and discourse (*Rede*). See Heidegger (1967: §§29–34). See also Heidegger (2018: 154).

²⁰ For a comprehensive overview over Heidegger’s understanding of feelings, including the distinctions between feelings, moods, groundmoods (*Grundstimmungen*), findingness (*Befindlichkeit*), see the recently published book by Katherine Withy (2024).

The most significant implication of Heidegger's approach is that feelings, due to their role in the opening of our world, delimit the scope of what we can understand, regardless of whether that concerns theoretical cognition of objects within the realm of representations or the interpretative understanding that Heidegger designates as the philosophical understanding (Heidegger 1967: 139–40; 182).

Heidegger's philosophy posits a challenge to the metaphysical paradigm according to which reason (in the broadest sense) is prior to and superior to feelings (in the broadest sense). However, Heidegger never intended to replace reasoning with feelings. When Heidegger emphasized the "equiprimordiality" (*Gleichursprünglichkeit*) of feelings and understanding in *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1967: 142), he did not do so out of an infatuation with the irrational or sublogical but because any understanding is contingent upon the disclosive qualities of feelings. Heidegger's critique targets the methodological framework of the modern pursuit of knowledge, which conflates all understanding with theoretical understanding. He contests the taken-for-granted and unjustified "panarchy" of the "theoretical logos," which he views as a reductive Cartesian interpretation of cognition, certainty, consciousness, and reasoning (Heidegger 1987: 215). Heidegger repeatedly warns that this specific interpretation has become overly dominant, eclipsing other forms of understanding, especially those that emphasize the methodological significance of feelings and neglect the normative dimension of the awareness of one's existence. Heidegger calls this a "deeply ingrained obsession with the theoretical" (Heidegger 1987: 87–88).

Heidegger would nevertheless concur with Brelage that feelings, in isolation (if this isolation were possible), are insufficient for constituting knowledge in a philosophically meaningful sense. Philosophy, according to Heidegger, relies on understanding, which must be manifested in some form of conceptual explication (*Auslegung*) (Heidegger 1967: 148ff). However, understanding and, by extension, "philosophical knowledge," are not contingent upon the theoretical knowledge that Brelage and many of his contemporaries consider to be the indispensable and indestructible foundation for Western rationality (cf. Tugendhat 1979; Habermas 1985).

We wish to emphasize this point: within Heidegger's philosophy, cognition and knowledge retain their paramount significance, but only when considered in the light of the equiprimordiality of feelings and (non-theoretical) understanding (Heidegger 1967: 142). Heidegger's "philosophical knowledge" is not a theoretical objectification within

the representation of objects. Instead, it is a distinct kind of knowledge grounded in the disclosive qualities of “understanding moods,” possessing its own kind of non-theoretical certainty based on the peculiar self-referentiality and potential self-awareness within feelings. “Potential,” because this awareness, although it is latent in all feelings, becomes transparent only in the mode of resolute authenticity.

The reasons for why this form of knowledge is deemed “more fundamental” (as opposed to simply a different kind of knowledge) and the precise nature of the disclosive qualities of feelings will be elucidated in the subsequent section.

5. The Superiority of Philosophical Knowledge

With the equiprimordiality of feelings and understanding in mind, let us now turn to Heidegger’s conception of philosophical knowledge as first-personal. The relevance of this lies in the fact that theoretical knowledge strives to be valid (*gültig*) regardless of who, where, or when it is stated. Its validity or objectivity is premised on its trans-subjectivity and trans-occasionality (Gethmann 1993: 19), meaning that it is said to be reliably true for all subjects in all situations until falsified by updated claims. Although modern philosophers have attempted to apply the same standards to philosophical knowledge, Heidegger maintains that this modern Cartesian methodology, while well-suited for scientists within the confines of their specific purposes and goals, is inadequate for philosophy. He argues that philosophical knowledge is inherently tied to the individual and thus also situated within the particular context in which it is articulated (Heidegger 2005, 345ff; Heidegger 2004: 95).

Heidegger’s argument is based on the premise that any form of knowledge with corresponding truth claim implies a relation between thoughts and reality in the broadest sense. If things were directly accessible and what could be stated about them were identically self-evident to everyone, regardless of any circumstances, then there would be no need for further philosophical inquiry. However, if it is the case that things can present themselves in different ways based on how we relate to them, then wouldn’t we be in urgent need of a philosophy that investigates these correlations? Heidegger confirms that this is indeed the case: “After all, a being [*Seiendes*] can show itself in different ways, depending on the way it is accessed” (Heidegger 1967: 28).

The philosophy that is dedicated to this task is known as “phenomenology.” Heidegger, building upon the work of Edmund Husserl,

argues that all entities, by default, show themselves as what they are not. Our habitual way of perceiving things and engaging with things is not necessarily incorrect and, for the most part, works perfectly fine. There is even a specific scientific way of “seeing” things that provides us with the aforementioned objectivity, enabling us to predict and control them. However, Heidegger argues that what entities are – that is, their “Being” (*das Sein*) in his terminology –, is not made explicit within these various ways of relating to them, and that therefore entities typically show themselves as what they are not (Heidegger 1967: 35).

To fully understand Heidegger’s argument, we can first acknowledge that there are hidden aspects within our ways of relating to things that we are typically not aware of. Most of these aspects are simply irrelevant. For instance, when using a table, we do not need to see its backside, which is anticipated within our act of perceiving it from my particular perspective (as Husserl has explained). However, the hidden aspects Heidegger is concerned with in his philosophy are essential for how we relate to things. According to him, what is essential is not a hidden attribute of things or a subjective quality of our perception, but rather the unconcealedness of beings in our relation to them. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger refers to this hidden and yet essential determinant of our relation to beings as their “Being” (*das Sein des Seienden*) (Heidegger 1967: 35).

To clarify what Heidegger means by “Being,” we can examine his description of the Being of human beings, which he terms “existence.” Unlike inanimate objects like rocks and sticks, human beings are in a constant and unique relationship with the world, where things matter to us. Heidegger elaborates on this relational character in much more detail in his works, but the important point is that he considers it to be essential to human beings. It designates our Being. However, as Heidegger demonstrates in the well-known passages on “the They” (*das Man*), in our everyday lives and interactions with each other, this essence is not what primarily guides and governs our actions. Instead, for the most part, we live with each other in a diminished and average understanding of what it means to be human (Heidegger 1967: 169). Only in certain situations and with the aid of disclosive moods that provide us with a more fundamental understanding (see the previous section), do we grasp what it means to exist in this world. This understanding enables us to act accordingly – for instance, by treating someone as a unique human being rather than as a mere means to our personal goals (Heidegger 1967: 122). The former is a relation based on an understanding of the singularity of existence, while the latter is an understanding that conceals

the meaning of existence and mistakes it for something that is ready-to-hand (Heidegger 1989: 182ff).

Heidegger asserts that Being is by default concealed due to a central aspect of our lives that he terms “fallenness” (*Verfallenheit*) (Heidegger 1967: 175ff; Heidegger 1976: 177). Heidegger’s account of the “uncanniness of existence” suggests that this fallenness arises from our being thrown into a situation of finitude and responsibility for our actions, something that can become transparent not in representational acts of cognition but only through the transparency provided by anxiety and resoluteness (Heidegger 1967: 181ff; 259). However, the origins and implications of fallenness cannot be fully explored in this paper due to spatial limitations. The more salient point regarding Heidegger’s methodology is that he argues the only way to “counter” the fallenness that leads to the concealment of the Being of beings is by engaging with it in a first-personal manner. This countermovement is described in *Being and Time* as the methodological significance of “individuation” (*Vereinzelung*), which is made possible and facilitated by moods: “This individuation is how the ‘there’ is disclosed for the existing” (Heidegger 1967: 263). The crucial point, according to Heidegger, is that it is impossible to counter the tendencies of fallenness without this first-personal engagement and that this engagement is a methodological prerequisite for revealing what is normally concealed in our relation to things (Heidegger 1967: 35; Heidegger 1985: 153).

Regardless of whether one fully accepts Heidegger’s account of fallenness, and his explanation of why essential aspects are hidden from us, it is still possible to understand his claims in terms of the common distinction between knowledge that we have confirmed by ourselves and knowledge that we have taken over and accepted from others. For Heidegger, philosophical knowledge necessarily falls into the first category (see Cimino 2013). However, he argues that the verification of this knowledge is not simply a matter of looking at something or conducting scientific experiments. Instead, it involves a unique kind of enactment that questions and makes explicit essential determinants of the specific situation, such as our preexisting knowledge of what something is, our prejudices, the way we conceptualize it, the perspective from which we view it, the context in which something appears to us, and how something appears to us (Heidegger 1985: 18ff). Even without the concept of “fallenness,” we can acknowledge that these are essential determinants of our relation to things that typically remain concealed. Furthermore, these determinants are dependent on specific situations, requiring the

philosopher to address them individually from within their own situation (Heidegger 1985: 42ff). Heidegger's "perspectivism" is methodological. It contests the possibility (and necessity) of transsubjective and transoccasional objectivity for any kind of knowledge that aims to reflect how ontic phenomena are constituted within individuated ways of being ("existentials"). In other words, philosophical knowledge about the correlation between Dasein and the world must be situational and individuated.²¹

Heidegger describes the individuating first-personal engagement that constitutes the philosophical attitude as "authenticity" (*Eigentlichkeit*) or "resoluteness" (*Entschlossenheit*). Although these concepts have been predominantly understood as some kind of normative ideal, their significance and the reason they are discussed in *Being and Time* is that they, through rendering transparent the unique normativity of one's situation, function as a countermovement against fallenness and, thus, as the means to uncover the essential and constitutive predeterminants of one's individual relations to beings. Their disruptiveness is revelatory: By being disruptive, they render something visible that was already there, although concealed and covered up (Heidegger 2005: 362). Heidegger elucidates the methodological significance of this countermovement by extending its unique certainty, self-awareness, and transparency to the individual modes of constitution. Heidegger describes the countermovement as a mode of "explicitly transcending," or "letting-be," in which the Being of beings can be experienced and conceptualized (Heidegger 1967: 42–43; 298; 316; Heidegger 1985: 151ff; Heidegger 1996: 223).

This brings us full circle to the previous discussion on the methodological significance of feelings, as Heidegger posits that philosophy relies on feelings because they are what enables this countertendency. According to him, moods and feelings possess the potential to disrupt our lives and, in doing so, counteract the tendencies of fallenness. (Heidegger 1985: 137–8). This disruptive potential is not solely negative but also serves to reveal – that is, *disclose* – essential aspects of our relation to beings, thus rendering it methodologically significant (Heidegger 1967: 191).

We can now articulate more clearly that the disclosive qualities of feelings are a result of their disruptive nature (Heidegger 1985: 141;

²¹ What Heidegger considers the ideal form of philosophical knowledge is thus comparable to the Greek notion of *phronesis*. Hans-Georg Gadamer has further developed this idea in his philosophy.

Withy 2012: 195–211). For instance, the mood of anxiety can function as a countertendency against fallenness primarily due to its unique disruptive potential, and this disruptive potential explains its methodological significance (Heidegger 1967: 190–1). There are uncountable examples throughout Heidegger’s work that demonstrate that for Heidegger doing philosophy is an enactment of a first-personal countermovement that must be based on the disclosive and disruptive qualities of feelings. This is key to understanding Heidegger’s emphasis on the individuation in his (often misunderstood) “existential solipsism” (Heidegger 1967: 188) and, more generally, for the methodological significance of individuating feelings. Echoing Brelage, we could say: It takes a strong “infatuation” (obsession) with scientific objectivity to neglect the “prismatic character” of human experience, namely that Dasein functions as a prism for the constitution of the world. There are *a priori* determinants of our relations to things that cannot be reflected theoretically from a neutral third-person perspective. Rather, they must be reflected from within one’s individual situation, from the perspective of one’s own pre-understanding (*Vorverständnis*), and from within a first-personal countermovement that renders visible what was concealed (Heidegger 1985: 42ff). For a more adequate understanding of the world, philosophy must therefore rely on non-theoretical, non-representational, feeling-based certainty.

Heidegger even applies these insights to philosophical language in general, asserting that philosophical concepts are only adequately understood from within this first-personal disruptive countermovement.²² Heidegger contends that if concepts such as “death,” “conscience,” or “existence” are taken as scientific terms or used in an ordinary, everyday manner, they are misunderstood. However, if, for instance, the phenomenon of death is understood from within the described attitude, essential determinants of one’s unique “understanding-situation” (*Verstehenssituation*) can become visible, and within the transparency of this situation the possibility of death and what this possibility means for one’s existence is understood. Compare this philosophical understanding of constitutive elements of the individual’s relationship to death and its normative implications with any scientific, theoretical understanding of death. Then, decide which one is more fundamental (and which one is potentially

²² Part of Heidegger’s distinct philosophical methodology is a theory of conceptualization that is known by the name of “formal indication” (*formale Anzeige*). An essential part of these formally indicating philosophical concepts, according to Heidegger, is their disruptive or prohibitive potential. See, for example, Heidegger (1985: 141). See also Kraatz (2022).

reductive). The certainty of the knowledge (of the possibility) of one's death, acquired in the feeling of anxiety, allows for a non-theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of death. When conceptualized, this understanding can provide insights into the significance of finitude for existence, thus offering an understanding of what it means to be alive. Heidegger does not claim apodictic certainty for this kind of knowledge, nor does he assert objectivity for its truth. However, he does insist that phenomena related to existence cannot be understood theoretically and must instead be approached from within what is disclosed to us through feelings.

Heidegger contends that this understanding, and the validity and truth that result from its potential conceptualization, are more "binding" (*verbindlicher*) than the objectivity of modern science (Heidegger 1992: 24; Heidegger 1976: 358). This is because this understanding is both highly situational and individuated, providing an understanding of one's existence for one's existence (Heidegger 1985: 138). In contrast to the neutral objectivity of non-philosophical truths and the empty and formal self-referentiality within Cartesian certainty, this understanding and the certainty of its truth are uniquely relevant to the individual. Philosophical knowledge is not passively accepted or arbitrarily taken over from others, but explicitly appropriated and acquired by the individuated individual who recognizes the normativity of the situation ("transparency") and accepts responsibility for the consequent actions and non-actions ("resoluteness") (Heidegger 1967: 267ff). Philosophical knowledge is a fundamental non-theoretical first-personal and situational understanding of the irreducibility of the normativity of one's unique situation and of previously concealed essential aspects of one's relation to things.²³

Due to the disruptive nature inherent in its enactment, philosophical knowledge can first make visible what in ordinary life and within science remains concealed. It can be characterized as "more fundamental" because it does not simply reveal other aspects of life, but, according to Heidegger, aspects that are concealed and yet essential for our relation to things (Heidegger 1967: 35). The priority and superiority of philosophical knowledge over theoretical knowledge can thus be defined in two ways

²³ Steven G. Crowell has demonstrated that this normativity is what underlies and makes possible the socially shared praxis of reason-giving. Crowell (2013: 184): "that care is prior to reason – that *homo cura* is more fundamental than *animal rationale*". Ernst Tugendhat has claimed that the link between normativity and rationality is missing in Heidegger's philosophy but suggested as a correction something that is identical to what Heidegger is proposing (Tugendhat 1979: 207ff).

that pertain to what this knowledge is “about”: it comprises knowledge about what is primary in any relation to beings and about aspects that typically remain concealed. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger identifies this with the Being of beings and proclaims its unconcealment as the principal task of his phenomenological ontology (Heidegger 1967: 35–39). Insofar as Heidegger sees in the certainty of individuating feelings the possibility of a conceptualization of the constitution, philosophical knowledge comprises knowledge of the Being of beings and thus could also be described as “ontological knowledge,” in contrast to the “ontic knowledge” of the positive sciences (Heidegger 1996: 223).²⁴

Acquiring this kind of philosophical ontological knowledge enables us to base our relation to entities on their explicit Being, thereby making possible more informed, that is, more rational choices, or an attitude that Heidegger describes as “authenticity” or “resoluteness,” alluding to the possibility of a more informed “originary ethics,” where the individual takes responsibility for their actions based on the first-personal engagement with the fallenness of life and the therein gained certainty of philosophical truth (Heidegger 1967: 122; 286; Heidegger 1976: 356).

Philosophical knowledge is “non-theoretical,” situational, and individuated, but this does not imply that this kind of knowledge is sublogical or irrational, as critics such as Manfred Brelage have claimed. The fact that it is not theoretical is not a deficiency but an advantage of philosophical knowledge. According to Heidegger, philosophy is “a pre-theoretical or over-theoretical, in any case a non-theoretical science, a genuine original science [...] from which the theoretical itself takes its origin” (Heidegger 1987: 96). Heidegger thus explains the difference between philosophy and science in terms of how they reflect their sphere of origin, meaning how they originate in that sphere and remain determined by this origin (Heidegger 2005: 347). Philosophy gains its status of being *more fundamental than* and *superior to* science by explicitly reflecting its origin, that is, its situational and individuated ways of constituting and predetermining beings. Whereas even though modern science also originates in that sphere, it does not possess the means to

²⁴ Heidegger uses the notion of “philosophical knowledge” *qua* “knowledge of Being” (*Erkenntnis von Sein*). Science, on the other hand, is simply “knowledge of beings” (*Erkenntnis von Seiendem*). See Heidegger (1989: 402). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger does not use the term “ontological knowledge,” however he refers to the knowledge of Being as “transcendental knowledge” and to phenomenological truth as “*veritas transcendentalis*.” See Heidegger (1967: 38). If we further consider that Heidegger, during this time, identifies transcendental philosophy with ontology, we can justify the use of the term “ontological knowledge” in this context. See also Heidegger (1989: 180).

gain and secure knowledge about existence, mainly due to its neglect of the methodological significance of feelings and its overreliance on the representational structure inherent in the Cartesian model of cognition. Heidegger writes: “It belongs to meaning of theoretical presuppositions, that is those on which the *theoretical attitude* as such stands, on which it is dependent, that they are not grasped and graspable by this attitude” (Heidegger 1985: 159). Modern science is therefore at minimum derivative, secondary, non-fundamental, and dependent on philosophy regarding a possible reflection of its underlying presuppositions (Heidegger 2002: 138). It is also dependent on alternative modes of certainty regarding a possible transparency of its normative implications, for instance the certainty that Heidegger ascribes to the mode of authenticity.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, contrary to Brelage’s and the Neo-Kantians’ critique of Heidegger’s “infatuation” with feelings, this “infatuation” should instead be understood as a significant strength of Heidegger’s philosophy. Unlike modern science and mainstream philosophy, by acknowledging the methodological significance of feelings, Heidegger’s philosophy can offer knowledge about existence, including ontological knowledge about what underlies and makes possible any relation to entities.

One could therefore still argue with Brelage for the primacy of “epistemology” if it is understood broadly enough to encompass its dependency on the openness linked to feelings and moods and the necessity of a first-personal engagement. This epistemology, however, would not be the one advocated by Neo-Kantians such as Brelage or more modern analytical and theoretical philosophers in their critiques of Heidegger. Instead, it would be an “ontological epistemology” that is grounded in disclosive and disruptive moods. This Heideggerian epistemology opens up the possibility of conceptualizing the differentiations of beings in terms of their Being. By drawing attention to regional ontological differences, it can also shed light on the blind spots of modern epistemology and on the limitations of core methodological concepts.

This can perhaps serve as a hint towards the inherent rationality of Heidegger’s philosophy. Heidegger is not abandoning knowledge or cognition. Instead, he developed a philosophical methodology that allows us to gain a more fundamental understanding of the world we are living in by taking into account aspects that are central to the human experience.

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